

Following my election to Kent County Council in May 2021, it has been a privilege to work with and serve the residents within the Division of Hythe West. Being my first year as a Kent County Councillor, I have found myself on a steep learning curve, which has been on occasions enlightening as well as frustrating. However, those of us who seek public service through the electoral process do so I hope, with an expectation that they will impart many tangible positives to the community they serve.

There have been many headlines, both social and political over the past year that have captured public attention, none more so than Covid-19 and its various mutations. Through its impacts this virus has truly sculpted many aspects of our daily lives as well as completely changing the way through which local government has been able to operate. Thankfully, with many of the controls imposed to limit the impact of the pandemic now removed, we have seen meetings returning to the Council Chamber in Sessions House.

My first year therefore has been negatively impacted due to my inability to fully interact with KCC Officers on a face-to-face basis, as I believe from colleagues was the norm prior to March 2020. Yet I am pleased to say that with a new normality evolving and Officers returning to their desks, we are once again able to engage with that much needed rapport.

The impact that Covid 19 has had on public health matters within the County of Kent, especially that of public mental health, is considerable. Sitting as I do on both the Public Health and Adult Social Care Committees it is very evident that impacts to many people's lives have been very profound since March 2020, impacts that will take time to both fully assess and fully address, especially as many of the negative impacts have yet to fully materialise. Further support of affected individuals will be required.

February 2022 saw Kent County Council finalising its financial budget for the year 2022/2023. This was an incredibly challenging time with some complex decisions having to be made. On the whole, I am confident that given the financial challenges faced by Kent County Council, the decisions taken were correct and form the bedrock on which Kents services can be successfully delivered for yet another year.

Since my election I have reached out and contacted many of Hythe's social and community groups, which in no particular order include Age UK, Hythe, Hythe Dementia Awareness, Bright Shadow, Hythe Town Concert Band, Hythe Green Preservation Society, and Hythe Under 16's football. As with all community focused groups, I passionately believe they form and provide a most important part of our society and as such, I will continue to do what I can to support and promote these groups.

I was also fortunate enough to be able to provide a community bus to Age UK. This bus formerly belonged to KCC and has both wheelchair and disabled persons' access. It is hoped therefore that this community asset will provide a much needed mode of transport for those residents needing assistance with traveling.

With a view toward infrastructure – I have proactively worked with the local KCC Highways Team, pursuing both repairs as well as new highway projects. One such project will see much needed junction improvements being imparted to the Scanlons Bridge junction with London Road. This work will commence in October 2022 and will be financed through the Community Infrastructure Levy. The successful delivery of this Highways project finds its roots with the efforts of my predecessor Cllr Martin Whybrow. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his work on this project.

Traffic volumes in Hythe town will I fear, continue to be an issue, as both local population numbers grow and corresponding residential properties are developed and built. Unfortunately, this is a matter largely out of our control, part of a much wider national political debate, however; its impacts will be felt locally. I will continue to work with both my KCC and Folkestone & Hythe Highway colleagues to ensure that any negative impacts are controlled and minimised as much as possible.

2022 has seen the Cinque Ports Cycle Scheme progress with the physical completion of a shared cycle path along the A259 at the Hythe ranges. This forms part of the wider national cycle path initiative being funded through the Governments Active Travel Scheme. This phase of the scheme has been split into two parts with phase 5 part 1 now complete. Phase 5 part 2 will now be completed in October 22, which will see a combined cyclist / pedestrian path established around the perimeter of The Redoubt, effectively linking Hythe to the Dymchurch Sea Wall from an off-road cycling perspective. Ultimately the scheme will link through to Rye, subject to additional funding. Obviously getting people out of their cars and onto two wheels has numerous benefits, notwithstanding public and personal health as well as reducing traffic volumes. I will continue to support and promote this scheme.

The A259 Dymchurch Road has also seen a new roundabout being installed at the Nichols Quarry site. With the residential development of this area being a matter of District Council, I will be reviewing the traffic flows along the A259 as they will ultimately increase, placing more pressure on both Scanlons Bridge and Hythe West.

One of the first issues to demand my action was the flooding of Hythe High Street. Although this seems to be somewhat of an historic issue, which has remained unaddressed for several years, having met with several residents and business owners it became clear that action was required. Surface water drainage along the High Street is the responsibility of KCC and so a programme of drain clearance was initiated. However, it was noted that the issue lay more with Southern Water who have control and ownership of the main sewer running under the High Street. Having lobbied Southern Water I was pleased to see their initiative-taking approach, which led to both a physical cleaning of the sewer, CCTV inspection and report. It was found that the sewer had several unknown intakes. I will advise that currently Southern Water are undertaking capacity modelling from which a determination as to maximum flows can be made and an action plan established.

Hythe's Library remains open despite having to be closed during the various CV19 restrictions. I remain keen to maintain this facility for the community.

I also had occasion to become involved with matters pertaining to the natural infestation of the Royal Military Canal. Parts of this historic monument fall under the control of the Environment Agency, however, from West Hythe it comes under the control of Folkestone & Hythe District Council. The issue in 2021 lay with excessive amounts of Azolla and floating Pennywort, which was choking the waterway. Having consulted with F&HDC a programme of manual removal was initiated.

The KCC Conservative led administration remains completely focused on its targets in term of establishing a Carbon Net Zero profile across the KCC estate by 2030. This being in response to the national Government led environmental targets. That said, there are several fundamental challenges facing us, especially with the current issues with energy supply pricing and the military conflict in the Ukraine.

It is becoming clear that Kents energy utilisation profile will need a lot of consideration given the international situation we currently note. Projects that see renewable energy schemes are gaining increased attention within the County Council, inclusive of the use of electric vehicles, both KCC asset and commercial, in the form of electrically powered public buses. Focus is also mounting on the reintroduction of nuclear power and the generation of electricity at Dungeness.

Other environmental schemes of note include Kents Plan Bee, which saw a great deal of success in 2021, with heightened expectations that it will attain equal traction and interest in 2022.

The recycling of household waste has developed well with the establishment of several centres across the county, through which household waste is processed, resulting in less than 1% of said waste finding itself entering landfill.

Household food waste is also being used to make electricity via the county's renewable energy biomass plant in Sandwich. Through this biogas Combined Heat and Power plant, we are generating just over 27 MW of green electricity, which is enough to supply 50,000 homes and save over 100,000 tons of CO2 every year. The CO2 saving attained here is equal to over 1 million plane flights to Paris or nearly 28 million miles driven by an average car – the same as driving around the world nearly 1,135 times.

In conclusion, I congratulate the KCC administration for driving forward and embracing a thoroughly green energy agenda, one that can only benefit the residents of Hythe and surrounding areas. As a County Councillor, I look forward to working with both Hythe Town Council and the residents of Hythe through the next twelve months and welcome any comments or feedback which can help me and others deliver a sustainable future for all.

Thank You

Cllr Andy Weatherhead (Conservative) KCC Member for Hythe West.