

# **Cornwall Council report**

## **Cllr Dick Cole**

Time period: 21st February – 21st March 2014

### **1. Council meetings**

I have attended a range of meetings over the last month. These included: Full Council; Cabinet; Environment, Heritage and Planning Portfolio Advisory Committee (PAC) (plus three associated pre-agenda briefings/meetings); Homes and Communities PAC; Constitution and Governance Committee (plus an associated informal meeting); and the China Clay Area Network.

I also attended a briefing on welfare reforms and a further meeting with the new Chief Executive and the leader of the Council. As Chairman of the Environment, Heritage and Planning PAC, I was present at a Conference event run by the new Local Nature Partnership.

### **2. Other meetings**

I also attended two meetings of the Clay Country Local Action Group, as well as a meeting of the Community-led Local Development & Leader working group (which I chair), and the local Governing Board of Summercourt Academy.

### **3. Extra land for Indian Queens School**

I am pleased to be able to report that Cornwall Council has agreed to swap land at a former school site in Camelford in exchange for the field next to Indian Queens School (owned by Ocean Housing).

The report stated:

“Due to an increase in projected pupil numbers, Indian Queens School has been identified as requiring a significant expansion of its built campus and sports facilities. In order to implement this project further, land will need to be acquired which is contiguous with the school campus. The Council has engaged with the landowner, Ocean Housing, and has negotiated a land swap arrangement which involves the disposal of the former Camelford Primary School owned freehold by the council.

“The commercial terms that have been agreed generate a capital receipt for the Council, enable a high priority expansion of Indian Queens School to proceed and bring forward a mixed tenure housing development in Camelford.”

The Cabinet was unanimous in its support for the initiative.

#### **4. Council tax**

At the Full Council meeting on 25th February, the members of Cornwall Council voted to put up council tax by 1.97%. This was just below the 2% threshold which would have forced the Council to put its proposal out to a costly public referendum. I supported the increase because it was my view that the Council needed to do what it could to offset the massive cuts in grants from central government.

#### **5. Reduction in library opening hours**

The ruling Cabinet at Cornwall Council has announced a reduction in opening hours at local libraries in order to meet budget cuts of £400,000, which I have personally contested.

The 12-week consultation on the cessation of all mobile library and mobile one stop shop services is continuing, and I have made strong representations against the loss of the Clay Bus at the most recent China Clay Area Network Meeting and also at Full Council.

#### **6. Letter from China Clay Area Network Meeting**

In co-operation with the Network Manager of the China Clay Area, I recently drafted a letter which addressed local concerns about the inequitable provision of council services across Cornwall. At the meeting of the China Clay Area Network on 24th February, the letter was endorsed by all Cornwall Councillors and parish councillors present, and it was agreed to send it to the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and the members of the Cabinet.

The full text of the letter, which was in my name, was as follows:

##### **Delivery of Council Services in the China Clay Area**

I have been asked to write to you concerning service delivery in Clay Country by the China Clay Area Community Network.

The network consists of the five parishes of Roche, St Dennis, St Enoder, St Stephen-in Brannel and Treverbyn; and it is served by myself and Cllrs Curnow, Greenslade, Luke, Rix and Wood.

The delivery of customer-facing services from Cornwall Council appears predicated on the hub model, where a town often acts as a local service centre for a surrounding rural area.

This may work well in parts of Cornwall where the economy was formerly based on agriculture. But in our area, there is no natural "centre" and communities are smaller and dispersed – reflecting a 19th and 20th century settlement pattern, created at a time of the widespread extraction of china clay and other minerals.

We believe that, through this model, the China Clay Area has lost out and, with the ongoing cuts from central government, it will continue to lose out in comparison with other parts of Cornwall.

Since the creation of the unitary authority, Clay Country has never had a permanent One Stop Shop. A mobile One Stop Shop – combined with an enhanced library provision – was launched in October 2012. But it is clear to local members that this service is now under threat and there is little evidence that the Cabinet or wider Council would wish to retain the service.

Local members would also question whether the China Clay Area – as a result of its distinct demographic and geographic profile – gets its fair share of central expenditure from Cornwall Council.

The five Parish Councils in the area are particularly active and are responsible for a wide range of services, including playing fields and play areas, open spaces, allotments, cemeteries and business units.

But there is a strong perception that service provision from Cornwall Council is limited in comparison.

We would note that the China Clay Area has had a poor service from Civil Enforcement as officers focus on areas of greater population, while local members receive repeated complaints about issues such as the limited extent of street cleaning and lack of waste bins in local villages – compared to urban centres.

At the same time, local residents are aware of the “double taxation” issue, namely that they are contributing to Cornwall Council’s share of the council tax, which is being used to provide services in other parts of Cornwall, that are provided by Parish Councils closer to home.

It is view of the Community Network that Cornwall Council needs to undertake a full assessment of how it provides services – geographically – across Cornwall, so that it can identify those Networks and communities, which receive less than average expenditure. This will also allow the Council to be more informed when it makes decisions about future investments, service delivery and the devolution of services.

It is ironic that whilst Cornwall Council Members and officers travel to London seeking from central government a fairer settlement for rural authorities, the unitary authority does not appear to “rural-proof” the distribution of its own services across Cornwall.

After all, council tax is uniform across Cornwall. So it is important that the 26,000 people of Clay Country do receive a reasonable parity of council expenditure.

## **7. Patching at Highgate/Gaverigan Roundabout, Indian Queens**

In February, I reported that Cormac had carried out some temporary patching of the worst pot-holes at Highgate/Gaverigan Roundabout near Indian Queens, and that the resurfacing of the roundabout was timetabled for May.

