

County Councillor's Report, February 2021

Stop Line Way cycle/walking route - Seaton Wetlands

I am pleased to report that on 8th January, the County Council issued a Compulsory Purchase Order for land needed to complete the missing section in the Wetlands. I have been pressing for action on this since I took office, and was disappointed that unsuccessful negotiations with the landowner have delayed this a further 18 months. The CPO procedure will take a little more time, but assuming it is confirmed there is money in the 2021-22 budget to carry out the work. Unfortunately the Council's position remains the same that the original scheme to extend the route from Colyford to Axminster cannot be funded, since there has been no Government money for rural cycle routes. I will carry on looking for opportunities to revive this.

Seaton Seafront Enhancement Scheme

I have taken part in several meetings and conversations to progress the scheme, which has widespread public support. It was discovered that very unfortunately the planning permission had lapsed (due apparently to a misunderstanding of the Covid-related changes to planning deadlines), but the Town Council and EDDC are now discussing a constructive way forward. I shall continue to monitor progress and offer any help I can at County level.

Future of Community Hospitals

I was involved in discussions at the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee on 26 January over the future of Teignmouth Community Hospital. The Committee had held a Spotlight Review in December on the CCG's consultation over its proposals, coming to the conclusion that it was seriously flawed. The CCG decided to go ahead regardless, and the Committee was faced with a choice of whether to use its statutory power to refer their decisions to the Independent Reconfiguration Panel, which reports to the Secretary of State. Unfortunately the Conservative Chair and Labour Vice-Chair together with most other Conservative members supported a weaker proposal to ask for the panel's advice. My amendment to use the statutory power was lost by 5 votes to 8. My view is that this proposal should never have been pursued during the pandemic, which has underlined the need for greater bed capacity in Devon and especially for rehabilitation beds like the 12 abolished in Teignmouth.

Locality Budget

My budget for 2020-21, which I have to spend by the beginning of March because my term ends in May, has now been spent, with the remaining funds divided between proposals from Colyton Caterpillars and Beer Parish Council.

Council Budget and Council Tax

The Council will meet in February to agree its budget. The Government has put us in the position where yet another above-inflation increase in Council Tax (the 7th in a row, I think) is inevitable if we are to maintain essential services.