

County Councillor's Report January 2019

Roads action

The two roads which I put forward for repair and resurfacing under the County Council's Resilience Fund, Beer Road (Seaton) and the road north of Drummerstone Cross (Offwell) have now been done, as has Gatcombe Lane (Seaton) which I also pressed for.

The road from Northleigh Cross to Offwell Brook, which I put forward under my Pothole Action Fund allocation, will be done in March. I asked for Northern Lane (Branscombe), which was patched last year, to be top dressed, and this will also happen in the spring.

The County Council has been given £18 million additional funding for Highways and I am expecting additional funds for our division, so parishes should let me know which sections most need doing.

Colyton Grammar School expansion

Colyton Parish Council asked me for my views on the report that Colyton Grammar School is one of 16 grammar schools which will share £50 million money to expand, and I replied as follows:

Colyton Grammar School is an excellent school and as County Councillor for Seaton and Colyton, I support its case for improved funding for its ongoing activities, as I do for all local schools. However I do not support the Government's £50 million extra funding to expand grammar schools and I am disappointed that Colyton Grammar School put itself forward for this controversial scheme. Additional capital funding should benefit the education of all children, rather than being used to expand a small number of selective schools. It is not right that Colyton Grammar School should benefit from millions of additional funding purely because it is a selective school, when under-pressure local schools which are open to all children receive no funding boost. I also share residents' concerns that expansion of the school would exacerbate the traffic problems which bussing pupils to and from the school already cause in Colyford, and to which no solutions have yet been found.

The Headteacher of the Grammar School has subsequently confirmed that their funding of £490,000 is for Sixth Form expansion. Their case referred to the closure of Sixth Form entry at Axe Valley Academy. I find it depressing that the Government can't fund Axe Valley well enough to support their Sixth Form, but can find extra funding for Colyton Grammar.

Govers Meadow, Colyton, street lighting failure

I intervened with Western Power after the company told residents it could take four weeks to restore lighting on the estate, and the lighting was restored the next day.

Seaton Area Health Matters

The Steering Committee, of which I am a member, will finalise its proposals for using the empty space in Seaton Hospital by the end of January, when they will be made known to members and affiliated organisations as well as discussed with the CCG and RD&E.

CPRE reports on Devon's Housing Needs to go to DCC Cabinet

The Council meeting decided that my motion to examine the implications of the reports by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, which suggest that Devon is being asked to build too many additional houses and the wrong types, will go to the Cabinet on 9th January. The CPRE have said they will address the Cabinet.

Flybe / Exeter Airport concern due to Brexit uncertainty

I asked a question at the County Council about this. As reported in the press, Flybe has put itself up for sale and Virgin may be interested. The County Council together with other local councils has offered support for Flybe including its training academy at Exeter Airport, but says that in the end it is for the company to resolve the situation. The threat to Flybe was reported to be as a result of the effects of Brexit uncertainty, but Conservative councillor Rufus Gilbert, cabinet member for Economy and Skills, denied this was the cause of the situation.

I also proposed a motion on the Brexit crisis, in the light of this threat and the closure of a car parts factory in Plymouth with the loss of 350 jobs which has been clearly put down to the Brexit situation. However the Council referred it to Cabinet in January. This postpones a full Council discussion until February, when it will be too late to influence Parliament's decisions.

Fracking petition published

Along with over 850 other councillors, I have signed an open letter, Let Communities Decide, opposing government proposals to fast-track fracking by allowing exploration under permitted development rules. We are insisting that before any exploratory work is done local planning authorities should have a chance to look at the proposals. Our area is available for exploration licenses although at the moment there are no signs of any interest from companies, unlike in Dorset.