

County Councillor Report –Apr/May 2026

Dear Parish Councillors,

April has been a busy and varied month, with a continued focus on getting out into our communities, progressing detailed work at County Hall, and responding to the issues that matter most to residents. The glorious weather has meant that the highways teams have been out and about around the clock repairing defects on the roads.

A significant amount of my time this month has been spent out across the division with our Neighbourhood Highways Officer. We have been looking directly at issues on the ground, including drainage, potholes, overhanging vegetation, road closures, and wider pressures on the road network. You may have seen some of our crews working night shifts, this is because we employ M-Group – a highways contractor who has plenty of staff to call upon, but is limited by the amount of equipment they have. At times this month, we've had 3x 8-hour shifts of highways operatives out repairing the roads.

This kind of work is not always immediately visible, but it is essential. Many of the problems we see, particularly potholes, are symptoms of underlying issues such as poor drainage and sub-standard repairs in the past. When water is not able to clear effectively, it sits in the road surface, weakens it, and accelerates deterioration, particularly during colder weather. That is why a lot of our focus has been on identifying blocked or failing drainage systems, alongside prioritising repairs that will last rather than short-term fixes. Now we're into bird nesting season, cutting vegetation back has another obstacle, however we've had some good success recently when Parish Councils have identified landowners and politely asked them to cut back overhanging trees. If we had an infinite budget, we'd be able to write to all landowners every year and remind them of their responsibility to keep the carriageway clear.

Spending time on site also ensures that local knowledge is properly fed into the system. Parish councils and residents often know exactly where problems occur repeatedly, and combining that knowledge with officer expertise allows us to target work far more effectively. As the additional highways funding begins to come through, this detailed, location-specific approach will be key to making sure it is spent well and delivers lasting improvements.

In the first 25 days of this financial year (1st-26th April), we saw 141 safety defects repaired within our electoral division. They form part of 3188 that were completed across all 58 divisions in Devon, meaning we are currently batting at twice the county-wide average for pothole repairs! Credit where credit is due, 134/141 of those defects were raised by the public using our online reporting tool. It is vitally important that we report every single defect on the highways so that we have a full picture of the scale of the works required.

At the North Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) next month, I have tabled a motion relating to the bus lane on Gratton Way and wider traffic management in the Roundswell and Barnstaple area. As the Old Torrington Road bus gate is now being enforced by traffic cameras, I think it's vital we have an overview of the implications.

A number of residents have raised concerns about congestion and journey times following recent changes, and it is important that we respond to those concerns with evidence. My proposal asks for a comprehensive traffic survey across the area, alongside a detailed report into the impact of the bus gate camera enforcement. This will allow us to properly understand what is happening on the network, rather than relying on anecdotal evidence alone.

In addition, I have asked that we investigate the possibility of allowing general traffic to use the Gratton Way bus lane at peak times, where this could help ease congestion without undermining the purpose of the scheme. The intention here is not to reverse the principle of prioritising buses, but to look at whether the current arrangements are working as effectively as they could, and whether there is scope for a more balanced approach at the busiest times of day.

It is important to be clear that these measures were originally introduced to address very real issues, including significant levels of non-compliance and short-cutting through residential areas. However, good policy must always be open to review. By gathering robust data and considering targeted adjustments, we can make sure the network works as well as possible for everyone. I can also confirm that vehicles used by the crematorium are exempt from the restrictions.

At County Hall, much of the focus this month has continued to be on adult social care, particularly how we support people to live independently for longer and reduce pressure on hospitals and care services. I recently attended the Joint Engagement Forum of stakeholders and cabinet members across the social care sector. The meeting included some hard-hitting questions that really highlighted the strain some of our partners are under in delivering quality social care.

One area that is developing at pace is Extra Care Housing. This model provides people with their own self-contained accommodation, alongside access to care and support when needed. It sits between independent living and residential care, and is increasingly recognised as one of the most effective ways of helping people maintain their independence while still having the right support in place.

There are currently six Extra Care Housing schemes in Devon providing over 300 units, with a further four schemes in development that could double that number. This reflects a wider priority within the Council to find local solutions that allow people to stay connected to their communities rather than moving into more institutional settings.

Alongside this, the “Living Well in Devon” programme is continuing to test new ways of working between health and social care. One of the key issues identified is how people are supported when leaving hospital. I am always sceptical when public sector organisations like local councils employ private sector consultants (Newton Consulting Ltd is leading the Living Well in Devon programme), however I am keeping an open mind and watching to see how much value can be added.

In parts of Devon, more than half of patients were not achieving the best possible outcomes following discharge from hospital. To address this, a new trial has been running where social care staff are based directly on hospital wards, working alongside NHS teams. The aim is to involve social care earlier, improve decision making, and ensure that people are supported to return home safely and with the right level of independence. Early feedback has been positive.

We also saw the launch of the new Devon Dementia Strategy for 2026–2029. This sets out a clear ambition that people living with dementia should be able to live fulfilling lives with dignity and respect, supported by joined-up services and strong community networks. It also recognises the vital role of families and unpaid carers, and the need to ensure they have access to the support they need.

Taken together, this work reflects a broader shift towards prevention, independence, and supporting people in their own homes wherever possible. While there are still significant pressures in the system, these changes are an important step towards a more sustainable and person-centred approach.

I have also been involved in a number of local events this month focused on environmental issues and community awareness.

At the end of April, Chulmleigh Town Hall will host a screening of the National Emergency Briefing short film, followed by a panel discussion which I will be chairing. The event aims to create space for a constructive and informed conversation about the climate and ecological crisis, and what it means for communities like ours. It’s easy to become depressed at the sheer scale of the challenge we face as a species, climate change is accelerating faster than we predicted and devastating consequences are being felt all over the world.

Earlier this month, I hosted a panel discussion following a screening of *Jo in the Water*, a powerful and moving film about one woman’s legal battle against sewage discharges into Devon’s rivers and seas. It is an issue that resonates strongly across our area, where water quality has a direct impact on our environment, public health, and local economy. Thanks to *Sustainable Chulmleigh* for putting on these events and inviting me to host.

What stood out in both events was not just the strength of feeling, but a clear desire to move towards practical solutions. Creating spaces for informed, respectful discussion is an important part of that process, and something I am keen to continue.

I was also pleased to attend the Chair of Devon County Council's Civic Celebration in South Molton on Sunday 26th April. The event was a celebration of all things Devon, with a particular focus on poetry, music, and song. The South Molton Town Band were excellent, and it was especially encouraging to see so many young people performing and showcasing their talents.

I was particularly impressed by the Lord Lieutenant's Cadet from the Devon Army Cadet Force, who was immaculately turned out and a real credit to the organisation. The Army Cadet Force provides fantastic opportunities for young people, helping to build confidence, discipline, and a strong sense of community.

Looking ahead, my focus will be on continuing to support highways improvements as new funding is rolled out, progressing the work through HATOC to better understand and respond to traffic concerns, and continuing to ensure that the voices of our communities are clearly represented in decision making at County Hall.

Thank you, as always, for the work you do in your parishes. It is a privilege to work alongside you.

All the best

Cllr Ed Tyldesley