

County Councillors Report to Brettenham Parish Council, Thursday 10th November 2016

Devolution

The council leadership and senior officers continue to be distracted by issues related to Devolution. It appears to be taking longer for the new Conservative Administration to make up its mind about the issue since the timetable has been pushed back and the council meeting to approve the arrangements has been postponed from 2nd to 23rd November. The results of the Suffolk wide Mori poll have now been published. Although those who were personally contacted by telephone showed a slight preference for the process and for an elected mayor, the sample was small, and a good number admitted to understanding little about the issues involved. Those who voluntarily responded were not in favour of an elected mayor, but did want to see decisions made closer to the people who are affected by them.

The problem with the arrangements as proposed is that they do not really achieve this as I have explained in the past.

School attendance.

Following above average results for both SATS tests and also GCSE's and A levels,

The Department for Education has released national statistics showing pupil absences in schools in England for autumn 2015 and spring 2016.

Suffolk's overall absence has reduced from last year's 4.7% to 4.4% this year, which marks the highest attendance record we have seen over the last decade.

Suffolk continues to have less unauthorised absence than both the East of England region and the national average and has ranked 16th out of the 152 Local Authorities across the country for the lowest unauthorised absence this year. This demonstrates a vast improvement since 2013/14 where Suffolk was ranked at 71.

Brettenham (following Village review)

Traffic.

I will be happy to follow up with regard to traffic issues that were raised at the village review meeting, although I do not think that it is within the remit of SCC to raise issues of speeding with the school. A possible route might be to ask a PCSO to visit the school once evidence of actual speeding is established.

As far as speeding is concerned, I can investigate the possibility of speed testing and the supply of VAS equipment for the village and will certainly flag this up as a request with the relevant officers. As I think you may be aware Steve Merry has been promoted and his successor, John Simpson, was the person who used to deal with VAS equipment. At present I am unsure who, if anyone has taken over the responsibility for this. I will make enquiries.

I have been able to fund this equipment out of my Highways Safety budget in the past and see no reason why I should not do this again, subject to availability of funds. It would be preferable if Brettenham could share the equipment with another village, and I think that it may be possible to arrange this as one or two other communities are in the process of investigating this solution.

Currently, owing to a backlog of cases, extensions to the speed limit are on hold while outstanding requests are dealt with. I should warn however that it is not an easy thing to achieve, involving agreement by the County Council's speed panel to check that the proposal meets fairly stringent criteria, followed by a legal Road Traffic Order which involves consultation and a relatively high cost.

Broadband.

I have raised the matter of inadequate Broadband in Brettenham generally with Jonathan Chown, and have also raised the specific case of Mr Keith.

In general Jonathan has replied to me that there is a plan to build a new cabinet in Brettenham, and a tentative date of September 2017 is 'pencilled in'. In my experience however not too much weight should be put on these projections. Sometimes work happens sooner, sometimes later. It is positive however that there do appear to be some plans in place. This means that Brettenham will not be among those very remote places in the last one percent or so of the county where the question of receiving high speed, or indeed any, workable broadband is still uncertain, in my opinion, despite SCC commitments to 100 percent coverage by 2020.

As far as Mr Keith's particular situation is concerned I have to confess that I did not really understand the technicalities of Jonathan's reply but it seems that because Mr Keith lives in a new house, the new and superior cabling to his house may enable him, and presumably his neighbours, to receive higher speeds through the new VDSL technology. However, Jonathan is somewhat sceptical about this, and he is going to monitor the process to see what happens when the technology is implemented and report back.

I note that you have written to James Cartlidge about the criteria for prioritisation. My understanding remains that it is British Telecom and not the County Council that controls this.

11/11/2016 Subsequent Email Communication with Jonathan Chown of SCC following Parish Council Meeting.

Question raised by Jenny Antill:

The Principal of the Special Needs School, Centre Academy, in the village said that he had contacted British Telecom about poor broadband in the village and had received a letter from someone called Matthew Lloyd who is the Head of Community Fibre Partnerships at BT. He has apparently offered them £20,000 towards getting high speed broadband to the school. How does this fit in with what we are doing? Should the school be doing this?

Response from Jonathan Chown, Programme Manager, CIO IT Service, Resource Management, Suffolk County Council:

Community Fibre is a BT scheme aimed at allowing communities (who are usually outside of the BDUK rollout) to self-fund upgrades.

I guess the question is to what extent it would benefit wider Brettenham compared to what is in our contract with BT. It's also worth being aware that BT would probably be unable to mobilise and build the upgrade any quicker than what we are planning to deliver via the programme too. I am unsure whether this will actually be any faster than waiting for the SCC roll out to hard to reach.

Play equipment

This would be a suitable project to receive County Councillor locality funding in future. I should warn residents that locality funding is being reduced alongside our budgets so an early application once a scheme is planned and costed would be advisable.

Jenny Antill November 2016