

Cornwall Council report

Cllr Dick Cole

Time period: 27th September – 25th October

1.0 Council and other meetings

In terms of physical meetings during the last four weeks, I attended Full Council and the Economic Growth & Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee at Cornwall Council, as well as meetings of St Dennis Parish Council and St Ender Parish Council. A meeting of the Customer & Support Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee had to be cancelled, because of problems with people trying to access the meeting via video-conferencing.

Other meetings via TEAMS or ZOOM video-conferencing included an informal development session of the Customer & Support Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, an informal development session on housing for the Economic Growth & Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee and a budget briefing, the Cornish National Minority Working Group, the China Clay Area Community Network Panel and the advisory group for the Local Heritage List Pilot for Clay Country.

Some of the above meetings are referenced elsewhere in this report, and I had a number of further online meetings about a range of local issues.

2.0 Cornwall Council approach to 20mph speed limits

I attended the Economic Growth and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5th October, which had an item about the roll-out of 20mph limits across Cornwall.

The key recommendation in the report was that (i) a number of 20mph schemes would be installed across Cornwall as part of a pilot project, which would be in advance of a Cornwall-wide default position, and (ii) the wider scheme would be fully considered by the Scrutiny Committee in October 2022. It was supported by the members of the Committee.

The report stated that a “default approach is the acknowledgement that 30mph is not the appropriate speed for roads that are primarily residential in nature or town / city streets where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high ... communities would not need to request a site be assessed for suitability, as it is a policy commitment to work towards a Cornwall-wide default (with roads remaining 30mph by exception).”

I have sought clarity on how the Council would assess which roads would remain “30mph by exception,” especially as in many areas there are key roads, such as A roads, which go through the heart of local villages. I feel it is important that communities know what to expect from this scheme, while the Police have also raised concerns about the enforcement of such lower speed limits. I will continue to report back as I get more information on this Cornwall Council initiative.

3.0 Local Highways Scheme

Cornwall Council makes highway improvements in a number of ways. This includes central government funding for certain key roads, as well as core funding to deal with locations that have been identified as a priority, often because of the number of accidents. There has also been a "Members Scheme" (2018-2021) for smaller improvements, through which the works outside Summercourt School and the double yellow lines near Wesley Place, St Dennis, are to be funded.

I am pleased to be able to report that Cornwall Council has announced it will be launching a new Local Highways Scheme for Cornwall Councillors for the period 2022-2026. A total of £183,456 will be made available to the China Clay Area (through £45,864 for each of the next four years). Councillors in Clay Country have always worked together to spread such funding equally between the different divisions, which means that there should be over £45,000 to spend on small schemes across the St Dennis & St Enoder division. I am already starting to think about potential schemes that would not be funded by other means and, once this programme commences in 2022, I will be discussing options with St Dennis Parish Council and St Enoder Parish Council.

4.0 Flooding

The heavy rainfall on 19th and 20th October caused significant problems in terms of flooding and damage to the local road network across my division. I have been liaising with Cornwall Council / Cormac in regard to what happened at a number of locations.

5.0 Cornish National Minority Working Group

I am pleased to have been elected as the Chairman of the unitary authority's Cornish National Minority Working Group, which is tasked to ensure that Cornwall Council and other public bodies meet their obligations to the Cornish in line with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. It lobbies central government to meet their obligations as well.

6.0 Cornwall Council budget

In recent weeks, there have been numerous statements from the new administration at Cornwall Council about pressures on budgets. This has included a review of staffing and plans for a large number of redundancies, the potential closure of council offices and the removal of certain leisure centres from the Council's leisure contract. I will report more fully in my next monthly report.

7.0 Community Chest

As a Cornwall Councillor, I have been allocated £3,000 which I can distribute to local community organisations. Grants should be above £100 and the maximum grant is usually £1,000. If you are interested in applying, please get in contact with me.

