

## **REPORT FROM CLLR JESS BAILEY, OTTER VALLEY (DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL) AND WEST HILL AND AYLESBEARE (EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL)**

### **FEBRUARY 2022**

Unfortunately, I am unable to attend this meeting due to covid within my household. This is the second time in four months that covid has struck my family and last time I was infected too. Although I am currently testing negative for covid, I think it would be ill advised for me to attend a meeting held indoors due to the chance of infecting members of the parish council or members of the public attending.

### **Broadband**

I am frequently contacted by residents with concerns about poor broadband speeds and the unreliable service in West Hill. Broadband is an essential service and residents quite reasonably expect to be able to work and study from home relying on their broadband to do so. Although West Hill has fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) I know that some people suffer from poor speeds and intermittency due to factors such as distance from the cabinet. I am also concerned that given global internet traffic which is growing by approximately 40% each year we need to ensure that the system in West Hill is 'future proofed'.

I have become aware that some parts of West Hill have been upgraded by Openreach to ultrafast broadband, whilst others have not, which is creating two tiers of service within our village. It seems that some upgraded locations are often located in close proximity to those which have not been. It was my understanding that Jurassic Fibre were previously intending to roll out to West Hill but advised that they changed their mind due to the arrival of Openreach.

I recently organised a meeting with Clive Selley CBE the chief executive of Openreach to discuss broadband issues in our area. I raised concerns with him about West Hill as well as across the wider Otter Valley ward. In the Otter Valley there are a number of rural communities and properties that do not even have FTTC and are still reliant on the extremely slow copper network. I will be having a further meeting in February with Clive Selley as well as Simon Jupp MP where I continue to highlight concerns in West Hill and elsewhere. Much as I would like to insist that there is an upgrade in West Hill as well as across the wider Otter Valley, the Government's mode of delivery is heavily dependent on commercial operators who are of course free to upgrade wherever and whenever they wish.

Another potential option aside from looking to commercial operators, is the gigabit rural voucher scheme where residents can pool vouchers, although I am not aware of any such schemes in our immediate locality who have previously done this <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk>.

It is worth noting that the issue of delivery of improved broadband is not just an issue in our community. The Public Accounts Committee published a report on 8<sup>th</sup> January criticizing the government's undue emphasis on delivery by commercial operators and the problems that this creates in providing broadband to the hardest to reach (often the most rural) areas. I have written to Dame Meg Hillier MP chair of the Public Accounts Committee endorsing the findings of her committee's report.

### **Local Plan progress**

On 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January developers and site promoters made presentations to the strategic planning committee. There were many presentations for sites across East Devon but there were no West Hill sites contained within these presentations. I understand that many other site promoters

wished to participate in this process but did not meet the criteria to make a presentation. One of these sites was from West Hill (site West Hill \_05 Ash Hill Road) which I have been advised was not included because the site had only scored 1 (poor) by the officers initial assessment and the committee was focusing on sites which had scored 3 (mid range) and 4 (fair). I understand that at the strategic planning committee meeting to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February there will be a discussion about how to address these further sites where the promoters wish to make presentations.

On 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022 the Strategic Planning will continue to discuss the working draft of the local plan. There have already been two six hour meetings discussing the working draft of the local plan but we have not yet discussed the key chapters of it relating to the hierarchy of settlements. The hierarchy of settlements proposes the most houses should be built where there are the most jobs services and facilities. I anticipate the discussion will happen on 8<sup>th</sup> February once we have worked through the remaining chapters. I continue to be really concerned for West Hill about the direction of travel of the Local Plan and in particular the number of developments that have been put forward in and around West Hill which is hugely disproportionate to other villages of equivalent size. It is unreasonable for our community and the surrounding area to be saddled with a burden of excess development which will put an undue strain on our services particularly when there has already been significant growth locally in recent years. What is proposed in the draft plan does not accord with the hierarchy of settlements, because as we know and the planners know there are very limited services and facilities here.

