



## Report on Suffolk County Council's Self-Help Scheme

By Ruth Johnson, Bucklesham Parish Council Clerk  
For Parish Council Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024

### **Purpose of Report**

To ascertain whether it is appropriate for Bucklesham Parish Council to join Suffolk County Council's Community Self-Help Scheme.

### **Background**

Bucklesham Parish Council have reported numerous Highways issues on SCC's 'Report-it' tool in recent years. The vast majority of the reports have not been acted upon despite assurances that the work would be carried out within the given time period. After continually chasing up these unfulfilled reports, the Parish Council has received communication from Highways engineers advising us to consider joining their Community Self-Help Scheme. This scheme was launched by Suffolk Highways in May 2019. And *'aims to empower and support town and parish councils that wish to carry out minor highway maintenance within their communities.'*

### **How the Scheme Works**

Community Self-Help has been developed in response to a high number of requests by Parish Councils for various maintenance works that, due to budgeting restraints, Suffolk Highways say they are unable to deliver.

Suffolk Highways have stated they can no longer provide many services and wish local communities to get involved in Community Self-Help. The range of works that parish councils will be able to undertake via Suffolk's Community Self-Help Scheme include:

- Grass cutting
- Tree pruning
- Weed clearance
- Siding out of footpaths
- Cleaning around gullies and grips
- Sign cleaning
- Painting street furniture

There are four Community Self-Help options:

### **1. Buying in services from a private contractor**

This option enables us to buy in services from a private contractor. We would be responsible for employing the contractor and ensuring that work is undertaken in accordance with the legal requirements of working on the highway as any appointed contractor must have a 'license' to work on the highway.

### **2. Using our own trained employees**

This option enables us to utilise existing or new employees to undertake work on the highway. We would be responsible for employing and managing any individuals and ensuring that work is undertaken in accordance with the legal requirements of working on the highway. Employees will need the relevant training and qualifications for the work they plan to undertake.

### **3. Using community volunteers**

This option enables us to utilise community volunteers to undertake work on the highway. We would be responsible for ensuring there is somebody suitable trained and qualified to supervise volunteers and ensure that work is undertaken in accordance with the legal requirements of working on the highway. Suffolk County Council will provide the relevant training for 'lead' volunteers.

### **4. Buying in additional services from Suffolk Highways**

This option enables us to buy in additional services from Suffolk Highways directly.

## **How we would join the scheme**

We would need to consider the types of work we would like to carry out and whether we wish to utilize either a private contractor, our own trained employees (we have none), community volunteers or Suffolk Highways operatives.

We would submit the relevant application form along with supplementary documentation such as location plans, certification of contractor/employee competence (e.g. NRSWA qualifications) etc.

SCC aim to acknowledge any email requests/submissions within 2 working days of receipt. This may be with a proposed 'way forward', or to request further information. Once we've expressed an interest in getting involved with Community Self-Help, SCC will work with us to ensure our application is signed off and plan our chosen maintenance activities appropriately. This will include making decisions regarding volunteer training, the provision of PPE and equipment.

SCC dictate that when carrying out work on the highway (i.e. roads, footways, verges) and traffic management is required, at least one volunteer/operative onsite must be trained in signing, lighting and guarding and hold a current Street Works Qualifications Register (SWQR) card. This card certifies that the holder can competently install traffic management (e.g. signs, cones and barriers) in line with both Safety at Street Works and Road Works.

If we wish to put volunteers forward for signing, lighting and guarding training (Suffolk County Council offer a course) we would need remember that volunteers who are then qualified must be present onsite at all times when traffic management systems are in place, as they are responsible for installing, maintaining and removing equipment such as signage, cones and barriers safely.

As part of managing the health and safety of both our own workers and members of the public, we must control the risks involved with our chosen minor highway maintenance activities. To do this, we need to think about what might cause harm to people and decide whether we are taking reasonable preventive action.

As part of Community Self-Help, SCC currently offer the following items of PPE, free of charge, to all community volunteers:

- Standard peak helmets
- Clear lens safety spectacles
- Orange latex palm coated gloves
- Orange high visibility breathable waterproof jackets
- Orange high visibility long sleeve waistcoats
- Yellow high visibility combat trousers

## **The Benefits**

We would be able to ensure all minor works currently not being undertaken by Highways would be completed.

## **Experience of Others**

Having spoken to others who have experience in this scheme I can report that their opinions are very negative and they would advise us to consider whether the scheme is worth the time, effort and money.

## **Moving Forward**

If the Parish Council wishes to join the Community Self-Help Scheme there will be many things to consider:

- Buying in services from a private contractor would cost the Parish Council money where as at present we do not pay an additional charge for Highways services.
  - We have no current trained employees and any we did employ would need to be licenced to work on the Highway – all more expense to the Parish Council.
  - Training our own volunteers comes with many more issues. The cost of training can be £1,500 per volunteer. We would need to train a ‘team’ not just one volunteer. Any work undertaken then needs to include a traffic management system including traffic lights/cones for sign cleaning/hedge cutting etc.
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- Buying in additional services could be seen as paying Highways twice as Highways Services are supposedly already included in residents' Council Tax bills.
- If Community Volunteers undertake some highway tasks for free, we may find that we are expected to do more and more and we receive less and less services from Suffolk Highways.

### **My Recommendations**

I would recommend that Bucklesham does not join SCC's Self-Help Scheme. This item is on the agenda for January's meeting. I hope this information has been helpful. If there is anything else you would like to know, please just ask.

*Ruth Johnson*

5<sup>th</sup> January 2024