ST DENNIS PARISH ISSUES

8.0 Social /affordable rent properties in St Dennis

Since I was elected as the Cornwall Councillor for the parish of St Dennis, I have received a number of complaints that families and individuals (with a local connection to St Dennis Parish) have been struggling to get access to social / affordable rental properties in the village.

8.1 Wesley Place development

In particular, I was told that none of the ten housing units constructed by Coastline Housing at Wesley Place went to local families. I have looked into this and it has been confirmed to me that all of the units went to households from outside of the Parish (from locations such as Bodmin, Newquay, St Austell, Truro and elsewhere in Clay Country).

For most new developments that include affordable housing, there is a legal agreement (Section 106) which specifies that priority for the affordable dwellings should go to households with a connection to the local Parish.

In terms of the development at Wesley Place, planning permission was given for ten open market properties (PA17/05442). The site was then purchased by Coastline Housing, which developed the houses as affordable rent units (ie. 80% of market rents). There was no Section 106 agreement, but the scheme was funded by Cornwall Council and the advert for the lettings in August / September 2019 stated there was a "local lettings plan." I have been told by a council officer that "Coastline has advised that the properties were not easy to allocate to people with a local connection to St Dennis." But I simply cannot comprehend how a "local lettings policy" can fail to allocate a single housing unit to a family with a parish connection to St Dennis.

8.2 Recent re-lets

Following on from what I found out about Wesley Court, I asked for information about who secured properties through recent re-lets of existing properties in St Dennis. Of the last ten re-lets, only one had a section 106 legal agreement that specified a parish connection. This went to a household with a local parish connection. In terms of the remaining nine properties (without section 106 agreements), only three went to St Dennis households.

8.3 Extent of publicly-owned rental properties in St Dennis

Following on from this, I have had a closer look at the nature of publicly-owned rental properties in St Dennis.

Figures from Cornwall Council state that there are 236 such homes in the Parish, split between Ocean Housing (177), LiveWest (33), Sanctuary (16) and Coastline (10). The split is 38 one-bed units, 50 two-bed units, 142 three-bed units, five four-bed units and a single five-bed property,

A large number of the properties are over 15 years old and therefore do not have a Section 106 or a nomination agreements – which would give preference to local people. I have looked at more recent developments to investigate how many of the social / affordable rent homes have legal or nomination agreements to ensure that properties go to households with a parish connection.

I have identified the following planning applications:

Downs Close (C2/08/01605)

This development of three social rent properties has a S106 agreement specifying a parish connection.

Hendra Heights (C2/06/01242)

The original approval was for 39 dwellings, of which 12 were for shared ownership and subject to a S106 agreement. Restormel Borough Council ensured that 17 of the remaining dwellings would be for social rent through grant funding and these were developed by Ocean Housing. Re-let adverts for these houses specify that a legal agreement gives priority to households from the parish of St Dennis.

Hendra Heights (PA17/00826)

Further to the above, this left permission for ten large open market dwellings, which were replaced by a permission for 26 smaller homes. Six of these were for intermediate sale, and Cornwall Council grant funded 16 of the remaining properties for affordable rent. These are owned by Sanctuary Housing. I have been told by council officers that there should be a local nominations agreement, but I have found that new and re-let adverts for these housing units do not refer to any need for a parish connection.

8.4 Homechoice data

The last time I asked for data from Homechoice was in July 2021. This showed that the database then contained 122 households (seeking rental accommodation) with a local connection to St Dennis. It should be noted that 30 of these households were already occupying affordable homes but looking to move.

Of the ten households in Band A (made up of households in greatest need or existing tenants who were looking to down-size, thereby also freeing up a large property), nine were existing tenants who wished to down-size. It should be noted that there were 31 households in Bands B-C (ie. those deemed in significant need), though ten were already occupying affordable homes.

Taking this into account, I simply struggle to understand why Coastline were unable to house any local families at Wesley Place.

8.5 Representations to Cornwall Council / registered providers

Once I have discussed this information with St Dennis Parish Council, I will be making further and more detailed representations to the unitary authority, and the owners of the local public housing stock, about the need to better prioritise the needs of St Dennis families.

