

Chichester City Council – Wed 28th June 2023

District Councillor's Report

Jonathan Brown

Introduction

Hello all councillors and members of staff! And congratulations to all of you who were elected in May – I hope you are settling in, and I look forward to working with you.

Prior to May I represented the Ward of Southbourne on Chichester District, and my colleague and I presented a joint report to the Parish Council every month. Chichester is a much larger parish, represented by 9 councillors on Chichester District (although quite a few of those people are also City Councillors). I would very much like to hear from you how you would like to me / us to feed back to you. Perhaps each ward could present a joint report? And how much information would you like?

A little bit about myself: I moved to Graylingwell in Chichester North in August 2021 with my partner (Shiva Knight, who is - full disclosure - a City Councillor). I am now Deputy Leader of the District Council and Cabinet Member for Environmental Strategy, with a remit to cover virtually everything the Council does if there is an environmental / climate change aspect to it. Stepping up the Council's progress on tackling the climate emergency, both through its own operations and through demonstrating leadership in the community, is my priority, along with doing more to tackle the nature and biodiversity emergency that the country is also facing. One of the biggest practical challenges the District Council faces is getting its Local Plan Review finished, submitted and through Examination. Despite an awful lot of hard work by officers and members, the whole process (indeed the whole planning system) is in my opinion deeply and fundamentally flawed. We need to get the Local Plan resolved to be able to make more progress on climate change and habitat protection.

I have Chaired Southbourne's Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for several years so can empathise with your efforts to complete your own Neighbourhood Plan. I am a trustee of the Chichester Community Development Trust (which is based in Graylingwell but manages assets in various locations around the city). I also now sit on the Chichester Vision Delivery Steering Group and the Evening and Night Time Economy group.

Ward Work

University of Chichester Accommodation

Along with other members representing Chichester North and neighbouring wards I attended a drop-in consultation session held by the University of Chichester on their plans for a big new student accommodation block at Graylingwell. It is a challenging project and I have been making enquiries and suggestions on behalf of some residents (who commendably have presented their questions and concerns to the university in a very helpful fashion). I hope that the challenges can be resolved as the university is a hugely important contributor to the city's economy and culture.

Friends of Oaklands Park Wildflower Walk & Talk

A big thank you to the Friends of Oaklands Park for organising a very enjoyable and informative walk to learn about local wildflowers. I took away several useful ideas for our garden but also for things the District Council may be able to do to help support local biodiversity.

Environment Portfolio

Climate Change Action Plan

I chaired the first of the new Council's Environment Panel, the main item of which was receiving an update on progress towards achieving the Council's carbon reduction plan. Progress will appear greater in some years and worse than in others and the economic shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic makes things appear more positive than they are. Though there is much more to do, significant strides have been made by the Council in reducing its own emissions. Progress towards the area-wide target is, unsurprisingly but disappointingly, very poor. The new Council will be reviewing its action plan in the coming months in the hope that we can achieve much more and more quickly. We desperately need Government to act more quickly too – to introduce the new rules and standards it keeps promising, to make funding available and to give local government the power to do more, but we will do what we can.

Southern Water – Sewage Discharges

I took part in a meeting with 'stakeholders' to try to see what can be done to work together across the southeast of the country to get more effective action from Southern Water on reducing and preventing sewage discharges into our rivers and sea. Again, a massive problem that requires much more from government, but there are many other councils across the region who, like us, are desperate to do more if we can.

Growth & Sustainability Business Support

CDC's Growth Sustainability Officer, Derek Irvine, is planning a "Lunch and Learn" event at the Enterprise Centre in September for the tenants based there and similarly sized businesses. This is provisionally booked for 12 September. We will also have one of the Sustainability Leaders from the county wide "Let's Go Net Zero" programme to speak at this session about steps businesses can take to reduce their carbon footprint and grow more sustainably.

On a personal note, it is really good to see this work being done as the creation of this post resulted from a budget amendment I put to the previous Council. Mr Irvine has been very busy helping businesses in a great many ways to both reduce their carbon footprint and create more local profit and jobs.

Home Energy Efficiency Grants

CDC are currently promoting a range of home energy efficiency grants. People can apply for help to fund air source heat pumps, insulation or solar panels. You can check eligibility and find out more by visiting: www.warmerhomes.org.uk or calling 0800 038 5737. Tips on how people can reduce their carbon footprint, along with online calculators that offer personalised advice can also be found here: www.chichester.gov.uk/climatechange.

Carbon Literacy Training

Officers are rolling out Carbon Literacy training to managers, team leaders and members over the next few months. Carbon literacy training will support the council's climate emergency declaration by increasing awareness of climate change and embedding climate awareness into decision making across the organisation.

Chichester City Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) - Route K Public Engagement:

WSCC are carrying out a public engagement exercise from 27 June to 7 August for Route K of this Council's LCWIP. The Route is for the whole of Westgate (west from the Orchard Street roundabout junction) to the A27 underpass on Fishbourne Road East. This is the first step in bringing the Route on its journey towards delivery (for which there are currently no timelines).

The Leader and I were briefed on the challenges of progressing cycling routes much more quickly. The County Council is the delivery authority and is something of a bottleneck. It hasn't helped that the government has slashed funding for Active Travel by two thirds. We must hope that they reverse course on this sooner rather than later, but in the meantime we will do whatever we can to try to make more progress.

Second Electric Refuse Vehicle Delivered

CDC received our second 26 tonne electric vehicle in June, forming part of the council's commitment to reducing its carbon emissions. The first vehicle was delivered in March and has been used on our collections rounds with great success and learning opportunities. Two vehicles have been purchased so far to allow the team to get used to maintaining, operating and charging them. In addition, the vehicles will be used on different rounds in the district so we can gain as much experience as possible before looking at options for more electric vehicles in the future.

The diesel refuse collection vehicles are by some way the most substantial contributing factor of the District Council's carbon footprint. Electric alternatives are very expensive (up front, although their maintenance costs are lower). Subject to the trials being successful I hope CDC can make the switch with more vehicles in future.

Other Updates

Summer Street Party

The Summer Street Party is returning on Sunday 9 July, offering a day full of family-friendly activities and entertainment, an array of local food vendors, and competitions and giveaways from city centre businesses. Running from 10am until 4pm, the event is being held in conjunction with the Cross Market & More, a mixed street market celebrating local designers, makers and producers.

Supporting You

The Supporting You Team continue to make a real difference to residents struggling with the Cost of Living crisis. Residents can refer themselves online via: www.chichester.gov.uk/supportingyoucampaign or councillors can refer individuals as necessary.