

## **Bressingham and Fersfield Parish Council. Community Connection, March 2016.**

The past month or so has been a busy one with regional and national events taking place that are likely to impact on our lives in the local community. For all that's been said about the budget, it did contain one important feature for us: the business rate adjustment for small businesses. We all wish to see our local businesses flourish, including our excellent village shop. We hope the adjustment to this liability will be of significant local benefit. At our Parish Council Meeting of 7 March, our county councillor spoke about the concept of the 'Eastern Powerhouse' – the concept of uniting Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk in a 'sub-regional' district under an elected mayor. It would appear that there is not fully shared enthusiasm for this idea across the three counties, but the initiative may well not go away: if there is development, there will be impact and a process of change for the way our local affairs are run.

Since our last Community Connection, we have received our Council Tax bills. I do urge you to read carefully the accompanying tax guide, and to see where our money goes. I know quite a few people who feel that in a rural area they 'don't see very much' for their money and that the council tax is taken from already-taxed income. Education and adult social care necessarily consume vast quantities of cash, and we may not always feel that much of the tax we pay goes towards maintaining good quality in our own lives. One of the important roles a Parish Council can play is to help ensure that we all get a fair crack of the whip according to our needs, and feel that we are being looked after and have access to information when we need it. It also matters to feel that we have a 'voice'. It's been suggested that we sometimes invite a chief officer of one of the service providers which levy a precept (charge) in our council tax to come and talk to us. People are, for instance, still concerned about what they see as the lower level of visible policing – including the closure of local police stations. I don't know what sort of response an invitation to 'face the music' will create, but as an opener we have asked the Norfolk police commissioner to come and talk to us. We'll see.....

It is a step in the right direction to report that some of our infamous 'pothole problems' have had some attention: particularly in School Road and Algar Road reported on last month. Other items mentioned last month include some attention to the derelict bungalow near the Village Hall, and the excellent progress of the monthly 'Afternoon Club'. The community's strong response to this initiative is so encouraging, and the Parish Council has voted it a grant of £250 to help with the cost of equipment. Planning and preparations are moving ahead for our 'Anglia in Bloom' participation (will you do a decorated wheelbarrow?) and for June's 'open gardens' weekend: it's going to be a busy but enjoyable summer.

It would be nice to have a functioning public house in our villages. I know there is on-going concern about the future role of 'The Chequers', and that there may be issues which are not always apparent. Nevertheless, it does seem to me that there is a considerable shortage of information, and I have been in contact with South Norfolk District Council (our local planning authority) to try to get an update on the situation. It took a long time to get a response to my 'phone-calls/e-mails, and the one I have received stops short of answering specific questions, simply admitting that there has been no progress instigated by the SNDC Planning Dept. in the last twelve months. I have no wish to be unkind to the present owners, but 'The Chequers' is, and remains, our community pub, and should be a vital hub of community life.

With so much going on at the moment, I really do want to thank all those who are working hard for our community, including the Village Hall Committee and their supporters who have so kindly taken on the role of organising our village event to celebrate the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday.

With our best wishes to you all,

Richard.