

Member of Norfolk County Council (NCC) for **Henstead** Division
Parish areas within the Division: **Bixley, Bramerton, Caistor St Edmund, Framingham Earl, Framingham Pigot, Kirby Bedon, Poringland, Stoke Holy Cross, Surlingham, Trowse with Newton**

CURRENT ISSUES AND CONCERNS 22nd February 2016

1. The County Council meets today to decide on its Revenue and Capital Budgets for the next three years. Of particular concern will be the Revenue Budget for 2016-17 as its agreement will set the Norfolk County Council's share of **Council Tax** for that year, bills for which will be sent out next month. It seems that the likely increase is 3.99% which on a Band "D" property will mean a tax of £1190.79 (last year: £1145.07, the same rate as in 2010-11) to which must be added the precepts from the Police (agreed at 1.98%), & Districts (proposed in South Norfolk at 3.3%), and Parishes (the rate depending where we live). The Budget setting has been assisted by further changes to services, more efficiencies, an increase in the tax base (more homes paying council tax), reductions in discounts offered by some district councils, a share in the New Homes Bonus and improved Council Tax Collection rates.
2. I have recently received another update on the proposed **Long John Hill railway bridge** reconstruction, in respect of which there is a prolonged road closure. In the latest news Network Rail has announced closure of the footway under the bridge due to falling bricks. This footway stoppage will last until at least Easter. Currently the plan is still to replace the bridge at Christmas, but Network Rail is seriously looking at whether this could be accelerated in view of the continuing deterioration of the bridge.
3. Remember that [Youth Parliament elections](#) take place in Norfolk 14-20 March this year and all 11-18 year olds are invited to stand for election and to vote. At the last elections in 2014 more than 37,000 votes were cast. The deadline for applying to stand for election has now passed.
4. [Anglian Bus services 87 & 88](#) through Poringland, Stoke Holy Cross and Trowse have new timetables from 22nd February involving slight adjustments at certain times to routing to improve timekeeping. Additionally from that date [Anglian Bus services](#) 85 (via Bramerton) & 86 (via Poringland), operated under contract to Norfolk County Council, are to be operated by Simonds in place of Anglian from 22 February as part of re-quoting for County Council subsidy. Furthermore a new timetable for these services from September 2016 has been drafted and is out for consultation which closes 1st March. For Service 85 this indicates the potential loss of two Norwich bound services and three outbound towards Loddon and bus users are justifiably concerned.

5. [Emma Healey, whose novel “Elizabeth is Missing”](#) won the Costa First Novel Award in 2014, came to Poringland Library on Monday afternoon 15 February, to talk about her writing and her book. “Elizabeth is Missing” which became a fixture on bestseller lists after it was published nearly two years ago. It follows octogenarian Maud’s quest to find out what happened to her friend Elizabeth, a mystery made all the more difficult because Maud has dementia. The book has received praise for its portrayal of a protagonist coping with dementia, and Emma discussed her inspiration for the novel and answered audience questions. All 47 Norfolk County Council libraries have ‘reminiscence packs’, comprising items designed to trigger memories, available for loan as well as a special collection of books and resources both for those living with dementia and their carers.
6. Work continues by the Trails Team at Norfolk County Council in resolving the current closure of part of the [Wherryman’s Way](#), the Norwich to Great Yarmouth footpath, near Chedgrave. The section currently closed runs along the River Chet’s northern bank between Chedgrave Common and Hardley Hall. This follows significant safety concerns arising from the deterioration of the footpath structures and of the underlying bank. A community forum for local residents and user groups will be arranged soon to discuss and seek views on a way forward.
7. There is concern locally about the disturbance and eroding of the grass verges along Caistor Lane, Poringland/Caistor St Edmund caused by Anglian Water and other Construction Traffic. The local Network Coordinator at County Highways is “on the case” and will ensure that reinstatement is made.
8. Norfolk County Council has lodged an objection to the planned Norwich Powerhouse development (Generation Park Norwich) by the River near Trowse on the grounds of potential flood risk. In similar vein the Environment Agency has made a holding objection in the absence of an acceptable flood risk assessment. This follows reports that the developer is currently in financial difficulties.
9. Following increased misuse of [Blue Badges](#) the County Council is to appoint a Blue Badge Investigations Officer to help reduce fraud in the County. Where misuse is detected offenders may be prosecuted with a fine of up to £1,000. Blue Badges are a vital resource for someone with mobility problems. They allow a disabled person to park as near as possible to their destination. Misuse by people who do not require this help makes life harder for genuine users. To report Blue Badge misuse call 0344 800 8020.
10. Concern has built up about dangerous and inconsiderate parking outside Framingham Earl High School and Stoke Holy Cross Primary School both at the beginning and end of the School day. There is consequent danger to students who have to weave between parked vehicles, obstruction to school buses, traffic congestion, blockage to immediate residents, and damage to footways and grass verges. Do we really need the heavy hand of the law or large sums of public money on parking restrictions to resolve matters? Or might common sense prevail?