

District Councillors Report to the Barrow cum Denham Council 27 April 2022

After District Council elections in 2019, the way of life for all of us came to a grinding halt in March 2020 when all the restrictions and Lockdowns came in for Covid 19 and have been ever present, on and off, to today's date. Restrictions still applying to 'medical' settings despite having been generally removed elsewhere. The Council Offices are not immune still recommending, from Whitehall Civil Service advice, masks, hand gelling, distancing etc., causing not a little frustration within the staff and Councillors.

Work has continued at the Council with the Council Tax for the old St Edmundsbury District being increased by only pennies pa. The SCC and Police precept increases being significant. WSDC through ARP (Anglia Revenues Partnership) have been charged with getting the £150 Council Tax rebates to eligible recipients. This should be done by the end of May, April for most. Those whose Direct Debits are not met will get a new payment schedule with the discount included. Individual queries should be directed to the ARP.

The Council, despite central government assistance have had significant losses in income and increases in expenditure over the past two years and have had to dip into Reserves to put forward a balanced budget. Businesses in West Suffolk have similarly suffered and have had difficulties in some instances paying their NNDR and rents. WSDC rents out many commercial premises, charging for commercial waste and are responsible for collecting NNDR, so there are some likely losses or cash flow in this area.

We have slowed up on some projects like the new Leisure Complex for Bury St Edmunds but have completed the Mildenhall Hub, starting to clear the old Forest Heath District Council Offices site for much needed new housing. In Brandon their Leisure centre has been upgraded.

Sorry to report the SCC's ongoing financial stresses mean such services as school buses are being strictly allocated to eligible students which locally has meant children from Barrow who want to go to Westley at year 5 get no funding. Westley school likely to close in 2023 or possible 2024. County Upper School being expanded to take two new year groups

Work has continued since 2019 but slowed by Covid restraints of the emerging local plan, the SHELAA sites (Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment) were submitted at end of December 2018. The planners have considered all those put forward and have selected their 'Preferred Options' across the whole of WSDC. The ones in Barrow being the 2 exiting sites for light industry/commercial use just off Barrow Hill and the site behind the school grounds, the other two, one for circa 20 houses down Denham Lane, the other for up 150 dwellings from behind the Willow and Dale Tree Close all the way down to the farm track opposite the Dolls House. The PC have been working on a neighbourhood plan, yet to be completed but this does not mean it cannot be seriously taken into account.

These sites and numbers are not set in stone and will be out for public consultation in late May, should Annual Council approve the whole document at their Annual Council Meeting 17 May. Every comment is looked at and considered, so, every resident is encouraged to take part. The village is a 'Key Service Centre' and as such is designated to take additional housing.

Residents should comment on type, style, and size of housing, locations, layout, infrastructure including roads, pavements, cycle paths, water, sewerage, land and street drainage, ecology matters, broadband, bus services, school services, village services, trees and landscaping – the list is almost endless

They will also refer back to the previous Vision 2031 Plan, signed off in 2014, to see what constraints were mentioned to growth in Barrow. Such as no village/hamlet consolidation, no encroachment into designated parkland, not affecting the setting of an Ancient Monument etc.

The Council has taken professional advice and they currently have in excess of a 6-year land supply, this is land that already has planning permission. The Government target is 5 years. Developers have claimed we do not meet the minimum target which means, they feel, they have a right to build on land outside Vision 2031. They officially have not. The likely developments in and around villages nearby will also haon Barrow and Denham, so it is important to make observations about any proposed development in any part of West Suffolk not just Barrow within the advised time frame.

I am grateful to the PC and WSDC through my Locality Allowance to be able to help groups and the PC's in the Ward to supply useful items including gardening equipment to FOBS, VAS signage, Christmas Lights, Defibrillators and most recently to help All Saints with their Platinum Jubilee program and a commemorative gift to children of the village from the PC also assistance to a project to a 'well-being garden' at Wedgewood House Hospital in Bury St Edmunds which I know has helped patients from Barrow.

I am always available to talk to any resident and it is easiest to contact me by my email ian.houlder@westsuffolk.gov.uk or 07597 961069 – always noted on every issue of NewsLink.
Cllr Ian Houlder 26 April