

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

25 March 2010

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Portfolio Responsibilities:	Public Transport; Roads; Rail; Ports; Airports; Rights of Way; Archaeology; Spatial and strategic Planning and Road Safety

1. SHORELINE MANAGEMENT PLANS

The Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (Lowestoft to Felixstowe) has been adopted by Suffolk Coastal District Council. It is being considered Waveney District Council and has been adopted by the Environment Agency. It was endorsed by Suffolk County Council at the Cabinet Meeting earlier this month. The emphasis is continued protection of our major towns and villages, but it accepts that, in order to reduce the long term reliance on hard and visually intrusive defences, there is a need to allow parts of the coastline function more naturally. This will be achieved by managed re-alignment of the coast in some places and allowing natural erosion to continue in others. This will inevitably result in some changes and losses and I will continue to take a close interest in integrating the management of the coast with wider local objectives. For example, I have been involved in discussions on the future of the B1127 and coastal footpath at Potter's Bridge which will become increasingly subject to both fluvial and tidal flooding.

I am also involved in the production of Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (covering the Stour and Orwell estuaries in Suffolk) which is due out for public consultation in March 2010. Here too there will be areas where the County Council will have to have detailed discussions with our partners and make difficult decisions about changes on our coastline.

2. BEYTON FLOODING

This winter has again seen problems with flooding of Thurston Road, Beyton near the A14 junction and, after protracted negotiations with the Highways Agency, Parish and District Councils and the local landowner, funds have been found to undertake practical works to alleviate the problem. The first phase of the work will commence at the end of March involving a temporary road closure and improvements to the watercourse alongside the road. Later in the year further works are planned to increase the water storage capacity, which I hope will alleviate the problem under most circumstances.

3. New streetscape for felixstowe

I am very pleased to support an exciting project to enhance the streetscape in Felixstowe's historic town centre. The County Council's planners and designers have been working closely with colleagues from Suffolk Coastal District Council and Felixstowe Town Council.

The project is due to be constructed through 2010. The first phase to improve Convalescent Hill has been completed, and work to improve Bent Hill started this January. The next phase will improve the central shopping area of Felixstowe, Hamilton Road. This work started in early February.

The final scheme will involve a level block paved surface from shop front to shop front, with attractive seating areas. Currently the road is dominated by motor vehicles and the road safety record is poor compared to similar towns in Suffolk. A limited number of disabled parking spaces

and loading areas will be provided, however general parking will not be permitted under the new street design. This type of scheme has produced considerable road safety benefits at other locations in the UK and Europe.

I invited the highly respected international Shared Space expert Ben Hamilton Baillie to Suffolk to review the proposals. He was extremely pleased with the high quality of the design and commended the Council, and their partners, on the speed of the progress from initial proposal to the commencement of work on site.

4. A11 public enquiry

I gave evidence to the A11 public enquiry at the end of last year. I made a brief overarching statement which:

- reinforced the County Council's support for the A11 Improvement;
- emphasised my role as Chair of the Regional Transport Forum when the transport component of the second Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) process was discussed and the recommended programme was agreed and the regional commitment to the improvement of the A11 Fiveways to Thetford as a high priority project;
- stressed the County Council's commitment on Rights of Way Issues and the financial contribution from the County Council towards the NMU facility (relevant to the draft supplementary orders); and
- highlighted the wider benefits of the project in particular to Brandon.

The public enquiry was adjourned on a number of occasions to allow the Elveden Estates – the only objector to the scheme – to be supplied with up to date traffic surveys.

5. wi-fi on track

I was very pleased to support the introduction of WiFi provision on the Norwich to Liverpool Street InterCity rail service. This is an important step in supporting business travellers, and raising the profile and status of this key rail link. This in turn reflects in perceptions of Suffolk as a place to live and do business.

The project has only been possible because of funding contributions from Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils, and the East of England Development Agency. This will also set a benchmark for the new franchise due to start in April 2011 and gives added credibility to the County Council's lobbying for the best possible deal for Suffolk from the new franchise.

