

Parish Council Annual Report May 2024

I want to start by thanking the Parish Council for all your help and support over the past 12-months and for everything you do to serve your communities. Please see below a short report from me on some of the main issues I have been dealing with as your Test Valley representative and leader of the Borough Council over the last 12-months:

The biggest and best news was securing £18.3m from the government's Levelling Up Fund to build a brand-new multi-purpose theatre in the heart of Andover town centre – accelerating the masterplan. This is absolutely amazing news for Andover and the surrounding villages. Ultimately, the reason we received this sheer size of grant is because of our careful and robust approach to regeneration. Assembling the land holding, recruiting top quality masterplanners, consulting the public, doing the technical work, delivering the early phases and now being in a position to convince government we can deliver. We're currently going through a tender process to appoint architects.

Earlier this year, we undertook consultation on the next phase of the Local Plan. The Local Plan allocates strategic development sites for both new homes and employment - and always includes very difficult decisions, balancing the need for new homes, including affordable housing with the impact those decisions will have on existing residents' lives.

Ultimately, though we are required by central government to provide sites for 11,000 new dwellings across the borough by 2040. If we don't, there is a huge risk of developers getting permission for speculative plans, which are unlikely to include the significant amount of new infrastructure we are demanding through the Local Plan process.

Test Valley is split across two housing market areas – with 6,270 homes (plus a 10% buffer) that are required in the North of the Borough, which includes Andover and its surrounds. Thanks to the permissions that have already been granted since 2020 though, this leaves sites for 3,790 new dwellings to be identified - or just under 237 homes a year over the next 16-years. Various options were put forward as part of the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. Essentially a call for sites that we are obliged to undertake on a periodic basis. Following a lot of careful work that has been undertaken assessing the opportunities and constraints of those various sites, we are recommending that just under half of the additional new dwellings (1,500) should be built out on two sites to the east of Ludgershall, complementing Wiltshire Council's draft Local Plan. With a further 1,400 at Bere Hill to the Southeast of Andover and 800 at Manor Farm North of Saxon Way. Both latter options propose country-park style open space to protect and enhance Ladies Walk and the gap between Andover and Enham Alamein. There were other sites put forward, such as further development at Augusta Park, but these weren't deemed acceptable in planning terms.

One element of frustration is the delay in the rollout of a new waste service. Especially as we had previously agreed plans to introduce weekly food waste collections from 2024, as well as the introduction of a new 1,2,3 Weekly, waste and recycling collection system. Last year, whilst we were planning for our service changes, the Government announced 'Simpler Recycling'. This was an unexpected change in policy direction at a national level. The announcement meant that the new county-wide twin stream system was no longer an absolute requirement and other options could be considered. A Government consultation

followed, which we responded to but we're still waiting for the outcome. As a result of 'Simpler Recycling', it is likely we will be able to introduce a fully comingled waste collection system. This means all recyclable materials, including glass, will be contained within one bin, making recycling much easier for residents. I'm keen to see the changes to waste happen ASAP, but we're having to wait for the Government's response before Hampshire Districts and the County Council can develop a waste collection and disposal system that meets the legislative requirements.

Finally, I wanted to add a word on the finances. You will have heard horror stories in other parts of the country where councils like Woking, Nottingham and Birmingham have had to declare a section 114 (bankruptcy notice) with the latter imposing a council tax increase of 21%. Against a backdrop of severe financial pressure for local government, Test Valley is in a relatively good position. Our below inflation council tax rise of 3.1% this year protects front line services. That means an average bill of £163.91 for an entire year of Test Valley Borough Council services. £43 lower than the average charge for the rest of England. Not only to have your bin collected every week but to maintain the housing & homelessness, planning, licensing, countryside, parks & open spaces, environmental health, economic development and leisure services - as well as continuing with our ambitious plans to improve our town centres.

In terms of Bourne Valley matters, as well as assisting residents with individual cases, I was also pleased to:

- Support Hurstbourne Tarrant Parish Council with their successful Community Asset Fund (CAF) Bid to TVBC, securing £12,565 to upgrade the zipwire and teen shelter in the King George V Playing Field.
- Support Smannell Parish Council with their CAF grant for £17,137 for the replacement of play equipment in Little London.
- Use my community councillor grant to help fund the HBT pop-in and play group, the Enham Trust in their purchase of event equipment and the Knights Enham 12th century church to upgrade their electrics.
- Continue to support Tangley Parish Council in negotiations with Aster to secure Hatherden Green in The Close for the long term.
- Continue to support Enham Alamein residents through the Aster merger, including meeting regularly with the Chief Executive, Rachel Credidio.
- Attend a meeting with the Environment Agency, HCC and the local MP to look at further flood alleviation options for Bourne Valley – most notably for Vernham Dean and Upton.
- Work behind the scenes with the County Council to ensure the right support was in place for Vernham Dean primary school, helping them to gain a GOOD Ofsted rating and avoid an academy order.
- Attend the Remembrance service at Christ Church, Smannell with pupils from Smannell & Enham CofE Primary School.
- Run the London Marathon for Enham Trust, raising £1,675.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with you all over the coming year.

Cllr Phil North – May 2024.