

County Councillor 'Update' Holsworthy Rural (3 September 2019)

Dear Members and Officers,

I do hope that everyone has enjoyed the recent holiday period as we start to think about getting in shape for Autumn, and, for what, I think, is going to be a very interesting year ahead! This period (summer holidays) of the year is usually less busy (although, we do have the 'B' word which is causing a lot of interest!), but I would like to mention one or two matters of some significance which, I hope, you might find of some interest.

Blue Badge Scheme

There have been recent changes to the Blue Badge scheme which were introduced on 20 August 2019 and will now allow people with hidden disabilities such as mental health conditions, dementia and Crohn's Disease to receive permits to park in disabled parking spaces. It's a very welcome change.

A Blue Badge lasts for three years and it is policy for a renewal notice to be issued automatically at least six weeks before it expires. If Blue Badge holders move during that time they can phone Devon County Council on [0345 155 1006](tel:03451551006) or e-mail csc.bluebadge@devon.gov.uk to let the County Council know any new address.

Ash Dieback

A current major threat to Devon's trees, hedges and woodland is arising from the spread of ash dieback throughout the county. For more information, including a call for action now to combat this disease in Devon, please visit the Devon Ash Dieback Resilience Forum website (<https://www.devonashdieback.org.uk/>). The website provides key information and advice relating to ash dieback in Devon.

Highways

Much of my time as you know is spent on matters related to Highways. I am meeting again with officers from Highways in a week or so's time to cover some of the particular issues currently being experienced by those in the ward. I have also received an update from Paul Wilkins, Routine & Reactive Auditor at Highways.

Please continue to encourage pothole defects being reported via the 'Report a Problem' page on the DCC website. Problems will remain visible on the map until such time as the enquiry is closed down. Historically, when this happens it doesn't always necessarily mean a repair has taken place. A large quantity of the reports received from members of the public are often duplicates of existing reports, have already been repaired, cannot be located due

to inaccurate positioning on the map or do not meet intervention criteria, as set out in our [Highway Safety Policy](#).

Defect reports can be tracked on the 'Report a Problem' page using the enquiry number issued at the time of logging the defect (clicking 'Track an existing problem'). Paul has informed me that there is work to improve the automated messages - dictated by the outcome of the gangs/inspectors attendance to the report.

In a bid to address the inefficiencies associated with relying on public pothole reports DCC has recently been trialling a triage process with dedicated inspectors visiting and assessing all public pothole reports logged on our website. I understand from Paul that there has been a dramatic improvement in the number of repairs taking place, through the verification of actual safety defects being sent to repair gangs. This process commenced in July of last year and was introduced in to West Devon recently. It is now countywide. As a second strand to this, and in a bid to reduce future repeat reports work has been done to address serviceability defects. These are potholes or areas of general deterioration that do not meet our intervention criteria to be considered a safety defect, but that have resulted in a public report nonetheless. In these instances defects are, generally, being repaired, or, at the very least the information passed to asset management teams for consideration for future schemes.

The introduction of this process has resulted in our term maintenance contractor receiving verified, consistent works instructions which are yielding a more consistent output. I understand from Paul that we're already seeing a reduction in the overall number of pothole reports across the network.

I emphasized to Paul again the concerns raised around checking of workmanship and timeliness of repairs and he informed me that contractually we work to an auditing figure of 5% (which I have already mentioned to many parishes) of all defect repairs carried out. This sample is randomly chosen. Where it is found that works have been completed to an inadequate level DCC request that the contractor returns to put these right, as per the agreed specification, at no extra cost. This same rule applies when DCC is made aware of repairs that have failed. There is also a series of key performance indicators which monitor key metrics like timeliness of repairs.

Funding for Village Halls

I get a number of requests requesting information related to funding for village halls. Please note the information below which is very recent:

<http://trushousecharitablefoundation.org.uk/>

<https://www.fundingforall.org.uk/funds/defra-village-hall-improvement-grant-fund/>

<http://acre.org.uk/our-work/village-hall-improvement-grant%20fund>

I hope the above is helpful.

With every best wish, Barry