

Chairman's Report – Stoke Canon Parish Council 2019-2020

Welcome back from isolation!

In order to maintain social distancing during the shut down period the Parish Council maintained its role by delegating decision making to the chair and deputy chair after consultation with our clerk and other members of the Parish Council by email. All decisions made have been documented and have been made public.

The Parish Council responded to the coronavirus crisis by circulating our members details as points of contact if help was required or could be offered. As a result of this a network of volunteers was quickly formed and help delivered as required.

Stephanie Bending Hall and I registered with the rapidly established East Devon Community Hub which responds to urgent requests in our area. In addition, we contacted our doctors' surgeries in Thorverton and Silverton and offered support if required.

The 'good neighbour' system works well in Stoke Canon and together with the Village Spar shop and the Stoke Canon Inn the needs of the village were met.

Council business was carried out during the pandemic by email and phone calls. No major decisions needed to be made.

Now for a summary of the last twelve months :-

Highways

During the year we have attended 2 meetings hosted by DCC Highways where we have discussed important issues for Stoke Canon such as drain clearance, street cleaning, tree maintenance and pot holes.

Drains – despite the heavy winter rain surface flooding was minimal after earlier drain clearance. Problems near the Honors culvert have been identified by a camera survey and these will be tackled in the future.

Pot-holes – these are being reported once they reach a depth of 40mm and a width of 300mm.

Traffic speed – as a result of concerns about traffic speed we are in the process of purchasing a digital speed sign (VAS) in the hope it will remind motorists that they are in a 30mph zone. This will be located on the lamp post by the cemetery.

Untaxed vehicles – several have been reported and some removed during the year.

Footpaths

The footpath to Rewe was finally completed with a slurry seal coat in October which is a big improvement and is getting a lot of use. A grant of £1960 was awarded to lay some hardcore on a muddy section of the footpath to Brampford Speke, close to the level crossing. Unfortunately, due to the heavy winter rains work on this has not been possible but will start as soon as the lockdown is over.

Play park

The grass in the park is now recovering well after additional re-seeding and levelling. The swing seating and chains have been replaced and damage to the suspended walkway has been repaired.

Police Liaison Committee

This has been set by the Police Crime Commissioner and promotes community involvement in policing. We send two councillors to this meeting which discusses policing matters within the parish. It has been clearly stated that not every call to the police will get attended to or every crime be investigated. Priorities are mental health, domestic abuse, 'County Lines', child abuse, on-line crime and fraud. There is also a community alert messaging system which is free to all to sign up to.

Devon Climate Emergency Response Group

The council has agreed to support this initiative and are waiting to hear from DCC about what we can realistically achieve. We are exploring the possibility of electric charging points subject to cost and location.

Connecting the Culm

This is a new grant funded project which will run over the next 3 years. It will look at the management of The Culm with the aim to reduce flooding, improve water quality and increase biodiversity. The Council is supporting this project and will attend workshops and be updated on it's progress.

Village Tidy-up

We are still using the Community Payback team who carry out a days work tidying the village about 4 times a year. They cannot cover the whole village each time so it is up to us all to do our bit where and when we can.

Finally I should like to thank our Parish Councillors and our clerk, Neville Bennett, for their invaluable in-put over the last 12 months. Also, thanks to our County and District Councillors who regularly attend our meetings and pass on relevant information.

County Councillors Annual Report:
Cllrs Sara Randall Johnson and Ray Bloxham
March 2020.

Some facts about Devon County Council:

Budget

Additional £43 million of funding into front line services in 2020/21

Approved budget £541 million for 2020/2021, an increase of 8.7 per cent on the current year.

Additional investment in social care and health, children's services, roads and drainage.

An extra £23.7 million for adult care and health;

£11.5 million more for children's services and

£2.7 million extra for highways including £1 million to help deal with drainage issues on the County's 8,000-mile road network.

Context

The Government has reaffirmed a commitment to a fair funding review of local government. This is welcome. The continuing wide disparity in funding between counties and metropolitan areas requires tackling.

Current Government funding per head of population is £258 for Devon compared to an average £421 for metropolitan councils and £556 for inner London boroughs.

There has been a 72% real terms reduction in Government funding for Devon between 2010 and 2019/20. During that period of austerity, the County Council has reduced its spending by nearly £300 million and staff numbers by nearly 3,000.

