

# **Kettlestone Parish Annual Report**

*Steffan Aquarone, County Councillor for Melton Constable division*

It has been an exciting year for Kettlestone, with a number of key casework achievements as well as some countywide changes that are good news for the village. As ever, I am happy to take up issues on behalf of Kettlestone residents who should feel free to contact me via the contact details at the end of this report.

## **Reversal of cuts to road gritting and bus services**

The County Council reversed its planned cuts of £500,000 to bus subsidies and £400,000 to road gritting following pressure from the Lib Dem group. We created a petition that gained 6,000 signatures and lobbied both at County Hall and in the press to prevent the cuts from going ahead. I know that communities across Melton Constable division benefit enormously from public transport; many people I have met rely on the buses for access to work, family, healthcare, and social activities. Cutting subsidies to the service runs the risk of fueling a vicious cycle whereby passenger numbers decrease further (because of infrequent services and/or a decline in the quality of service), which in turn is used to justify further cuts in the future. To keep our public transport system alive we need to protect existing funding as well invest more - in the right places - so that the buses can be made as enjoyable and as accessible as possible, particularly for rural communities.

## **County Councillor allowances and my new community project seed fund**

Before Christmas, whilst wielding an axe to public services, the County Council voted to increase Members' allowances. You couldn't make it up: politicians giving themselves a combined £142,000 a year extra, whilst planning on cutting more than twice that from each of the above services! Rather than refusing the increase (which means I would have no power to direct how it's spent) I instead decided to use the additional money I will be receiving, after tax, to create a seed funding pot for community projects across the division. Anyone who lives or works in Melton Constable division can apply for funding, and I will consider all proposals. The total pot for this year came to just over £500. So far, the projects / initiatives I have funded include: mulled wine to encourage local people to come to a meeting at the Melton Constable Country Club to discuss its future, paint for a volunteer-led community project being organised by Thursford Parish Council to renovate the phone box (which these days houses the village defibrillator), a contribution towards the cost of assessing options for reducing the speed limit along the B1110 to Briningham, and sponsorship of some fruit trees for the new Briston Community Orchard being set up by the Parish Council. You can keep up to date with projects I am funding on my website: [steff.mycouncillor.org.uk](http://steff.mycouncillor.org.uk). I invite Kettlestone residents to get in touch with any ideas they have for projects that need seed funding, and could benefit the local community!

## **The mobile phone project**

My ongoing mission to help improve mobile phone signal in North Norfolk has taken an interesting step forward. The County Council has commissioned surveying of mobile signal on all networks across Norfolk but only on main/B roads and around tourist

hot-spots. For us rural folk, of course, this is not especially helpful. However, I am pleased to say that the Council has agreed to pay whichever surveyor wins the contract an additional amount of money to supply do-it-yourself surveying kits to communities, to help fill in the gaps. Our volunteers for the phone project are poised to go, as soon as we receive information about the next steps from the Council. Once the surveying is done, we will be able to feed into the County Council's improvement plan - which is in fact very similar to the proposal I made when I first launched the project: to use publicly-owned buildings to add small cell transmitters, which will boost local signal. For any gaps that still remain (e.g. because of a lack of suitable publicly-owned building) we will explore a variety of options for alternative small-cell sites in each village.

### **Other updates from County Hall**

Frustratingly, all the Lib Dem group amendments to the annual Council budget were voted down, despite being fully-costed, at the full council meeting in February. In particular, our amendments aimed to slow down cuts to Adult Day Care and the Building Resilient Lives housing support services. We had also hoped to prevent any cuts to Children's Services so that no Children's centres are forced to close this year. You can read more about the amendments at: [bit.ly/2GabE50](http://bit.ly/2GabE50).

Despite the defeat, we were pleased that our campaign to reverse cuts to bus and road gritting subsidies had already been successful. Moreover, my personal motion on the Council's sexual harassment policy was passed unanimously. The motion stated: *this Council considers that that sexual harassment, bullying and intimidation are completely unacceptable and believes that they have no place in any workplace. Any Councillor or member of staff who feels they have been subjected to unwanted sexual advances should feel confident to raise their concerns without fear of intimidation or retaliation.*

The issue of mobile libraries has been kicked into the long grass: the cuts weren't planned until next financial year anyway, so I will continue to fight for this issue. It's particularly important, since the mobile library is one of very few services that people in rural areas actually receive from the County Council.

### **Resident surgeries**

My next closest surgery to Kettlestone will be in Great Ryburgh on the 3rd July at 6.30pm in The Memorial Hall. Kettlestone residents are welcome to drop in to raise any issues or concerns affecting them or the local community.

---

*Feel free to get in touch:*

Steffan Aquarone, FREEPOST NORFOLK LIBDEMS (no stamp necessary)

01603 327827

[steffan.aquarone.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:steffan.aquarone.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk), @steffanaquarone (Twitter), or

<https://www.facebook.com/steffanaquaronemeltonconstable/>