

## **Report on 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Suffolk Coastal Environmental Forum (Greenprint) at Butley Village Hall on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016.**

The evening was introduced by Luke Bennett of ESP followed by Guy Ackers as the first speaker. Guy had been involved from the very beginning in the Forum and subsequently took on the informative Hedgerow Survey for SCDC as well as for other districts at their request. Some farmers unfortunately would not allow the trained monitors on to their land but most of the district was done. The Survey was part of Local Agenda 21 and was part of the Millennium Challenge undertaken by Steve Ratcliffe of SCDC and WIs from the Eastern region. Each group took on a piece of land and monitored it in terms of animals and plant life over the course of a year. Waveney later joined the group which changed its name to the Suffolk Greenprint Forum. The group is now in need of a new Chair.

Many more allotments have been made available to the public and in some villages, farmers have donated pieces of land for this and other environmental projects. One of the most successful in this regard is Waldringfield. The estate of the late vicar was used to fund flood protection and is also trying to recover salt marsh. The village has also planted 60 apple trees as part of the Scattered Orchards project. They have their own apple harvester and apple press which they rent out to other groups. Their primary school has a garden plot and have been composting for years. There is a perceived crisis in gardening as many over 40s have no time to garden, being at work, and the gardens of second homeowners are also often neglected.

Greenprint Forum organised a marvellous walk through Staverton Thicks which was very well attended.

### **SALC Area Meeting**

The main item at the meeting on June 20<sup>th</sup> was a talk by Sue Davey, transport Manager who told us about the new transport organisation called CATS (Connecting Coastal Communities) which is Leiston-based and which takes over the Link Bus. It has a contract for 5 years. Prime consideration has been given to the needs of young people who have to get to college or school or social events rather than those of the elderly. There is a new number which covers the whole of Suffolk Coastal 01728 635938. Each area in Suffolk has its own number and the service operates from Monday-Saturday. Bookings can be made a week in advance.

Following a question about hospital appointments, it transpired that some people who have been released late have been unable to get a hospital car after 7pm and have incurred taxi bills of £40 if they have not had relatives to pick them up. Volunteers are desperately needed as over 70 year old drivers are having trouble getting insurance.

Devolution: This is also a hot topic which some had thought had been thrown out. There is a consultation on at present and a decision could be made in 6-7 weeks. Salc is waiting for Philip Ridley of Planning at SCDC to speak at one of the area meetings so parishes can review any relevant policies.

Motor firms which are trying to sell electric cars were at the meeting but with batteries needing to be charged every 200 miles, it would be difficult to undertake long journeys. It takes 30 minutes even to do

a short recharge. The cars are very heavy so it is very difficult to change tyres in the event of a puncture and a specialised transporter has to be rung up. Conclusion was that it was not ideal for Suffolk.

### **SCDC Disabled Forum Report**

In order to see how difficult it is for people in wheelchairs and for those using walkers to access shops, members of the Disabled Forum went to Hamilton Road in Felixstowe on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July to evaluate shopping conditions for the disabled. Both sides of the road were covered during the hour and a half. I went from Boots as far as Dorothy Perkins. We looked at how easy or not it was to gain access through the door, the space inside the shop and whether it was crowded or not (many were and users could not get past people); we also asked about hearing loops and disabled toilets. Some businesses had them but had stock in front of them; some businesses were good while others were rude. The best was Iceland which displayed what facilities they had on the window at the door.

Afterwards we went to see the wheelchair which has big wheels so that it can be taken on to the beach but at Felixstowe it is only for children. Others went to the public gardens on the prom which raised questions of access.

At 2pm the Mayor of Felixstowe joined us and put herself in a wheelchair, wearing her chain of office, and went round the shops herself, keeping a note on each. The party then adjourned to the Salvation Army hall on Cobbold Road. One blind member had trouble with advertising boards at street level. The Mayor found that despite her chain of office, people ignored her and spoke over her head to those who were pushing her. She was surprised and felt people needed to be educated to realise that those in wheelchairs are human beings! My daughter-in-law's brother has been in a wheelchair since he was 12 and this happens to him in both Felixstowe and Woodbridge. Hollesley people who know him act differently. Further results will be analysed and reported on later.

On Friday 9<sup>th</sup> July, we were supposed to have Cll Colin Noble of SCDC to talk to us but he had his father's funeral so Tony Goldsom from Halesworth who deals with areas of Health spoke. He wants Park and Ride to be public buses line number 66 which go around all the estates but there is not enough room for wheelchairs on the number 66 bus. If there is not enough room, you have to wait for an hour for the next bus which is unacceptable especially in bad weather.

Overgrown footpaths are also hazardous for blind people and for other disabled users. In Bawdsey overgrown vegetation is very apparent especially along Ferry Road where there is no pavement. Mr McGill from the transport department at SCC also spoke to us.

This has been a very busy but interesting period in all three areas. Disabled Forum has a lot to fight against. Woodbridge Town Council didn't reply to our letter asking to try out access to shops in the town but Felixstowe wanted us to go there. Woodbridge has many boards on the Thoroughfare making it very dangerous for disabled people.

Cll Liz Mark

