

Report to Hythe Annual Town Meeting 28th April 2022

by Councillor Rory Love; Kent County Councillor for Cheriton, Sandgate, and Hythe East

On 6th May last year, I had the privilege of being re-elected as the Kent County Councillor for Cheriton, Sandgate, and Hythe East. The part of Hythe included in my Division is the whole of the Hythe East Town Council ward, which in the broadest terms means all properties east of a line drawn along the centre of Twiss Road, the lower part of Tanners Hill, and Castle Road, as far as the boundary with Saltwood. There are a few additional properties to the west of that line.

I have summarised in this report those activities of mine over the last year which predominantly relate to Hythe.

I have continued as Chairman of the County Council's Folkestone & Hythe Local Children's Partnership Group (F&H LCPG), which brings together a number of partner organisations with the aim of improving outcomes for children and young people. The partners include representatives from the education, health, police, and voluntary sectors.

We set our priorities for the year, and then seek to co-ordinate work across all partners to focus on those priorities. Some of our objectives are made possible by grant funding which we allocate.

The F&H LCPG's priorities are:

- Raising aspiration and educational attainment, and extending employment & training opportunities
- Creating Safe, Resilient and Inclusive Communities, and
- Enhancing communication skills as a foundation for life.

We have also been responsible for the local delivery of the Kent Reconnect Programme, to help children and young people reconnect with the things they have missed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to it.

I also had the privilege until March 2022 of serving as the Vice Chairman of the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee, as well as sitting on the Policy & Resources Committee, the Children, Young People, and Education Cabinet Committee, the Scrutiny Committee, the Regulation Committee, and the Standards Committee. From last month, I have been asked by the Leader of the Council to serve as the Chairman of the Growth, Economic Development, and Communities Cabinet Committee. To concentrate on this new role, I have stood down from my two previous Cabinet Committees.

My new Committee has a vital role in Kent's economic development, which in turn will bring prosperity to Kent's residents, and provide funding for public services.

Among my priorities for enhancing prosperity for Kent are: Rolling out ultrafast broadband, creating jobs, building the right homes in the right places for our local population, encouraging people back to their offices to stimulate spending in our town centres, and helping secure affordable, green nuclear energy with small modular reactors at Dungeness; which will also enable us to retain our skilled nuclear workforce.

In the first half of the last year, together with my Hythe West county councillor colleague, Cllr Andy Weatherhead, I successfully lobbied the Secretary of State for Transport to hold a full public inquiry into the District Council's proposal to stop-up part of Princes Parade as part of the controversial development plans for the site. The inquiry took place in October.

The Inspector made clear that evidence would carry more weight if witnesses allowed themselves to be cross-examination. I was the only councillor appearing as an objector who agreed to be cross-examined. I was on the witness stand for 2 hours and 40 minutes fighting the road closure, which I believe will impact on both the motorists who use the road, and the residents where traffic is displaced. In the end, the Inspector found in favour of the District Council's plan to stop-up almost half of the road.

It remains my view that the plans for development on this site have expanded beyond all recognition from the original objectives.

On other local matters, I have lobbied successfully for the full reopening of the Libraries serving residents of my Division, with Cheriton Library going back to pre-Covid opening times last July, and Hythe Library reopening after having a new heating system installed last August. This has made Hythe Library far more comfortable for visitors over the winter. I also grant-funded a new community centre now open on the ground floor of Cheriton Library.

On the local roads, I have extended the 30mph speed limit (down from 40 mph) at the top end of Tanners Hill as it approaches the boundary with Saltwood to give motorists more opportunity to adjust in time for the 20mph limit for those continuing into School Road, Saltwood. I am also winning the argument with the Kent Highways team to bring forward the resurfacing of Horn Street. If I am finally successful, this is likely to be carried out in two phases.

Elsewhere in my Division, I have successfully called for a rethink on the route of a cycle lane, which in its original location would have resulted in a loss of roadside parking and a loss of several mature roadside trees. While I wish to promote cycling and walking, I believe we must ensure that such routes are in the right place, so as to avoid damaging the viability of our High Streets, which are already struggling after the recent Covid measures.

I remain concerned about the impact of Operation Brock on the M20, and will continue to lobby for a permanent solution that does not inconvenience residents of, and visitors to, this district.

On wider County Council matters, I have long argued against the charges for disposal of DIY waste at the household waste recycling centres, including highlighting the problem direct to Government Ministers. I have also pressed for the return to normal working at the centres, post-pandemic. I am pleased to see that the Government has recently launched a consultation on both of these matters with the aim of bringing all the sites back into line with Government policy of free waste disposal for all household waste, including DIY waste. To take part in the consultation, which closes at 11:59pm on 4th July, visit:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/consultation-on-diy-waste-and-call-for-evidence/>

In addition, I regularly assist residents of my Division with any issues they have with Kent County Council or its services, and welcome the opportunity to do so. I am also happy to be contacted for questions or further information on any of the matters I have summarised in this year's annual report.