

This is the eleventh Annual Parish Report, and probably at one of the most trying times in our history. I would like very much to believe that by the time this report is delivered we are on the way out of the curse of coronavirus, and hope beyond hope that you have all kept well.

Once again I wish to record my thanks to the parishes I represent, and to the respective parish councils for making my job representing them easy. It is the part of my role as County Councillor I enjoy most. I thank the parish councils I represent for their continued support of the Rural Parish Forum too.

Every year Wiltshire Council is challenged with squaring the circle between income and expenditure, and this year will be no different. This coming year will see an increase of net revenue budget to £344.023m with 62% of budget now on adult care, social services and SEN children's services, up from 54% five years ago. 8% of that is on SEN and children's services alone. To put those figures into context Wiltshire has an under 15 years of age population of 19%, and over 65 years of age population of 21%, and increasing.

We are also facing a budget gap of £69.527m over the next five years which will need to be closed somehow. As such there will be as you will have noticed an increase in Council Tax of 1.99% together with a social care levy increase of 2%. We no longer receive from central government a Revenue Support Grant, rather we can now benefit from retaining a proportion of the business rates we collect under a new Business Rates retention scheme. However, that only allows us to retain £56m of the £160m we collect so in the next year we need to make savings of £14.683m and have an expectation too that that New Homes Bonus for the additional housing being built will also come to our aid!

I have been approached over the progress of the Chippenham railway station project. Original funding was to be in the region of £34m, £16m from central government to be matched by local investment and £2m from local contributions. The original expectation was to provide onsite, 102 homes, 5450 sqm of commercial office space and 1594 additional car parking spaces. This was with an eye on the additional expansion of Chippenham and the need to accommodate 4510 additional homes and 26.5 hectares of employment land by 2026. There is an expected increase in railway services by 2029 of 40%.

Unfortunately this level of funding has not proved possible and the Chippenham Station Hub project as it has been named is no longer at the forefront of government or stakeholders priorities. That together with land ownership and grade 2 listing issues have mitigated the original aspirations. Progress will continue however, although the project will deliver 102 homes, 4200 sqm of commercial office space, and 1079 additional car parking spaces, mainly at Sadler's Mead.

I have also been asked about car parking charges, and how they are spent. I am pleased to say that once again Wiltshire Council have not imposed Sunday car parking charges, but admittedly there have been increases in car parking charges which have not been welcomed. However, the bulk of these pay for the car park upkeep, enforcement services, and also make a major contribution to all TROs (Traffic Regulation Orders). Additionally, and probably appropriately, Bus Transport provision is subsidised to the tune of some £5.174m which comes from car parking charges too. Without car parking charges in North Wiltshire we wouldn't have the level of public transport we enjoy in the rural areas.

In closing, I am as ever conscious of the fly-tipping issues we face, and intend in addition to the signs you may have seen, progressing the purchase of CCTVs although recent events have put paid to that at the moment for obvious reasons.

As always please do contact me if you require; my details are on the Wiltshire Council website, and thank you for your time.