

## **Ringwood Town Council Meeting 24th February 2010**

### **– a Report from District Councillor Chris Treleaven**

#### 1) District Council Budgets and Council Tax 2010/11

NFDC Cabinet reported at the February meeting that savings made in the current year have amounted to approx. £1million, and that, in spite of falling income, the District Council is currently running a balanced budget. It was agreed at Council on Monday (22<sup>nd</sup>) that the NFDC part of the overall Council Tax should only increase by 2%, which, for a band D household, amounts to an extra £3.05 per year.

Although the on-going efficiency drive should allow the Council to maintain a balanced budget for 2010/11, there are considerable uncertainties – particularly in central Government funding of local authorities – for the years 2011 onwards. Expenditure/income reviews in the coming year will prioritise and optimise Council services for the future.

#### 2) Ringwood Town Access Plan, Cycle Routes and Transport Schemes

Both County and District staff resources are currently being spent on designing transport and access schemes tailored to Ringwood needs, particularly safe pedestrian and cycle links to and within the Town. One of the major sources for funding these access improvements inevitably has to be Developers' Contributions. To secure these, schemes have to be designed and agreed by all Councils in order to link them appropriately to Planning Applications.

#### 3) A31/ West Street – Highways Agency proposals

Whilst we Members still await the proposals and consultation meetings planned for us, I will attend a preliminary meeting on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Apparently the Agency will be looking at alternative plans for reducing congestion on the westbound carriageway of the A31, one including closure of the West St exit and one maintaining it open.

We look forward to the promised consultation, particularly as the West St. issue affects the Town Access Plan referred to above. The recent suggestion of reversing the traffic flow in the Meeting House Lane access to the Market Square might there be discussed.

#### 4) Young Peoples Concessionary Fare Scheme

The £40 voucher scheme for assisting 14-17 year olds with travel costs is running at nearly 40% over budget (of approx. £50,000), largely due it seems to wider publicity and ease of applying. This scheme was originally intended to assist those young people with particular travel needs in terms of accessing services and facilities otherwise denied to them.

However, no means test has ever been applied, and with over 6000 young people in the District, the expense could reach at least £250,000 pa, which is not sustainable.

We therefore intend from April onwards to make it necessary to apply for the vouchers through the Youth Service, Connexions or other young peoples' agencies (details on NFDC website), as these organisations are more likely to engage with those most in need of assistance. Nevertheless, no means test or similar will apply.

In any event, the whole concessionary fare regime will change in 2011 when the County will take responsibility for the 'bus pass' etc. This will be the time for the District to review all its 'voluntary' top-up schemes, including that for Young People and the all-day bus pass instead of the statutory off-peak concession for the disabled and over-60s residents of the District. .

(crt 23.02.10).