

## **County Councillor for Necton and Launditch Division**

### **Report February 2021**

#### **Committee Meetings:**

A reminder that all County Council meetings are streamed live on You Tube and can be viewed as recordings on the same channel later.

#### **Budget:**

The Council will set its budget for financial year 21/22 at a meeting to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. The settlement from central government is broadly neutral; there has been a small increase in the Rate Support Grant and the Rural Services Delivery Grant but a reduction in the payment from new homes bonus. Despite this the Council will set a balanced budget which maintains the current level of services. However, inevitably there will be an increase in council tax; a 1.99% increase in the general rate and a 2% increase in the adult social care precept (up to 3% is permitted). As with all local authorities the Council must set a budget which is balanced over a 3-year period; the projection for 22/23 is for a tax rise of 1.99% plus 1% for adult social care.

#### **Flooding:**

The heavy rain that occurred on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> December caused over 180 dwellings in Norfolk to be internally flooded, roads were flooded and damaged, and blockages to highway and other drainage systems were caused due to silt run off from surrounding fields. Norfolk County Council is the Local Lead Flood Authority and has a duty under the Flood and water Management Act to investigate flooding which puts lives at risk or causes serious structural harm to buildings; causes dwellings to be inundated or causes a highway (above Cat 3) to be impassable. The work of the Water Management Team has been put under severe pressure investigating these incidents. NCC has allocated £650k from this years budget to assist with flood investigation work, urgent repairs to highway damage and clearing of blocked drainage systems. A reserve of £1.5m has been created for 2021/22 to fund flood investigation and maintenance work. A Norfolk Strategic Flood Board has been established under the Chairmanship of general Lord Dannatt to coordinate a Norfolk wide response to flooding with the 36 organisations within Norfolk that have flood risk management responsibilities.

#### **Elections 2021.**

The government is putting in place plans to hold Covid secure elections on the 6<sup>th</sup> May. In Norfolk there will be elections for the 84 seats on Norfolk County Council and for the Police and Crime Commissioner which was postponed in May last year. Currently hand delivery of leaflets and canvassing is not allowed, instructions on delivery of election material from candidates is awaited. The government is allocating extra money to local councils to allow polling stations and vote counting venues to be made Covid secure. Rules on postal voting and proxy voting are being considered.

### Census:

Every 10 years Office for National Statistics (ONS) carry out a census of the population of the United Kingdom. 2021 is census year and the census will ask for responses on **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March**. Census population estimates are vital in helping to shape the communities in which we live and work. Census 2021 will be “digital first” which may be challenging for some but there will be a large range of backup services available to help residents respond to the census in a different manner wherever they live.

### Ash Tree Die-Back.

A study of roadside Ash Trees has revealed that by 2023 half of the 168,000 roadside Ash trees in Norfolk will display advanced decline due to Ash die-back. Most of these trees are privately owned with only 20,200 belonging to NCC. It is estimated that the cost of carrying out tree safety work, habitat restoration, raising awareness among landowners and inspecting and reporting will be £1m over the next 2 years.

### Highways:

My Division has been without a highway engineer since the beginning of October last year and 2 other post have been vacant since before Christmas. Happily, 2 personnel were recruited to fill the 2 voids and I understand that a highway engineer will be appointed this week. Please continue to report highway matters as they arise and encourage members of the public to report highway problems either directly to NCC via the website or via the parish clerk. Items “saved” for reporting at the PC meeting only delays action by the highway team.

### Free School Meals.

NCC has extended its free school meal voucher scheme to make sure no child goes hungry during the February half term. The scheme is administered through schools and details of eligibility can be found on the NCC website.

### Every Child On-line.

NCC is committed to ensuring that children learning from home are not disadvantaged by lack of equipment or connection to the internet. The Children’s Services team have delivered 2,000+ laptops and tablets to 2241 children in 140 schools. In addition, we will be improving connectivity in 4G and Wi-Fi notspots with unlimited data packages for the next 6 months.

Mark Kiddle-Morris.

Member for Necton and Launditch.

Norfolk County Council.