

County Councillor's Annual Report 2020-21

The pandemic

This year has been one like no other because of the pandemic. We have been very lucky that our infection rates have been consistently lower than in the rest of the country. Nevertheless we have suffered repeated care home outbreaks, with the deaths of at least 8 residents in one Seaton home and a care worker in another. There are still outbreaks in local homes, despite residents being vaccinated. There have also been community cases from time to time, but I am not aware of any deaths.

I joined the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee early last year, and together with some other members raised issues including

- (1) the urgent need for a lockdown in March 2020, when the Government was prevaricating,
- (2) the need for local Public Health to be involved in contact tracing, and
- (3) the need to keep hospital patients from being sent to care homes.

I advocated using community hospital wards for Covid-secure hospital care, supporting the proposal by Cllr Jack Rowland, chair of Seaton Area Health Matters, that our hospital could be used.

I also pressed for free school meals to be continued and, when this was agreed, supported the successful efforts by Seaton community group, Re:store Axe Valley, to distribute Christmas parcels to children from schools across the area.

Future of Seaton Community Hospital

I am now pressing for a new Devon NHS Plan to anticipate future waves or new pandemics, including a plan to fully use our community hospitals. I welcome the use of Seaton Hospital - previously over a third empty - as a vaccination centre, but will press for a long-term plan to fully use the hospital, after NHS Property Services, which owns the hospital, rejected Seaton Area Health Matters' proposals.

On Health Scrutiny, I have played a major role in opposing the closure of Teignmouth Community Hospital, finally ensuring that the proposal was referred to the Secretary of State (which in 2017 the Committee refused to do for Seaton and Honiton).

Seaton and Colyton Traffic Group and the state of our roads

I have continued to chair this group throughout the year and, although it is an uphill struggle, we have had some successes in improving the worst rural roads. In several cases, however, the refurbishment of the ford at Farway, Highways have simply said that funding is not available. Underfunding is a key problem, but also the rules that restrict which potholes contractors repair, leading often to one being fixed while nearby holes are untouched.

Stop Line Way cycling and walking route

After a long period of pressure on my part, the County applied for a Compulsory Purchase Order for the land needed to complete the missing section in Seaton Wetlands. The landowners have objected to the CPO so this will likely go to an Inspector with a decision later in the year. Funding to complete the section is fully budgeted. However the remainder of the route, from Colyford to Axminster, has been dropped by DCC, against my protests. I shall continue to fight to put it back in the programme.

Traffic calming and 20 mph limits

The proposals of a DCC working group, which I contributed to, to make it easier to get 20 mph zones in town and village centres, have been accepted in principle, subject to a trial in Newton Abbott, which was delayed when the pandemic hit. I have encouraged interested parishes to put themselves on a Highways waiting list for 20 mph zones, and Seaton, Colyton, Beer and Offwell have done this.

Seaton Seafront Enhancement

I allocated substantial funding towards Phase 1 of this much-needed project and was involved in lengthy negotiations for Highways approval. I was therefore very disappointed that, due to an error, the planning permission lapsed. I have pressed strongly for the Town Council to secure a new permission and supported Jack Rowland's efforts to obtain EDDC support. Once these are secured I will look for any support possible from DCC.

A35 in Wilmington and Offwell

I have continued to work with the two parishes and the A35 Action Group to get Highways England's scheme, which includes speed calming, average speed cameras and crossings in Wilmington, approved and underway. As ever, this is proving a very slow and frustrating process, but it appears that progress is being made.

Local projects funded by the locality budget

In 2020-21 these have included Re:store Axe Valley, the installation of a defibrillator at Northleigh Village Hall, new noticeboards and support for the play park at Offwell, the Re-Store Christmas scheme, road-mending material for Branscombe, support for Colyton Caterpillars, repairs to a wall and steps in Beer, and TRIP community transport.