

Bridget Wayman, Wiltshire Councillor – Annual Report 2021/22

At the local council elections in May 2021, I was very pleased to have been elected as your representative for the new Division of Nadder Valley. Wiltshire Council also elected a new Leader of the Council and, sadly, he did not select me to be in Cabinet. I am, however, chairman of the South West Wiltshire Area Board and also the chairman of the Community Area Transport Group.

I have also taken on chairing the Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership Board. This is a part of the Cranborne Chase AONB area which was awarded significant Heritage Lottery funding (£1.68m) create a five year partnership working with local communities to connect people with the landscape. The aim is to deliver twenty projects providing benefits to individuals, communities, heritage and the landscape across the three themes of Natural Landscape, Historic Landscape and Cultural Landscape.

Agricultural transition taking place between January 2021 and 2027 will see Defra gradually reducing and stopping untargeted Direct Payments. Money freed up will be used to support agriculture in different ways; farmers will be paid to improve the environment, improve animal health and welfare, and reduce carbon emissions. There will be three levels of support aimed at paying for sustainable farming practices, creating habitats for nature recovery and making landscape-scale change such as establishing new woodland and other ecosystem advice.

89% of the AONB is farmland. Half of this is cropped and about a third is grazed, the rest is mostly woodland and set aside land. Farmer Groups have been set up to work together to provide greater benefits, especially at a landscape scale. In South West Wiltshire there are three farm cluster groups – Chalke Valley Farm Cluster, Nadder Valley and Wylve Valley Farmers.

I mention all this because Wiltshire Council adopted their Climate Change Strategy and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy at full Council in February this year. Protesters were at the council meeting under the umbrella of the Wiltshire Climate Alliance. Needless to say, the protesters do not think Wiltshire Council is doing enough to avert the 'Climate Emergency', but they have little regard for all the services the Council has to provide and seem unaware of the actions that are taking place through the AONB and by farmers and landholders in the area. One very good piece of work that has come from the Council is the Community Environmental Toolkit to help local communities deliver projects that will have the greatest environmental benefits.

The Budget setting meeting in February and the Budget papers demonstrate that out of the total budget of £417.703m 55% is spent on Caring for Adults and Children and Young People. 10% is spent of collecting and disposing of household waste, 9% on maintaining highways and subsidised buses. An additional £500k per annum for three years has been allocated for drainage schemes. The torrential rain storms in October last year caused some considerable anxiety for some residents and flooding to some properties. The Local Highways budget was awarded an additional £500k for this year to inspect and remove diseased ash trees where they may be causing a hazard to drivers and pedestrians. Inflationary increases were added across the board, but with the very dramatic events recently in Ukraine one has to wonder whether the increases will be sufficient to meet increased costs over this coming year which will add further pressure to Council budgets.

Funding for Area Boards has changed. The Capital grant funding has been reduced by half, which is £400k, but funding for the Community Area Transport Groups has been increased by £400k. The CATGs are to be renamed as the Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Groups and the increased funding may also be used to improve footways and footpaths amongst other things in each community area. In SWWAB this means that the Capital Grant will be £24,876 and CATG (LHFIG) will be £34,582. Funding for Older and Vulnerable Adults will be £7,700 and Youth Funding will be £21,148.