

Notes of the Zoom Meeting between Chideock Parish Councillors and Cllr Simon Christopher

1 pm on 12 March 2021.

1. Attendees.

Cllr Simon Christopher (SC), Dorset Councillor for Marshwood Vale Ward
Vanessa Glenn (VG)
Deirdre Coates (DC)
Anna Dunn (AD)
George Dunn (GD)
Peter Hunt (PH)
Tony Peacock (TP).

2. In Attendance.

Sal Robinson, Clerk

3. Introduction from Cllr Christopher.

SC briefly outlined his background before considering what he sees as the issues facing Chideock.

He sees the A35 as the main issue, causing pollution noise, vibration damage to buildings, traffic congestion and delays, severance, speeding vehicles especially at night. There is a lack of pedestrian safety.

There are things which will happen in years to come – electric vehicles, green tourism, improved walking and cycling routes.

But there are threats we need to be aware of, as a result of coming out of COVID lockdown –

- Increased traffic in short to medium term
- Probable influx of tourists – Dorset councillors are meeting to discuss how to cope with the summer
- Insufficient police to deal with all issues

In his view pollution heads the issues list. He has engaged with Cllr Patricia Knox, who heads up Public Health and she is willing to come to future CPC meetings

He considers that there is a lack of social housing throughout West Dorset. There are currently approximately 1900 households on the housing waiting list in West Dorset. There is also an aging population – Dorset has the highest proportion of over 65s in England.

Chideock has over the years lost many facilities – the garage and filling station, the butcher's shop etc.

It is incumbent on him to fight for Chideock to ensure provision of public services, most importantly a bus service. He has made this point to Councillor Ray Bryan who appears to have realised that lack of buses leads to reliance of private cars which runs counter to fighting the climate emergency.

In his view most important problem areas for West Dorset are

- Bridport Leisure Centre's continued existence
- The low birth rate in North and West Dorset.
- Which impacts the viability of local schools
- Lack of money for highways – the bulk of the Dorset Council budget goes on children's and adult social care
- Lack of well-paid employment opportunities
- Poor broadband
- Poor mobile signal coverage
- Keeping people warm given the planned phasing out of oil-fired heating which many use as there is no gas supply
- Climate change
- Pressure on NHS services

He spends time and effort trying to ensure the services currently available are retained.

4. Establishing a new working partnership with Cllr Christopher.

VG spoke briefly about the meeting with Chris Loder on 5 February.

She said that, for many, many years, the Parish Council has sought, through a variety of different means, to get a number of issues addressed, mostly relating to the A35. Over the last 18 months vigorous efforts have been made in the relevant bodies to listen to the very real concerns of villagers. Frustration has led to this being done in a more challenging manner than previously.

SC then replied.

He wants Chris Loder to visit Chideock and see the issues for himself, particularly safety issues such as lack of pavements and pedestrian crossings.

He has been discussing this with Highways England and expects suggestions from HE

He will be part of the new A35 Working Group being set up by Chris Loder.

He considers HE to be negligent in relation to safety and severance, and this must be addressed.

He feels obliged to challenge Highways England on this even though the A35 is not a Dorset County road.

AD said that the pavement camber is a bigger issue than the lack of pavement. This is dangerous for wheelchair / mobility scooter users and elderly people on foot using walking frames. This is causing social isolation as older people are afraid to walk on the pavements so stay indoors.

VG said that CPC is trying to establish how to work with SC, especially in regard to the new A35 Working Group. Chideock needs its voice to be heard.

SC said this raises the question of how powerful the group will be. It will contain persons who represent villages / towns which are not on the A35, but which are impacted by diversions etc.

He feels that he needs to continue working with HE with CPC using him as a conduit for passing Chideock's concerns, so HE can be challenged on the basis negligence. He is hoping to make Chris Loder understand the need for a 2nd pedestrian crossing

GD said that Chris Loder has suggested that CPC use him as a sounding board / conduit in the future when dealing with HE and other bodies. This could include the escalation of CPC's complaint against HE to the Ombudsman. He asked SC if he agreed with this approach.

SC said that he has been criticised for copying many people in on e-mails he sends because he feels that it is basic communication across different areas of responsibility. Which is what CPC has been doing – communicating concerns. There is frustration that things are not moving forward as expected. So, things are chased up. Which can upset recipients.

VG said that CPC does not have the same level of confidence in HE that SC has. 18 months ago, HE decided to stop direct communication with CPC. If Chris Loder can get communication going again it will be a big plus.

The Clerk said that, in regard to the speed limit reduction trial on Chideock Hill, residents received a letter from HE which said that updates would be available via the Parish Council. No updates have been received.

VG asked how CPC can achieve a new working arrangement with SC to take things forward. CPC needs SC to be a conduit for CPC at the A35 Working Group meetings.

SC mention the DfT letter of 28 August 2020 in relation to results from the trial and the A35 Charmouth to Yellowham Route Safety Study being available at the end of April 2021 – 7 weeks away. He suggested that CPC should follow this up now, copying in Chris Loder and SC.

He said that his role on the A35 Working Group is to fight Chideock's corner.

