

Gloucestershire County Councillor Report for the Stow Division

Report for the Temple Guiting Annual Parish Meeting, 4th May 2022

I regret that I'm not able to be present this evening, owing to a previous commitment.

I'd like to register my thanks to Cllr. Richard Keeling, your District Councillor, with whom I have a very good working relationship. I'd also like to express my thanks to Maxi and the Councillors for their support over the last year.

By way of background the county is divided into 53 Divisions and the Stow Division is just one, which I represent on your behalf. It's made up of 20 parishes ranged between Little Rissington in the south, Moreton-in-Marsh to the north, Bledington to the east and Farmcote in the west and Stow in the middle. The principal roles of the Council are:

- Education
- Public Transport and Highways
- County Planning – not domestic
- Fire and Safety
- Adult and Children's Social Care
- Libraries
- Waste Disposal – not collection
- Trading Standards

As a Councillor we are required to sit on various committees and I sit on the following:

- Adult Social Care Scrutiny
- Appeals Committee
- Children and Families Scrutiny
- Commons and Rights of Way
- Fire & Rescue Scrutiny
- Pension Committee
- Planning Committee – Chairman
- Safety & licensing Committee

Additionally, I sit on the North Cotswold Line Taskforce Committee and representative to the Temple Guiting Quarry Working Party and Bledington Flood Group.

The County Council is working hard to maintain and importantly to improve its services, at reduced cost, while working around the inevitable restrictions brought about by the Covid pandemic. The financial year just ended had a budget of £482m and the newly agreed budget for 2022/23 is £519m, a rise of £37m. The County Council Tax element is an increase of 1.99% plus the ring fenced National Social Care precept of 1%, which brings about an increase of £3.50 per month for Band D properties.

Key areas of additional expenditure being:

- Extra £100m on roads – 15 additional ‘pothole teams’ in the last 12 months
- £150m into new and improved school buildings
- Further £14m supporting Children and Young People’s Services
- £1m towards our Climate Change Manifesto pledges
- £20m into new and improved cycle routes across the county
- £9m extra on supporting vulnerable adults and those with disability
- £500,000 Community Speedwatch Safety Fund looking into concerns of local communities regarding speeding and HGV traffic and the 20 Is Plenty campaign.
- £500,000 Build Back Better –regeneration of our Market Towns high streets.
- £3m extra for our Fire & Rescue Service to buy the very latest equipment – new eco fire appliances etc. The service will not be merged with the police as previously suggested, so the Stow Fire Station will remain very much as part of the community. They have donated a wide range of equipment to Ukraine in their hour of need.

We will soon see the introduction of a dedicated new North Cotswold bus service, based out of Moreton, that will respond to requests from isolated people who don’t have other forms of transport, available for daily between 7am & 7pm, from specific locations taking them to their local community. Details will be provided as soon as a contractor is in place. It will be part of a 2 year trial including the Forest of Dean costing £1.532m, funded by Government.

It was as recently as September 2021 that the County Council settled 35 Afghan families fleeing from their conflict. We are now in the process of helping Ukrainian refugees via Central Government who have identified the families in Gloucestershire that have offered accommodation via. www.apply-to-offer-homes-for-ukraine.service.gov.uk Prospective homes will be inspected and approved by the District/ Town Councils, with the County Council carrying out DBS checks. The dedicated Welcome Team will greet the arrivals at their new homes and will provide details regarding medical care, schools etc. www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/your-community/ukrainian-support

The County will continue the School Holiday Activities & Food Program for the next 3 years. In 2021 21,063 children attended ‘face to face’ activities and a further 8,865 were involved remotely. 14,418 food boxes/ tokens were provided with 18,581 meals being served. The service also supported 743 children & young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities.

Ofsted have just concluded their latest inspection and they reported ‘significant progress the council has made in many areas of its children’s services’. This follows a previous and less than satisfactory inspection in 2017. We have a new Head of Services and great progress is being achieved with a more stable team. There are about 860 children and young people in council care across the county at the current time. The annual cost per individual is circa £110,000 and in a very few extreme cases well over a million pounds. Fortunately, we have no cases in the Stow Division.

I sit on the multi discipline North Cotswold Line Taskforce committee that is looking into expanding the train service between Worcester and London via Oxford. It is likely double the current number of services and will run later in the evening. Moreton will be an integral part of the proposed upgrade, including expanded car parking at the station. It will require some further double tracking at a total cost of many tens of millions.

As members of the Parish Council and the Quarry Working Party I'm involved in trying to get a better working relationship between the various authorities to get an Environmental Impact Study across the local 'cluster' of quarries that are becoming a matter of major concern over applications to increase output significantly. The result is increasing disquiet over noise, dirt, roadside damage, health issues mainly caused by the number of HGVs traveling through the region. We are working with Tewkesbury Borough Council, the Cotswold District Council and the Environment Agency to find the best outcome.

Our local schools are vitally important and as previously mentioned the County Council is investing an additional £150 into new and improved school buildings and facilities. Locally the GCC and the generosity of local people both Temple Guiting and Swell schools will have significant and 'life-saving' rebuilding and improvements taking place during the forthcoming summer.

- Councillors have had their annual Highways Fund of £30,000 renewed. I continue to push for improvements in our area so just let me know where you've identified problems or would like improvements – paths, junctions, laybys etc. and I'll do my best.
- The enlarged team of 'potholers' are able to get onto the reported problems much quicker than in the past and we encourage the public to take pictures – please do it safely – and report it on-line at the GCC website.
www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/reportit
- A £469m contract has been awarded to Kier Highways for the A417 'Missing Link' to be ratified by the Government in November. Once completed it should significantly reduce the number of HGVs coming through the north Cotswolds.
- The Build Back Better – Councillors Fund continues, where I have a sum of £40,000 available over the 4 year term of the Council, to go towards non-profit making projects that benefit the community as a whole. Some examples of where I have been able to help include Cotswold Friends - £5,000, Guiting PC - £1,100 for playground renovations, Stow Motor Show, which is on Saturday 9th July – £9,000 and we are looking at funding for the Stow Youth Club – to restart cookery classes, Moreton Tennis Club – new courts, Oddington playground equipment and Moreton Croquet Club for a clubhouse.