

## Parish Report March 2014

### Councillor

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### Government confirms more funding for Suffolk Broadband

Suffolk has been awarded almost £5 million of additional Government funding to help make high speed fibre broadband available to the hardest to reach communities. Today's announcement means that the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme, currently working to make superfast speeds (24 megabits per second or more) available to 85% of the county, can start working towards a higher target of up to 95%. All properties in Suffolk have been promised speeds of at least 2 megabits per second.

The funding comes from the Government's Superfast Extension Programme – designed to give 95% of the UK access to superfast broadband by 2017. Suffolk has been allocated £4.82 million. Welcoming the news, Suffolk County Council leader and chair of the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme, said: "This additional funding is excellent news and means we can start work on significantly extending the commitments we have made under the current Better Broadband for Suffolk programme. In particular, we're going to be able to make high speed broadband available to more of Suffolk's hardest to reach rural communities. We're only half a year into the delivery of the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme and we're already looking at how we can take it to the next level. Our current commitment to making superfast speeds available to 85% of Suffolk homes and businesses is only the beginning. We want to push forward so that even more people are able to benefit. I'm looking forward to this additional work getting underway and the day that slow, or non-existent, internet speeds are a thing of the past in Suffolk."

In January 2014, Suffolk County Council announced that it was inviting potential suppliers to discuss how they could deliver the additional work. A 'mini-competition' - separate to the current Better Broadband for Suffolk contract with BT – is now underway to identify a suitable supplier. As part of the new tendering process, Suffolk County Council is conducting a review of the open market to establish what broadband coverage commercial providers are planning to deliver. Following consultation, this information will be used to define the areas where the additional public funding can be invested. Officials aim to complete the tendering process by the summer of 2014, and for works to start by the end of 2014 - in parallel with the on-going Better Broadband for Suffolk programme.

Announcing the funding, culture secretary, Maria Miller MP, said "Superfast Broadband will benefit everyone in Suffolk - whether they need it for work, to do homework or simply to download music or films. Thousands of homes and businesses now have access and it is helping people with their everyday tasks. We want to make sure that Britain is one of the best countries in the world for broadband, and the extra £250 million we are investing will help ensure communities around the UK are not left behind in the digital slow lane."

### First Nominations in for Raising the Bar Awards

The first tranche of nominations has been received by Suffolk County Council for the Raising the Bar Awards. The awards aim to motivate those making a positive contribution to education in Suffolk as well as helping to spread best practice in the county. More than 180 nominations have been received in all 12 categories of the awards. In fact SCC has had so many nominations that it has decided to extend the deadline for submission to 1pm on Friday, February 28. Some of the examples of outstanding effort in

education include Vicky Hogg, headteacher at Thurlow CEVC Primary School. She is up for the Excellence in Achievement award.

Her nominator said: "Vicky has turned a failing school with no direction and with performance in the bottom quartile of all SATs measures into an Ofsted recognised 'good' school in under a year. "Through Vicky's leadership and her team's hard work and dedication we achieved some of the best Key Stage Two results in all of Suffolk. All in all, a fantastic year's work and a performance that the governing body are justly proud of." Another nominee is Claire Kent, who is up for the Innovation in Education and Skills award for establishing a Forest School in Clare. Forest Schools aim to inspire pupils by taking education outdoors and into a woodland environment.

She was nominated by St Edmundsbury borough councillor Alaric Pugh, who said: "This is an innovative educational approach responding to local need and the advantages of the Suffolk environment. Incredible dedication and commitment by entrepreneurial educationalists."

### **Eighty ways to discover Suffolk through County's Walking Festival**

Brochures for the Suffolk Walking Festival have been published with details of nearly 80 guided walks covering every inch of the county. Now in its seventh year, the festival kicks off with the 'Launch Jaunt' at 10.30am on May 10 at Ickworth House near Bury St Edmunds, with the help of Lesley Dolphin.

Throughout the three-week festival, which runs until June 1, there will be a delightful mix of short strolls around medieval villages and market towns and longer rambles through the gentle landscapes of Suffolk; through Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and along the glorious Suffolk coast.

"Many of the walks sold out last year," said David Falk, manager of Discover Suffolk. "So we are delighted that we have been able to develop the festival to include more walks than ever before. The range is fantastic and really offers something to suit all tastes and abilities."

### **Residents set to receive new travel bus passes**

As spring approaches so does the deadline to renew travel passes and Suffolk Passenger Transport is urging residents to take time to note the renewal process for Free Travel Bus passes or Travel Vouchers that expire on 31 March 2014. Suffolk residents with an age related pass will automatically receive a new one without the need to complete any forms. Pass holders will this receive before 31 March 2014.

Disabled Persons pass holders who qualify due to a disability which means they are unable to obtain a driving license or has a long term effect on their ability to walk will have received a renewal form to complete and send back with evidence of eligibility. Completed and returned forms will be processed with a new pass issued before 31st March 2014. All other Disabled Persons pass holders will receive their new pass automatically before 31 March 2014.

Resident who do not receive their new pass are urged to call the information line on 0845 6000659 after 31 March 2014.

As an alternative to free travel passes, the council offers a benefit to those living in remote areas or with severe disability in the form of Travel Vouchers that can be used towards the use of community transport, taxis or private hire vehicles. Travel Voucher holders will have received a renewal form and are ask to complete and return them for processing and new vouchers issued before 31st March 2014.

Alternatively residents can opt to renew their vouchers online at:  
<http://www.suffolkonboard.com/concessionary-travel>

Councillor Graham Newman, cabinet member for roads and transport said: "I'd encourage those with Travel Vouchers and Bus passes to follow the renewal process if they need to do so to avoid any delays in them receiving their new pass. If you are at the age to be eligible for a free bus pass and haven't already applied then you can do so online or by calling the information line on 0845 600 0659."

All forms should be returned to the following address: SCC Free Travel Pass PO Box 212 Waterlooville, PO7 6ZN

## **Businesses enjoy the good life in Suffolk**

A recent survey shows that businesses in Suffolk rate the quality of life and cost of premises as key reasons to locate and expand business in the county. Transport connections and location of Suffolk within the UK are also important factors for businesses after carrying out a survey to find out what makes Suffolk a good place to locate. Of the businesses responding, 65% say they are planning to expand in the next 12 months, of which 56% will be staying in Suffolk.

The second annual survey was carried out by Suffolk County Council's Invest in Suffolk service to support its work in promoting Suffolk as 'the bright choice' for businesses. When asked what is good about Suffolk as a place to do business, respondents said: "Long-term commitment to local area of business community. Ease of access to and from London. Low rents. Great connectivity to London. Local and well-skilled people at a good price – although we need more. Suffolk is a county full of opportunity... it just needs to be realised."

Councillor Richard Smith, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member responsible for economic development, said: "Businesses have told us they value Suffolk as being in the centre of trading activity, with a strong customer base, affordable premises, a skilled workforce - with the added bonus of having a high quality of life. We want to build upon this strength and encourage more people to invest in the county. That is why we carry out this survey. We want to show others what makes Suffolk the bright choice for businesses. Our county is home to some of the fastest growing industries that will drive the UK economy, backed by pioneering technology and far-sighted investment that puts them ahead of the rest. Our ambition is to create even more high value jobs across the county and ensure Suffolk is home to businesses that play a prime role in driving the sustainable growth of the UK economy."

This year's survey shows 63% of businesses have found it easy to access information about Suffolk. Businesses looking to relocate in Suffolk say they want information about commercial land or property, industry specific fact/figures, transport connections, skills and workforce availability and the availability of business networks