

## **Annual Report to Newton Poppleford and Harpford**

**24<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

**Cllr Jess Bailey, Devon County Council (Otter Valley)**

### **Val Ranger**

I was very sad to lose Val Ranger this year as an outstanding representative and advocate for Newton Poppleford and Harpford as well as a lovely person who was very supportive to me. I worked closely with Val as the district councillor since being elected as the county councillor in May 2021. Following the by election arising from the sad passing of Val, and the election of Chris Burhop I'm pleased to say that positive spirit of collaboration has continued between myself and the new district councillor Chris.

### **Road Safety**

This has been a year of intense frustration for me as your Devon County Councillor from a road safety perspective. I have worked very hard pressing for road safety improvements, particularly in relation to the A3052. I have convened meetings with DCC Highways Officers, I have worked with residents on petitions, and I have appeared on BBC Spotlight. I have supported Newton Poppleford's Parish Council's formal application for 20mph (twice). So far my efforts and those of the Parish Council, and residents have yielded few results from DCC. However, that does not mean that as your county councillor I am abandoning my quest for improvements. Quite the opposite, I will be redoubling my effort in the next twelve months.

I am pleased that one modest highway initiative does seem to be progressing, that is the installation of Wig Wags on the A3052 (which will flash during school drop off and pick up and will state '20mph when flashing'). I have been advised that suitable locations have now been identified (I will seek clarification from Highways Officers where these are and report to the Parish Council).

As a general comment, the roads are in the worst state I have never known them and terrible potholes have appeared, which are not only unpleasant to drive over and risk damaging our cars but they also risk causing accidents with drivers swerving to avoid them. This would be bad enough if it was on our minor roads but there have been terrible holes appearing on some of the main roads including the A3052 on Four Elms Hill, already a terrible accident blackspot. Devon's roads are suffering from years of under investment by the Conservative administration at DCC and it is frankly not good enough.

I am very grateful for the continued hard work of the Community Speedwatch which is run by Gill Cameron Webb. I was pleased to contribute from my DCC Locality Budget to Community Speedwatch signs this year.

### **Footpaths**

Responsibility for public rights of way falls within the highways department at DCC. Again I have had some difficulties, particularly in relation to the relocation of the Red Bridge, to actually find out what progress has been made by DCC officers over the past two years. I have made numerous requests for information, including contacting Meg Booth head of DCC Highways, and I am simply not prepared to let this drop. It is absolutely vital that progress is made before the current bridge becomes unusable and Harpford and Newton Poppleford are severed from each other, without a safe walking route between them. Liz Downen and other residents are actively campaigning and I fully support their commitment in resolving this issue.

I was pleased to support the application to register a formal footpath at Lynch Head submitted by the excellent footpath warden Ted Swan. The registration was approved at the Devon County Council Public Rights of Way committee on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023 which is great news.

### **Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee**

As a member of DCC's Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee I have been very concerned by DCC's consultation on a number of significant proposed cuts to services and funding. These include closing Day and Respite centres for disabled adults and cutting the £1.5 million Homelessness Support Grant. The consultation process is, in my view flawed. I called for there to be an agenda item on the consultation at the committee meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> March. (I really would have expected the chair Conservative Cllr Sara Randall Johnson to have automatically included this as an agenda item as there are significant public concerns about the proposals). When I was met with no response, I then had to formally request an agenda item from the chief executive of DCC and it was duly included. In the meeting I expressed my view that the consultation was flawed in numerous ways, and should be paused. My proposal to pause the consultation was voted down by the Conservative committee members and my concerns were also dismissed by Cllr James McInnes the Conservative cabinet member for adult services who was in attendance.

However, a few days later the consultation for Day services and Respite services was abruptly withdrawn, two days before the consultation closing date. This was, I understand, prompted by the receipt of a letter from the leading local disability charity Mencap to DCC which stated it was considering legal action because DCC was not complying with its public sector duty of equality. None of the other consultations (including the proposed cuts to the homelessness support grant) have been paused. I will be monitoring the situation closely to see what happens next.