9.0 Proposed solar farm at Trerice Manor Farm

I previously reported that Statkraft UK had sought a screening opinion (PA21/08542) from Cornwall Council to see if they would need to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment as part of their upcoming application for a solar farm in the parish of St Dennis.

Cornwall Council has decided that an EIA and Environmental Statement is not required. It should be noted that this is consistent with the unitary authority's view that an EIA is not needed for a solar farm (PA21/06846) located just outside St Enoder Parish near Dairyland. But Cornwall Council has decided that the other solar farm (PA21/08039) proposed by Statkraft UK at Tresithney Farm near St Columb Road does need an EIA because the development "would be likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of the scale, location and cumulative impact of the development proposed."

I have written to a senior planning officer to seek a greater explanation about why an EIA was not deemed necessary for all these large solar farm applications, especially given the cumulative industrialisation of the landscape within St Dennis Parish.

10.0 Incinerator update

The latest update from SUEZ has confirmed that the annual planned shutdown for maintenance of the incinerator plant will be taking place during October and November. Line 2 will be shut down on 29th October and will come back into service during the week commencing 8th November. Line 1 will be shut down on 20th November and will come back into service during the week commencing 29th November.

SUEZ have also told members of the Community Forum that they anticipate dealing with 11% more waste than in previous years. This means they will be dealing with more than the 240,000 tonnes agreed at the time of the planning consent. To allow this, they have already secured an Environmental Agency permit which consents the processing of upto 280,000 tonnes of waste.

11.0 Ditch to rear of Hall Road

I have been contacted by local residents about a ditch which takes water from the downs above St Dennis and runs down the eastern side of properties on Hall Road. Concerns were raised about the ditch eroding the banks at the rear of properties. I accompanied one of Cornwall Council's land drainage officers to the area on 18th October and we also looked at the ditches on the downs, which CORMAC are tasked to maintain. I am presently awaiting further feedback from him.

12.0 Speed readings on Hendra Road

Amongst the highway issues brought to my attention has been the speeding traffic on the southern-most part of Hendra Road, which lies outside of the stretch that previously had some traffic calming. I asked Cornwall Council to

monitor traffic speeds in this area. This was done between 13th and 20th August and I recently received the results.

The average speed of north-bound traffic was 28.3mph, though 33.7% of vehicles were travelling at speeds of between 30 and 40mph, with 1.7% going over 40mph. Traffic coming south was quicker. The average speed of south-bound traffic was 33.6mph, but 60.5% of vehicles were travelling at speeds of between 30 and 40mph, with 11.3% going over 40mph.

Calming measures in this area is one of the potential schemes that could be considered through the new Local Highways Scheme (see Section 3.0), which will start in 2022. I can supply the results of the recent monitoring to anyone who would like to see them.

ST ENODER PARISH ISSUES

13.0 Highway matters

Listed below are those highway matters where I have updates. Further information about other representations I have been making (for example, the review of road safety issues from Penhale to Halloon Roundabout, parking problems at Penhale, etc) will be included in upcoming reports.

13.1 Summercourt School

Work to install the safety measures outside Summercourt School commenced on 25th-29th October). This includes the extension of the 30mph limit to the east, a "variable" 20mph speed limit during school drop-off and pick-up times, a dual-purpose vehicle-activated sign on the eastern side of the School which will flash if vehicles are going over 30mph but show the 20mph limit during school drop-off and pick-up times, and another illuminated sign to the west of the School which will show the 20mph limit at appropriate times of the day.

Some of the electrical work may take place after the initial installation, with signs becoming operational in early-mid November. I must however add that the dual-purpose vehicle-activated sign will not arrive until December, but in the meantime there will be a temporary illuminated sign showing the 20mph limit during school drop-off and pick-up times.

13.2 New footway between Harvenna Heights estate and Indian Queens School

I am relieved to be able to report that works on the new footway commenced on 20th October. The works are being carried out by Eric Roberts Contractors.

