

County Council Report April 2015

County Council Budget

Austerity continues and the County faces another three years of cuts and budget reductions. These cuts will further reduce the services available to the public. The capacity to make back office and efficiency savings becomes harder each year. The staff working for the County Council has been substantially reduced and there will be further cuts.

There has been controversy over the decision to press ahead and to build a new County council Office in Carlisle. There is a substantial business case for this to happen. The present office stock is unsuitable, expensive to run and there is a large backlog of repairs which will cost a great deal. The savings and capital receipts from property disposal underpin a sound business case.

Health Issues

I have served on the County Council Health Scrutiny committee for the last six years. For the last two years I have chaired the Committee. There are issues both in terms of quality and in terms of delivery that face the Health economy in Cumbria. Such are the problems that Cumbria is described officially in NHS England circles as a distressed economy. UMBHT is presently still in special measures. The recent report on Maternity Services at UMBHT provides graphic evidence on quality issue. Delivering services in a rural County such as ours is difficult and can cost more.

The Scrutiny Committee were in active discussion with NHS organizations on their plans for the future. Better Care Together provides the blue print for delivering all health services. More will be delivered locally with Hospital outreach. The plans do represent major changes in the way health and care work together in terms of organizational change and financially in over coming the historical financial deficit in order to allow the new system to be introduced.

Local Issues

I was able to attend the majority of PC meetings last year. There were some interesting and informative discussions, particularly on planning issues.

There are two matters which are still ongoing which the Parish Council will wish to pursue.

The first is the National Trust's plans to refresh Fell Foot Park. I met with the Trust and Highways some twelve months ago when the plans were first raised. I subsequently attended a meeting between the Trust and the PC and then a public meeting last Autumn at Fell Foot. Councillors' will also recall that a petition asking for a reduction in traffic speeds was presented to Local Committee in Kendal last year.

I hope the plans which the Trust are bringing forwards will deliver residents aspirations for speed reduction and improved safety. I have spoken to Nick Raymond (Area manager for Highways and Transportation Barrow and South Lakes) and also to Andrew Moss (Assistant Director- Highways and Transportation) on this matter. Both are clear on my view that a speed reduction is necessary. I have also made it clear that the road engineering needs to have hard features in terms of refuge points.at the bottom near the Gummers How junction, (where pedestrians coming down the hill will cross; and also further north). My view is hard features will encourage traffic slowing and push vehicles away from the road center in a way that painted lines alone will not.

The second matter relates to the “Across the A590 Initiative” that is taking place. One proposal supported by your Parish Council was that there should be no right turn onto the A590 fro the Swann Hotel Bridge. Traffic would turn left and go to the round about. Some County Council funding has been allocated for a feasibility study and preliminary planning in the financial year 20014 -15. Further funding will be needed to take the plans on and this will be dependent upon Local Committee budgeting for a Members Divisional Highway scheme for the present financial year. It will also be dependent upon gaining the support of my successor. Sue Sanderson may be able to provide an update on where we are with the Highways Agency in terms of the bigger picture.

I have enjoyed coming to your meetings and appreciated the friendliness and warm welcome. I am sorry to be standing down but it has become very clear over the past weeks that I will not be fit enough for some time to do the job properly so in the end the decision to go was really a given.

Good luck with your work and many thanks

Rod Wilson
8th April 20015