

Cornwall Council report

Cllr Dick Cole

Time period: 23rd February – 31st March 2022

1.0 Council and other meetings

In terms of physical meetings during the last few weeks, I attended Customer & Support Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee plus the first meeting of an Inquiry into Equality and Diversity Indicators (EDI) for the Council (for which I am the lead member), Chief Officers Employment Committee, Constitution and Governance Committee, and two briefings for Group Leaders about a possible “county deal” for Cornwall.

Other meetings via TEAMS or ZOOM video-conferencing included Support Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee (meeting following the call-in of the Cabinet decision to close the Ships and Castles pool in Falmouth), Economic Growth & Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and an all member briefing on a possible “county deal.”

In terms of our local area, I have attended online meetings with Cornwall Councillors for Clay Country, meetings of St Dennis and St Enoder Parish Councils, and four consultation events linked to the production of a Neighbourhood Plan for St Dennis Parish.

I also had a number of further online meetings about a range of local issues.

2.0 “County deal” for Cornwall

A “Levelling Up” White Paper was published by the UK Government in early February, and it invited Cornwall Council to commence negotiations about “devolution” through a “county deal.” The Conservative administration at the Council submitted a proposal on 25th March.

I am extremely disappointed that the “devolution” on offer to Cornwall is certainly not the meaningful devolution achieved in Scotland and Wales, but it represents extremely limited accommodations with local government. The leader of the Council is working within the strict and limiting constraints set out in the White Paper, which would include the need for a directly elected mayor or leader. I have appealed to the administration to seek to go beyond the unambitious constraints of the present “devolution” debate as configured by the UK Government, and argue for a more comprehensive settlement. I don’t think this is happening.

As this debate continues, I will provide regular updates.

3.0 Community networks

I have previously reported that the administration at Cornwall Council has commenced a review of Community Networks. It has been widely suggested that the number of networks will be reduced. In my position as the Chairman of the

China Clay Area Network Panel, I have written to the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods expressing concern at the possibility that the China Clay Area Network could cease to exist. I will be making further representations in the coming weeks.

4.0 Update of Cornwall-wide roll-out of 20mph speed limits

Cornwall Council has confirmed that it will be putting in place 20mph speed limits across the built-up parts of two Community Network Areas (Falmouth / Penryn and Camelford). This is the “pilot” phase of the council administration’s plan to make 20mph the default speed limit for residential roads across Cornwall. Feedback from this initial phase will be reviewed by the Economic Growth & Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee in order to inform or guide the wider roll-out of the project.

5.0 Drive EV2 (Electric Vehicle Charging) Project

The unitary authority has secured funding to install 150 charge points for electric vehicles across Cornwall. It is proposed that the majority of these will be located in Cornwall Council car parks, where there is a significant throughput of people and vehicles. The initial list shows there will be some points in all Network Areas – except the China Clay Area.

I have contacted the team and asked whether they could also identify sites within Clay Country. As they have been focusing on council-owned car parks, I have suggested that they might consider an installation in the Wellington Road car park in St Dennis.

6.0 Homechoice

At the most recent meeting of the Economic Growth & Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee, it was confirmed that there is to be a review of the Homechoice system, through which affordable housing is allocated. I have already raised a number of concerns with senior officers, and I will be making further detailed representations in the coming weeks. This will principally relate to putting in place more mechanisms to ensure that a higher percentage of the affordable homes go to households with ties to the local community.

7.0 Community Chest

As a Cornwall Councillor, I am awarded £3,000 each year to support local groups with small grants. I can confirm that, for the 2021-2022 year, I supported the following organisations with funding: British Divers Marine Life Rescue, Indian Queens Band, Indian Queens Community Choir, Indian Queens Under Fives, St Dennis Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Committee, St Dennis Ukulele Group and Treverbyn Community Trust (for mobile community larder and emergency food bags).

My allocation for 2022-2023 has just been confirmed. If any local groups would like further information about the grants, please get in contact with me.

ST DENNIS PARISH ISSUES

8.0 Social / affordable rent properties in St Dennis

As previously reported, I produced a report into complaints about affordable housing in St Dennis not going to local households. This was submitted to Cornwall Council in December 2021 and I received a written response in February. A follow-up meeting was held with the Head of Housing and Planning, Head of Housing Delivery, and an Affordable Housing Manager on 30th March.