6. regional spatial strategy

The East of England Regional Assembly has endorsed the review of the Regional Spatial Strategy for passing on to the Government. When we were consulted on the scenarios for growth to be included in this document in the autumn, Suffolk County Council said that the lowest of those options (about 3,200 houses per annum) was the most that the county could accommodate in the foreseeable future. This is the figure that has now been included in the final version of the document. In addition, other changes have been made to the policies in the Strategy and the County Council has been working with the Regional Assembly to improve those affecting the coast, rural areas and climate change.

The future of the Regional Spatial Strategy is not yet certain, but if it follows the current legislation, it should be the subject of a further round of public consultation and an Examination in Public before it is adopted by the Secretary of State.

7. sizewell consultation

The Assistant to the Portfolio Holder and local members of Suffolk County Council joined District

and Parish Councillors on 23 February to hear a presentation from the senior management of EDF Energy on the progress of their plans for the development of a new nuclear power station at Sizewell. They heard of EDF's plans for public consultation on the proposals, with two stages before the application is finally submitted to the new Infrastructure Planning Commission, probably in late 2011. It is clear that there is a considerable amount of work that will need to be undertaken before the plans are ready to be submitted. This applies not only to the scheme for the nuclear power station itself but also for associated development away from the main site, such as transport infrastructure, workers' hostels and habitat creation. Officers from this Council and Suffolk Coastal District Council are working with EDF staff to understand the implications of their proposals and the way that any impacts might be mitigated.

Representatives from National Grid were also present at the meeting. They confirmed that the existing twin power line from Sizewell to Bramford was capable of coping with the planned new power generators at Sizewell and Greater Gabbard. However uncertainties remain as to how the much larger Phase 3 Norfolk/Suffolk marine windfarm will be connected to the Grid and we will pick this up in our efforts to push National Grid and Government to consider an offshore power transmission grid as an alternative to new damaging lines across Suffolk.

8. ENHANCING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE

The historic environment matters to all of us. It tells us about who we are and where we have come from. It gives identity to our villages, towns and cities. It has shaped the distinctive character of our countryside. The people of Suffolk recognise this. They visit historic buildings and sites in large numbers and want to participate in heritage activities through volunteering, study, and events.

Following the inclusion of archaeology in my Portfolio, I have been discussing with the service what ways there might be to enhance public access to Suffolk's heritage and, in particular, to the vast body of information and finds which it has collected over the last 36 years.

The role of this service has greatly expanded since it was established in 1974. Its budget has increased year on year to a likely £2.3million in 2009-10, but its core funding has reduced to £315,000 this year (with £2million in external funding). This gradual reduction in core funding has severely limited the ability of the service to engage the public in its work. At the same time, public interest in archaeology has greatly increased, largely because of the success of television programmes such as Time Team.

I am concerned that virtually none of the important finds made on excavations since 1974 are being displayed in Suffolk museums nor has the story which they tell been told.

The core staff of the service, who are recognised experts in the history and archaeology of the county, no longer have time to spend on community archaeology projects or write popular and academic accounts about the sites and finds which have been discovered. This is a matter of some concern as some of these staff are now nearing retirement and this considerable wealth of knowledge needs to be available to the people of Suffolk.

The Archaeological Service is the major provider of historic environment services to the people of Suffolk and the County Council has a major and richness of the County's heritage. As matter of some urgency, I have asked the service to come forward with proposals for enhancement with particular emphasis on public engagement and partnership working.

9. ENHANCING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE

Suffolk's Archaeology Service celebrates 60 years this year. The service will also be supplying six of the speakers at a forthcoming conference entitled Archaeology in Suffolk to be held at University Campus Suffolk's Waterfront Building in Ipswich on the 27 and 28 March.

The Conference, which will present the current state of knowledge about Suffolk's heritage from the earliest evidence of humans, 700,000 years ago, up to the archaeology of the Second World War, is being jointly sponsored by SCC, the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, the Council for British Archaeology (East Anglia), and UCS. It is hoped that the proceedings of the conference will subsequently be published as a monograph.

10. Winter Conditions

The weather conditions this winter have been very challenging in terms of snow fall combined with the very cold temperatures and the length of time these conditions have prevailed.

