

Report to Brettenham Parish Council, 10th September 2015

Devolution

Suffolk's expression of interest in respect of taking on devolved powers from central government was published this week and will be discussed by Cabinet and full council next week. This document is the joint production of Suffolk County Council, the Districts and other public sector organisations such as the PCC and the Clinical Commissioning Groups. This is just the opening move in what is likely to be a lengthy process of negotiation with central government. The expression of interest can be seen on the SCC website.

Finance

During the August break there has been no news about how the County Council proposes to bridge the forecast shortfall in our finances of over £20m in the next two financial years. £20m may be a conservative assessment of the problem since, as was reported in an Audit Committee report last year, central government has little idea about the relative financial strength of individual councils and continues to push more costs onto them. In addition to changes with regard to payment of the living wage, there have also been changes in National Insurance contributions and a number of other impositions. The Local Government Association is becoming increasingly vehement about the necessity for central government to reconsider its approach to the future funding for councils in the autumn statement expected in November.

Other news, mainly about education

August as usual has been a quiet month and the only important other news has been examination results. I think that it is fair to conclude that efforts to improve educational standards in the county are showing signs of working, but progress is not surprisingly slow. Improvements were seen in both GCSE and A level results despite the fact that no overall improvement was seen nationally. In addition the SAT tests for 11 years olds in the county saw an increase in the percentage of pupils in primary schools achieving the expected level in reading, writing and maths. In 2015 77% of pupils achieved level 4 or higher in the tests compared with 73% last year. The national average stands at 80%, so Suffolk is definitely closing the gap. Suffolk has moved up 22 places in the national rankings, and is now 118th out of 150. There have also been improvements at key stages 1 and 2. The full figures will be published in October.

You Can Leave Your Cap On

The Suffolk Waste Partnership has launched a campaign to encourage residents to recycle the aluminium screw tops from glass bottles such as wine, spirits and cooking ingredients, along with the glass bottles on which they came. The 'Leave Your Cap On' campaign aims to increase the recycling of aluminium screw tops and collars by encouraging people to screw the tops back onto the empty glass bottles before taking them to one of the many glass recycling banks located at sites throughout Suffolk.

New vaccination programme launched to protect against meningitis

This month, SCC's Public Health team are welcoming the start of the new vaccination programme that will offer teenagers protection against meningitis (inflammation of the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning) caused by four meningococcal strains.

GPs will be inviting all teenagers aged 17 and 18 (born between 01 September 1996 and 31 August 1997) for the vaccine. It's important that anyone who plans to go to university this year gets vaccinated before they leave.

Jenny Antill
September 2015

Subsequent Email response from Jenny Antill regarding Potholes

1. Why when a pothole is reported on the website does the team come along and just fill in that hole, ignoring other potholes close by?

Our contractor does try to undertake the repair of potholes when they are aware of them in advance. If they are not aware of them it is not so easy. The work of the gangs is planned the day before and the work should be enough to keep the gang busy and so there should be little opportunity to take on large amounts of extra work and still treat all the sites that are planned. If it is just one or two extra potholes these will not be as disruptive.

We set targets for repairs to be completed in a certain time and failure to do so can incur a financial penalty. Thus there can be a reluctance to take on extra work. This is one example where the targets in the contract is driving behaviour that can be contrary to what we want. For that reason we are currently developing revised targets that better reflect what we want to achieve.

2. Why is such a long time left between repairing potholes and other defects and actually top dressing the road? In one case in Brettenham the gap was so long between road repair and top dressing that the potholes had in some cases opened up again. They were not repaired once again however, and the topping was simply poured into/over the holes.

The work to prepare a site for surface dressing takes significantly longer than the surface dressing operation e.g. a few days to patch the road and a few hours to surface dress. Surface dressing can only take place during the late spring / summer period when temperatures are higher, whereas patching can take place most of the year. In order to maximise resources we need the surface dressing team to have a continuous workload so that they can move from site to site with no days lost. We need to have most of the patching complete before we start the dressing. We would like to undertake this in the spring before the dressing season, but there is simply not time and given the risk of the patching gangs needing to be involved in gritting operations for the winter service we do undertake some patching during the autumn. The patching is a permanent treatment with a two year guarantee and should not open up. Our contractor should not ignore the potholes as described above. If you can provide me a location I will arrange for the site to be inspected.