I have received the following update from Robert Hancock at Cormac:

"There has been considerable correspondence on this topic over the past few weeks, resulting in the present proposal for the works consisting of:

"24hr closure of the Treviscoe road for 5 days and 4 nights commencing Tuesday 5th May.

"Night time closure of the B3279 from 1900hrs to 0700hrs.

"The B3279 will remain open through the day. However, traffic will be shuttled through the roundabout by means of temporary traffic signals.

"The official diversion route for the closure is via St Stephen to the A3058 to Brighton Cross then north on the B3275 to Fraddon before joining the A30.

"We have been in communication with Sita representatives, Matt Ives and Michael Dobson. They are aware that access to the CERC via Stamps Hill/Gaverigan will not be possible for the period of the closure and are rescheduling their works accordingly.

"The restrictive size of the roundabout and the amount of reconstruction works required does not allow us to provide for traffic whilst these works are undertaken. In an attempt to reduce disruption to a minimum, Cormac intend to double shift our workforce, working day and night for the period of the closure."

## **8. Closure of road bridge near Perrose and Retyn**

In February, I reported that a road bridge near Perrose and Retyn had been undermined by the amount of water in the river beneath it. I have recently received the following update from Cormac:

"As you are aware, we have closed the road at Retyn Bridge due to it falling into an unsafe condition ... unfortunately some of the local residents have been persistently moving the signs and

barriers and driving over the bridge. Therefore, it has become necessary to place concrete barriers at either side of the bridge to prevent unauthorised access and to protect highway safety.”

I am continuing to lobby officers for the repairs to be undertaken as soon as possible.

## **9. Corporate Directors at Cornwall Council**

The New Chief Executive Andrew Kerr, with the support of the Council’s Cabinet, has decided to reduce the most senior “Corporate Director” posts at the unitary authority from six to three. I have been appointed to the panel which will appoint the individual who will be responsible for issues related to the economy and the environment.

## **10. Gypsy and Traveller Strategy**

A new Gypsy and Traveller Strategy was agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 12th March. I had made representations at previous meetings of the Homes and Communities PAC, pointing out the disproportionately high provision of residential pitches in the China Clay Area and the former Restormel.

The figures show that, since 2006:

- A total of 115 pitches had been consented within Cornwall.
- Of these, 71 residential pitches had been consented in the area of the former Restormel Borough Council. This equates to 62% of the pitches consented for the whole of Cornwall – even though the area is approximately one-sixth of Cornwall.
- Since 2006, 43 residential pitches had been consented within the China Clay Area. This equates to 37% of the pitches consented for the whole of Cornwall – even though the population of the China Clay Area is less than 5% of that of Cornwall.

As a consequence of the intervention of myself and other colleagues from the China Clay Area, changes were made at the PAC and endorsed by Cabinet. Changes included the following:

“In response to the consultation on the earlier draft Travelling Communities Strategy and Delivery Plan (published December 2012), a number of Parish/Town Councils and individuals expressed concern as to the uneven distribution of existing, approved, or planned sites, in particular with regard to the concentration around the former Restormel area. In preparing the DPD, the Council will need to address local needs and historic areas of need/demand. However account should be taken of the concentrations of recent developments. This should seek to ensure a provision of sites outside of these areas to

ensure a reasonable Cornwall-wide spread looking at local needs.

“Further development of Gypsy and Traveller sites outside the towns and villages in the St Blazey and Clay Country Community Network Areas where recent supply has been focused, should be restricted to those with a clear local connection to reduce potential domination of the character of the area.”

**11. Appeal statement on proposed solar farm at Burthy Farm PA13/05983**

As previously requested, I have completed a detailed (3,500 word) statement on behalf of St Enoder Parish Council which was submitted to the Planning Inquiry (written representations) for the above application.

**12. Appeal statement on proposed wind turbine at Chytane Farm PA13/02367**

As previously requested, I have completed a detailed (4,000 word) statement on behalf of St Enoder Parish Council which was submitted to the Planning Inquiry (written representations) for the above application.

**13. Consultation on draft Supplementary Planning Document on affordable housing**

As previously requested, I have completed a detailed response to the above consultation on behalf of St Enoder Parish Council. It has been submitted to Cornwall Council.

**14. Meetings about Youth Club and Neighbourhood Plan**

Along with other fellow parish councillors, I have attended two meetings about progress with the St Enoder Youth Club (which included a get-together with the youth workers Dan James and Laura Kinsley-Potter), and a single meeting of the Neighbourhood Plan working group, where we debated the likely content of a parish-wide questionnaire.

**15. Penare Farm anaerobic digestion (AD) plant**

Work on the AD plant started in the week commencing 10th March. The developers are presently agreeing the “pre-commencement” conditions related to the project, which will include details of regular engagement with the local community and the Parish Council. I have been in contact with representatives of the developer and would suggest that an invitation be extended to them to address the next meeting of the Parish Council.

**16. Newsletter**

My six-monthly newsletter (dated January / February) has been distributed to around 95% of homes in the Parish. Much of the distribution

was delayed because of the bad weather, and I was not able to get around to all the rural parts of the Parish.

### **17. *Cornwall Council Has (not) Got Talent***

Earlier this month, I joined a number of fellow councillors and staff from the Democratic Services section and took part in the annual *Cornwall Council Has (not) Got Talent* competition, which raises money for Children in Need. Our entry was a troupe of dancers, who performed to traditional Cornish music. Naturally, the boys were dressed as girls, and vice versa, and I have had it on good authority I did not look good in a brunette wig.

### **18. *Inquiries***

Throughout the last month, I have also helped numerous people with advice and guidance. Issues included flytipping, housing concerns, planning matters, the condition of local roads, etc.