

Enquiries regarding this Agenda:
Amy Bryant (01284) 757100

Rural Area Working Party

***Wednesday 15 June 2011 at 5.00 pm
in Room GFR14, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds***

CONSTITUTION: *Chairman: To be elected*
 Vice-Chairman: To be appointed

FULL MEMBERS:

<u><i>Conservative</i></u> <u><i>Members (8)</i></u>	<u><i>Independent</i></u> <u><i>Group Member (1)</i></u>	<u><i>Labour</i></u> <u><i>Member (1)</i></u>
<i>Mrs Broughton</i> <i>Clifton-Brown</i> <i>Hale</i> <i>Pugh</i> <i>Ray</i> <i>Stevens</i> <i>Thorndyke</i> <i>Mrs Whittaker</i>	<i>Redhead</i>	<i>VACANCY</i>

SUBSTITUTES:

<u><i>Conservative</i></u> <u><i>Members (3)</i></u>	<u><i>Independent</i></u> <u><i>Group Member (1)</i></u>	<u><i>Labour</i></u> <u><i>Member (1)</i></u>
<i>VACANCY</i> <i>Houlder</i> <i>Mrs Rushen</i>	<i>Nettleton</i>	<i>VACANCY</i>

QUORUM: *Four Members*

<p><i>Please switch off mobile communication devices during the meeting, unless exceptional circumstances require otherwise.</i></p>

Agenda

Procedural Matters

1. **Substitutes**

Any Member who is substituting for another Member should so indicate together with the name of the relevant absent Member.

2. **Election of Chairman**

3. **Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

4. **Apologies for absence**

5. **Minutes**

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2011 (copy attached).

6. **Declaration of interests**

Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any personal or prejudicial interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda no later than when that item is reached and, when appropriate, to leave the meeting prior to discussion and voting on the item.

Part 1 – Public

7. **Terms of Reference**

- (a) Maintain an overview of the issues relating to the wellbeing, economic prosperity and future development of the rural area of St Edmundsbury and to make recommendations to the Cabinet about actions required to promote its success;
- (b) oversee the development and monitor the implementation of the Council's Rural Action Plan (and any replacement) and to make recommendations to the Cabinet accordingly;
- (c) consider service related and other issues which relate specifically to the rural area and to liaise with parish councils and other partners as appropriate;
- (d) appoint steering groups for any issue within the remit of the Working Party, and to co-opt non-voting members to these steering groups in order to provide alternative viewpoints and expert advice; and
- (e) invite interested parties to meetings as considered appropriate.

The Working Party is required to **NOTE** the Terms of Reference for the Rural Area Working Party.

Part 1 – Public

8. Parish Conference: Debrief

Following the Parish Conference on 12 May 2011 a debrief will be undertaken and planning for the Autumn conference will commence. The Management Support Officer will verbally updated the Working Party.

9. Rural Bus Cuts: Identify Practical Solutions

Representatives from Suffolk County Council, bus operators and other stakeholders will discuss the issue of rural bus cuts and identify practical solutions.

A copy of Suffolk County Council's transport solutions toolkit is attached as Report **C21**.

10. Street Lighting

Suffolk County Council (SCC) is shortly to embark on a project to make all street lighting controllable in respect of timing and light level output.

SCC is to invest £2.5 million to install an intelligent lighting system to over 55,000 street lights. This will enable street lights to be dimmed and lighting hours to be controlled from a central location. Overall the investment will deliver annual savings on energy costs approaching £500,000 and carbon reductions of over 4,000 tonnes per annum.

The proposals would as a rule see lighting turned off in residential areas, between midnight and 5.30am and dimmed in other areas.

There are certain locations where close examination of lighting levels and operating times needs consideration such as town centres, major junctions, public car parks and indeed residential areas. SCC are proposing to draw up initial proposals and hold local meetings to allow all those interested (Police, Borough/District, Town and Parish Councils, residents, businesses and including Borough Councillors) to have input in order to draw on their local knowledge.

A presentation on the proposals will be made at a meeting by Richard Webster, Electrical Services Manager, Suffolk County Council.

Recommendation

The Working Party is recommended to **NOTE** the contents of this narrative and presentation.

11. Rural Vision 2031: Issues consultation summary

Report **C20** attached.

12. Rural Post Offices: Benefit Cheques

The facts

- (a) currently 'green giro' benefit cheques can be cashed at Post Offices, however the Government recently awarded PayPoint, a private sector company, the contract.
- (b) from 2012 (no official date has been issued yet) those people wishing to cash their DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) benefit cheques will only be able to do so at a PayPoint outlet.
- (c) change will not affect the majority (98% nationally) of benefit recipients who receive their payment directly into their bank account - those without access to a bank account can receive their cash via a Post Office card account, a very basic form of bank account, if they wish to continue to use and support their local Post Office.
- (d) there are 22,000 PayPoint outlets around the country. However in St Edmundsbury very few are found outside of Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds.

Potential benefits

- (a) the DWP state it would save taxpayers millions of pounds - cashing and processing cheques costs £30 million a year.
- (b) PayPoint outlets are often open on Sundays and in the evenings, unlike many Post Offices.

Potential concerns

- (a) benefit recipients will have to access the PayPoint system through a swipe card or barcoded bill, which may cause difficulties for some vulnerable people (most people who had opted for the giro system were unable or unwilling to cope with electronic banking). Of the 250,000 to 350,000 estimated recipients of 'green giros' in the UK, around 60,000 are pensioners.
- (b) PayPoint outlets may not be as conveniently located as existing Post Offices.
- (c) Post Offices will lose income and potentially visitors. The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters has expressed its fears to the Government about the potential impact on the Post Office network.

The specific impact for St Edmundsbury

- (a) the Borough Council does not pay anyone their housing benefit payment via a 'green giro' – the majority now receive their payment via BACS. A small minority receive payment via a 'crossed cheque' that can be cashed at any bank.
- (b) the change will affect those residents who still receive their DWP benefit payments by cheque. They will need information and support from the DWP and other agencies to assist them in the transition.

- (c) local Post Offices may also want to advise their customers on switching to means of payment that still allow access to their money at the Post Office itself. For instance, as well as the Post Office's own card account, a large number of high street bank accounts can now be operated free of charge at Post Offices.

Recommendation

The Working Party is recommended to **NOTE** the current position.

13. Rural Area Working Party Work Programme

Report **C22** attached.

14. Dates of Future Meetings

The following dates are suggested for the approval of the Rural Area Working Party:-

Monday 12 September 2011;
Wednesday 9 November 2011;
Tuesday 17 January 2012; and
Wednesday 14 March 2012.

All meetings to commence at 5.00 pm.

Part 2 – Private

NONE