

County Councillor's Annual Report for Bluntisham 16/17

I am proud to have been elected to serve and represent the residents of Bluntisham for a further 4 years and look forward to continuing to assist the parish council in any way I can. Having knocked on a lot of doors over the last few weeks and spoken to a huge number of residents, I was struck by the pleasant reception I received and positive response to most things that were discussed. That was particularly so here in Bluntisham.

The unfinished cycleway was mentioned a few times, but nowhere near as much as I thought. My newsletter did help to answer some questions and much of the concern was as a result of misinformation or not understanding the project. I am pleased to say that landowners do now seem to have agreed on the type of agreement they prefer, so the paperwork is now being prepared for signatures. This should allow for work to recommence late summer.

For the planned extension to Earith it looked like the north side was favoured to avoid a crossing in Bluntisham. As we are already looking at a central island, or safer crossing point on Station Road as a result of the successful LHI bid, I have asked the engineers to see if it would be advantageous to combine a cycle and pedestrian crossing point, in which case the cycleway could revert back to the south side. We'll have to see what they come up with.

The County Council continues to face a huge budget challenge, needing to save a further £100m over the next 5 years. The emphasis of the new administration will be to transform the way we do things to avoid cutting essential services.

The recent Devolution Deal will bring decision making and spending of Gov't funds much closer to us and within the influence of both County and District Councils. The new Mayor will be responsible for delivering the benefits, attracting inward investment and negotiating further devolution deals with Gov't.

At CCC over the last year, my primary role has been Spokesman for Highways and Community Infrastructure. This is an area I have grown to know well. Challenges have been the completion of the Balfour Beatty Streetlight replacement contract, complex issues in connection with the Amey Cespa Waste Contract and the renewing of the Highways Maintenance contract with SKANSKA. I have also found my chairmanship of the C&P Strategic Road Safety Partnership challenging and rewarding. Locally this year I have helped 6 of my villages gain funding from the Local Highway Improvement Scheme.

My secondary role has been to lead on Community Resilience policy and delivery. I successfully persuaded Council to allocate £1m to be invested in Community initiatives and I launched the Innovation Fund at the Annual Parish Conference in November.

Following the example set in Somersham, community enhancing initiatives such as Time Banking and Good Neighbour schemes are taking off across the County including locally in Colne, Warboys, St Ives, and Houghton & Wyton.

As the new Council year starts, I will be chairing a new Community and Partnerships Committee, set up specifically to build on and mainstream my previous work. It will involve working with Parish Councils, District Councils, Nhs and the Mayor amongst others.

Steve Criswell