The Council has confirmed the following:

- A nominations agreement was in place for the Sanctuary Housing development at Hendra Heights, which prioritises households with a local connection to St Dennis. But due to an "internal" error, the register provider failed to apply the agreement. As a consequence, only four of the 19 lettings during 2018-2021 went to local households.
- A nominations agreement (to prioritise households with a local connection to St Dennis) should have been put in place at Coastline's Wesley Place development but, because of failings at both the local authority and the registered provider, this was not done. Coastline did however produce a local lettings plan for lettings, but this prioritised households with a local connection to the town of St Austell! As a consequence, none of the 11 lettings at Wesley Place went to households with a St Dennis connection.

This therefore shows that, of the 30 lettings (2018-2021) on the two sites which should have prioritised St Dennis households, only four went to people with a parish connection.

In the meeting with council officers, I was told that because the agreements were not tied to a Section 106 legal undertaking, they were deemed "voluntary" and the Council would not be in a position to take enforcement on past errors.

However, Sanctuary have acknowledged their error and agreed to do more to ensure re-lets in the future go to local families. I understand that after the initial lettings, the nominations agreement states that 75% of voids should be awarded to local households. But they have suggested that, for the next two years, this should be 100%. At the meeting with officers, I have requested that discussions be had about whether that two year period can be significantly longer.

Coastline Housing are aware of the requirement to enter into a nominations agreement. One is presently being drafted by the Council's legal team for future lettings, and I hope to soon have sight of it.

I have also requested that Cornwall Council approach other registered providers operating in St Dennis to explore how they can help to ensure that more rental properties in the Parish go to local households. I have already spoken to key officers at Ocean Housing about this.

There are some aspects of my report which I am still following up with Cornwall Council, and I will report back further when I have more news.

9.0 Neighbourhood Plan

I was pleased to assist parish councillors with the delivery of questionnaires for a Neighbourhood Plan around St Dennis, and it is good to see completed forms coming back to ClayTAWC. If you haven't filled in one yet, the deadline is 16th April. In addition, I attended the four consultation events held on 15th, 23rd, 30th and 31st March.

10.0 Planning matters

10.1 Proposed dwelling on Hendra Road (PA21/10233)

St Dennis Parish Council objected to the proposal for a single dwelling to the south of Jubilee Terrace. Concerns included the plot being too small for a dwelling. I raised these worries with the case officer and, after a site visit, he came to the same conclusion. The application was then withdrawn by the applicant.

10.2 Proposed solar farm near Trerice

The application has yet to be formally submitted, but the applicants (Statkraft) have lodged information about archaeological remains within the proposal site with the unitary authority for "pre-application" advice.

11.0 Highways

As previously reported, Cornwall Council has just relaunched its Community Network Highways Scheme.

The four councillors for Clay Country have been informed that our area will receive £45,864 a year for each of the next three years. We have agreed that the funding will be divided equally between the four elected members, which means I will have just over £34,000 to spend across the parishes of St Dennis and St Enoder.

I can confirm that I have asked highways officers to explore a (i) potential scheme to slow traffic entering Hendra Road from the south, and (ii) something to prevent access being blocked to properties located to the rear of the kebab shop.

ST ENODER PARISH ISSUES

12.0 Planning

There continues to be a significant number of ongoing planning matters in St Enoder Parish. Listed below are some which may be of particular interest.

12.1 Land to rear of Unit 2, Indian Queens Industrial Estate (PA21/01683)

I have previously reported that, on 2nd August 2021, the Central Sub-Area Planning Committee of Cornwall Council unanimously rejected the planning application for four commercial units at the rear of Unit 2 on the industrial estate at Indian Queens, which included a new access from Moorland Road.

Local residents were concerned about the traffic problems that a new access onto the old A30 would cause, and also raised concerns that the screening (trees and shrubs) previously located within the area had been removed. There had been a petition of 92 names against the development.

The landowner appealed the decision to the Planning Inspectorate, and I produced a detailed representation (of over 4,500 words) on behalf of the Parish Council and local residents. I am very pleased to be able to report that the Planning Inspector listened to local people and rejected the appeal. In his ruling, he stated the following:

“An access point, in itself, may not be uncharacteristic of Moorland Road, but at this location would result in removal of the existing hedgebank and opening up of the frontage. The new access could be formally landscaped and managed in a tidy manner, with some ecological enhancement. However, the presence of the access, along with the service yard between Moorland Road and the new buildings, would result in an uncharacteristic, strong frontage relationship of industrial activity to Moorland Road.

