

Buckerell district Council report

At the full council meeting last week the devolution bill was raised, particularly around the fact that no mention in the white paper is made of parish and town councils. Cllrs expressed concern that very little, if any, consultation has filtered down to parish and town council level. We were told that the officers are working 'at pace' to get a draft ready for councillors before the March 21st deadline. We were also told that information would be disseminated to parish and town councils as soon as practical. I raised my concerns that we were in danger of ignoring the legal requirement to go out to consultation in order to satisfy the government's deadline, purely for political expediency. I did not get a satisfactory answer to the above. We are having an extraordinary council meeting on the 19th, when more details as to how and what shape our local democracy is planned to be, will be discussed. I will push for more interaction from council officers with town and parish councils as to how these changes will impact the level of responsibilities that will emanate from these changes.

On which subject the request from Gittisham parish council for a senior planning officer to attend has been passed to them. As yet there has been no response. In fact, whereas before I could just phone or email an officer, I am now required to fill in a form so that my query/question gets to the right person. This is plain bonkers, as I know who I need to speak to, and about what. So much for reducing red tape!

I include the next item as it has implications for all our area. At a planning meeting last week, a major application was passed despite a large number of objections raised by myself, Feniton parish council and members of the public. Whilst many of the committee were swayed by these passionately presented arguments, they were ultimately persuaded (a member of the public behind me described as being brow beaten) by the officers into approving it. Many were left wondering precisely what is the point of turning up with first hand information on the flooding in the village and the appalling state of sewerage spills, when the committee is directed by officers that these points cannot be defended if an appeal against refusal goes to the planning inspector. I tried to advocate that they should test it in front of the inspector, but to no avail. Personally, I found it completely unacceptable to see elected cllrs in a flap trying to come up with valid reasons to support their conviction to object. I believe it is for officers to help cllrs find reasons if the cllrs are minded to refuse against officers recommendations. They have the professional background to do this. Cllrs, however well trained, cannot have the same level of experience. I have raised my concerns with the chair of planning, as this is not the first time i have witnessed this scenario in the council chamber.

Report ends