These conditions, together with the timing of these, have stretched our resources and have resulted in a number of issues.

Restriction of Salt Supplies

The timing and the severity of weather has depleted salt stocks across the country and these remain at a critical level. The delivery and distribution of salt is currently being directed by the 'Salt Cell' – which is comprised of the Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Department for Transport, [Department for Communities and Local Government](#), Highways Agency and the [Local Government Association](#).

Suffolk is currently assessed as a high priority as determined by Salt Cell and we are receiving small, however, regular deliveries.

All Highway Authorities are required to preserve salt and continue to treat only the highest priority roads. From 5 January 2010 and for the foreseeable future Suffolk County Council will only be able to use salt on our Priority 1 network, which includes all A and B roads, access to hospitals and fire stations. The maximum spreadrate for treating our roads has been reduced from this time, from 20 to 15gm/m². In the event of significant falls of snow we will use grit at difficult spots on the lower priority routes.

Suffolk's Priority 1 and Priority 2 routes can be viewed through the Elgin Website, please following the instructions from the link below:

<http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/TransportAndStreets/RoadMaintenance/RoadSaltingAndSnowClearing.htm>

Statistics for this Winter Season

1 November 2009 to 19 February 2010

Salt used - 23,500 tonnes

Priority 1 runs –95 at 1232 miles per occasion.

Priority 2 runs –38 at 848 miles per occasion (P2 runs haven't been run since 5th January due to the shortage in salt stocks)

Total drivers hours 16,500 hours by 115 Drivers; we have salted 149,500 miles of road

Spend for this season so far to the end of January 2010 - £2.2million and we projecting a total cost outturn of £3.1million

Clearing pavements

There have been lengthy discussions in the media during this winter regarding individuals clearing the snow away from pavements in front of their homes or business and the issues of liabilities. It is hoped that these discussions do not deter the community spirit shown by people across Suffolk from carrying out this work in the future.

The latest advice from the Government states the following:

“Although, ultimately, it is for the courts to decide issues of liability, as long as the clearing of snow and ice does not make the situation more dangerous, then it is highly unlikely that any claim against people who did so, would be successful. All that is needed is a shovelful of table salt to prevent the formation of ice on the cleared area and a pinch of common sense”

Grit Heaps / Bins scheme

Suffolk County Council runs a scheme to provide roadside grit heaps or fill grit bins on request from Parish or Town Councils so local people can treat local trouble spots on minor roads, which otherwise would not be treated.

During the severe weather a reminder has been sent to all County Councillors and SALC have been requested to re-issue the detail of the Grit heap / bin scheme. There have been numerous enquiries from Parish and Town Councils exploring the opportunities of introducing such facilities in their areas. Further work on this issue will be undertaken in preparation for next winter.

For further information on this scheme please go to the following link:

<http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/TransportAndStreets/RoadMaintenance/RoadSaltingAndSnowClearing.htm>

11. Winter Weather takes its toll on the County's Roads

The snows may have melted for the time-being, however as the frost comes out of our roads the extent of damage which the worst cold spell for 30 years has caused is becoming apparent.

Councillors will have noticed a rapid appearance of potholes and breaking up of some road surfaces across our highway network. You may well also have received reports from Parish Councils and road users of problems in their localities. This is a picture which is also being reported across the Country.

Area Highway Managers, and Ipswich and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils have the responsibility for keeping the highway network safe for the public to use. Their staff carry out regular inspections of the roads and pavements and receive reports of potholes from the public.

- The December – January period saw a three-fold increase in the reports of potholes from the public compared with the same period last year
- Anecdotal information from recent inspections has shown a two-three fold increase in numbers of potholes requiring urgent repair.
- In total about 4,000 pothole repairs have been undertaken during January and February
- There are currently 24 road gangs working full time around the County on pothole repairs
- The additional cost of repairing potholes to date has been around £600,000
- The deterioration in road conditions has resulted in an increased number of pothole related insurance claims

The main problems being identified are :-

- Breaking up of carriageway edges, particularly on narrow roads where there are problems of vehicle overrun and verges have been softened by recent wet weather.
- Breaking up of road surfaces around existing areas of weakness such as utility trenches, previous patch repairs and construction joints. Cracks in road surfaces allow water to penetrate which when it freezes causes further cracking.
- Stripping of previous surface dressings. The very cold frosts have caused bitumen binders to become brittle resulting in loss of stone from surfaces.
- Breaking up of previous surfacings - water has penetrated surfacing layers and frozen

causing the surfacing to lift away from the underlying road structure.

