

Andrew Saywell's Report 22nd September 2021

The latest update from DCC.

Highways – Eggesford Road

The poor condition of this road in the village has been a priority of mine for some time and after reporting the potholes on this road for the 'umpteenth time' I raised its condition with the Head of Highways at DCC as it seemed to me we were spending an inordinate amount of time repairing potholes on a road that will continue to pothole until it is either patched or resurfaced.

Following my discussions with the Head of Highways, the road has been identified for serviceability patching which is likely (but not 100% confirmed yet) to take place during the October half term week.

Serviceability patching is not quite as good as full patching/resurfacing but is similar, and recent examples of it in the village include the patching on Coopers Hill and Townsend Hill. It should improve the current quality of the road substantially and keep it in good condition ahead of full resurfacing works in 2-4 years' time if they are deemed necessary after these works. We have done similar patching on the A377 near High Bickington and Umberleigh, and the B3227 in Langtree.

There is a lot of demand for serviceability patching across Devon so these works may yet get pulled, but I am hoping not and once they are done, I will continue to lobby and fight for more improvements in the rest of the Parish and Torrington Rural.

Work Hub Update

Since the last meeting a possible two alternative sites have emerged and I am working with Torridge District Council officers and DCC officials to see whether these new sites will be viable. As and when I have more information, I will let the Parish Council know. It is very early days but am hoping site visits can be arranged soon.

Covid

Covid cases in Devon have fallen since the summer and are now below the England average (216 per 100,000 in Devon, 258 in England). Latest weekly data to 17th September there were 1751 new infections, a fall of 532 (23%) on the previous week. School age children are accounting for a large proportion of positive cases and are driving the case numbers across Devon although we are still seeing some outbreaks in care homes and some workplaces.

I sent the Parish Clerk the latest vaccination briefing on Friday but as of 17th September 93% of people aged 16+ in Devon have had one dose, 85.6% have had both doses.

Exact details of the booster vaccine rollout and for children aged 12-15 are TBC but I am hoping to find out more at a meeting of the 'Team Devon' outbreak board. As and when I have details, I will let the Parish Council know.

Covid hospitalisations remain, thankfully, stable, but there is pressure on the NHS, in part due to the pent-up demand in the system post lockdown.

Children's Services

In September the Cabinet approved proposals to improve recruitment and retentions of Children's Services Social Workers, with an additional £3.4m being invested into the service. The new measures include better pay for key roles, retention payments, more administrative support to free up social workers to focus on doing direct work with children and families and expanding training schemes and workforce development.

There is a national shortage of social workers, so this is a challenging 'market' in which to recruit and retain new staff, however these measures are intended to improve the situation in Devon and also reduce our use of agency staff.

We are now turning attention to Adult Social Workers and what additional support can be given there too.

Devolution Bid

DCC has on behalf of 'Team Devon' (the County Council and Devon District Councils) submitted a devolution bid to Government. Key priorities of the bid are:

- Increase the supply of social housing and affordable homes for key workers
- Create a single pot of national and local funding to improve skills and training to increase business productivity and tackle poverty
- Promote a clean growth agenda that would see Devon achieve net zero carbon emissions with key priorities for transport, housing, energy, and land use
- Support local regeneration and investment in coastal and market towns
- Maximise pupil premium to raise the aspirations of Devon's young people and promote social mobility

The Government appears to be receptive to these proposals, but as ever it will take time to see them come to fruition even if approval is granted. 'Watch this space' would be my thoughts on this at the moment!

We will hopefully hear back from the Government soon as to whether Devon's bid is likely to attract support...

Afghan Refugees

DCC is involved with the Home Office programme to resettle refugees from Afghanistan and is working closely with the District Councils to facilitate this. up to 15 families are expected to move into 'bridging accommodation' at Exmouth but this is only temporary until they are found permanent accommodation in the rest of the country. The numbers re-settled in both Devon and locally in Torridge are likely to be very low.

I hope this is helpful – any local matters you would like me to look into then please let me know.

October half term week, getting Eggesford Road patched