

Cornwall Council report

Cllr Dick Cole

Time period: 1st December 2024 – 24th January 2025

1.0 Council meetings

Over the last two months, physical meetings at Cornwall Council included Full Council, Corporate, Finance and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Economic Growth and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cornwall Growth Board, and the China Clay Area and Luxulyan Community Area Partnership. I also attended a session of the Cornish Lithium Liaison Group.

Meetings via Teams or Zoom video-conferencing included the Cornish National Minority Working Group (and associated preparatory meeting) and two catch-up sessions with councillors from the China Clay Area, plus briefings on the Government's White Paper on devolution, the top-down changes to the planning system and councillor safety.

In addition, I have had informal meetings with a number of individuals.

2.0 "English Devolution" White Paper

The UK Government published a "devolution" White Paper on 16th December. Sadly, it did not include any proposals for Cornwall, but instead set out proposals to create Strategic Mayoral Authorities covering populations of more than 1.5 million people. MPs and politicians from the east of the Tamar are already pushing for a South West Peninsula Mayoral Strategic Authority.

I tabled a motion at the most recent meeting of the unitary authority on 21st January 2025, which reaffirmed councillors' support for devolution on a Cornwall footprint. It also set out opposition to any Devonwall set-up being imposed on Cornwall. It was passed with 56 councillors voting in favour – from all political parties and none – with only four councillors voting against. There were 11 abstentions. The motion was as follows:

This Council:

- Confirms its full support of the content of the letter seeking a greater autonomy and devolution for Cornwall, sent to the Deputy Prime Minister in September, which was signed by representatives of all political groups on the unitary authority and all six of Cornwall's MPs.
- Welcomes the efforts of Cornwall's six MPs in continuing to make the case for devolution to Cornwall as a stand-alone political unit.
- Notes that the UK Government has just published its "English Devolution White Paper," which does not include specific proposals for Cornwall.
- Confirms that elected members will not countenance any cross-border combined authority deals.

- And further calls for a meaningful devolution settlement for Cornwall, which properly reflects Cornwall's national identity and the national minority status of the Cornish.

This Council also agreed to write again to The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and other relevant ministers seeking a meeting with a cross-party delegation from Cornwall Council.

3.0 Planning changes

The new Government announced significant changes to the planning system at the end of last year. The Deputy Prime Minister has imposed a mandatory annual housing target of 4,421 on Cornwall, which is up nearly 70% up on the present figure in the Cornwall Local Plan of 2,625. I have attended meetings of the Cornwall Growth Board and the Economic Growth and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, plus a briefing for councillors on this, to raise concerns about what this means.

We have been informed that a significant consequence of this top-down target is that the housing policies in the Cornwall Local Plan will now be considered out-of-date, and will be given little or no weight in the consideration of planning applications. In addition, housing policies in Neighbourhood Plans – such as the one for St Enoder Parish – will also be given little or no weight when planning decisions are made. It all means that local councils will have less control over what residential developments happen in Cornwall.

In St Dennis Parish, I have also been working with parish councillors on a "direction of travel" consultation document for a Neighbourhood Plan. We were planning for it to be circulated around St Dennis Parish in the very near-future, but this is on hold at the moment because of uncertainty caused by the Government's planning changes. At this stage, we are seeking advice from Cornwall Council about what we are actually empowered to do. I will report more when we have greater clarity on how we can progress this project.

4.0 Homechoice

I have previously reported how I was a very vocal opponent of changes to the Homechoice system, through which publicly-owned rental properties are allocated. But as a consequence of my efforts, I was able get an agreement that there should be a local lettings plans (LLP) for St Dennis and St Enoder parishes to ensure that more rental properties will go to local households. The LLPs were presented to a meeting with the various housing associations on 23rd January and will be formally signed in the near future.

The agreed LLPs will ensure that all of the recent properties with legal agreements will go to households with a connection to the host parish. In terms of the older houses, which do not have legal agreements specifying local connection criteria, 75% of these properties will now be advertised for families with links to the host parish.

5.0 "Report it"

Over the last two months, I have reported a number of local issues of concern to residents. If you spot any problems, you can also report it through Cornwall Council's website at: <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/report-something/>

ST DENNIS PARISH

6.0 Planning matters

6.1 Solar farm near Trerice [PA24/09234]

The planning application for a 35MW solar farm, which would be located in the Trerice area of St Dennis Parish, was submitted to Cornwall Council in the latter part of 2024. I attended the meeting of the Parish Council on 16th January, when councillors raised a number of concerns. I am keen to know the views of the local community about this application, so that I can ensure these perspectives are well represented in the planning process.

6.2 St Dennis Neighbourhood Plan

For an update on work on the Plan, see section 3.0.

7.0 Traffic matters

To be added.

8.0 Hall Road play area

I have previously reported that Cornwall Council is working up a project to look at the "devolution" of small play areas and green spaces to Parish Councils throughout Clay Country. St Dennis Parish Council has agreed to take on ownership of the play area at Hall Road. A site meeting was held with Cornwall Council on 13th December and hopefully work will soon start on the transfer documentation.

Linked to this, I will be working with the Parish Clerk and parish councillors to bring forward a scheme to replace the present play area with a better new one. The intention will be to make a funding application to the St Dennis and Nanpean Community Trust (incinerator fund) to cover the majority of the costs for the works.

ST ENODER PARISH

9.0 Thomas Playing Field

I am relieved that the refurbishment of the play equipment was completed in December and the park is again open for use by local families.

10.0 Fraddon Millennium Green

As the Secretary of the Fraddon Millennium Green Trust, I am also pleased that we have had contractors on site, cutting back overgrown vegetation and removing dead trees. Improvement works on the Green continue.

11.0 St Enoder Neighbourhood Plan

For an update on the “weight” to be afforded to the housing policies in this Plan, following the changes to the planning rules, see section 3.0.

12.0 Traffic matters

I continue to make lots of representations about road safety and related matters in St Enoder Parish. A couple of years ago, I persuaded Cornwall Council to do an audit of road traffic issues through Fraddon and St Columb Road, between Penhale and the Halloon roundabout. Progress on its findings have been limited because of cuts to council budgets for such projects and the decision of the present council administration to focus their efforts on the roll-out of 20mph speed limits across Cornwall.

But I am pleased to report that two improvements are presently being worked up. These are (i) works on the roundabout at the bottom of Fraddon Hill and (ii) a build-out to slow traffic and protect parked cars outside of Ridgewell Terrace in Fraddon. I anticipate that there will be proposals will be consulted on within the next few weeks.

St Enoder Parish Council has three speed visors, which we place at various points around local villages on a temporary basis. We have been placing them on streetlights, but Cornwall Council has taken the decision that we are no longer allowed to do this. Therefore, eight stand-alone poles have been erected around the Parish, which we are starting to use to display the speed visors going forward.

13.0 Small play areas and green spaces

In terms of the “devolution” project to transfer small play areas and green spaces to Parish Councils throughout Clay Country, there was a site meeting with Cornwall Council on 13th December. We visited the areas which will be transferred in the near future, namely Clodan Mews, Hanover Park, Kingsley Court, Lindsay Fields, Penhale Gardens and St James View.

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL FAMILIES

14.0 Advice

In addition, I have assisted numerous households and individuals with guidance and advice on a range of topics.