13.3 Proposed works on A3058 through Summercourt

I am also pleased that the 21-day consultation on the A3058 improvements (through the Safer Roads scheme) between Quintrell Downs roundabout and Summercourt crossroads, commenced on 20th October and continues until 10th November.

The consultation paperwork can be viewed at:
<https://www.engagespace.co.uk/cornwall/default.aspx>

The proposals are split between nine sections of the road – each with an individual consultation. The key areas are:

Area 6 – widening of highway near Goonhoskyn.

Area 7 – widening of highway by turning to the bypass to the north of Summercourt / extension of 30 mph limit on Beacon Road plus vehicle-activated speed sign and a pedestrian island.

Area 8 – signalised crossings on three arms of Summercourt crossroads linked to the traffic lights.

Area 9 – vehicle-activated sign on St Austell St. [Please note that although the proposal was for the road to the north of the crossroads, I was able to persuade Cornwall Council to add this sign on the southern approach to the village].

13.4 Zebra crossings on Chapel Road and St Francis Road, Indian Queens

However, I am very disappointed to report that the installation of the two zebra crossings (on Chapel Road and St Francis Road in Indian Queens) has not started during half-term week (25th-29th October) as arranged. Cornwall Council has put back these works to the half-term week in February 2022.

13.5 Speed readings in Chapel Town, Summercourt

Following requests from local residents, I asked Cornwall Council to monitor traffic speeds in Chapel Town. This was done between 13th and 20th August and I recently received the results.

The average speed of traffic going in a south-west direction was 38mph. Very few drivers were staying within the speed limit with 54.6% going between 30 and 40mph, and 34.1% going over 40mph. Traffic going north-east was a little slower, with average speeds being 32.8mph. It should be noted that 54.9% of vehicles were nonetheless travelling at speeds of between 30 and 40mph, with 12.8% going over 40mph.

Calming measures in this area is one of the potential schemes that could be considered through the new Local Highways Scheme (see Section 3.0), which will start in 2022. I can supply the results of the recent monitoring to anyone who would like to see them.

14.0 Higher Fraddon (PA21/05945)

An application for seven new properties on the site of derelict farm buildings at Higher Fraddon has been approved. It is in place of an extant planning permission for five housing units allowed via a new mechanism known as “Q Class” which allows buildings on farm holdings to be converted into dwellings as long as they are structurally sound. The applicants argued that two more of the buildings could be converted through a different policy mechanism.

Discussions with Cornwall Council focused on the development being better than the ad hoc conversions of existing buildings, and the officers and I made sure that the new dwellings would be restricted to the area of the farm buildings and not extend into the surrounding agricultural ground.

The consent has 12 conditions. One condition limits working hours on the site (8.00AM-6.00PM on weekdays; no working on Sundays or bank holidays), while another has removed permitted development rights (ruling out modifications that elsewhere can be undertaken without planning permission).

15.0 Social /affordable rent properties in the parish of St Enoder

In addition to the research I have been doing into the provision of affordable housing in St Dennis, I have also requested information on the results of lettings in St Enoder Parish during the last three years. I will present my findings in my next monthly report.

16.0 Other projects

In recent weeks, I have also been liaising with the Clerk of St Enoder Parish Council on a number of local projects, including the construction of the public toilet in Indian Queens Recreation Ground and the repairs to the wall around the closed cemetery in St Enoder Churchtown.

17.0 Indian Queens Victory Hall

It was lovely to attend some of the events celebrating the centenary of the official opening of the Victory Hall on 21st October, which was built to commemorate the fallen of the First World War from Indian Queens, St Columb Road and surrounding areas. I would like to say a massive well done to everyone involved in the arrangements.

A detailed narrative about the construction of the Victory Hall can be found in our book "Trusting Fully Trusting: Remembering the men of Fraddon, Indian Queens, St Columb Road and Summercourt who lost their lives in the First World War." It is still available from St Enoder Parish Council for only £12.00.