

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting on 15th April 2024

- 1 I have approached a second specialist Solicitors' practice as recommended by the National Community Land Trust Network of which Council is a member. Their quote was not competitive with Anthony Collins and Agenda item 20.04.14 refers. However, in discussing the matter, they did proffer the following, which I think is instructive, based on our broad enquiry: *...these are actually really difficult questions, and in many cases there might not be a clear-cut answer. The question of how to ensure perpetual affordability (e.g. avoiding the Right to Buy/Right To Acquire) is something which we have spent countless hours over and unfortunately there are few cast-iron guarantees of the kind I suspect you're looking for.*
- 2 The Food Bank is now operating from the Baptist Chapel on Ashfield Road. I have made it clear that the bowls pavilion remains an option over the winter months should an alternative be necessary.
- 3 The SCC Transport Planning Manager has been in touch to provide an update on progress towards the Elmswell/Woolpit pedestrian & cycle link. Cllr Mellen has queried the validity of some elements of the reasoning which lead to a conclusion that unavoidable delays including weather problems and the change in SCC's highways contractor have jeopardised the chance to apply for CIL funding until the Autumn bidding opens. The full answer to some of these questions and the chance of remediation towards progress on the ground will be the subject of a proposed meeting.
- 4 Along with Cllrs Hancock and Mansel and the MSDC Sustainable Transport Officer I met on 21st March with the SCC Area RoW Manager who is keen to help towards improving pedestrian / cycle access up Ashfield Road to Grove Lane, as per feedback from the MSDC Consultation. This will include our link with the Matthew Homes estate along with the proposals for development at Oak Lane and the rationalisation of paths through Turners' Field. We walked the various paths and discussed options for creation / diversion as well as noting various problems en route. Meanwhile, I have arranged a further meeting between SCC and the ElmsWild volunteers towards discussing the possibility of a footpath link between Kiln Meadow and Lukeswood.
- 5 I have had various on-line meetings regarding the sustainable transport initiatives in which EPC is engaged – the existing taxi-bus service and how it might be developed plus looking forward to the possibility of a DRT (Demand Responsive Transport) service using our own electric vehicle and an Uber-style App. Thurston PC are keen to consider a partnership on the latter. I have called a meeting of the 4 villages involved in the current (and ever-more successful) service towards discussing the way forward – possibly by the provision of a Thursday run to Stowmarket in the first instance. Grant aid is secured for this.
- 6 There has been discussion at BWMA meetings for some time regarding the difficulties in finding volunteer officers to keep some of the village organisations running. It has been suggested that the parish council might be able to offer paid-for 'secretariat' services, mainly bookkeeping, to encourage the continuation of our clubs and societies. One such is the Amenities Association which has the extra administrative burden of Newsletter advertising, subject to annual examination by the Charities Commission. The loss of key members leaves the Association at risk of not being in a position to address this, hence the Proposal at Agenda item 13. The income would cover costs and here is scope for staff to take on the work. Any approaches from other organisations would be taken on a case-by-case basis and it would seem to be a way to help maintain the diversity and range of our village community.

7 Ref Agenda item 11.2, Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP's) are major infrastructure projects of national importance, and the majority of Suffolk's NSIP's are associated with the generation or transmission of electricity. The decision to allow an NSIP to proceed is made by the relevant Secretary of State, not councils, although the county council is a statutory consultee for many projects. There are a high number of projects in Suffolk currently, with more in the pipeline:

- Drax – a gas power plant on the former Eye Airfield
- East Anglia Three offshore windfarm is under construction
- Two new offshore windfarms, East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two, were approved by the Secretary of State in March 2022
- EDF began construction of Sizewell C nuclear power station in January 2024
- National Grid are proposing grid reinforcement works from Bramford to Twinstead, with a decision expected later this year
- National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury stretch of the 'Great Grid Upgrade' programme, a controversial pylon route proposed for construction through the middle of the county
- SeaLink proposals for an undersea cabling route between Suffolk and Kent is due to see significant onshore infrastructure at Friston, near Aldeburgh
- LionLink (previously known as Eurolink) proposes undersea cabling to link the UK with the Netherlands, with landfall proposed either above or below the Blyth estuary
- Sunnica Solar Farm, a 2,500 acre proposed solar development for Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk, has still not been approved by the government, with a decision due in April

A new 750 acre solar farm, White Elm, has been proposed for Mendlesham in Mid Suffolk, with consultation due to begin in the autumn.

Most immediately, the Norwich-Tilbury pylons proposals are locally controversial and a statutory 10 week consultation is imminent with BMSDC seeking to co-ordinate local response towards a District-wide view.

8 We have official confirmation of the £500,000.00 s106 funded grant to Council for the Elmswell Tavern project. The applications for £200,000.00 in capital funding and £40,000.00 in first-year revenue funding are now submitted for consideration in the 4th tranche of the Government's Community Ownership Fund. Meanwhile the dissolution of the Community Benefit Society, ECE, is undergoing due process and Council will, as agreed, then assume delivery of the Elmswell Tavern project.

Peter Dow
14.04.2024