

Report for Lavenham PC 7 June 2018 – Robert Lindsay county councillor

Cabinet set to approve school bus cuts despite overwhelming opposition

County council officers have today recommended that the cabinet goes ahead with changing the school transport policy to “nearest school” despite the fact that of the 3600 responses its consultation, 85% “strongly oppose” the proposals and a further 5% “oppose” them. The Cabinet meets to make the decision on Tuesday 19 June. I, along with my Group, have opposed the proposed changes since they were first announced in September and we will continue to raise our concerns at the Cabinet meeting. New research by a parent action group opposing similar changes in Essex made in 2014 shows that costs went up per child by 40% and that one in four rural Essex secondary school children lost their bus, adding 3,110 extra cars every day to the Essex rush hour.

New Council Leader elected

Following a leadership challenge in the Conservative Group at the Council, Cllr Matthew Hicks has been elected as the new Leader of Suffolk County Council, replacing Cllr Colin Noble. His Deputy will be Cllr Mary Evans, the former Chair of Scrutiny. She replaces Jane Storey as cabinet member for Highways.

Cllr Hicks has promised a “new era” of politics at the Council, with a focus on mutual respect, collaboration and co-operation. We are hopeful that he will be more open to working with, and listening to, councillors from other parties.

The first major change has been the removal of Cabinet Committees, which were only established in September 2017. They will be replaced by Policy Development Panels, although we do not currently have the full details on how these will operate.

Unitary discussions on hold

In March, it was announced that Colin Noble had commissioned the think-tank Respublica to produce a report outlining the options for a unitary council in Suffolk. This news was not well-received by the District and Borough Councils, who had not been consulted by Cllr Noble. However, in the lead up to the Conservative Group leadership election in May, Cllr Noble announced that work producing the report had been suspended. It is not yet clear whether this work will resume under the new leader, Cllr Hicks.

Soper Project – I enjoyed the recent launch of this exciting project in Lavenham Village Hall and have lobbied hard to get more time for the trustees to raise the necessary money.