

County Councillor's Report for Lavenham Parish Council Meeting – Thursday 7th Sep 2017

Water Street weight restriction and highways reshuffle

As you are probably aware this project appears to have been (hopefully temporarily) stalled. I contacted the Suffolk Free Press after failing to get answers from James Finch – the cabinet member for highways who is supposed to be taking a personal interest in the matter. I think it is important the public know what is happening with Water Street and I aim to do some kind of street letter to inform residents of the plans and where highways are with them. I am told today that Graham Taylor has returned from holiday and as I write I am waiting to hear from him.

Trinity Gild and Sudbury Rd vegetation

Following the setting up of the new “service delivery centre” at Phoenix House at the start of this week, I am starting to get some sensible responses to highways issues. Trinity Gild and Sudbury Rd are now being inspected in advance of work to clear them. It's important that in the first instance the parish council report these sort of things on the highways reporting tool so that we have a paper trail and so that highways can respond to you directly. If there is no response I can chase.

Licence for Planters etc on pavement

I am chasing this with Phoenix House

Bears Lane development – access

I am awaiting a full reply from Steve Merry who is the new officer in charge of development management regarding the vehicle access issues for this proposed housing development. I calculate 159 dwellings would be having to use one narrow entrance onto Church Street with the current proposal. 150 is the minimum highways guidance tolerates for a single entrance.

Cemetery Chapel refurb.

You have asked for £5k towards refurbishing this. I visited with Cllr Andrew Searle and am happy to provide this but given I only have a total £8k locality budget this year and there are 17 other villages in the division, I will have to make that the lot for Lavenham for next two years.

Cutting of free school buses and post 16 travel subsidy

Schools supremo Gordon Jones this week suddenly announced a plan to withdraw free school buses to children's catchment area schools, leaving it in place only for pupils who attend their nearest school, with effect from Sept 2019. He also wants to completely axe the travel subsidy for post 16 year olds to their nearest college. There will be 789 pupils in Cosford affected. For secondary school pupils, our division will be the worst hit in Suffolk with 37% of secondary pupils having their free bus withdrawn and parents being faced with the choice of changing school or having to provide their own transport. This move will disproportionately hit rural areas across the county, and amounts to an attack on rural communities.

This was only announced this week but I from what I have heard from my fellow group members so far, I am hopeful there will be enough support to call this ill-thought decision in to scrutiny. It also goes against Government guidance on axeing school transport which recommends a phase-in to allow children to continue their education uninterrupted. I would like to see the council cut the cost of taxi transport for primary children deemed to have unsafe routes to school by making the roads safer.

**Robert Lindsay
September 2017**