

COUCILLOR GEORGE JEANS ANNUAL REPORT 2023- 2024

I sit on the Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel, Audit, Pensions, Southern Planning and the South West Wilts Area Board. I sit on Mere Town Council and I regularly attend Zeals, West Knoyle, Stourton with Gasper and Kilmington Parish Councils.

I spend many hours visiting local function across the Division from Kilmington to West Knoyle. I find this is a good way to find what people want, number one being good roads and housing. At Easter I was alerted to "The Welcome to Mere" sign on the B3092, which is the Mere to Frome Road, was coming adrift, has to be holiday time, therefore I personally secured it as best I could and I must thank the Mere Town Council for quickly repairing it. Also, at Easter someone parked over someone's entrance which I did do what I could to resolve.

I spend time supporting the wishes of the locally elected Parish and Town Councils which sometimes is over a long period of time. An example being Combe Barn junction with the B3092 in Kilmington. It is a matter of continually raising the subject when the opportunity arises to get the potential danger resolved by getting it placed on a highways improvement list, even a very long term one.

I have had recent training in Trowbridge to enhance my knowledge when sitting on Wiltshire's Pension Fund committee. While in Trowbridge that day, I note one of the shopping centres is almost devoid of shops, looking in need of rejuvenation. Wiltshire Council is working in partnership with town councils around the county to develop projects that will attract more visitors to town centres. The project starts with a regeneration scheme in Westbury, where both Wiltshire Council and Westbury Town Council are developing a scheme for a future funding bid that will look to improve the town's library, high street and the surrounding areas, much needed in some Wiltshire towns in my opinion.

How life is changing when young everyone knew locally where there councillor resided as my memory extends. The government minister has issued a statement in response to recent concerns from elected members about intimidation in public life. It makes councillors aware of the sensitive provisions in Section 32 of the Localism Act 2011. The sensitive interests' provisions provide for details about a registered interest to be excluded from versions of the Register of Interests available for public inspection (or published online) where a member and monitoring officer agree that the disclosure of that interest could lead to violence or intimidation of them or their family. The Government encourages monitoring officers to look sympathetically at accommodating requests for the withholding of home addresses from published versions of the register of interests where there are legitimate concerns of violence or intimidation.

Wiltshire Council's budget for 2024/25 was formally approved at a meeting of Full Council on 20 February 2024. The council is forecasting a small underspend of around £634,000 for the 2023/24 financial year. This coming financial year, 2024/25, an additional £36m has been added into the council's service budgets. Overall, the council's budget for 2024/25 stands at around £490m. More than half of that is spent

on adult and children's social care services. The most significant spending in 2024/25 will be on: Adult services - £179.4m, Families and children - £70.8m, Environment - £49.6m, Highways and transport - £43m, Education and skills - £38.9m

Wiltshire Council has allocated an extra £10m over the next two years to spend on filling potholes and a road resurfacing programme that will help to prevent potholes and other highways defects in all areas of the county. The investment will also fund more small, local repairs to the highways and verge repairs on rural roads. This is in addition to the £20.7m the council receives from the Government's Highways Maintenance fund for 2024/25, plus the £5.2m from the Department for Transport's recently announced Road Resurfacing Fund. The budget puts in an additional £1m investment into extra gully cleaning work and reactive pothole filling. This is on top of the £1m that was invested into improving drainage in 2022 and will effectively treble drain-clearing work since 2021.

The rolling out of Technology Enabled Care (TEC) is a project that will revolutionise the way support services may be delivered to adults, which will deliver savings but ensure people are still empowered to live good lives.

The capital programme for 2024/25 has been budgeted at around £285m. Some of the capital spend in 2024/25 will be on: Building and refurbishing council houses - £45m, Structural maintenance and bridges - £21m, Trowbridge and Salisbury Future

High Streets - £11m Highways investment plan - £7m, Property carbon reduction programme inc. solar canopies - £5m, Investment in leisure centres - £3m.

The council will also Invest an additional £10m in creating additional SEND school places including creating resource bases at mainstream schools to provide young people with access to enhanced support, spending time in the base for specialist intervention while also joining mainstream classes. There is particularly high demand for adults' services, children's social care and SEND.

