

Cornwall Council report

Cllr Dick Cole

Time period: 2nd December 2022 - 20th January 2023

1.0 Council and other meetings

In terms of physical meetings of Cornwall Council during the last two months, I attended Full Council, Strategic Planning Committee, Customers and Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Constitution and Governance Committee, China Clay Area Community Network and a meeting of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Network Panels to discuss proposed new Community Area Partnerships. Other physical meetings have included St Enoder Parish Council and St Dennis Parish Council (3).

Further meetings through Teams video-conferencing included an informal session of Customers and Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (about the devolution deal), preparatory session for Constitution and Governance Committee, Cornish National Minority Working Group (plus two associated preparatory sessions), monthly meeting for China Clay Area members (2), briefing in advance of Full Council, Group Leaders' meeting (2) and a briefing on proposed Shared Prosperity Funding (Community Levelling Up).

I also had further online meetings about a range of local issues.

2.0 Cornwall Council

2.1 "Devolution deal"

The ten-week consultation into the so-called "devolution deal," agreed between the UK Government and the Conservative administration in Truro, continues until 17th February.

During the last few weeks, I have studied the deal in detail and I have been involved in various informal discussions about what had been proposed. I have been very critical of what has been agreed and, as I have written previously, the deal does not include the transfer of far-reaching powers from Westminster to Cornwall as has happened in Wales and Scotland. The deal largely comprises accommodations between central government and the unitary authority in Cornwall.

To me, the inadequacy of the deal is shown by paragraph 24 of the document. This lists the functions that the "Government will devolve to Cornwall Council." But only two are listed, namely (i) adult education and skills, and (ii) housing and planning. In terms of adult education, it would mean decisions about an existing budget would be taken in Cornwall. While for planning / housing functions, it would allow the proposed mayor to "designate a Mayoral Development Area" and "set up a Mayoral Development Corporation" to push forward certain "strategic" developments. This is certainly not about devolving control over the planning system in Cornwall and, if anything, takes authority away from elected councillors.

It is true that the deal does include more money for Cornwall Council, principally through a promise of a "Cornwall Investment Fund," which would be worth £12million per annum for 30 years. There is a further £30 million of more immediate funding. In overall terms, this funding is extremely limited in scope. The fund itself represents less than one percent of Cornwall Council's annual budget, and I would question why such funding needs to be linked to a "devolution deal" and the imposition of a mayor.

Also, throughout the document, there are repeated "commitments" from central government. A wordsearch of the document shows that there are 27 pledges to "work with" the unitary authority on various matters, eight pledges to "consider" specific proposals and 17 pledges to "explore" certain initiatives. I struggle to take such "aspirations" seriously in this time of ongoing austerity. There is no guarantee that such "commitments" will lead to anything. It is also the case that some of the funding and some of the proposals are subject to business cases (that have to be approved by central government). Some commitments are further undermined as the text says they will be taken forward "where appropriate" – further reducing any certainty of delivery.

Anyone who wishes to take part in the consultation should go to:

<https://letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/>

2.2 20mph limits

As previously reported, Cornwall Council has a commitment to 20mph limits in villages and towns across Cornwall. At a recent meeting of the Economic Growth and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it was confirmed that the new speed limits would be introduced across the China Clay Area in 2024. Some key roads may stay as 30mph zones and local Cornwall Councillors have already requested a discussion about how such "exempted" roads might be identified.

2.3 China Clay Area CAP?

In my role as Chairman of the China Clay Area Community Network Panel, I attended another meeting about the decision of the Council's Conservative administration to change the present 19 Community Networks into 12 Community Area Partnerships (CAPs). At the present time, the option going forward to Cabinet in February includes a proposal for a China Clay Area CAP, though the possible addition of a single extra parish (Luxulyan) is being considered. These new CAPs, if agreed, will have an important role going forward, as it is proposed that the decisions behind the allocation of some Shared Prosperity Funding (Community Levelling Up) will be taken by the CAPs.

3.0 Solar farms

The planning application for a solar farm at Tregonning Farm (PA22/01511) in Newlyn East Parish was presented to a meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee on 12th January. While the actual solar farm is not located in my division, the cabling for the scheme would be excavated through St Enoder Parish for a distance of more than 4.5 miles. This would be partly through fields before going along part of the old A30 through Fraddon and Indian Queens, and then onto Indian Queens Power Station in St Dennis Parish. The solar farm did secure planning permission at the meeting. I spoke and successfully sought changes to the planning conditions to ensure that the trenching was also covered by the Construction Management Plan for the scheme.

When the application was submitted, it included provision for a community payment to Newlyn East Parish. This is normal practice for renewable energy planning applications. During the consideration of the application by planning officers, it was noted that the construction of the scheme would lead to some disturbance in St Enoder Parish. As a consequence, when the solar is built, St Enoder Parish will receive a one-off community payment of £25,000, which could be used for local projects.

I also attended the pre-application consultation event on another solar farm, which took place on 7th December. This solar farm is proposed for land at Burthy Row / Chytane near Fraddon. In addition, I can confirm that the promoters of another solar farm at Trerice in St Dennis Parish will be looking to do further community consultation in the next couple of months.

ST DENNIS PARISH ISSUES

4.0 Multi-use trail

In previous reports, I have noted how I had submitted unsuccessful applications to the G7 Legacy Fund and a Natural England "seed corn" fund to support the work to scope out, design and cost what would need to be done to turn the section of the defunct railway line between St Dennis and the Goss Moor National Nature Reserve into a multi-use trail.

2023 certainly started with some good news for me. I am very pleased to be able to report that Natural England had an under-spend and it has just been confirmed that funding has been found for Cornwall Council to carry out these scoping works. The Council has commissioned Sustrans to do the study, which needs to be completed within the next ten weeks.

I will report the findings as soon as I have them.

5.0 Footpath 20

Footpath 20 to the north of St Dennis Church leads over a stile which is very steep and difficult for many people to negotiate. In recent years, walkers have been going through a gap in the stone wall boundary, but this was recently repaired. Cornwall Council has been in discussions with the landowner and it has been agreed that a gate is to be inserted into the boundary to ensure that people can continue to take walks in this area. Works are anticipated to progress in the very near-future.

6.0 Highway schemes

Cornwall Council recently consulted on two small highway schemes in St Dennis Parish, which have been brought forward through the Community Network Panel's highway scheme, following representations from local residents. These were an additional pinch-point at the southern end of Hendra Road (to slow traffic entering and leaving the village) and a small degree of parking restrictions near the kebab shop (where some households have had difficulty in gaining access to their homes). I will soon be updated on feedback to what has been proposed in the near future.

ST ENODER PARISH ISSUES

7.0 Planning application for six extra gypsy / traveller pitches at Little Meadows, Toldish (PA20/03553)

In August 2020, Cornwall Council refused planning permission for six additional gypsy / traveller pitches at Little Meadows, Toldish, because of the adverse impact on the local countryside. The applicant appealed the decision to the Bristol-based Planning Inspectorate and a hearing was held in the council offices in Bodmin on 2nd November. At this hearing, I presented evidence on a range of matters on behalf of St Enoder Parish Council and others.

The decision was published on 12th December, when planning permission for the development was confirmed.

Central to the consideration of such applications is the target in the Cornwall Local Plan of 318 gypsy / traveller pitches, which need to be provided in Cornwall between 2015 and 2030. This target was founded on an accommodation assessment, which identified

need figures in four different areas across Cornwall (North Cornwall – no target; Mid Cornwall – 113; South East Cornwall – 14; West Cornwall – 190).

In terms of what has been consented, I can confirm that since 1st November 2015, a total of 143 gypsy / traveller pitches have been given planning permission in Cornwall.

In relation, the targets in the accommodation assessment, I can report the following:

- North Cornwall – 2 pitches consented in an area without a regional target (N/A)
- Mid Cornwall – 121 pitches towards 113 (107% of 2030 target)
- South East Cornwall – 5 pitches towards 14 (36% of 2030 target)
- West Cornwall – 15 pitches towards 190 (8% of 2030 target)

I can further report that 107 pitches were located within the China Clay Area / Luxulyan / St Blazey. This equates to 88% of traveller pitches approved in Mid Cornwall and 75% of traveller pitches approved across the whole of Cornwall during the last seven years.

8.0 CIL application

As previously reported, the Parish Clerk and I submitted an application to Cornwall Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding towards the extension of the Youth Club building in the Indian Queens Recreation Ground. I can confirm that planning permission for the extension has been secured and we are expecting to hear about the funding application within days.

9.0 Highway matters

9.1 Pedestrianised crossings in Summercourt

In my last report prior to Christmas, I gave an update on the timetable for the installation of the pedestrianised crossings on the three arms of the crossroads at Summercourt. I was told that the works would be carried out during March-May 2023, but I have recently received an update that this has been moved forward to February-March 2023.

9.2 Penhale double yellow lines

Many people will have seen that the double yellow lines near Penhale Cottages, adjacent to Kingsley Village, have finally been completed. The necessary legal order has also been lodged and everyone needs to be aware that, as of 4th January, the parking restrictions became enforceable.

HELPING LOCAL FAMILIES

10.0 Advice

Over the last month, I have also assisted numerous households and individuals with guidance and advice on a range of topics. Over the last few weeks, I have reported a number of issues to the unitary authority including fly-tipping, and problems with streetlights and pot-holes.