

County Councillor's Report, March 2019

Seaton Seafront Enhancement Scheme

I have offered funding from my Locality and Investing in Devon funds to support the first phase of this scheme, for which the Town Council has planning permission. This will involve the creation of a small shopping/craft/refreshment area near Fisherman's Gap and it is hoped that getting it up and running will help with obtaining the larger funding which is needed for the more ambitious redevelopment of the seafront in the later phases of the scheme.

I have also agreed in principle to support Beer Parish Council's scheme to improve footpaths. This will mean that my current Locality Budget will be almost entirely spent, but there will be a new allocation for 2019-20. However the Investing in Devon fund will not be continued.

Speed limit on Seaton Down Hill and at junction with A3052

This traffic order is being consulted on until 13th March: 'to extend the current 40mph restriction on the A3052 to encompass the junction with Seaton Down Hill (B3172) to address collisions occurring at the junction, and to introduce a 40mph between the A3052 and the existing 30mph speed limit just north of Honey Ditches Drive.' Seaton Town Council and my Locality Budget have funded the order, which is a result of a campaign by residents.

Colyford Crossing

Discussions are continuing and I shall shortly be meeting the Headteacher of Colyton Grammar School in an effort to support a way forward.

Proposed Harbour Road, Seaton, replacement crossing

Highways have accepted that the location proposed by Seaton Town Council, opposite Premier Inn, appears to be the only suitable one. However there is currently no funding, even for a survey, although I am looking into the possibilities of moving it along.

Council Tax and Budget 2019-20

At the annual budget meeting on 21 February, the County Council resolved to increase its precept (which makes up the largest part of Council Tax) by 3.99 per cent, i.e. 2.99 per cent general increase and 1 per cent for adult social care (the maximums permitted without holding a referendum).

These increases maintain statutory adult and children's services. Highways has seen a cut in real terms but this is balanced out by additional capital funding from the Government. All other services have also seen a real-terms cut.

However of the 3.99 per cent increase, over 1.7 per cent is going to fund an increase in reserves of £7 million. Together with other Independent, Lib Dem and Green councillors, I voted against this on the grounds that the Council already has reserves of £80 million and the additional amount is in effect a hedge against the possibility that the Government will not provide adequate funding in 2020-21.

Council Tax payers have already had many years of above-inflation increases while median earnings have fallen behind inflation, and should not be made to pay more into reserves because the Conservative leadership of the Council cannot trust their own Government.

Devon's Housing Needs

My motion on 21 February asking the Council to respond to the major reports produced by the Devon branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) was amended by the Conservatives so that no action will be taken.

Brexit

Council leaders and officers are worried that Brexit is already contributing to business failures and are concerned that a No Deal Brexit will cause serious harm, e.g. empty supermarket shelves, shortages of medicines, inability to import sufficient animal feed from or export lamb and fish to the EU, etc.

It is only in the last month that the Council has been asked by Government to do serious preparations for a No Deal situation and there is insufficient knowledge and time to resolve all likely issues. The Leader has spoken out, calling the national handling of Brexit a 'shambles', but he still opposed my amendment on 21 February that the Council collectively call on Government and Parliament to prevent No Deal arising, so this was defeated.