

Dear Officers and Members,

I hope this message finds you safe and well.

I know that one or two parishes are currently looking at assembling members and residents physically for meetings. For now, and, in line with County Council practice and Government policy on working from home I will, most happily, commit to attending town and parish meetings remotely and ask all town and parish clerks to invite me on that basis to meetings for the time being. Given the number of parishes within this ward (30), the continued potential (as shown in Leics and elsewhere) for the virus to be transmitted, as well as the need for me to treat all my parishes equally it is a sensible option for me to adopt and which still allows for full interaction.

There is some good news – Proposals to Cabinet (8 July 2020) for **Highways Maintenance Capital allocation (2020-21)** – Pothole Fund Budget 2020 to approve **increase to Highways, Infrastructure Dvt and Waste Capital programme by £19.249m and by £7.7m in 2021/22.**

Gvt Budget on 11 March announced new Potholes Fund consisting of £500m each year from 2021-2024/25. This allocation has just been confirmed. The Roads Funding Information Pack was also updated as well as the Challenge Fund – all together, Devon's combined share moving forward is £26.949m for 2020/21.

The **anticipated financial profile** with additional funding is now almost **£77m**. Tomorrow, we have a Cabinet Meeting and will look to approve proposals. You will know that for some time I have challenged not only the County Council but our MP and Local Government Association over this matter of fairer funding for Devon roads, and, especially for our rural road network. It would seem, at last, that there is 'some' recognition of difficulties with many sections of (not only) our network fragile and lacking resilience.

With austerity since 2008, the County Council focus has, rightly, been on those most vulnerable we have always known that the County with the most mileage network would never be able to sustain a strategy of continued reliance on preventative and short-term, less expensive treatments (which, of course, is reflected predominantly in our rural road network).

Having an indication that Government is going to allocate this additional funding the **intention is now to have an increased financial emphasis 'C' and 'Unclassified' roads**. As I understand it additional funding allocation proposed for 2020/21 will be for Bridges and Structures (c £3.25m), Principal Roads (£6m), and, **Non-Principal Roads (c £17.7m)**. The additional funding makes this **the largest annual highway capital programme ever**.

I am very pleased, too, to see there is also a paper to Cabinet to approve the **scheme for the "Gateway to Northern Devon"** improving the **Link Road from S Molton to Bideford**. The overall budget, if supported, **will work within a budget of £93m**. The scheme was one of the first things I pushed when I acquired my Cabinet Post at DCC as that road is major in linking ourselves in Northern Devon to other parts of the country. So, I am delighted to see this progress.

Central Government has asked for us to remind of the importance of remaining vigilant at this time. Leicester's lock-down, sadly, is a poignant reminder of the need for us to be so.

Locally – I am in contact with Nicki Kenneally and Nicky Cheshire from the Northern Devon Healthcare Trust (NDHT) and am informed our care homes both in Holsworthy and Torrington are Covid negative – and that they are not aware of any outbreaks in Bideford. Homes are being advised to carry out whole home swabbing for residents and staff and the homes are responsible for getting the kits etc. NDHT has offered support if needed due to the high numbers that would need to be done.

I am mindful of the Police Report for this last period. It would seem that in some parts of rural Devon there is increased activity and I would ask that everyone is encouraged to be as vigilant as possible. Please, encourage residents to be watchful and, very **importantly, if possible (eg by phone) gather evidence** of any possible crime being committed.

Libraries Unlimited - From the 6 July the 'Choose and Collect' (online service/Telephone call or email/collect from your local library) service in Devon has been operational. Risk assessments have been produced for buildings, mobile libraries service, home library service and book delivery. The stock team are already back on site preparing for re-opening and all current loans have been extended to the end of August.

If you are anything like me, you'll be looking forward to sitting around a table with us all being together. It's not an easy time and likely to be so for a while yet. I do want to express my appreciation for the many acts of kindness that have taken place.

My every best wish,

Barry