

District Councillor Annual Report 2019/20 - Ropley, Hawkley & Hangers Ward, EHDC

As we approach the first anniversary of the existence of the Ropley, Hawkley & Hangers ward, it is useful to reflect on the events of the year. It seems like a long time since the election in May 2019 where I was elected to represent you with a respectable turnout for a stand-alone election. Since then we have had a European Parliament election and a General Election, and Ropley parish had a Neighbourhood Plan referendum as well.

There have been some significant events at District Council level.

Early in 2019 we held the first public consultation on a review of the East Hampshire Local Plan. While large parts of the area of the ward are within the SDNP so unaffected by this plan, the majority of the population of the ward is in Ropley so most definitely potentially impacted. The plan is introducing some welcome new aspects to the blueprint for the district, including policies addressing climate change and dwelling sizes, but also proposing an additional 3,500 dwellings up to 2036. Following analysis of the initial results there was some concern that there had been inadequate feedback concerning the proposed large housing sites, and that there should be a further consultation on the large housing sites to mitigate the risk of a challenge to the plan during inspection. This took place in September and October 2019, and produced a very significant level of feedback with 3,500 people responding and providing over 10,000 responses to the questions posed in the consultation. Of the ten proposed sites, seven are along the A31 corridor with four in Four Marks including one that crosses the parish boundary into Ropley. A summary of those consultation responses is now available on the EHDC web site and they are guiding the generation of a refined spatial strategy for the district. The target is to take the refined plan out for its final public consultation, known as Regulation 19, in the autumn of 2020, followed by inspection by an independent examiner and adoption by spring 2021.

The last year also saw the adoption at last of the South Downs National Park Local Plan 2014-2033. All planning applications within the park are now governed by this plan, and it should provide a greater level of protection against developments that would otherwise harm the purposes of the park. I am already involved in supporting parishioners on a significant proposed development in Newton Valence that goes to the heart of the plans objectives.

In September last year the council introduced a new waste contract supplier. Since 2011 our waste had been collected by Biffa under a joint contract with Winchester City Council, with roadside maintenance of verges and hedges performed by idVerde. Since 2017 we have been negotiating a new contract with our partner council in Havant to use their existing supplier, Norse, in order to introduce more flexibility to these services and also to reduce the cost of provision. Flexibility will be increasingly important as pressure from both public and government rises to recycle further classes of waste, and our waste disposal partner, Hampshire County Council, brings more advanced recycling facilities on stream. The switch to Norse has gone quite smoothly and is now running very well, although there were some initial issues collecting from some more remote households; these have been resolved by the introduction of a smaller collection vehicle and specific collection rounds to serve these hard-to-reach properties. The new supplier has also allowed us to expand the number of households that can use the Green garden waste collection scheme. Taken together the new contract

and supplier will save EHDC over £400,000 annually allowing us to both keep Council Tax low and expand the facilities we provide.

Expansion of facilities to residents has taken place throughout the year with the completion of the refurbishment of the Taro Sports facility in Petersfield and the opening of a completely new replacement Leisure facility in Alton. These will be joined later this year by a new leisure facility serving the needs of the growing Whitehill & Bordon communities and those in surrounding villages. The re-development of Whitehill and Bordon continues apace with a number of new planning applications either submitted or in the pipeline covering development of the health hub and town centre.

The council also approved a new place-making strategy, backed with £250,000 of funding. This strategy aims to take the lessons learned through the re-development of Whitehill and Bordon and to apply these to re-vitalising our other large centres in Alton, Petersfield and the Southern Parishes.

As well as these major infrastructure projects, the district council launched two new funds during 2019/20 to support local initiatives. A fund totalling £1M over three years for local infrastructure projects was opened for bids and the first round of applications have been judged and funds made available with almost £300,000 allocated. There will be two further bidding rounds for this fund this year and in 2021/22. The council also launched a Welfare fund to support local welfare charities; this fund was established with £500,000 and this will be supplemented with over £200,000 raised through the 2% increase in EHDC's Council Tax levy.

At a ward level, I have been active in supporting parishioners on a number of matters, mostly relating to planning, including two appeals, one of which was successfully fought and the appeal dismissed; the other appeal is yet to be determined. I was also active in encouraging villagers to review the large housing site consultation information and provide their feedback. I used my Councillor Community grant to support these projects in the ward through the year:

Hawkley - Emergency tree work

Ropley - Replacement freezer for village shop

East Tisted - Funding towards purchase of Speed Indicator device to reduce speeds

Colemore - Funding towards establishment of village web site and communications

Newton Valence - Funding towards footpath improvements and stiles

The final event of the year has of course been CoVid-19. I would have preferred to deliver this document in person but that is obviously not possible at present. I had also planned to start holding a surgery in Hawkley on a monthly basis to improve my accessibility to those in the east of the enlarged ward, but that will now have to wait until the current restrictions are relaxed.

Thank you for your support during the year and I look forward to serving throughout 2020/21. If you have any questions or observations please do not hesitate to contact me at charles.louisson@easthants.gov.uk or on 07563 649416