

### **Locality award.**

Recent awards have included to Baylam Village Hall for part funding of their improvements. In hand is one to the Paupers Graves in Onehouse towards a memorial for the 11 names found to have been resident in Creeeting St Peter. There is an application too for Gipping River Trust for new equipment to maintain the footpath Ipswich to Stow Market but it may be that this will fall into the next financial year funding.

### **Flooding.**

A flooding public meeting was held on the 6<sup>th</sup> February in Needham Market Community Centre which was well attended. This was in part a gathering information exercise by the Environment Agency who are the 'lead authority' to produce a report on the situation in Needham Market for SCC. SCC continue to work closely with the EA and the final report will be produced and published by Suffolk County Council LLFA. One positive outcome of the meeting has been the interest in setting up a local flood resilience group and anyone interested should attend the initial meeting at Needham Market Community Centre in Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March at 1000 hours.

### **Parking**

In response to requests from residents I have made a request for parking restrictions in the High Street to be lifted to 2 hours from the current 1 hour. The response from SCC greater consultation is required to establish the need. I am now be consulting with parish councils business and residents to inform SCC of the need or otherwise.

Following my protests at the loss 33% of parking spaces at Needham Market Railway Station while EV charging points are being installed. Signs have now been placed over the prohibition signs to permit continued parking. I have also asked that when the charging points are installed the number of bays is phased in according to the identified need, perhaps in pairs and not all 8 together. The jury is still out on this one.

### **Needham Lakes Connectivity To The High Street**

I continue working with officers and councillors to develop better signage and information to those arriving at Needham Lakes to encourage them to visit the High Street and businesses. One of the ideas being looked at the moment is as a district wide App called Love Exploring. The Love Exploring App details walks and places of interest in the town (which will be added to as we go) via the APP on a phone and which can be accessed directly via QR codes. It sounds promising to me and worthy of further investigation. It could mean that anyone interested in walking and exploring towns in MSDC could use one App to get a better and informed experience. Relevant QR codes for Needham printed on stickers can go in shop or business windows or on existing signage which direct people to the App and the specific walks and trails in the location.

### **Footpaths.**

Following concerns raised by a resident at a CSM Soup Lunch I attended before Christmas, regarding brambles overgrowing and obstructing the footpath no 8 from Bridge Street to the Pightle. SCC only removed a reported blockage obstructing the footpath caused by fallen two bushes. At the beginning of this month a colleague and I cut and removed the brambles overgrowing the path from Network Rail Land and cleared the footpath of weeds and ivy overgrowth on the residential side. Hopefully the cleared footpath will remain accessible for much of the summer. Whilst there is a strong desire in MSDC to improve accessibility by walking and cycling. It is a shame that in many cases the priorities of SCC and Network Rail do not match the publics expectations of in maintaining what we already have.

## **Budget**

Next year's budget was approved at last week's Council meeting.

An increase of 7.7% for council house rents, equivalent to an average rent increase of £7.33 for social rent and a RPI + 0.5% (9.4%) increase for affordable rent of £10.65, a week be implemented. This follows a number of years of rents freeze or reductions.

A 2% increase in the Band D Council Tax for 2024/25 from £171.59 to £175.03, an increase of £3.44 for a Band D property. However additional SCC and policing increases will be near 4.99%.