The footpath from Hazzards Hill to Burton over the years I have been questioned on. In the last few years, I had a sign fitted displaying private road with footpath over. The path created by the enclosures act, has a definitive width of six feet maintainable to on foot standard by the local authority which is Wiltshire Council. I am aware you can drive over a footpath to your own property in many if not all cases, that precludes anyone not invited or authorized. Wiltshire Council Highways which is not the responsible body for this path as I understand, it would be Wiltshire Council Rights of Way who have got little finance, they often persuade the landowner to keep footpaths to a standard. Both bodies have recently acquired a common head of service.

The resurfaced footpath across the Meads which I have and will continue to support, now called Eric Mitchel Way has been well received by the majority of people locally. It is pleasing that Wiltshire Council, Mere Town Council and Mere Footpaths Group have worked together to achieve this supper enhancement, which I was not sure if I would have seen in my life time. It has been made possible by developers' money

and grants from Wiltshire Council and indeed Mere Town Council and The Mere Footpath Group.

Peter Binley, Head of Major Highways Projects who has been with Wiltshire Council for as long as I have at a minimum, has retired, I am sorry he has left it feels like another connection to the past has gone. Steve Wilson is now dealing with Head of Major Highways Projects. Also having been with Wiltshire Council for 13 years, Wiltshire Chief Executive Terence Herbert has accepted the post of Chief Executive with Surrey County Council and will be leaving Wiltshire Council in the summer.

A further reminder from last month, remember you now need to show photo ID to vote at polling stations in some elections, including Parliamentary elections, general elections, local elections and by-elections, Police and Crime Commissioner election – which takes place on 2 May. If you want more information on Voter ID and what to do if you don't have photo ID, please visit [Registering to vote - Wiltshire Council](#).

Building Digital UK (BDUK) has entered a contract with Wessex Internet to build gigabit capable infrastructure in South Wiltshire. Wiltshire Council have welcomed the appointment and look forward to developing our working relationship with Wessex Internet, providing operational support to enable the build. Wessex Internet anticipate connecting 14,500 premises over the next five years. BDUK and Wiltshire Council are currently in the process of analysing the deployment phases and where Wessex Internet plans to start and finish infrastructure in South Wiltshire.

Wiltshire Council is hopeful for further flexibility through the BDUK Gigabit Voucher Scheme (GBVS). This scheme can provide vouchers worth up to £4,500 for homes and businesses in the hardest to reach rural areas to support the cost of installing new gigabit-capable connections to their doorstep when part of a group. Currently the voucher scheme is paused in Wiltshire and many other parts of the UK, although this can change. The following e-mail can be used to raise specific enquires: broadband@wiltshire.gov.uk. Find out more about Project Gigabit and BDUK: www.wiltshire.gov.uk/project-gigabit. Anyone in South Wiltshire can check their status with Project Gigabit and/or register their interest and ask questions: <https://www.wessexinternet.com/project-gigabit-south-wiltshire/>

As part of its continued zero tolerance approach to tackling fly-tipping, Wiltshire Council has successfully prosecuted a Calne woman who had dumped waste on a public footpath.

A Melksham man was given a 24-month Conditional Discharge and ordered to pay £1,465 in costs for significant fly-posting across Wiltshire. I am hoping enforcement do not see some of our very worthy local community groups impacted by this, they do not fly post across Wiltshire. However, I have made you all aware.

More additional school places for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) will be available in Wiltshire following a successful bid by Wiltshire Council to secure a new free school.

Update on the next stages of Local Plan and Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan. Wiltshire had a huge response to the Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation, which

closed on 22 November 2023. Since then, Wiltshire have been working through more than 10,000 comments from many different stakeholders and all parts of the county. Wiltshire are working to identify potential sites for allocation as part of the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan, which is taking time.

Wiltshire Council is encouraging families to access healthy lunchtime free school meals in reception and years one and two if eligible, and to check if they remain eligible in year three and above. The initiative helps to save families more than £350 per year.

Wiltshire are still short of placements for foster children and looking for those interested. There are situations that arise unexpectedly which mean young people need emergency care and support at short notice. Foster carers under this scheme provide temporary emergency care to any child or young person needing a safe place to stay until a suitable home is found. Young people in this situation are dealing with uncertainty and may also be traumatised and will need extra support.

Emergency foster carers receive £900 per week per child when they have a child to stay with them and £500 per week when they don't have foster children to care for. The council would like to recruit more carers to help meet the demand.

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