

Annual Town/Parish Meeting 2021

Report from District Councillors

The last year has been dominated by the COVID pandemic. All face to face meetings were cancelled and held via Zoom instead. For the most part the broadband signal was sufficient but a number rural areas have a very slow connection.

Council officers at District have largely been working from home while making every effort in providing support to the community. Some of the major issues tackled have been:

- Distributing over £60 million of government funds to local businesses
- Managing Universal Credit which has increased by 40%
- Manning a central Hub to direct callers to appropriate services
- Maintaining the kerbside recycling and waste collections against a background of sickness and increased loads

Looking ahead, there is considerable concern that the government want councils at all levels to resume face to face meetings. Whilst the vaccination roll out has been a huge success, not everyone is fully protected and the prospect of meetings in close quarters is causing justified worries.

To date the government has not authorised hybrid meetings where both face to face and remote connections could be held simultaneously. We await further developments on this issue.

The **Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP)**. This is an Environment Agency backed project designed to bring the valley back to it's original form and to encourage more diverse wildlife. Survey work has begun and construction work will start in May. It will take a year or more to complete and then several years to settle and establish.

At District the continued reduction in government funding has created serious financial issues, highlighted by the closure of Leisure Centres, swimming pools and tennis courts. Some £1.5 million is having to be found to keep these valuable health and wellbeing services operational.

All three ward members are on the District Licensing Committee where the main issues have been the problems facing pubs and restaurants - hence the increase in pavement and car park 'pop-ups'. Also the loss of business faced by taxi firms.

On a more positive note, a proposal to install 30 Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points in car parks across the District is being presented to the District Council on 21 April. If approved, this will mean there will be one such charging point (serving two cars) in the Rolle Mews car park in Budleigh.

Cllrs. Alan Dent, Paul Jarvis and Tom Wright.