“As a consequence, commercial activity would be more readily visible in the street scene. The industrial area would cease to be contained, inward looking to the estate road and would begin to creep into the residential area, leading to a harmful dilution of the residential character. The proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with those aims of Local Plan policies 2 and 12 that seek to protect the distinctive characteristics of the local area.”

12.2 Tregonning Solar Farm (PA22/01511)

A solar farm is proposed for land on Tregonning Farm, to the east of the Dairyland complex, in St Newlyn East parish. The proposed scheme lies immediately adjacent to the boundaries of St Enoder Parish. However, the cabling will run through St Enoder Parish, linking the solar panels to Indian Queens Power Station in St Dennis Parish. The cabling would cover a distance of about four miles. The first two miles would be across farmland, but the second two miles would follow the local road network through Fraddon (Barton Lane, the old A30 and Fraddon Hill) and Indian Queens (Chapel Road and Highgate Hill), before passing Gaverigan to the power station. Anyone wishing to comment on this application can still do so on Cornwall Council's planning portal.

12.3 Tresithney Solar Farm

The application has yet to be formally submitted, but the applicants (Statkraft) have lodged information about archaeological remains within the proposal site

with the unitary authority for “pre-application” advice. It should be noted that there is evidence of significant prehistoric settlement remains in the north-west corner of the farm, covering an area of over 25 hectares, which would be impacted upon by the development.

12.4 Class Q development in Chytane Woods area (PA21/08165)

I am very unhappy about the decision of Cornwall Council to allow “permission” for a dwelling in countryside off New Road near Fraddon, where residential properties would not normally be allowed.

The UK Government brought in a policy known as “Class Q,” through which an agricultural building (if it meets certain criteria such as being structurally sound) can be converted into housing. It is not a formal planning application as such, but simply a “prior approval” or notification process, which the local authority can “refuse” if the supporting evidence is lacking.

The building for this application was built without planning permission in the late 2000s. The building lies within a piece of land measuring only two-and-a-half hectares, which contained no residential properties. There was an investigation, but no enforcement action could be taken as more than four years had expired since the structure had been erected. At the time of the enforcement investigation, officers of the authority referred to it as “agricultural.” In their application, the new owners of the site have argued that it the building was agricultural – which the Parish Council and I have challenged in recent months.

I have found everything about the application to be a nonsense and I am preparing a detailed representation to Steve Double MP seeking a review of the whole “Class Q” aspect of planning.

12.5 Proposal for six flats at St Columb Road (PA22/00228)

St Enoder Parish Council has objected to the proposal for six two-bedroom flats on the right-hand side of the road to Clodan Mews and rear of the Co-op. The three-storey scheme would only have six parking spaces, which is less than the two parking spaces per housing unit specified in the St Enoder Neighbourhood Plan. The lack of parking provision was considered especially inappropriate in such a congested part of the Parish.

13.0 Update on highway improvements

13.1 Zebra crossings in Indian Queens

As I write this report, I am pleased that the two zebra crossings and associated highway works (on Chapel Road and St Francis Road) have been largely completed.

As many residents will be aware, the raised platform for the St Francis Road crossing was initially built too high and had to be reduced in height. This was disappointing, but I am pleased, after pushing for these safety measures for so long, to see them in place.

13.2 Summercourt School

I am also pleased that the promised permanent vehicle activated sign has been erected on the approach to Summercourt School. This was funded through the old Community Network Highway Scheme.

13.3 A3058 improvements

Works for the first phase of the A3058 Safer Route improvements in Summercourt are ongoing. In St Austell Street, some road markings have been redone and the column for a permanent vehicle activated sign has been erected. I have just been informed that the actual sign will be installed in the week commencing 25th April. The other vehicle activated sign on Beacon Road will also be erected in that week. Related works to extend the 30mph speed limit on Beacon Road are in progress.

The timetable for the second phase of works around the installation of the signalised pedestrian crossings at the crossroads has yet to be finalised.

13.4 Other updates

The road safety audit of the road through Fraddon and St Columb Road (between Penhale and the Halloon roundabout) is also ongoing and I have asked officers to include congestion / road safety issues in the Co-op area into the review. This has been agreed.

14.0 Newsletter

Having completed a newsletter around St Dennis Parish in recent weeks, I will soon be distributing a newsletter around St Enoder Parish.

HELPING LOCAL FAMILIES

15.0 Advice

Over the last few weeks, I have also assisted numerous households and individuals with guidance and advice on a range of topics including planning matters, housing need, adult social care, educational matters, environmental issues and more.