

It seems like much longer than a year since the last parish APM. Although most of us were well aware of CoVid-19 by that time few of us could have adequately imagined the year ahead – that rumble from the eastern horizon would soon become a tsunami.

While most of us would happily forget 2020, we all acknowledge the efforts that key workers such as teachers, police and those in the NHS have made to keep us safe. We should also acknowledge the efforts of the scientists and pharmacologists who have developed vaccines in ten months that would normally have taken ten years, and are offering us a path back to normality.

On a more local level, the officers at EHDC have been busy keeping our services running, and additionally managing a significant financial support effort for local businesses and disadvantaged families. They have distributed almost £30 million in support on behalf of the government since April 2020.

Planning is an area that touches most of our lives occasionally, and this year has been no different. The Government published two white papers concerning proposed planning reforms for consultation.

The first, “Changes to the current planning system” proposed changes to the way that the local housing need is calculated and this could have resulted in EHDC’s housing need increasing from about 600 dwellings per year to over 900. For those of us resident outside of the SDNP, this would have put huge pressure on communities to accept a lot more housing. I am pleased to say that faced with significant feedback from local councils including EHDC, backed up by opposition from its own MPs, the method of calculation has been revised so that, while changed, the effect in our area is minimal.

The second paper, “Planning for the future” proposes new methods for creating local plans which would delay all of the work done by EHDC over the last two years to create the local plan review. It should be noted that this review was only started because in 2018 the government changed the rules to require councils to review their plan every five years. Additionally this white paper proposes changes to the way that local infrastructure is funded; at present Parish Councils receive money from developments in their villages, and these are used to contribute to the maintenance and rebuilding of local infrastructure such as sporting and play facilities or meeting locations. The proposals would fundamentally change this and remove a significant element of local control. Consultations on these proposals are still underway, but EHDC has decided to proceed with the existing Local Plan Review as to wait for the reforms to come into effect would have left us exposed to speculative planning applications for far longer. SDNP’s Local Plan was adopted in 2019 so is not in need of review until 2024.

Locally the pandemic has led to a dramatic increase in home working. This has in turn led to an increased number of planning applications for extensions, garden offices and annexes. Home working has also highlighted the poor state of our broadband and mobile services and I have been involved in projects across the ward to try and improve this, although this may take time to come to fruition.

Our new waste contract supplier, Norse, continues to bed in well with few disruptions to service now that the revised collection rounds and issues with hard-to-reach properties have been resolved. The new contract allowed us to remove the restrictions on the number of garden waste collections that could be made, and that programme has been very successful with an additional 3000 properties taking up this service.

Another change that has recently taken place is the move to distributing the waste, recycling and green waste collection calendars online. These can now be found at <https://www.easthants.gov.uk/bin-calendars>.

Expansion of facilities to residents has taken place throughout the year with the completion of a new leisure facility serving the needs of the growing Whitehill & Bordon communities and those in surrounding villages. The re-development of Whitehill & Bordon continues apace with a number of new planning applications either submitted or in the pipeline covering development of the health hub and town centre.

The council has recently launched its updated strategy until 2024 and this will focus on four primary themes: A fit for purpose Council, a safer, healthier and more active East Hampshire, a thriving local economy with infrastructure to support our ambitions, and an environmentally aware and cleaner East Hampshire. More details of this can be found on the EHDC website – search for “strategy”.

You will have received your Council tax bills for 2021/22 already. While the lion’s share of the bill gets passed on to Hampshire County Council, Police and Fire & Rescue services, roughly 8% goes to EHDC to fund our services. The amount we receive will increase by 2% this year, amounting to £2.68 on a Band D property, or around 5p a week. Because we are an efficient council and have developed alternative income streams to combat the steady removal of central government funding, we have been able to allocate over £4M next year to several projects including £1M to an extension of our Supporting Communities Program for a further three years starting in 2022/23, £1M towards our Digital strategy making EHDC a digitally equipped council, and a further £250K towards environmental initiatives in support of tackling the Climate Emergency.

Finally, you may have seen articles in the local press suggesting that EHDC is going to merge with Havant Borough Council (HBC). I can assure you that this is NOT true. We have for several years co-operated with HBC, one of our neighbouring authorities, in a number of areas, share a number of key officer positions and last year moved our waste collection to a service provided through HBC. EHDC is focused on providing the best possible services in as efficient as possible manner to keep your council tax low. We will continue to rationalise our workforce to achieve that goal, including sharing further positions with HBC.

At a ward level, I have been active in supporting parishioners on a number of matters, mostly relating to planning, including an appeal and a number of committee hearings. I have also used my Councillor Community grant to support a number of projects in the ward through the year.

Thank you for your support during the year and I look forward to serving you throughout 2021/22. If you have any questions or observations please do not hesitate to contact me at charles.louisson@easthants.gov.uk or on 07563 649416