

## **Cllr Stephen Molyneux's Woodbridge Town Council AGM Report 2025.**

It has been a tumultuous year.

2024 ended with the sad passing of fellow District Councillor Kay Yule. I had huge admiration for Kay and her forthright approach to her public duty. Her death was met with huge shock throughout the council.

The wooden boat down on the Ferry Quay beach has been renewed recently, as when she showed newly appointed head of planning, Ben Woolnough around Woodbridge, it was something she was keen to get sorted out.

Although sad to see Kay go, I'm enjoying working with newly elected Woodbridge ward member Cllr Ruth Leech and the many insights of all three levels of local government she brings to the table.

The next big thing to overshadow everything we're doing at District is of course Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. As an administration we're now in the infuriating position whereby we're having to look at which projects we put down due to the fact our officer's time will now get sucked up by how we go about dismantling District services. It'll take several years to complete and millions of pounds to deliver and it will be likely be only after a decade that we'll see any savings or improvements to services.

I can't help but feel this is a case of throwing the baby out with the bath water and the usual tales of jurisdiction overlap between, parishes, district and county, could just be addressed rather than having to completely remodel from the ground up.

We need to be working on the urgent issues our district faces right now rather than getting caught in the quagmire of reorganisation that'll completely overshadow and drain and capacity for anything else.

One glaring problem is the quandary of diversity of councillors. Suffolk becoming a, or a collection of, Unitary Authorities will mean less councillors covering broader geographical areas. The workload will increase dramatically, likely ruling out individuals in full time employment. There've been discussions around looking at councillor positions as being full time jobs, however, who would take on a job where they could be voted out of their position every 4 years? Also, how much of this work will be devolved to town and parish councils and will there be more resources for them to carry out the extra responsibilities?

I also can't help but feel that this is a move by the new Labour Government to remove local dissent around major developments and infrastructure so as to speed up 'growth' and remove local opinion and descent from the equation.

In my role as Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning, this is the latest disruption in a long line of change happening in the national planning landscape. We were initially looking at the Levelling Up Bill, then the new draft edit of the NPPF, now the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill and then of course, new housing targets and LGR. When chatting to a planning officer recently I was told that the main thing obstructing planning is planning reform. Changes to planning aren't given a chance to bed in and start working.

Politicians looking for legacy are continuously dissecting the patient and not allowing them to heal.

Our planning team approach these slaloms with far more grace, patience and thoughtfulness than I'm able to muster and deploy their expertise in tackling these constant riddles set to them by successive governments.

The next huge body of work we're approaching in the mele of this uncertainty is the East Suffolk Local Plan. This sets out to combine the old Suffolk Coastal and Waveney local plans to update policies, five-year land supply and housing delivery targets etc. We as an administration have already earmarked policies we wish to be more ambitious on with regards to climate change and mitigation. My area of focus has been on the Sustainable Construction policy and has led to us as a council joining the Good Homes Alliance, supporting legal positions against the Government's 2023 Written Ministerial Statement (which limits Local Authorities' power to demand more from developers) and producing the East Suffolk Developer's Charter: [Developers-Charter.pdf](#). A specific voluntary energy efficiency standard is in the pipelines at county level as well and with LGR approaching, Districts have been aligning their local plans, so I'll be pushing for standards that go above and beyond across the board.

I've also been enjoying helping out on the housing side of things and working with David Bevan looking at various finance and building solutions that deliver modular, high performing, bio-based housing with a view to deliver more social housing. We need to show that super energy efficient housing doesn't have to cost the earth. If planned and delivered to first principles and eventually at scale, we can deliver housing that's healthy and affordable to run, insulated from the turbulence of global energy prices. Government want local authorities to deliver housing at a scale not seen since after WWII. This was a time that local authorities were delivering council housing. The difference is that the technology has come along in leaps and bounds since then. I believe that if government wan to truly tackle the housing crisis they need to get councils building again. Building with communities in mind, not the guaranteed 20% profit. The private sector haven't delivered the numbers or the types of housing needed for some time and the many undeveloped sites that have planning permission have contributed to this housing crisis. To look to them to deliver these new houses and high-quality places now is foolhardy.

We've a couple of projects in the pipelines right now and hope to be talking more about them in 2026 and seeing this innovative approach taken on past Devolution and LGR.

On a more local level, I've been enjoying my role as chair of the Melton, Woodbridge and Deben Peninsular Community Partnership and growing it become a flourishing network and to have now supported a range of amazing local projects. From democratising and levelling up music provision in state primary schools, to bat-based community science, to CIC's that support families tackle unsustainable living conditions.

I've also been enjoying managing my Enabling Communities budget that's renewed at the beginning of the financial year. I'm proud to have fully allocated both year's funds across 20 different community initiatives, ranging from music and arts events to table tennis groups, to greening the thoroughfare, to supporting great youth groups like the Sea Scouts.

I'll be covering some of the various other roles I've taken on as a District Councillor in an upcoming newsletter which will be distributed to every house in Woodbridge but in the meantime, you can see various updates via my Instagram account:

