

Parish Report October 2013

Councillor

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Update of Roadside Bus timetables

I am advised by SCC's Passenger Transport Team that a vast number of service changes have been received recently, mainly due to amendments within the schools network which also have a knock-on effect on public transport services. A large number of service changes have also been instigated by operators in the eastern part of the county. This means that there will be delays in updating the roadside timetables. The PT team is working as quickly as possible to rectify this situation.

The public transport website, www.suffolkonboard.com, is fully up to date and the production of leaflets and registration of the routes are being prioritised. We are expecting all roadside timetables to be up to date by October. The main areas affected are Southwold, Halesworth, Lowestoft, Bungay and Beccles.

I would be grateful if you could please note the delay, notify Parish/Town Councils in your Division, and respond to your residents if this is raised as an issue.

Stanstead Footpath No 9

A Planning Inspectorate now has the information it requires to proceed, and is seeking agreement to adopt the written representations procedure. Confirmation of agreement to this procedure being adopted is required by 23rd September.

The written representations route will not require personal attendance – each party will submit written evidence. Once they have each party's agreement to use this procedure, they will notify everyone of the fact, and the date of that notification will be the "Start Date". From that date interested parties will have *eight* weeks to submit a statement of case. This authority has to submit its statement of case within *two* weeks of the start date. Once the statements of case are in from all parties, these are distributed to the other parties for any further comments (to be received within fourteen weeks of the Start Date). Any further comments are likewise distributed to all parties. Within eighteen weeks of the start date, the Inspector holds a site visit (unaccompanied).

More information can be found in the document

http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/pins/row/row_booklet2.pdf

Broadband in Suffolk

Broadband speeds are inconsistent and generally poor across much of Suffolk. Upgrades to fibre broadband (Fibre to the cabinet, FTTC) are generally limited to the denser urban areas, with rural areas left with older copper broadband. BT, under their own commercial activity, have upgraded 59% of the cabinets across Suffolk with fibre. These are those which they identified a commercial case for doing so. The things which are considered when making the decision as to whether or not a cabinet is commercially viable include the potential revenue from the lines, weighed up against civil engineering, power provision, planning permission etc.

BT have undertaken this process, and committed to upgrading 59% of areas in Suffolk using their own capital at their own risk. The other areas (the expensive areas with high civil engineering and power costs and fewer lines connected to secure revenue) are non viable and were set to be left unimproved.

At this point, Suffolk County Council chose to intervene in these "leftover" areas as there was market failure. In order to fix this, and extend the 59% coverage up to 90%, we signed a contract with BT committing investment to turn the non viable ones viable. So our investment, termed the "Suffolk Better Broadband Programme" intervenes in the 41% of Suffolk which has been leftover by the (BT and Virgin Media) commercial upgrades, this area is termed the "intervention area".

This contact commits £11.68m of Suffolk County Council funds, £11.68m of DCMS funds and a further contribution from BT. Essentially we are extending the 59% fibre coverage achieved commercially up to 90%, and also ensuring that every single premise in the county has speeds of between 2Mbps and 24Mbps, even if it is not delivered over fibre. This will complete in September 2015 and has nine rollout phases between now and then.

You can check the phasing of your area at www.betterbroadbandsuffolk.com

In terms of the NAO report, though the BBC reports varied by media and as the day progressed, the BBC reports persistently contained at least two factual inaccuracies:

1. The BBC took the main message of the NAO report of a delay in meeting the DCMS target of achieving 90% coverage, translated this into a 'slowness' in deploying rural broadband, and suggested that roll-out in four areas (Highlands & Islands, Cumbria, Norfolk, Suffolk) was particularly 'slow'. This accusation of 'slowness' is inaccurate, since all four highlighted areas (including Suffolk) were among the first to sign contracts and among the first to start to deploy broadband in rural areas and our contract will be completed within the 2015 deadline..

2. The NAO report makes clear that the four areas will not reach 90% Superfast Broadband coverage because the funding allocated by BDUK was insufficient to meet that target (i.e. the DCMS funding model under-estimated the cost of meeting that target in the four areas). Yet the BBC report accuses the four Local Bodies of not applying for sufficient funds, which is inaccurate (Suffolk had no say in the amount of funding awarded by BDUK, just an obligation to match BDUK funding with the same level of local funding).

In Suffolk, we signed a contract to deliver around 85% of superfast coverage, the DCMS policy was 90%. Although other local authorities have signed contracts to deliver this 90%, and are hence "on target", we "traded" 5% superfast speed to ensure that everybody got something, so we are aren't meeting the 90% target, but, our approach is actually more valuable to the people of Suffolk (as per feedback we received in surveys and consultation etc). Other local authorities didn't do this, for example, Norfolk will still leave 10% of people with nothing, as well as not meeting the 90% superfast target.

Our argument here is that yes, we might have spent all the public subsidy on headline superfast speeds and hit the 90% (or 95% when we access the additional funding announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review) target, but if we had spent the funding amount which government allocated us (note, we didn't ask for £11.68m, this was allocated by central government and non negotiable) purely on this, then there would still be people who can't access the web at all, can't consume online services etc.

Our approach to conceding headline speed for blanket coverage was supported by a House of Lords Communications Select Committee report last Autumn. In summary our plans are still ahead of schedule and we will deliver on all the commitments made on www.betterbroadbandsuffolk.com

Save Local Pubs

Local pubs are in serious decline. Twenty-six pubs close every week across the country.

In many instances, valued community pubs are converted into other uses such as betting shops and pay-day loan stores or are demolished, without planning permission being required. This means that local communities and the councils that represent them have no say before local pubs are lost to the local area forever. We are therefore asking if you could please put forward a motion for your next Council meeting resolving to submit the following proposal under the Sustainable Communities Act:

“That the Government help protect community pubs in England by ensuring that planning permission and community consultation are required before community pubs are allowed to be converted to betting shops, supermarkets and pay-day loan stores or other uses, or are allowed to be demolished.”

Below is a suggested motion you could use for convenience.

Pubs inject an average of £80,000 into their local economy each year and support almost one million UK jobs, 46% of whom are 16 – 24 year olds. They are a vital part of local economies. The demolition of pubs is classed as “permitted development” meaning planning permission is not required. Between 2003 and 2012, 414 former pubs were demolished in London alone. The Sustainable Communities Act is an ideal tool to use to deal with this problem. If lots of councils jointly submit this proposal to government under the Act, it will put significant pressure on government to make the necessary changes to the planning system.

Sample Motion

[Name] Council notes the possibility of submitting the following proposal to the government under the Sustainable Communities Act:

‘That the Secretary of State help protect community pubs in England by ensuring that planning permission and community consultation are required before community pubs are allowed to be converted to betting shops, supermarkets and pay-day loan stores or other uses, or are allowed to be demolished.’

The Council notes that if this power was acquired it would allow the council to determine if pubs should be demolished or converted into other uses and could save many valued community pubs. The Council resolves to submit the proposal to the government under the Sustainable Communities Act and to work together with Local Works and the Campaign for Real Ale to gain support for the proposal from other councils in the region and across the country.

Suffolk Flood and Coastal News

Defra's flood and coastal resilience partnership funding was introduced in 2011. This funding system allocates a proportion of national funding to flood and coastal erosion schemes based on outcomes - generally number of properties protected. Any shortfall in funding must be filled by local contributions. Having been in place for two years, Defra is commissioning a mini-review of how it is working and whether it is delivering the desired outcome of more schemes progressing and local communities having greater say into the design of schemes. The Suffolk Flood Risk Management Partnership and Suffolk Coast Forum have been actively engaged in the review.

The flood team has been undertaking a series of briefings to Parish Councils across the county explaining what communities and homeowners can do to assist in managing flood risk (whether from the sea, rivers or surface water). The important messages are outlined on the website <http://www.greensuffolk.org/flooding>.

One of the key issues we are finding is that riparian owners (land and home owners who have watercourses on or adjacent to their properties) are often unclear about their rights and responsibilities. We will be undertaking a series of media communications in the coming weeks to address this issue, promoting the Environment Agency's very useful *Living on the Edge Guide* (available on the website above) and joining up with them to promote new guidance for landowners.

We would also like to remind everyone to report incidents of flooding to us – particularly where properties are flooded internally. This is crucial information for building up a picture of where to focus our efforts to reduce flood risk. An online form is available on www.suffolk.gov.uk/floodrisk. We would be very grateful if Councillors and other community leaders would assist us in spreading these messages as widely as possible.

Free Electric Blanket Testing Offered to Residents

The dangers of faulty electric blankets are being highlighted as Suffolk residents are urged to get their blankets tested free of charge. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, Suffolk Trading Standards and Age UK Suffolk are encouraging people to book a free five minute test and significantly reduce the number of fires caused by unsafe electric blankets. In the last three years the Fire and Rescue Service and

Trading Standards have tested over 1200 electric blankets. Of those tested, 270 were found to be potentially lethal and destroyed. Test times across Suffolk are from 9am to 5pm as follows, and pre-booking is essential, by calling 01473 260588.

Bury St Edmunds Fire Station - Tuesday 24 September
Kessingland Community Centre - Wednesday 25 September
Needham Market Fire Station - Thursday 26 September
Woodbridge Fire Station - Thursday 3 October
Tower Ramparts Shopping Centre, Ipswich - Friday 4 October

If residents are unable to attend an appointment at one of the above testing locations, it is still possible to drop off and collect electric blankets at local fire stations across the county on the following dates and times:

Aldeburgh Fire Station - drop off: Thursday 19 September, 1pm - 3pm, pick up: Thursday 10 October, 1pm - 3pm

Beccles Fire Station - drop off: Wednesday 18 September, 10am-12pm, pick up: Wednesday 9 October, 10am-12pm

Brandon Fire Station - drop off: Monday 16 September, 10am-12pm, pick up: Monday 7 October, 10am-12pm

Eye Fire Station - drop off: Tuesday 17 September, 10am-12pm, pick up: Tuesday 8 October, 10am-12pm

Felixstowe Fire Station - drop off: Friday 20 September, 10am-12pm, pick up: Friday 11 October, 10am-12pm

Framlingham Fire Station - drop off: Thursday 19 September, 10am-12pm, pick up: Thursday 10 October, 10am-12pm

Haverhill Fire Station - drop off: Monday 16 September, 1pm-3pm, pick up: Monday 7 October, 1pm-3pm

Stowmarket Fire Station - drop off: Friday 20 September, 1pm-3pm, pick up: Friday 11 October, 1pm-3pm

Sudbury Fire Station - drop off: Tuesday 17 September, 1pm-3pm, Pick up: Tuesday 8 October, 1pm-3pm

Blankets should be tested routinely every three years and should not be used at all if they show any of the following tell-tale danger signs:

- Fraying fabric
- Scorch marks
- Exposed elements
- Creasing or folding
- Damp patches
- Tie tapes damaged or missing
- Worn flex
- Loose connections

The BEAB (British Electrotechnical Approvals Board) safety mark must also be checked to ensure it is up to date. The old mark, which means the blanket is more than ten years old, is a round symbol. The new sign shows white capital letters on a black background.

In addition to this information, residents are being urged:

- Never to fold electric blankets – as the wiring inside them needs to be protected by storing them flat or rolled up
- Never to leave an electric blanket switched on all night, unless it is thermostatically controlled so it can be used all night
- Never to use hot water bottles in the same bed as an electric blanket, even if the blanket is switched off

Councillor Colin Spence, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for public protection, said; "Appliances which are not maintained could easily start a fire, destroy homes and cost lives. Before the cold weather is upon us, it is important to take advantage of this free testing and to book an appointment for your own safety and peace of mind, especially if your blanket is over three years old.

“It is a huge concern that there are still old electric blankets out there in homes across Suffolk which may not be safe for use and I would encourage anyone with any concerns to come along to one of our testing days.”

All tests must be pre-booked by calling 01473 260588. If an electric blanket should fail the test, it cannot be returned. However you will be offered a free of charge replacement.

Councillor contacts:

Councillor Colin Spence (Con), cabinet member for public protection, tel: 01787378184, mobile: 07968580636, email: colin.spence@suffolk.gov.uk

Councillor Peter Gardiner (Lab), shadow portfolio holder for public protection, tel 01473 711612, mobile 07545423825, email peter.gardiner@suffolk.gov.uk

Councillor Bill Mountford (UKIP), leader of the UKIP group, mobile: 07545 423849, email: Bill.Mountford@Suffolk.gov.uk

Councillor David Wood (Lib Dem), Lib Dem & Ind Group Leader , tel: 01473 328269, mobile: 07889389443, email: david.wood@suffolk.gov.uk

Councillor Mark Ereira (Green and Independent), leader of the Green and Independent group, mobile: 07545 423841, email: Mark.Ereira@Suffolk.gov.uk

New Highways Contract

We are now getting close to the start of the new contract for highways services. This starts on 1st October, and I have given some details at item 12 in my report to the 19th September County Council. On that day there will be a display in the councillor area, where representatives from Kier MG Ltd and SCC Highways will be present to answer questions. I hope you will be able to take advantage of this opportunity to meet the team.

The overriding priority is making sure that critical operational services continue smoothly during the change over to the new contract, and safety is the top priority. Extra effort is therefore being made to ensure that repair of safety related defects and response to emergencies continue uninterrupted. Winter maintenance is also a particular priority. Kier MG is very aware of the high standard of winter service for which Suffolk is well known, and the expectations on them as a result. Much planning has taken place jointly between the council and Kier MG, and pre-contract preparations have included restocking with salt over the summer and ensuring gritters are fully serviced and ready to go.

I should also like to dispel any misconception that there will be a lot of new people delivering the service. The people currently designing and delivering highway works and services will transfer to the new contractor and continue to work on providing the service. You will therefore still be served by the same people who know, and are based in, Suffolk.

In any case, the area highway offices, which will be your main point of contact on highways issues, will remain part of the County Council. Among other things, the area offices will continue to carry out the regular inspection of our roads, and make the key operational decisions on salting and snow clearing operations. The new contract will provide councillors with ready access to up to date information on what work is planned and taking place in their divisions. This will start to become available during the first few months of the contract.

I am very conscious that some councillors have experienced quite long delays in the delivery of some small scale local highway projects. The new contract should bring improvement and consistency to the service councillors receive on locally important projects. A clear works date will be set at an early stage and all activities planned and monitored to achieve that date. This will only work if councillors appreciate there is no longer capacity in area office teams to carry out design work, so may I respectfully ask you not to expect them to do so. All design of highway works will be undertaken by the new contractor, Kier MG. The cost of design will be part of the costs charged for any scheme, including those funded from councillors' local highways budgets.

I am very much looking forward to the improvements in service, as well as the financial savings, which the new contract will bring. I also recognise the operational priorities for the first few weeks of the transition, and that the improvements will not be instant, and I thought it would be helpful for me to share that with you.