#### **Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee, Devon County Council 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

This was the third time the committee looked at aspects of the long term plan since May 2021. I have repeatedly raised my concerns about the way in which reports are brought forward by the Clinical Commissioning Group. The reports are characterized by lack of detail, no timescales, no numbers and contain much NHS management speak which makes it very difficult to scrutinize because the reports are therefore quite abstract. There are clearly big changes planned but I cannot tell what they are going to look like based on the information provided.

I gave an example of a sentence from the report which is indicative of the style I referred to: “ We will develop analysis to better understand ambulance demand and develop a strategy for a newly procured integrated urgent care system service to divert demand more appropriately through hear and treat and see and treat”.

The long term plan has been worked on since 2018 and whilst I acknowledge all the pressures due to the pandemic there still seems to be a lack of detail to enable meaningful scrutiny. I also expressed my view that if the committee was going to be shaping the NHS in Devon this should be done in open committee meetings rather than behind closed doors in ‘masterclasses’ as had been suggested in the report. I asked when we were going to see some detail and some information on finances because there was a SOP 4 notice (this relates to financial pressure) in July as we hadn’t seen anything further about this. The response was that it was not the case that there was information being withheld and not being shared, they didn’t yet have any more details but were working towards March and there were difficulties because people were currently tied up with operational matters.

#### **Tree Strategy and Budget at EDDC**

As you will recall last year the Council committed to prepare a tree strategy for the Council following my motion to council. During the budget setting process it looked as though the £50,000 which had been proposed to assist with this work (and the actual implementation of the strategy) could not be

funded due to financial pressures. I have been strongly arguing for the continued inclusion of the tree strategy in the budget for 2022-3. I hope that it will be funded through the Climate Change budget which it very much aligns with.

The Council will meet in person to approve the budget on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February and the latest budgetary discussions can be found in the report to cabinet [Revenue and Capital Budgets 2022-23.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#). These will be discussed when the cabinet meets on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February. You will see that it is proposed to raise the council tax by £5 per year giving a Band D property council tax of £156.78 a year for 2022-23. The principle discussions in the report are around the need for increases in car parking charges, in order to ensure that the service areas are properly funded. Streetscene for instance is requesting an additional £285,000 and notes that there has been no investment in staffing resource over the last ten years through austerity but during this time demand, population and strain on the service has increased. Last year for instance demand for seafront cleansing rose by 29%.

### Budget at DCC

The DCC budget will be discussed at the full council meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> February at 2.15pm. The cabinet papers providing the detail have not been published yet. However, the Health and Adult Care Budget at the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> January discussed the health and adult care element at its meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> January. I was concerned to note that cuts are proposed in the attached saving strategies to some of the people who need support some of the most vulnerable in society. The full report can be found here. [Agenda for Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 20th January, 2022, 10.00 am - Democracy in Devon](#)

	Budget		Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Adult Care Operations and Health</b>	253,467	28,517	281,984
<b>Adult Commissioning and Health</b>	29,827	1,117	30,944
<b>Total</b>	<b>283,294</b>	<b>29,634</b>	<b>312,928</b>
			<b>Change</b>
			<b>£'000</b>
<b>Reasons for changes in Revenue Budget</b>			
<b>Technical and Service Changes</b>			
Inflation and National Living Wage			15,020
Adult Services demographic and demand pressures			27,506
Disabilities invest to save - investment in disability resources			1,538
Investment in Emergency Duty Service			750
National Insurance levy			2,659
Liberty Protection Safeguards - advocacy costs and investment in autism services			402
			<b>47,875</b>
<b>Savings Strategies</b>			
Supporting people with disabilities to live more independently and to reduce their dependence over time			(1,417)
Reduction in care and support for Older People			(7,086)
Reduction in care and support for people with physical disabilities			(1,559)
Reduction in care and support for people with learning disabilities			(6,125)
Reduction in care and support for people with mental health services			(1,004)
Savings on prevention contracts and fees			(700)
Introduction of charging costs for arranging self funder care and improvements to non residential charging processes			(350)
			<b>(18,241)</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>29,634</b>