

County Councillor's Report for Willingham Annual Parish Meeting Wednesday 23 May 2018

It has been a year dominated by roads. Latterly, following the repeated freeze-thaw winter and the very wet and unseasonal start to spring, the potholes around the country have been particularly bad, and councils across the country are struggling to repair the backlog. Cambridgeshire County Council is investing £90million to arrest deterioration of carriageways, and the government provides a specific pothole action fund. I got our MPs to write to the Department for Transport, querying the cost-effectiveness of repeated patching rather than permanent repair. A minister wrote back agreeing with me that doing the job once and well is far preferable to doing it over and over again. The County Council is shifting its approach from cure to prevention, and the new Highways Operational Standards are changing from "intervention criteria" to a risk-based approach instead. In other words, if the road has started breaking up it is better to seal the cracks to stop the water getting beneath the surface than repair the resulting potholes months or years later. The most recent estimate was that it would cost £18million a year to keep Cambridgeshire's roads in "perfect" condition. With the prudential borrowing we are spending £14million a year, but when that runs out we will have only £8million a year. Given highway maintenance is a universal service, as a country we may need to change our priorities.

Speeding and volume of traffic worry all of us, but they are proving difficult to tackle. Fast action stopped trucks serving Northstowe going through Rampton, but the bunds at the Cottenham Gun Club still have some way to climb. Andy Preston was well received at a Traffic & Transport Working Group meeting in Cottenham exploring safer crossings and effective ways of taming vehicles in general. "Vertical features" (as the highways engineers call them) are the most effective method of controlling speed – but as we know they can be hugely controversial. Speedwatch works well, but takes the time of a group of volunteers. (I am one of those who have restarted the group in Cottenham recently.) Mobile Vehicle Activated Signs that flash the speed to oncoming drivers but are moved from location to location every three or four weeks are more effective than fixed ones, which tend to be ignored after a while.

The A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme is hugely disruptive, but the end result will be to take plenty of traffic currently diverting through our villages back to the main road. The computer-generated "fly-through" available on youtube is well worth watching to give an impression of what the A14 and local access road will look like when the job is finished - still on target for completion in 2020.

One of the new Mayor's top three transport projects is to extend the M11 to the A47 at the Guyhirn roundabout. A study on this is expected to report by the end of this year. If the business case is strongly positive (as initially indicated) then this could provide, in effect, the long-awaited Willingham bypass. That would take plenty of traffic, especially HCVs, that currently uses the Willingham-Rampton-Cottenham-Histon route, out of our villages.

Of course I already knew Willingham "from the outside", as it were, before being elected your county councillor, through planning committee site visits, shopping (and commissioning specialised glass for my listed building), and an organ recital in the church. But it has been a great pleasure getting to know and understand village life much more by attending parish council meetings and learning from your discussions. Many thanks, then, to the parish clerk for all her assistance, and to the outgoing chairman.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with you in the years ahead.

Tim Wotherspoon