

Borough councillor report

West Suffolk Council's Cabinet has set up an Environment and Climate Change task force and the Council has declared a climate emergency.

We have already been carrying out work to reduce carbon emissions. We own one of the largest Council solar farms in the UK, support businesses through solar for business, are working on initiatives to reduce vehicle idling and have secured investment in charging points for electric vehicles.

All of this work has already seen West Suffolk named by Friends of the Earth as one of the top areas in the UK for tackling climate change and supporting the environment. But there is more to be done.

West Suffolk Council has also been looking at innovative ways to improve the infrastructure for electric vehicles, which will be required to meet the Government's target of having 50-70% of new cars as zero emission by 2030, and we have secured Government funding from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) for a new project which will provide EV charge points connected to lampposts for residents that lack off street parking.

The trial scheme will initially see 22 charge points across West Suffolk. Their use at each location will be monitored and if a need is identified elsewhere, then the Councils can either apply to OLEV for more funding for more charge points, or relocate any that are being underused.

This is an important part of our ongoing commitment to reduce carbon emissions and help tackle climate change. West Suffolk Council is using a supplier who uses 100 per cent renewable energy which delivers a significant carbon reduction compared to petrol or diesel vehicles as well as reducing other pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide. By switching to EVs people are helping reduce air pollution which Public Health England says cost the country £42.88 million in health and social care costs in 2017.

Two of the charge points will be placed in Exning where local demand has been identified, while four will be installed in All Saints Car Park in Newmarket which is used by residents at night time and offers 24 hour access. The remaining 16 will initially be installed in Bury St Edmunds in Spring Lane, Out Westgate, Eastgate Street and the Southgate area – all locations where off street parking is not available and where lampposts are suitably located at the kerbside.

It is important to note that we are not taking away any parking spaces. The provision is primarily for residents who already use these parking bays and want the option to convert to an Electric Vehicle.

As stated this is a trial and should there be a demand identified elsewhere we can either relocate an underused charge point or apply for more funding. The lamppost scheme is being funded by £27,000 from OLEV and £9000 from West Suffolk Council.

If you have any further questions then please don't hesitate to get in contact. You can email environment@westsuffolk.gov.uk or phone 01284 757400.

West Suffolk Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment

Background

The Strategic Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment (or SHELAA) is an assessment of land for housing and economic development. Sites are assessed to establish if they are;

- suitable (policy compliant)
- available (the landowner has recently expressed a wish to develop the site)
- achievable (there are no legal issues or complexities that would prevent development coming forward within the next 15 years).

In 2018/19 we received 277 sites through the call for sites process (covering 2857 hectares of land). Nine sites were commercial submissions (223 hectares of land), and an additional 21 submissions (1178 hectares of land) proposed mixed use developments.

The new sites have been assessed against a set of criteria, along with all sites submitted in previous years, resulting in a short list of 'included' sites, with the remaining sites being 'deferred' for consideration.

The SHELAA is not an assessment of whether the sites will be allocated in the future West Suffolk Local Plan nor does inclusion in the SHELAA imply or grant any planning permission. The document or call for site process holds NO weight in decision making.

Headline results of the SHELAA:

The 2019 SHELAA involved collating and reviewing 709 sites for residential use:

- 211 were included
- 423 were deferred
- 75 were excluded (some of which were superseded by overlapping sites).

In addition, 23 economic sites were reviewed, 14 of which were included.

What is being published?

The SHELAA report is being published for stakeholder consultation, and contains:

- details of the methodology used for the assessment
- the total number of sites that were 'included' and those that were 'deferred' and the reasons; and
- proformas for the included sites, including individual site maps.

Consultation dates:

The consultation will take place between 15 October – 26 November 2019.

Next steps:

The final SHELAA will be published in late 2019. Details of all consultation comments received, and amendments made to the SHELAA as a result, will be shown in an appendix.