Through a combination of efficiencies, innovation and collaboration with other councils, Devon has managed to protect many important public services during this time. All of Devon's 50 libraries remain open, some with longer opening hours. The County has maintained a universal youth service and provided targeted support for the most vulnerable youngsters, and working ever more closely with health partners, the County has maintained services for the elderly and vulnerable adults.

Devon County Council is one of 26 County Councils in England. The authority, which has 60 elected County Councillors, represents 795,000 residents and administers an area spanning 2,534 square miles, the third largest in England.

Services

The County Council has a total budget of £1.1 billion and provides a wide range of public services – some directly and some commissioned from other organisations. The County Council's main service groups are:

Adult care and health including services for older people and adults with physical or learning disabilities.

- care at home for 10,000 people a year
- 13,000 people with dementia

Children's services including education and learning; services for vulnerable children and families; safeguarding; looked after children and care leavers.

- supporting 16,500 children with special needs or disabilities
- over 200 children adopted or fostered a year
- 97,000 pupils
- 398 schools

Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity including planning, transportation and environment; economy, enterprise and skills; trading standards; libraries; community safety and emergency planning.

- 50 libraries and four mobile libraries
- free school transport for 14,500 pupils a day
- funding for 185 bus services, 60 voluntary car schemes and 16 community ring and ride schemes
- nine new primary schools built or due to be completed in 2020

Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste including road and bridge maintenance; waste disposal and recycling; and the County Council's capital programme.

- 8,000 miles of road (England's largest local network)
- 62,000 potholes filled a year
- managing 357,000 tonnes of domestic waste a year
- 19 recycling centres
- £114 million invested every year on major infrastructure projects.

Climate Change

Devon is one of UK's leading county councils in the national response to climate change.

In February 2019, the County Council declared a climate emergency and pledged to work with other organisations so that the Devon should be carbon neutral by 2030.

The declaration built on the Council's Energy and Carbon Strategy and as a result Chief Executive Phil Norrey established and chairs a Devon Climate Emergency Response Group bringing together key partners from across Devon.

The County Council has already reduced its carbon footprint by 40% since 2012/13 including a 75% reduction in carbon emissions from street-lighting (15,000 tonnes a year).

In August 2019 and on the recommendation of the above group the County Council and University of Exeter established a Net-Zero Task Force with key public, private and voluntary sector partners with the following funding – County Council - £250,000, University of Exeter £130,000 and £70,000 from other partners. This is paying for the work of the Net-Zero Task Force to develop a cross-Devon plan supported by staff from the County Council and University of Exeter

The Task Force is chaired by Professor Devine-Wright who is the lead author on the UN Climate Change report, the findings of which have been accepted by the County Council as the basis for the Council's future policy response.

The County Council is a leading partner in the Great South West (GSW) campaign which seeks to establish the region as the UK's key provider of renewable energy and deliver a £45 billion boost to the regional economy. GSW is a partnership between Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset and includes LEAs, Businesses, Local Authorities, Colleges and Universities.

Working with Parishes and Supporting Local Projects

Once again we are grateful for the support of the Parishes that are within our electoral Division. We attend as many Parish Council meetings as we are able and work closely with the Parish Clerks outside of the meeting schedules.

We set up a process where Parish Councils can engage on a regular basis with the Police Service, The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership. The purpose of this is to improve connectivity between the partners so that the Parish, Police and all relative agencies can work together to protect our communities. This is the first initiative of its kind in Devon and has already been successfully replicated elsewhere. We are fortunate to live in a very low crime area but we all need to be mindful that crime and anti-social behaviour does happen and that we all have a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. The key to this is communication. It is really bad timing that this crisis has curtailed this initiative as both the police and OPCC are very

keen to take it forward and develop it to enhance community connectivity. We shall be picking up where we left off on this and other projects as soon as we are able.

We have supported as many local projects as we have been able. These have been many and varied and just as a snapshot include Local festivals; Tree planting; New village parking places; The Armed forces Hub; Clyst Caring Friends; Fun runs of many descriptions including a Santa run and regular park run; School books; School art projects; Play Equipment; Preventing knife crime education; Bench; Science and technology education; Transport schemes; Broadband; Footpaths; Youth service; Communication education; Village signage, Road signage, Community Farm projects and Village Halls. In total we have invested around £16000 in our local communities this year and the aim has been to help local communities support themselves.

