

News from your County Councillor Dr Marie Strong

Broadband:

As a long standing Member of the Broadband Work Party I am delighted that we are commencing our Better Broadband for Norfolk sooner than anticipated. Wells Division, including Sculthorpe, gave outstanding support throughout the whole of the campaign for Better Broadband. Thousands signed up and many supporting statements were submitted. In addition businesses in the Division provided evidence of the essential need of better broadband to flourish in today's market and these were included in the submission to Government for vital funding. I am pleased therefore that some of our small, rural parishes are included in the list of parishes named for early work. Before too long we will be hearing where work will commence for the start of the main programme.

In the meantime the seminar to which I invited representatives from all our local councils to explore the Better Broadband Programme, was very successful. The seminar covered the programme's objectives and the benefits it is expected to bring to Norfolk; how the implementation will take place; the types of technologies that will be used and the broadband speeds that are to be expected. Cllr Mike Gates and Mrs Gates represented Wells Town Council.

School Funding:

You may remember that together with Norman Lamb MP I took a deputation to Westminster to see the Minister of State for Schools, David Laws. The purpose of the visit was to stress that the proposed funding formula was particularly disadvantageous to our small high schools. And as we know in a rural county our small schools are an essential feature in offsetting rurality. Mr Laws listened to our concerns and those of others and promised to give further and serious consideration to the situation. He kept his promise to us, and other rural counties, and a number of important changes have been made to the formula. Whilst it is a lengthy document the most significant change Mr Laws is introducing is a new optional sparsity factor for 2014. This will enable rural authorities, including of course Norfolk, to target additional funding to small rural schools. Local areas will be provided with a number of flexibilities in how they use the sparsity factor in order to best meet local circumstances.

Incinerator:

I know many of you have friends and family in West Norfolk and indeed the question of the incinerator gave rise to discussion at a much earlier Parish Council meeting so I thought to give you an update. At Norfolk County Council's recent meeting of the full Council the following motion was agreed: 'Under Norfolk County Council's previous administration a contract was signed with Corry Wheelabrator for a waste incinerator. This full Council notes that the Planning Inspectorate process may not be concluded until January 2014. Full Council welcomes the decision of Cabinet Scrutiny to seek independent verification of the process of awarding the contract and the costs of terminating that contract. Full Council recognises that Cabinet will be drawing up contingency arrangements, involving officers, including looking at alternatives to Energy from Waste, in case the contract does not go ahead (including exploring funding options from Central Government). This council recognises that it would be premature to discuss the issue further until we can debate the outcomes referred to above.'

Norwich Bus Station:

To end on a very pragmatic note I know people have been disappointed to find the Norwich Bus Station, with its facilities, closed at week-ends. There is a strong possibility that the opening hours will be extended in the not too distant future. Also bus timetable signage is being improved.

Dr Marie Strong: County Councillor Wells Division: Glaven, Priory and Walsingham Parishes
You can contact me as usual at: marie.strong@norfolk.gov.uk or 07920 286 597