Because of the need to keep roads safe, many of the repairs have had to be completed in wet or frozen conditions. In these conditions temporary repairs have been undertaken and these will need to be replaced with permanent repairs as part of our summer repairs programmes. Also as part of the summer repairs programme early intervention repairs will be undertaken to roads which are beginning to deteriorate. This type of repair is a cost effective way of preventing further costly damage to our roads. The Council has agreed to provide an additional 1.5million to fund this work.

It can take some time for the full extent of the damage to our roads and pavements to become apparent and it is likely that potholes will continue to appear over the coming weeks. Parish Councils and the public are encouraged to report potholes which they consider to be dangerous via the County Council's contact centre on 0845 6066067.

12. RIVER LARK FOOTBRIDGE

I'm very pleased that Suffolk County Council has managed to 'reconnect' the people of Mildenhall and Barton Mills after recently completing the installation of a new footbridge over the River Lark.

The new bridge is a large single span and replaces two very unsatisfactory bridges that previously crossed the River Lark and presented a real obstacle to anybody with a mobility problem. The footpath between the two communities is a very convenient and attractive shortcut giving access to Mildenhall's local services and avoids walking down a twisty country road – or more likely getting in the car.

Work has now moved on to improving the footpath on the Barton Mills side of the river, including raising and resurfacing the path to prevent occasional flooding.

The bridge represents a considerable investment in the rights of way network but I think shows our commitment to sustainable, non car-based travel”

13. SUFFOLK ROADS SAFE BOARD

Last December a workshop of key road safety agencies met in Ipswich to consider the key issues for Suffolk, the way forward and how the Board will play its part.

During 2010 the County Council will be drafting a new Local Transport Plan and this is the opportunity to review and refresh our road safety strategy. Furthermore, in 2008 and 2009, the numbers of people killed or seriously injured on Suffolk's roads were higher than in 2007, reversing what had been a pleasing downward trend.

Following discussions with Lucy Robinson, I agreed we needed to kick start a review and the workshop brought together senior councillors and officers from the county council, the police, the Highways Agency and the Fire and Rescue Service. I was delighted that Simon Ash, the Chief Constable, was able to attend and describe the Police's commitment to road safety.

We discussed at some length the problems of speeding, the rise in motorcyclist fatalities, the high numbers of young drivers involved in accidents, and the growing numbers of pedestrians injured on our roads. We also took note of the variations in accident numbers and types in different parts of the county e.g. Waveney had (in 2008) the highest number of accidents causing injuries to a child, the highest number of motorcyclists at fault in accidents and the largest proportion of younger drivers at fault.

Work is now starting on reshaping the road safety strategy. Overall, I suspect this is not a simple process, there are many facts and issues to consider however I consider it is essential that all the agencies and the Roadsafe partners bring their particular expertise together during the next few months.

The role of the Roadsafe Board will also be essential in driving the new strategy forward and I will be discussing options on how best the Board will operate in the future.

14. IPSWICH MAJOR SCHEME

Officers submitted a funding bid to the Department of Transport for conditional approval for the £25 million sustainable transport major scheme Ipswich - Transport fit for the 21st Century in May 2009. This scheme is a key deliverable to achieve the Suffolk Story priority of a strong and dynamic jobs market and has been identified as a priority by the East of England regional bodies. It will transform the quality of sustainable transport in and around Ipswich.

The programme for delivery of the scheme assumes a start of works later in 2010. Since submission of the bid there has been a long period of discussion with Department of Transport officials to clarify scheme appraisal issues. A decision on the bid is still awaited from Government. In the mean time preparatory design work has been continuing and we are still on track to build the scheme as programmed."