

## **Annual Report**

### **Newton Poppleford and Harpford Parish Council 2023-24**

#### **Cllr Jess Bailey, Devon County Council (Otter Valley)**

**29<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

### **Flooding**

One of my key roles this year as Devon County Councillor has been to support residents and the Parish Council following the terrible floods of 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The floods have had a devastating impact on many people and seventy properties in this Parish flooded. The extent of the impact was so significant it required a multi-agency response and clear up operation in the immediate aftermath. I'm really grateful to the Parish Council for hosting a community drop-in meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 which enabled residents to discuss the incident and raise concerns with representatives from Devon County Council, the Environment Agency and East Devon District Council.

The medium and long-term priority is to try and address the issues that led to both surface water and fluvial flooding. This is particularly important in view of the ever-greater impact of Climate Change. In October 2023 DCC published its investigation report as the Lead Local Flood Authority which analyses the flood event and sets out a series of next steps. [Flood Investigation Report Otter Valley Floods 9 May 2023 - Flood Risk Management \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/otter-valley-floods-9-may-2023-flood-risk-management).

Since the floods of 9<sup>th</sup> May my actions have included the following:

- Working to progress the Venn Ottery flood scheme, including convening a site meeting of residents, DCC officers and other representatives. I supported the £50,000 budget for the scheme at DCC cabinet on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024. The design for the scheme and bill of quantities has been completed in-house at DCC and is being reviewed. DCC are looking to deliver the scheme this summer. The Venn Ottery Residents Association have been working hard over many years to achieve this scheme and I will do everything I can to ensure it is delivered.
- Participating in the grant application for a bid for over £1million for Natural Flood Management. The bid was submitted by the local EA team, and other partners including Devon Wildlife Trust and Exeter and Plymouth Universities. The success of the bid was announced in February this year and will target areas that were flooded on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023 including Newton Poppleford and Harpford. The good news is that the project is required to be completed within the next three years. I now sit on the project delivery board and should have a clearer idea of the specific projects in September.

- Pressing the EA to make progress in relation to Back Brook. Back Brook is a 'main river' and therefore falls within the remit of the EA rather than DCC. The EA have commissioned a feasibility study and this needs to be completed in order to assess the viability of any potential future schemes.
- Liaising with DCC officers who have commissioned a surface water model of the Burrow Lane catchment. This work needs to be completed prior to any potential future scheme.

## **Footpaths and Erosion**

The extremely wet weather this year has caused significant and rapid erosion of the banks of the river Otter. This has unfortunately resulted in the closure of Dotton footbridge.

There has also been a very concerning erosion and narrowing of the footpath immediately to the west of the Redbridge. I have called for DCC to urgently protect this section where the path has narrowed with rock armour or equivalent. The budget for this has been approved but the EA require DCC to obtain a permit from the EA to authorise the works as the EA will not allow it to be done under emergency powers. This of course takes time and meanwhile this key section of footpath is very vulnerable.

It is very disappointing that the negotiations for a new location for the Red Bridge do not appear to have made any tangible progress. I am pressing DCC to use whatever statutory powers they can to resolve matters and a report for DCC cabinet is expected next month.

As a more general point, my group of independent and green Devon County Councillors at DCC put forward a formal budget amendment in February this year to increase the number of DCC footpath officers and to increase the capital budget for footpath maintenance. It is readily apparent that with all the issues that there are along the River Otter there simply isn't the capacity in terms of officer time, or capital resources to address all these issues. I was really disappointed that our budget amendment was voted down.

## **Road safety**

This year I contributed £2,300 from my locality budget to the wig wags (the flashing lights) and signage on the main road through Newton Poppleford. The lights flash at school drop off and pick up times and alert drivers of the need to take particular care. I was pleased to be able to support the Parish Council with this joint initiative.

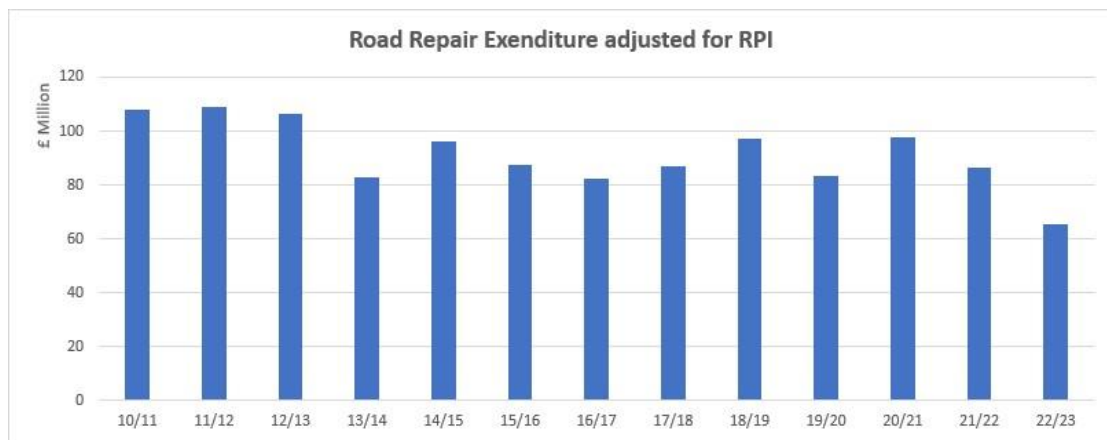
## **Potholes**

The bad weather has certainly not helped the state of our roads. However, there is no escaping from the fact that the underlying cause is a decade of

under investment in our roads. In 2022-3 DCC spent around £40 million less on road repair than they did in 2012-3. This massive reduction in expenditure over the last decade has coincided with a reduction of c£157million per year from central government.

I am told that to get the roads up to scratch would take a one-off payment of £200 million.

Like many other residents I am fed up of the potholes everywhere – but unless DCC is funded properly by Conservative central government we will continue to see DCC unable to proactively maintain the road surfaces and endlessly with short term fixes of filling potholes.



I would like to thank the Parish Council for all its hard work this year and also for the support that I have received as the Devon County Councillor. I look forward to continuing to work together in the forthcoming year.