

Newton Poppleford and Harpford Parish Council

Ward Councillor's Report for the year to 31st March 2023

The first thing to say is that, from the District Council's perspective, this was the year that we lost our fantastic, hard-working and altogether wonderful District Councillor Val Ranger. Indeed I was at the District Council's last council meeting on this session on Wednesday 19th April when the outgoing chairman Ian Thomas paid tribute to Val and how the whole council mourned her loss.

Val passed away in the summer but she worked for the parish until her last days. She fought so hard for us, in particular with respect to road safety. Indeed I accompanied Val to the East Devon Highways and Traffic Order Committee (HATOC) meeting at DCC's offices on Friday 22nd July. Despite being obviously very poorly Val insisted on attending the meeting and speaking about road safety issues in the parish. She passed away a couple of weeks later.

From August we were represented at the District Council by a familiar face, Councillor Paul Hayward, as an interim measure. However in October someone triggered a bye election to fill the vacancy. I was honoured to be elected in November. Since then I have been focussing on trying to help to deal with a number of residents' issues, including boundary disputes, footpath questions and issues with trees. Together with DCC Councillor Jess Bailey we met with DCC representatives about the long-standing water leak at Burrow. This had apparently been going on for years, with both SWW and DCC denying any responsibility. Finally we found that SWW had found and sorted the source of the water.

The work to try and improve road safety has continued but I have to say that DCC have steadfastly knocked back all our efforts, be it reduced speed limits, extended timings on the pedestrian crossing, getting more crossings, extra signs or, to date, "wig wag" flashing light signals, let alone redesigned road layouts and extra pavements. Of course the current parlous state of our pothole-riddled roads is a pretty constant topic too.

In January I helped to restart discussions between DCC and their agents and the local landowner in respect of a new crossing to replace the red bridge over the River Otter to Harpford. The campaign for a new bridge crossing continues and there remains no certainty yet that we will be successful, but we will try.

As District Councillor I am a consultee on all planning applications and TPOs and I have ensured that I have commented on all applications. I have found the neighbourhood plan that was "made" in 2021 after years of work by Val, Gill Cameron Webb and many others invaluable. Any residents who are considering an extension or development are strongly urged to make use of the plan. It certainly carries weight in respect of the planning process.

I sincerely hope to continue to serve the community in the capacity as District Councillor after the local elections on 4th May. That will of course depend on two things; the will of the residents of Newton Poppleford & Harpford and whether they remember to bring voter ID with them to the polling station!

Chris Burhop
21st April 2023