

## County Councillor's Report, February 2018

### Planned & Reactive Maintenance: Potholes and Drainage Task Group

This group's recommendations were reported to Scrutiny on 29th January, and will now go to Cabinet. They include

- Regular reporting on gully cleaning to Scrutiny.
- Regular reporting on planned maintenance programmes to HATOC (East Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee).
- The trials of more flexible ways of dealing with potholes, which have started in East Devon, to be evaluated (we heard that the trial is already saving money!).
- Improvements to public information portal ('report-a-problem').
- Clearer priorities for winter work
- More joined up approach between teams, contractors and communities - Highways to develop a user-friendly online facility by this summer (work on this advancing and we expect to see the Beta version around March/April)

### Traffic Speeds Task Group

This task group is ongoing and has received evidence from experts and most recently from parish councillors, including Cllr Ray Watts of Colyton PC. We are digesting the conclusions of the national Atkins report which are seen as broadly supportive of an extension of 20 mph limits in urban residential areas and village centres. There are, however, many complications. Other measures are necessary alongside changes in limits in order to achieve speed reductions.

### Seaton, Beer and Branscombe Traffic Group

I chaired this meeting on 21st January, which considered many issues across the three parishes with the Neighbourhood Highways Officer, Stephen Kelly, PC Adam Speers and local councillors. The other meetings this year will be on 20 May and 16 September in Marshlands, Harbour Road, Seaton.

I also chair the Coly Valley Traffic Group which will meet on 9 April, 23 July and 19 November in Colyton Town Hall. Meetings of both traffic groups are open to interested parties.

### Waiting restrictions

Colyton PC's proposal for restrictions in Sidmouth Road and within the town gateway, and Beer PC's for changes in New Cut, have been put forward.

### Devon's housing needs

I spoke at Devon County Council's Cabinet on 9th January in support of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, Devon Branch, report on Devon's Housing Needs, which provides a great deal of evidence to support the proposition that Government has pushed councils to adopt excessive targets for new housing, as well as the wrong sort of housing. Looking carefully at the number of new households which are forming and at trends for migration into Devon, the CPRE argues that Devon needs a more modest rate of housebuilding, more focused on social and affordable housing.

I had asked the Cabinet to look at the implications of the reports, which have cross-party support, for the Council's policies and its partnerships like the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan. The recommendation adopted by Cabinet was unhelpful, arguing that because the district councils are the planning authorities for housing, DCC doesn't need to respond.

I believe that this is wrong; the whole logic of partnership between the County and the districts means that we should be actively engaged - DCC has responsibility for overall economic and social development in Devon and for infrastructure (e.g. Highways) which supports housing, so we should be involved in the discussion. The matter will come to full Council on 21st February.

## **No Deal Brexit planning**

At the same Council meeting I asked the Leader, Cllr John Hart, detailed questions about 'No Deal' Brexit planning. His written replies were uninformative, and when I pressed him, he simply said, 'We haven't got a clue yet'. This suggested that, whatever Government is doing, it is not fully involving local authorities. I have since been offered a briefing on the situation in Devon by the Chief Executive and will report further after I meet him on February 11th.

## **Wilmington air quality raised at Scrutiny**

In a Scrutiny meeting discussion on Air Quality and Congestion on 29th January, I raised air quality in Wilmington, which exceeded the national recommended level in the last measurements made by EDDC in 2017. Of 11 existing Air Quality Management Areas, only 3 still breached levels in 2017, so Wilmington was among the four worst sites in Devon in that year.

EDDC's Environmental Health was not willing to put the village forward to become an AQMA on the basis of one year's readings, but if these are repeated, this course needs to be pursued. In any case, the evidence on the damaging effects of poor air quality is accumulating, and even results near the recommended maximum are of real concern.

## **'We need to talk about Devon'**

This will be the title of the new regular column which I have been invited to contribute to the (now) online-only *Devonshire* magazine, from the March issue.

## **Budget planning and Council Tax**

The County Council goes into budget meetings this month with proposed spending increases for services of 2 per cent for Adult Social Care, 9.4 per cent for Children's Services, 0.7 per cent for Highways (although this will rise when additional government funding is taken into account) and 0.7 per cent for all other services, which represents a significant cut in real terms.

The expectation is that in order to meet these targets the Cabinet will propose the maximum legal increase in Council Tax (without holding a referendum) of 2.99 per cent plus 1 per cent, i.e. 3.99 per cent, which is well above the current rate of consumer inflation of 2.2 per cent.

However in advance of the budget process, I have collated the following figures for Devon in the last 5 years, which emphasise the squeeze on living standards for workers (obviously retirement incomes may be better protected):

Median full-time earnings	+7.7 per cent
General inflation	+12.4 per cent (CPI) or +13.7 per cent (RPI)
Council tax rises (DCC)	+19.2 per cent

It is clear that the picture is of earnings declining in real terms and council tax increasing substantially more than general inflation, adding to the burden on working families. This is the result of government policies which have