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# Dear Residents,

As we approach the Christmas and New Year season, it is traditional to reflect on the year past and the year to come. For Spelthorne, there is no getting round the fact that it has been difficult, financially, for all of us; individuals, businesses and for the local authority.



Like other councils, Spelthorne has been hit by the economic downturn which has significantly affected our financial position and with it, some of our plans. We are having to think very carefully about not only what we do, but how, when and why we do it and see what options exist. We, as I suspect many of you, have to use some of our savings (reserves) to help us through this period – and we can't continue that indefinitely; our investments are also producing less interest.

We totally understand the misery that some of our residents are currently undergoing with redundancy, increases in utility bills and some people losing their homes. This is reflected in a large increase in the numbers of residents seeking our help. Consequently, we have decided to freeze, for two years, the Council Tax, staff salaries and councillors' allowances and we are looking again at how we can contain our costs while still providing the high quality services you tell us you want and expect.

It is not all bad news though. With your help, our recycling rate is continuing to rise and we are extending our garden waste service to more residents next year.

Next year will see Benwell Community Centre and Michison Court, complete with 39 one and two-bedroom flats for people over 55. Each has its own front door and there is also Extra Care with a team of trained staff on call 24 hours a day to provide support services. It will include a new community facility for older people and the wider community. In addition, we're looking forward to the signing of the contract to build the new Stanwell Community Centre. So there are real signs of growth and benefits for local communities.

Our housing and benefits staff are dealing with unprecedented numbers of issues and problems associated with the recession and giving practical help and advice. Thanks are due to our colleagues in the voluntary sector and Citizens Advice Bureau for their invaluable help during this difficult time.

We are also hopeful of seeing a massive new school improvement programme in the Borough – see page 19.

As your Council Leader I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you all a restful and peaceful festive time and assure you that we will continue to represent the wishes and aspirations of all our residents by working both for you and with you.

Cllr John Packman, Council Leader



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