

## **Report for Nedging Parish Council by Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Councillor 11 July 2023**

### **Replacing the mains pipe on Bildeston High Street**

Some time ago I wrote to Anglian Water's CEO to ask when they would be replacing the ageing and continually leaking Victorian main on Bildeston High Street. The reply I got said that it was in the works but there appeared to be no timetable. I'm pleased to say they are now planning to do it, from April next year. I have met on site with the project manager from AW, Nigel Plumb, and he has assured me he will communicate with parish councils of the villages affected. It will mean four different road closures at different places on Bildeston High Street for a continuous period of about 16 weeks, over the four phases of the work. The Ipswich Road entrance to Bildeston will be closed in phase 1 which is projected to last 4 to six weeks. I have heard repeatedly from residents that they would put up with a lengthy planned closure and diversions if it meant the frequent unplanned closures due to leaks were avoided.

### **Libraries funding – new contract to run them**

In June the county cabinet agreed to plug a £960,000 funding gap for the libraries service until the end of its contract in July 31st 2024. It is this week (Tues 11<sup>th</sup> July) being recommended to agree to raise the annual funding of library service from £5.992m to £6.842m per year and to seek a competitive tender to run the libraries for the next six years, with an option to renew for another six years. Officers have ruled out taking the service back in house or creating an arms length company to run it, as they say this will increase the running costs. The funding will not be subject to annual inflationary increases, so it will be up to whoever wins the contract to make savings or raise funding to meet inflationary costs. There will be a public consultation for 14 weeks from October this year to January 2024. The existing contract will be extended for 10 months to allow time for the consultation and tender process which will begin June 2024.

### **Coping with growing water demand as climate change strikes**

There have been mounting warnings about our water supply and the health of our rivers in Suffolk as climate change makes rainfall less predictable and as more and more housing, agricultural and industrial development increases demand.

Water Resources East stated in Nov 2022 "Unless action is taken, increasing water scarcity will constrain agricultural production and curtail economic and housing development, impacting the region's future prosperity and endangering the East's iconic chalk rivers, peatlands and wetlands."

Essex and Suffolk Water is currently consulting on a proposal for a moratorium on mains connections for new businesses until 2032 in the Hartismere area of north Suffolk. The water company objected to a recent application for new chicken sheds because it said it had no more capacity to supply extra water.

This month (16<sup>th</sup> May) the cabinet agreed to a new policy to guide its response to applications for reservoirs and desalination plants. The council's officers said developers needed to see that the council had a clear position in relation to water and "climate adaptive infrastructure projects".

My political group is concerned that building desalination plants will add to climate emissions and accelerate the problem. We believe a better way of tackling this issue is reducing water demand, rather than trying to boost supply.

### **Votes fill potholes!**

The Conservative county council leader used the council's annual meeting following local elections in which Conservatives lost control of four district councils across Suffolk, to admit that the council need to do more. He announced that they were spending an extra £10 million over the next 20 months, to try to fix potholes in side roads, outside the A and B category roads. The current annual roads maintenance budget, agreed with new contractor Milestone which begins work on 1<sup>st</sup> October, is just £11 million. It did not form part of the county's budget agreed in February this year and is likely to come from borrowing. It appears that this is a one off announcement made in response to what Conservatives heard on the doorstep in local district council elections. However, while welcome news, our political group is concerned that a sticking plaster approach of occasional announcements will not be enough to address a continuing problem beyond 20 months.

### **Bildeston Food bank**

The Bildeston food bank is a useful barometer of local need and the cost of living crisis. It is currently looking after 35 families - that's 103 people, 42 of them are under 16. Donations by individuals are down approx. 75%. They are receiving support from financial donations, the three local shops on our patch (Hicham, Bildeston and Monks Eleigh Community Shop), Morrisons and Suffolk County Council.

They delivered 500ltrs of heating oil to 14 families last winter and expect to do similar this coming winter.

It is now working in partnership with Social Services, Adult Social Care, Child Social Care and other agencies.