

A Message from your County Councillor - November 2017

I am writing this during the first weekend in December for what will appear, in most Villages, in the January or February newsletter. Should you by chance be reading this online before Christmas may I repeat my best wishes for a Happy and Peaceful Christmas and New Year.

I had intended to start this month's Report with some views on our local Health Service (more later). However, the explosion of comments on social media and elsewhere in the last week of November regarding "cuts" to subsidised bus services has brought a change of plan.

All bus services which are subsidised by the tax payer i.e. you and I, should already be "socially necessary" or at the very least "socially desirable". Any removal either in part or whole of these services must therefore be detrimental to someone. However, 97% of bus services running in Kent are not subsidised and will therefore be unaffected by any changes. The scaremongering by some Politicians is unfair to residents and is causing many to worry unnecessarily. Because of my own and residents' concerns I attended the recent Kent County Council Environment and Transport Committee as a visiting Member to speak on your behalf and seek further information. Kent County Council currently spends £5.69 million of our money annually subsidising bus services. The proposals to be consulted on seek to reduce this by £2 million in 2018/2019 and a further £2 million in 2019/2020, a possible 2% reduction in our bus services. There appears to be six bus services within the Swale area which are subject to review within the consultation. Services in the Swale East Division are the 662 and 664 serving Norton and Lynsted on school days only, the 638 Whitstable to Faversham serving Hernhill and the 666 Ashford to Faversham. I have requested further information on possible impacts to the above. Please remember some of these services travel with very few or occasionally no passengers at a public subsidy in excess of £10 per passenger. This £4 million spent elsewhere within the Transport Department Budget would, for example, fill an awful lot of pot holes per annum. The Consultation runs from 17th January to the 27th March. Please respond and copy me in to your responses.

Returning to the Health Service, there are currently two proposals to reconfigure acute services in East Kent. One proposal is to significantly downgrade the services offered at Kent & Canterbury Hospital in favour of moving them to Ashford and or Margate. The second option is to build a new "super" Hospital in Canterbury and downgrade services offered in both Margate and Ashford. Representing as I do a Division that stretches from Dunkirk and Graveney in the East to Bredgar in the West I am well aware that I have residents for whom either Canterbury, Ashford, Maidstone or even Medway are their nearest full Accident and Emergency Hospitals.

I believe this reorganisation to be premature and misguided. For decades, the Health Authorities have spoken of moving services closer to the patient. Whilst they often quote the example of Estuary View in Whitstable not all communities in East Kent have the advantage of a local facility able to deliver most or all routine operations and provide overnight inpatient care. Surely, we should be funding, building and staffing such facilities

in all our Towns before we reduce the number of Accident and Emergency units and force the sick and their visitors to undertake unnecessary long and complicated journeys?

Wearing my Leader of Swale Borough Council hat I have had meetings with both the Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Education and his Officers to discuss their future plans for further school places in Swale and also with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport and his Officers to discuss potential sites for lorry parks in Swale. Readers will know that getting heavy goods vehicles out of our lay byes and off of our slip roads etc. has long been a personal goal of mine.

November has seen the usual plethora of Committee Meetings, the World War 1 Commemoration Steering Group, Swale Borough Council Cabinet, Kent Flood Risk Management Committee, Kent County Council Growth and Economic Development Committee, Swale Borough Council Transformation Board, the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership and Kent Council Leaders to name but a few. I attended the Annual General Meeting of the Kent Association of Local (i.e. Parish) Councils on one Saturday in November. Swale has also played host to a visit from Kent County Council's Growth and Economic Development Committee, Members and Officers, to see at close hand the projects going ahead within Swale and discuss how Kent County Council may be of assistance. We also hosted a one day Swale Means Business Conference for local businessmen and businesswomen which has had very positive feedback.

Within Swale East I have attended Parish Council Meetings at Graveney, Bredgar, Dunkirk, Bapchild and Lynsted. I met with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Dunkirk Parish Council on a separate occasion to discuss planning issues within the Parish and later the same evening attended a presentation at Graveney Village Hall of the proposals for a massive solar park on Cleve and Nagden marshes. I also chaired a meeting of the Perry Wood Management Steering Group in November.

Stretching just into December my wife and I were pleased to attend the Lantern Parade, singing of Carols and switching on of the Christmas Tree lights in Boughton. The following day we were at the Christingle service with Carols at Selling Church.

Andrew Bowles