

**STOW DIVISION
GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
2023 ANNUAL REPORT
Cllr Mark MacKenzie-Charrington**

The Division, made up of 20 different parishes, is fundamentally rural, with the exceptions of Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton-in Marsh and Upper Rissington to a certain extent. The central axis being the Fosseway (A429), which in its self-causes major traffic issues for both Stow and Moreton. The Division police station being in Stow, national rail network station in Moreton along with the District Council's northern office.

Ward is in a thriving area that has attracted much development over recent years. Moreton having the most pronounced growth, which in its self brings capacity issues. More and more traffic, more and more congestion, especially with extensive tail-backs on the approaches to Stow, where a mixed-use development of up to 250 new homes is mute in their draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Highways are one of the County Council's responsibilities and like most, if not all councils, will be always criticised for the scourge of potholes. Often a case of 'damned if we do, damned if we don't' with repairs often take too long, especially if you've suffered a puncture as a result. That said you'll have seen significant amounts of resurfacing in our area over the last year, all part of the commitment to £150m investment over the term of the council. The last year has seen a 22% increase in the maintenance budget, the highest increase in many years. Priorities will always go to the A & B classified roads but you should have seen more of the lower rated roads now being fully resurfaced – not simply patched, although this is necessary on a sacrificial basis if they become badly damaged, before full resurfacing. Do remember that I'll have my 2023/24 Councillor's Local Highways Budget of £30,000 to assist your issues. Finally, the best way is to report it: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/reportit

County Council planning doesn't generally come up on resident's radar as it covers rather different topics to that are generally the responsibility of the Cotswold District Council, which handles commercial and residential development, in the main. The GCC looks after Infrastructure, schools, transport, environment, flooding and minerals, amongst many things. The last two items are very much in my focus.

We have suffered badly from flooding as recently as December 2020 in both Moreton and in particular Bledington, where in particular I'm pleased to say we are close to resolving matters. At a cost of personal heartache and several millions of pounds, working closely, possibly for the first time, with multiple agencies we have an agreed program for mitigating flooding disasters in the future.

The communities around the cluster of North Cotswold Quarries have been suffering considerable aggravation over recent years as many of these quarries, centred around the village of Ford, have reopened and seeking to substantially increase export, as well as import of aggregate for reinstatement. Residents are seeing a significant increase of HGVs, now of up to 35 tons, dust, with stone on roads, damage to the highways, structural impact to houses and long hours of noise. Working with the various communities and the relevant GCC officers we are working towards a way that all can live and work together in harmony.

I'm delighted to say that my Build Back Better budget of £40,000 has been well spent around the parishes. Grants of £1,000 for playground sand to £10,000 towards two new tennis courts are now being enjoyed. Others included grants towards Cotswold Friends, playground equipment, benches, facilities at Moreton Croquet Club and new cricket nets at Adlestrop Cricket Club. All for the communities' benefit, at a local level.

Your Council Tax will have increased over the year 2023-23 by 5%, or £5pa to the CDC and £1.38pw to the GCC for the average Band D property. To put things in perspective the CDC has a budget of circa £13.5m against the GCC's of £596m. Well over 60% of the County Council's revenue goes towards funding social services, which is under increasing pressure following the disruption caused by Covid, leaving little scope for introducing increases in other areas.

The County Council has worked closely in trying to improve public transport, especially in light of Stagecoach surrendering a significant number of routes, especially around the south west of the county. New contractors have been found and routes reinstated. Additionally, with government funding, we have established new 'diel-a-ride' services (0345 2638139) in the Forest of Dean and North Cotswolds under the banner of The Robin. The service collects and returns to isolated villages with no regular public buses.

Moreton is to see some significant transport improvements over the next few years with a doubling of the train service between Worcester, Oxford and London. The North Cotswold Line Tsk Force, Chaired by Lord Faulkner, is working with the Department of Transport and Network Rail, along with Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire County Councils to come forward with a workable and financially viable solution, that will include dual tracking missing stretches. With the former Royal British Legion site now in joint ownership between Moreton TC and Network Rail a close study of how the station can be best developed is under consideration.

Motorists will be pleased that the infamous A417, 'Missing Link', has now been signed off by Central Government for a £460m new road that will dual carriage the last section of the entire route between the M4 at Swindon to the M5 at Gloucester. Scheduled to start in the autumn of this year it should be complete in 4 years. No more Air Balloon traffic jams!

With health in mind the County Council is well into creating a 26-mile cycle and walking route between Stroud and Bishop's Cleeve. It will pass through the shortly to be completed Arle Court transport hub on the west side of Cheltenham. This in turn is close to the new M5 intersection that will vastly improve transport into and out of west Cheltenham as well as opening up land for significant commercial and residential development.

Further funding has been made to Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue to replace essential vehicles and equipment with the very latest, environmentally sensitive available. Furthermore, a number of fire stations will host the police with a new sharing agreement. This will give the police a greater exposure in areas lacking a permanent police presence. Chris Nelson, Police & Crime Commissioner, was elected on a basis of increasing the numbers in Gloucestershire's police force and is fast closing on his targets, two years into his term.

MM-C/13th April 2023