

Holsworthy Rural – County Councillor Update 30 April 2018

Dear Members,

I want to express my sincere thanks to a number of people in regard to the impending re-opening of the hospital beds in Holsworthy. Over 12 months has passed since the ‘temporary’ closing of the beds. The journey since that time has not been an easy one. On 19 April 2018, at the public meeting held with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) around 200 people at each of the two gatherings that day were told that the **beds are to be re-opened**. This is a very real accomplishment.

Indeed, the Mayor of Holsworthy, Jon Hutchins, and I have been particularly instrumental in establishing a new conversation with the CCG. The kind of conversation held was reflected at the meeting of 19 April where openness and honesty featured above all else. I want to express thanks to the members of the CCG for adopting such an attitude and to the people of Holsworthy and its parishes for sharing so much of their most personal of information and feelings. I want, too, to thank my associate, Jon Hutchins along with the Town Council for their involvement in giving us hope for the fullest and most appropriate use of our hospital in these difficult times. We will now see how best we can move forward with the CCG and in the best interests of all in and around Holsworthy.

Some other really good news this month is that Devon leads the community energy revolution with more community energy organisations in Devon than any other county in the UK. There are 23 grass roots organisations which have installed 12.3 MW of capacity through 62 community owned renewable electricity generation projects. In a real drive to tackle fuel poverty community energy organisations in Devon have already raised £14.1 million of investment, including £5.5 million through community shares which generate a return for local people who have invested. They have also created 33 FTE jobs which is wonderful news.

Many of you will be aware of the issue that has arisen nationally in terms of Community Transport. Over the past few years, there has been a growing concern from a small number of commercial bus and

coach operators at the national level, regarding the number of community operators undertaking contract work for local authorities. Their main contention is that this type of work puts the community transport sector in direct competition with them but also gives the CT sector an unfair advantage as the permit legislation which governs their operation is less stringent and less costly than it is for a commercial bus operator.

So, in brief, there has been a formal complaint to the European Commission. A public consultation about DfT's (Department for Transport) proposed changes to guidance alongside amendments to permit legislation was published on 8th February 2018 which runs until 4th May. One of such public consultations I attended at County Hall a couple of weeks ago along with Martin Prentice of Holsworthy Community Transport. I will keep all informed as matters progress.

Many of us, I know, are very concerned about issues related to our roads. I travel across our 555km road network with some regularity and have very significant first-hand experience of some of the difficulties people are experiencing. A recent national report (through ALARM, a nationally recognized organisation that deals with risk management) indicates that it is likely that 20% of our road network **across the country** will be virtually unusable in 5 years' time. This issue is not specific to Devon, indeed, Torridge.

I speak with regularity on this matter; and, indeed, am quizzed at all parish council meetings. But, I lobby regularly as many know at every opportunity to get the best for Holsworthy Rural. In fact, our ward has received as much in additional funds lately as any other of the 60 wards across Devon. It's no-where near enough, though. I have spoken not only to our most senior officers and members, to Cabinet, to the Local Government Association, the Local Enterprise Partnership, and others but need additional support through our MPs.

If one compares the amount of funding (nearly £60billion) going into the high-speed rail network (HS2) it is roughly 4 times that needed to make a massive difference to our roads. So, I am hoping that our South Western MP's will work together and insist on a much fairer funding allocation for rural areas, in particular.

Last week, at the Torridge Locality Committee with members and officers both of Torridge District and Devon County I proposed a letter to be sent to our MP which will now be sent by the Chairman of that committee on behalf of its members. I would encourage everyone to do the same. I hope our MPs will give the much-needed response to help not only folk getting around on our roads but enabling such as our emergency services to have considered access where needed.

If you are aware of any issues related to our roads please contact and encourage others to contact directly through the website address:
<https://new.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>

Finally, I am pleased to see, hopefully, the back of winter this past week or so. It has been a difficult period for many, I know, with numbers of individuals who have not been at all well. Let's hope the finer weather will bring more cheer and good health.

With every best wish,

Barry