

Thorndon Parish Council 17.1.2013
County Councillor Report

New County Farms Policy Agreed

Suffolk County Council agreed in spring 2012 to look into their policy regarding the future of our county farms, The county farm estate includes almost 13000 acres of land, as well as almost 100 farm houses and agricultural buildings, and had had no new tenants in the last decade, with officers consolidating some of the holdings (i.e selling off smaller farms) I was delighted to be chosen as a member of the panel that conducted this review, along with 4 fellow councillors and David Lawrence (principal of Otley & Easton Colleges) the panel met many witnesses, including existing tenants and officers as well care farmers, agricultural educationalists, community food schemes etc. in an attempt to bring this land to greater use by entry level rural business.

The policy change first democratises the Counties land holding, at the moment these farms are a very closely guarded secret, this will fundamentally change by making the maps of land that the County owns available for all to see, and most importantly we will invite expressions of interest from potential tenants business plans at any time during any tenancy. This move will mean that existing tenants will be aware of interest from other enterprises in the land they currently hold. The other major shift is that the council as part of assessing these business cases will consider investing in infrastructure that may be needed to assist these cases. Existing tenants had been frustrated at the lack of investment by the council over the years, this should help address this while being explicit that we need this land to nurture local enterprise. The County Council will assess these business case submissions as the tenancies come up for renewal (40% of our entire holding in the next decade) or if the existing tenant agrees to the tenancy being reviewed earlier.

This panel has been a pleasure to work with and we will closely monitor progress to make sure these 13000 acres become the rural business spring board they should be.

Broadband Contract Signed

The Contract to supply a fibre optic based broadband network for Suffolk has now been signed with B.T. as reported before this contract will enshrine many parts of Suffolk gaining 15mbps + line speeds as well as getting as close to 100% as possible at least 2mbps. Work is being carried out at the moment to determine if any obstacles exist (blocked ducts etc) that might hamper progress. It is worth noting that another report was released today suggesting that getting an entire area to a basic level of reliable service is preferable to all or nothing provision that could exist.

Local School Success

I have sent a table showing the standing of local pupils attainment at key stage 2 both Occold and Wetheringsett above the Suffolk and National average with Wetheringsett being among the best out of 167 schools in Suffolk

. Well done to all concerned and a Happy New Year

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