VG said we need to know when the first A35 Working Group will take place, what is on the agenda, and how CPC will find out what has happened at a meeting.

SC said he understands that the first meeting will not be before April. He will let CPC know the date. He will ask Chris Loder's Principal Secretary about provision of minutes and will find out who will be attending.

VG suggested that CPC should have a meeting with SC after the 1st A35 Working Group meeting.

SC said that questions for possible consideration should be sent to Chris Loder and copied to SC.

TP asked SC if he had received the Air Quality Management plan and the traffic and pollution data he had sent. SC said that when he receives something like that, he circulates it to a wide range of people.

5. Key areas identified by the Parish Council be addressed.

VG said that various discussions as to what are the key priorities taken place since the meeting the Chris Loder.

There are local Dorset Council priorities, and strategic priorities.

Pollution is probably the biggest issue, which sits with both HE and Dorset Council.

TP said that the issue is the volume of traffic. Highways England has a contract with Balfour Beatty / Connect and Balfour Beatty receive a "shadow toll" from HE based on the volume of traffic. Balfour Beatty maintains the route. There appear to be little incentive to reduce the volume of traffic - is it because HE fears a breach of contract that they do nothing to reduce traffic through Chideock traffic? The contract ends in 2026 – what will happen then?

TP also mentioned the recent Call for Evidence on a "Union Connectivity" scheme which will release £4.3 billion. The report has just been published (Transport to Support Economic Recovery) but contains very little about the South West. He asked SC if Dorset Council put in a response? **SC said to e-mail him, and he will ask Cllr Ray Bryan.**

SC said that he is lobbying for money so that there can be safer walking and cycling round Chideock. He is also involved with groups who want safer travel and a route from Maiden Newton to Bridport and then to Chideock. Dorset Council is getting money to fight the climate emergency.

VG said that she understood that this money was going to be spent in east / south east Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole.

SC said he is fighting this. He wants as many people as possible to be able walk and cycle safely.

He suggested that CPC sends him an e-mail questioning this, which he will forward to Cllr Spencer Flower.

SC suggested that CPC e-mails questions to Cllr Rebecca Knox about air pollution to him.

AD pointed out that one of the reasons for setting up this meeting was because the Parish Council rarely receives a direct response to e-mails sent to SC, for example on bus services. Whilst he may be passing them on CPC would welcome feedback.

SC said that bus services are a big issue. Whilst COVID may result in a short-term decrease in bus usage, people will increasingly want to travel. Given people moving to West Dorset and holidaying here, there is a need for more buses, not less. Buses take cars off the road.

VG said that funding should be spread across the whole county not just part. Why should Dorchester to Weymouth have very a frequent subsidised bus service when there is none further west?

SC said he agreed with these points.

SC moved on to the Dorset Local Plan Consultation.

GD said that a lot of thought had gone into CPC's response but wondered if Dorset Council will take any notice. Is there any feedback?

SC suggested that CPC e-mails Councillor David Walsh with a copy to Cllr Spencer Flower.

6. Key challenges.

SC said that Dorset Council's budget is £312.4 million pounds, £177 million pounds will be spent on Adult and Children's Social Care leaves Dorset Council somewhat underfunded.

It is very difficult to get to a position where there is continuing funding of services, he welcomes the idea of return to normality.

He wants the responsible officers, the Leader of the Council, and the Chief Executive to visit Chideock.

He would like to see open meetings with Chris Loder in the village hall.

He cannot comment on a proposed bypass route if nobody from the authorities comes up with a route.

He thinks that younger people have been forgotten during COVID.

They haven't been able to progress in employment, they haven't been able to have the availability of services. We need to remember there is a great dearth of well-paid employment in West Dorset. West Dorset suffers because much of the employment available is seasonal.

The number of tourists this summer will cause pressure.

West Dorset is rural and there is a lot of agricultural change going on.

AD asked if SC thinks that the low birth rate is connected to the shortage of accommodation for families. Th affordable houses available are out of reach of many. There is a need to concentrate of affordable social housing, for rent in perpetuity.

SC replied that this links to objections to planning applications for social housing about the size of houses. But different families need different sizes of house.

DC said that Chris Loder asked CPC to identify three issues to take forward. There are short- and long-term issues. Nothing has been achieved in the 2 years she has been a councillor which is frustrating. CPC needs to decide one the short-term issues which could be chieved.

She asked SC what he could do to help bring forward the all-purpose all-weather path between Chideock and Symondsburry / Bridport.

SC said that CPC should contact Tara Hansford at Dorset Council on this.

PH agreed with Cllr Coates regarding lack of A35 progress. Progress is needed on Average Speed Cameras.

TP said that when he gets to 80, he's going to need a bus.

SC said that in the short term he will hassling Highways England, in respect of Severance and Safety.

There is a need to consider truly affordable housing

There is a lack of laybys on the A35 for slow vehicles to use to allow others to pass and broken-down vehicles to pull into.

VG said that even with electric vehicles there will still be air pollution from tyres and brake;, noise; vibration; and issues with speeding vehicles.