

News from our County Councillor Marie Strong County Councillor Wells Division

Community Construction Fund:

I referred last month to Wells Community Hospital award of £100,000 and Wells Maltings Trust award of £79,700. Apart from the monies to be spent on construction another requirement was that the projects should be 'shovel ready'. In fact apparently ready, steady, go - since I received this week the commemorative plaques for me to present on completion of the projects! I have sponsored three more worthy projects from this Division in readiness for the second stage which closes on 14 February. Fortunately there is a strong likelihood that there will be a further opportunity next financial year.

Rural Buses and the Coasthopper:

On 24 January I met, along with residents from our division, Norman Baker MP, Minister for Transport. Many of you share my strong feelings regarding the deficit in Government reimbursement for the concessionary bus passes. I took the opportunity to make the following statement to the Minister:

'Norfolk is a rural county and rural Isolation is all too easily identified within our parishes. A key factor in offsetting rural isolation is good public transport - and this is a costly exercise made even more costly for this county because of its beauty.

A beautiful county attracts visitors - visitors are welcome, they are vital to Norfolk's economy. But a high percentage of these visitors use their concessionary bus passes - passes which are not refunded by the Government to the extent originally intended.

Today Minister you are joining us on the Coast Hopper, which is an example not only of important rural transport but of a heavy county subsidy due to the short fall from the Government.

I am handing you details from 738 people demonstrating that this is not simply a holiday bus but like all our rural transport essential for the well being of our residents. Examples given include getting to hospital, to doctors' surgeries, to work, to college and school, to shop, to carry out volunteer work, to care for family members. And these are the ways in which people can avoid, and help others avoid, rural isolation. These are the reasons why we need the full subsidy to support all our rural public transport.

I gather that the decision to resolve the problem lies between yourself Minister (Norman Baker) and Minister Eric Pickles. Therefore I politely ask that together you resolve this issue before it puts further at risk much needed transport in my division and other rural areas of our beautiful county.'

As you may imagine the response was not an immediate yes! But we must be persistent if we are to safeguard, hopefully even improve, our rural public transport.

Keeping Vulnerable People Warm:

Money has been made available to help our most vulnerable keep warm. Advantage has already been taken of loans of portable heaters, low level home insulation, emergency heating oil, and 'warm packs'. For yourself or someone you know who could benefit from the scheme go to www.norfolk.gov.uk/warmandwell or 0344 800 8020.

Post Office:

Residents not only from Wells but the surrounding parishes make use of our Post Office - to keep it the vibrant place it is we need to encourage other users. The Post Office can offer banking, finance, DVLA car tax, passport checks and currency exchange, moneygrams, insurance - and stamps - and conversation!

Norfolk Credit Union:

If you know anyone who is unable to access bank services, including affordable loans, due to credit history or lack of conventional ID suggest they contact Norfolk's Credit Union. The NCU is a community bank providing an alternative to high street banks; it is regulated by the Financial Service Authority and deposits are protected by the Financial Services Compensation scheme. Visit www.norfolkcu.co.uk or call 01508 533842 for more information.

Non-Emergency NHS Helpline:

A new non-emergency number for medical and health care advice has been launched. The freephone number 111 replaces the NHS Direct line and is available for non-life-threatening advice and information.

Contact Marie Strong: marie.strong@norfolk.gov.uk or 'phone 07920 286 597