

## **Annual Report by Richard Shepherd for 2021 – 2022**

**I represent the Division of Sileby and The Wolds**, which is made up of the parishes of Burton on the Wolds, Cotes, Hoton, Prestwold, Seagrave, Sileby, Walton on the Wolds and Wymeswold. As I have observed before, the range of parishes makes it a richly varied Division, which I greatly value.

I keep closely in touch with the Borough Councillors for the area and also the six Parish Councils, to assist in creating as far as we can a unified representation and helping our constituents negotiate what can seem a puzzling allocation of responsibilities. For example, the County Council (LCC) is a consultee on the highway aspects of planning applications but the Borough Council (CBC) actually makes the decision on those applications. The Borough collects refuse but the County disposes of it.

Parish Councils are the most local unit of local government and find themselves dealing with a range of issues which affect the quality of life of their residents. I attend their meetings as often as possible, present reports which are recorded in their minutes, and assist them as far as I can by following up their enquires. I am conscious of how busy their Clerks are juggling so many issues.

I also respond to enquiries from members of the public, examples being bus services, the mobile library, and highway issues.

I am grateful to the Editors of two magazines, “The Christian Link”, which is distributed in The Wolds, and the Seagrave Village Magazine, for allowing me space to report on County Council matters. I am also grateful to Sileby Parish Council for posting my Blog on their website.

A new feature last year was the introduction by the County Council of the **Members Highways Fund (MHF)**. Each County Councillor was allocated £25,000 to spend on highway projects in their Division, to supplement the routine work of the County.

The MHF gives a good opportunity to engage with members of the public and Parish Councils to discuss issues important to them. The process has been a steep learning curve for all involved and progress has been hampered by recruitment difficulties at LCC, but is now beginning to bear fruit. Dragon’s Teeth have been installed on Big Lane in Seagrave and a replacement speed

indicator device (SID) on Rempstone Road in Wymeswold. I know other projects are moving forward in Sileby and Walton on the Wolds.

A further £25,000 has been allocated to each County Councillor for 2022 – 2023 and I am taking part in discussions with Parish Councils about their ideas for more schemes.

### **What of the wider County Council picture?**

It will not be news that LCC is the lowest funded County Council in the country and of course the pressures of the Covid pandemic and current economic conditions, notably inflation, add to the difficulties. While highway issues are the most pressing ones for most residents the structure of local government gives LCC crucial and very costly responsibilities for vulnerable adults and children.

We had hoped to undertake work on a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) but our bid to Government for £58 million to support the work was unsuccessful, although our neighbouring authorities Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire were more fortunate. We are therefore only able to carry out a fraction of the work we proposed.

As well as being a Local Member for my Division I belong to LCC's Cabinet, supporting the Lead Member for Resources.

I also serve on the Cabinet Strategy and Co-ordination Group, Cabinet Briefing, the Constitution Committee and the Employment Committee. I am a member of the East Midlands Shared Services Committee (EMSS), and until last May was a member of the Management Committee of the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO).

Other appointments are as a member of the Local Pension Board and the British Gypsum (Barrow Project) Liaison Committee, and have been elected by the Conservative Group on LCC to be the Group's Chief Whip.

All the above enable me variously to take part in forming policy for LCC, assisting in the conduct of LCC business, and gaining experience which helps me in my Local Member role.

## **Briefings and other learning**

I have benefited from the frequent briefing/training opportunities provided by LCC, now held virtually. During the pandemic these were vital in providing up-to-the-minute information to enable councillors to inform and assist residents. Topics became more diverse and extended councillors' knowledge, including more recently about the arrival of those fleeing Ukraine.

I am a Member of Charnwood Borough Council (CBC), representing the Quorn and Mountsorrel Castle Ward. This adds to the number of communities of which I have immediate personal knowledge and means I experience the two-tier structure of local government.

CBC also provides me with briefings and training.

## **The year ahead**

Some key issues facing residents in my Division include of course national ones – inflation and the cost of living. Rising costs for LCC mean even greater pressure on the Council's finances and makes the provision of services even more challenging as savings have to be found. Efficiencies and the need to decide on priorities are important. Maintenance of the highway network is under strain.

Another key issue facing residents is housing development and pressure on our roads. As I mentioned earlier, Charnwood Borough Council is the decision maker about planning applications and LCC is involved as a consultee.

The pandemic accelerated a change in ways of working for many people and organisations, LCC being no exception. The task in the year ahead for LCC is to continue to respond as effectively as possible to the circumstances we are in, for the sake of all who live and work in the County. I welcome the continuing opportunity which being a County Councillor gives me to contribute to that task.

Richard Shepherd

June, 2022