We are very happy to hear about local initiatives and are happy to support these financially where we can or suggest alternative funding opportunities through the County Council where these might be more appropriate.

Coronavirus outbreak

Coronavirus is having an impact and we are seeing the cancellation of meetings and working through skype. For the next few weeks Sara and I are not routinely attending Parish Council meetings but we will maintain contact with Parish Clerks by e-mail and telephone. This is a rapidly changing situation and we will endeavour to keep Parishes informed. Up to date advice is available on the Devon County Council website from a link on the home page.

As a Council, we are now concentrating work on these critical areas:

- Doing what is necessary to keep the social care system working to ensure residential care homes do not close and home care for the elderly and vulnerable continues to operate to help hard-pressed hospitals and the NHS;
- Convening an urgent local community response to support those who are self-isolating – and particularly the most vulnerable elderly and disabled people at greatest risk;
- Supporting the economy so that local businesses and their employees can survive the shock.

In addition we have the following in place:

- We've set up a **helpline for Towns and Parishes** to support in their planning and resilience
- **We've set up a new fund** which is available now for communities and organisations to respond <https://www.devon.gov.uk/document/covid-19-prompt-action-fund/> (Up to £500) with a **further fund**

available later this week for larger projects and support (Up to £5000).

- In addition, the Leader has agreed that we can now accept your early applications for **Locality Budget** requests (to ensure payment as soon as possible past 1 April)
- We have established **clear guidance and advice** pages and these are evolving daily <https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/>
- We're gathering and using **key information from Towns and Parishes** Councils including their key contacts, plans around vulnerable people, and their support requirements

Thank you all for what you are doing in your communities and we look forward to continuing to work closely with and support our local communities throughout the coming year.

Ray Bloxham & Sara Randall Johnson

County Councillors

April 2020.

County Councillor Ray Bloxham.

Clearly combatting this virus has had a real impact on everyone. For my part I have been working from home initially ensuring that sources of information were available to everyone and I hope that by now there is much less that I need forward to you.

Like all Parishes, my own home Council is engaged in ensuring that all members of the community have access to everything they need from food and medicines through to social contact even if that is just an occasional telephone call. Groups of volunteers have been very busy from the council, church and schools ensuring that those in need are looked after.

Obviously, the picture differs from parish to parish and we are very grateful for the work that is being done locally, tailored to meet local need.

Many formal meetings at DCC have been postponed with only those that are essential taking place. However, we are all making good use of a variety of on-line conferencing facilities. DCC use "Teams", EDDC "Skype for business", some Parishes I know are using "Zoom" which is effective and I have also used "Google Hangouts".

There is a great deal of change at DCC with many staff re-deployed to tackle the outbreak and this is affecting some services. Key services continue with lead senior officers coordinating the response with the Director of Public Health leading the principle task force in Devon and DCC's Chief Exec coordinating the SW response.

Currently hospital capacity in Devon is OK running at between 40-50%. With the Nightingale Hospital coming on-line very soon, which will be led by the RD&E, we are well placed but that could change very quickly with a SW spike still possible. That means that we must not be complacent nor relax social distancing measures.

There have been a few issues with the voucher scheme linked to free school meals and I have been in touch with the Head of Education who in turn has been raising a number of issues with the Dept of Education.

Covid -19 relief funds are being well used with a high volume of applications being processed. Most popular are the small bids of up to £500 which can be processed reasonably quickly and provide essential funds to support local initiatives.

Most GPs are now using e-Consult. The NHS app is also being downloaded by many patients.

Social Care is having a tough time and DCC Officers are working hard to support Social Care providers.

PPE is challenging but we are starting to see more supplies. DCC is working towards a consistent approach to PPE across the health and social care network. There are arrangements to get emergency supplies where normal supply routes are not working.

As members we are trying to continue with our respective roles and I have been working remotely with officers in supporting the Local Government Pension Fund (which I chair). This is subject to the economic downturn we are experiencing and will be for some time. In addition, I am involved in the work that is responding to the recent Ofsted report into children's services.

But the main thing is to stay safe.

Ray Bloxham.
County Councillor
20th April 2020