Previous SHELAA documents can be found following the link below:
https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning_Policies/shlaa.cfm
For further information please contact the planning policy department:
Email: Planning.policy@westsuffolk.gov.uk
Tel: 01284 757368

ROUGH SLEEPERS

In the autumn last year, the Bury Drop In, supported by town centre partners including the Council, launched the Looking for Change alternative giving campaign.

The campaign encourages people not to give money to people they see on the streets but to give to the charity which helps rough sleepers and other homeless people access help, support and housing and ultimately to rebuild their lives. A similar scheme is also in operation in Newmarket:

<https://burydropin.echoleft.com/fundraising/newmarket-looking-for-change/donate>

A key part of the campaign is helping the public understand that sometimes giving money to people on the streets feeds addiction and that can be counter-productive hindering efforts to get them to engage in the support and accommodation available, or leading to them losing places of accommodation.

Equally the campaign tries to help people understand that not everybody that they see out begging is a rough sleeper – often they are already accommodated.

The campaign has run alongside the Council's efforts to reduce rough sleeping, which include investing in or securing access to more accommodation. Our rough sleeper support team actively engages with rough sleepers and works not only to get them into accommodation, but also to try to intervene when, for whatever reason, they are likely to be evicted. In addition we have a team to help rough sleepers access the private rented sector.

The money collected as part of the Looking for Change campaign is used by the Drop In to support people who have been helped into temporary accommodation, received the necessary support that they need, and are now ready to move on with their lives into a more settled and permanent form of accommodation.

The campaign has seen close to £6000 given to the charity. It has helped people who were once homeless get equipment to help them study, it has helped a victim of childhood abuse get to therapy sessions which in turn has helped them stay clean from drugs and start their own business. It has also bought items of furniture for people who were once on the streets but are ready to move into a home of their own.

The wider work of the Council and its rough sleeper support team has led to a reduction in the number of people rough sleeping in West Suffolk, although this number frequently fluctuates.

The Council provides specialist accommodation for those who are or have been rough sleeping. A number of places are available, and the Council is working with partners to increase that number further. As always, the Council will continue to provide emergency accommodation options throughout the winter months and it has been working with local housing providers to secure additional temporary and emergency accommodation.

As with last winter, the Council does not envisage that it will need to open a winter shelter as we prefer to offer a range of accommodation options, including smaller units as to everyone is able to manage in a hostel. This decision will be kept under review.

In recent months, Bury St Edmunds has seen an increase in street drinking. Our own rough sleeper night count and welfare checks plus our information on where people are placed in accommodation would suggest that most of these who are street drinking are not rough sleepers.

It should be noted that a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) is in place in the town which prohibits begging and alcohol related anti- social behaviour and police have been making arrests. We are continuing to work with the police and Our Bury St Edmunds Business Improvement District to look at other possible solutions.

At the same time agencies in the town balance the use of enforcement and engagement to ensure that those who are rough sleeping can access the support needed.

The Bury Drop In is now relaunching The Looking for Change campaign in Bury St Edmunds. The campaign is backed by West Suffolk Council, Bury St Edmunds Town Council, Suffolk Police, Our Bury St Edmunds and the Bury Free Press.

From our point of view, we want to ensure that given that Bury St Edmunds is a busy tourist town and receives lots of visitors especially in the run up to Christmas, that tourists do not give money to beggars and unwittingly contribute to the problems the town is experiencing.

Newmarket is not currently experiencing the same level of rough sleeping, begging and related anti-social behaviour as Bury St Edmunds which is why we the campaign there isn't being relaunched at the moment. We will obviously keep this under review.

The online webpage for people to donate to for the Looking for Change campaign in Bury St Edmunds has also changed due to the previous provider stopping the service. The new one is <https://burydropin.echoleft.com/fundraising/bury-looking-for-change/donate>

Finally, we are approaching winter and we want the public to understand that although they may see rough sleepers out on the streets, the council is continuing to do that it possibly can to get people into accommodation and the necessary support that those individuals need.

If you know or suspect someone is sleeping rough, report it to our rough sleeper team using Streetlink www.streetlink.org.uk so that it can talk to them and try to get them the help that they need.