



Online People's Forum - YOUR VOICE CAN BE HEARD - SOCIAL ISOLATION in the Pandemic

January 18 2021

This was the second of what is to be a continuing series of public consultations on the third Monday of each month. January's subject was Isolation. It will be followed by 'Broadband' in February and future subjects include 'Flytipping and Refuse collection' and the topical issue of Flooding. Suggestions for future Forums are welcomed and should be sent to info@waveney.greenparty.org.uk.

Introducing the topic Waveney Green Party Chair Andrew Easthaugh said Isolation had been exacerbated with the pandemic and sadly would be a continuing problem.

Annette Dunning, with her experience as a Halesworth town councillor and provider of a service directly addressing social isolation, the Rural Coffee Caravan, gave an over view of her experience. The charity rural Coffee Caravan (<https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/>) exists to counter loneliness in rural settings. But it was her experience working with the vaccine roll out in which she spoke mostly, of people arriving who had not 'socialised' for nearly a year, and how important it was to engage with these over 80's.

Caroline Topping outlined how part of the context of this Forum was the funding available from Community Partnership scheme using Funds from East Suffolk District Council. For example in Beccles an orchard had been funded, and in Halesworth a 'Friendly Bench' scheme was proposed. (<https://www.thefriendlybench.co.uk/>). Some of the views here would be important to feed into this Community Partnership scheme.

Those who came to this Zoom were asked for their contribution - how isolation effects them, what is needed, what is effective.

- Keri gave a very good example of keep fit classes, socialised walks, doorstep drops and checking on your neighbours. Her keep fit classes embraced elements of socialisation and conversation as well as keeping the physical body fit. Based Mutford, and Southwold. She had been in contact with the Sole Bay surgery to offer any patients a service to elevate isolation. Her contact details - which is ok for us to pass on - are kerilclements@gmail.com
- How do we know about Keri or what is available? There is a need to publicise services like a resource list (like keep fit, crafting, etc) as well as shops open for delivery etc. available.

- A Beccles resident made the point that most programmes to alleviate isolation were aimed at the over 65's, neglecting younger people who might have disabilities or mental illness which prevented them from working.
- An exception was the Befriending Scheme (<https://www.thebefriendingscheme.org.uk/>)
- The uncertainty of the vaccination programme - 'when will I be called?' - became apparent in particular with those living alone eager for information. Luckily we had 2 volunteer doctors, Andrew and Annette (Abbot), and Annette (Dunning) involved in the Administration with us.
- We had two people attending who experienced social isolation directly, having been isolated themselves since the lockdowns, both of whom honestly shared their experience with us.
- The limits of zooming, the missing of real communication, missing touching. A human need.
- Benefits do not stretch very far, benefits not raised but bills are rising.
- Bullying is particularly easy online, and very distressing when living alone.
- Friends are often far too busy to find time to socialise or are perhaps nervous of mental illness.
- A Suffolk Coastal Green Party member from Middleton reported that an exhibition open to all of varied handiwork - craft of photo or whatever - made during lockdown, supported by a grant from East Suffolk Council had promoted community spirit, and gave social outlet for creative work done in isolation.
- A Barnby Parish councillor and COVID volunteer co-ordinator said that a poor Broadband signal adversely affected isolated people in her community. This was important for us to hear as Broadband connection was the next Peoples Forum.
- A lot of older people are not on social media, as we live in our altered reality, it is difficult to know who.
- Some isolated old people were afraid of technology. They might benefit from coaching on their own or loaned equipment. Caroline said that East Suffolk are trialling lending 24 Grandpads, tablets made easy for the elderly together with training . 5 are still available(<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/>)
- A final suggestion was to contact the Eden project outreach scheme which aims to promote communities. (<https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/>)

Links

Annette Dunning - Rural Coffee Caravan 07957779623

Keri - <https://www.facebook.com/keri.clements1>

Beccles supporting our community together - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2072349422911819/>

Halesworth Volunteer Centre - <https://www.facebook.com/Halesworth-Volunteer-Centre-773802275977997>

Waveney Greens <http://waveney.greenparty.org.uk/> info@waveney.greenparty.org.uk

NEXT PEOPLES FORUMS

These Forums offer a safe and informed platform to discuss issues important to us all. They will be held monthly on Zoom. They are open to all members of the public from the Beccles, Bungay, Halesworth and Lowestoft districts. The schedule (once a month 3rd Monday) for the first few months of 2021 is as follows - you are welcome to make suggestions for future Forums.

To hear more or register for our regular events, email us at info@waveneygreenparty.org.uk.

FEBRUARY - Monday February 15 at 6.00 ZOOM

Better Broadband

It is more important than ever in Lockdown to have good broadband connections for our business and social contacts. The rural areas of Suffolk are often poorly served. This issue will be coming up for Scrutiny by East Suffolk Council - although no date is fixed yet. We need examples from you of a poor or even a good service, and any suggestions you may have for a better service

MARCH - Monday March 15 at 6pm ZOOM

Refuse collection / Fly tipping / Recycling -

This is another subject coming up for Scrutiny at East Suffolk Council.

Please bring your questions - some of which we may be able to answer. Those that we can't we can email to the Officers - but above all we can take to Scrutiny.

For example, what's happening to all the throw-away face-masks and gloves?

APRIL - Monday April 19th at 6pm ZOOM

Flooding and house building - Long term strategy

It's been the wettest and most flooded winter here in the Waveney Valley. Why are we building on flood plains and water meadows (Pilgrims way in Bungay for example) Where does the effluent water from the new houses go to? The water table is higher than it has ever been.