

Dear Tatworth & Forton Parish Council

Local Government Reorganisation: With around 180 working days before the new unitary council comes into being on 1 April 2023, the county council are working closely with four districts to integrate operations. Migration of council systems to a single IT platform is now planned, to be done in phases before 1st April 2023.

Local Community Networks (LCNs): these were proposed in the case for a single unitary authority as a way of involving our communities more in our work – something we also wish for. However, the plans made before May for them need substantial revision, not least because they do not include the matter of most concern to localities, namely planning. And, surprisingly, no budget provision was made for establishing and staffing them. The two pilot LCN projects are now ending, so we will draw on the learning from those in redesigning them.

Covid 19: infections are up 742 on last week, with 7,248 cases in South Somerset, 30% increase nationally, driven by the Omicron BA.4 & BA.5 variants; hospitalisation cases are rising, but death rates are stable.

Children's Services: As you may be aware I am a member of the corporate parenting board and the children and family's scrutiny committee, we have now held our first children & Families Scrutiny meeting, and our Corporate Parent board meeting. There are currently 560 children in care in Somerset of which 360 are in foster care, children are currently placed with 219 County Council foster carers and 149 external private foster carers. There is a national shortage of foster carers, we have had a huge recruitment drive over the past year, but I would urge everyone that knows someone who may be interested to contact Somerset Fostering Services as we desperately need more families to care for our looked after children in Somerset.

A quick update on the issues I am working on that I have mentioned previously

1, **Stop Line way**, we are awaiting a meeting with the stop line way group and Adrian Moore who is one of the locality officers in SSDC who is currently working on a feasibility report for the route.

2, **The footpath between Chard & Tatworth** I have been in contact with the highways department and rights of way officer and am now waiting for a date to meet the footpath to walk it with officers, As soon as I get a date I will contact Nigel and Richard so that they can attend if they would like to.

County Council Meeting: next full meeting will be on 20th July

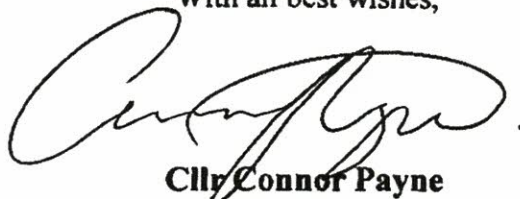
Regards

Cllr Jason Baker
Chard South
Somerset County Council

3. Reasons to support the motion regarding the Chard Junction Railway Station:

- a. **Significant future housing developments.** With over 2,200 planned being planned for the CEDA (*Chard Eastern Development Area*), demand for active travel over the next few years will be a key issue locally.
- b. **Largest settlement without a station.** Chard is the largest populated area near the Exeter-Salisbury route without a station, and with population growing soon, it is imperative that we plan ahead for the demand in active travel.
- c. **Support from Government.** The Government is ready to support the case for a Chard Junction Railway Station, providing a viable business case is submitted. Marcus Fysh MP and Chris Loder MP are willing to support this case and present it to the Government.
- d. **Support from County Council.** The new Leader of Somerset County Council, Cllr Bill Revans, has made it clear that the County Council continues to be 'broadly supportive' of the potential to open a new rail station.
- e. **Prompts investments elsewhere on the line.** It is clear, historically, that when a rail line begins to increase its demand, investment follows. The argument that 'another station will slow down the line' is simply not true. Mitigative measures are put in place to ensure fast-running lines are put in place that 'speed-up' travel times for regular users.
- f. **Environmental benefits for the local area.** It must be said that a Railway Station clearly mitigates environmental concerns, as car-users who commute between Chard, Tatworth & Forton to Salisbury, London or Exeter can use the line to benefit both the environment and cut travel times.
- g. **Investing in the local area.** While the concern with a Railway Station could suggest outward investment, the benefits of inward investment far outweigh this. Providing we have such new infrastructure, other investments will come to 'level-up' the local area – including better bus infrastructure, investment in roads and highways, and better access to health and educational facilities – such as doctors, hospitals, schools, and universities.
- h. **Prompts increase in jobs.** A potential benefit of a new Railway Station is the subsequent boost in employment, both regionally with people moving to the local area to commute to other areas for work, and locally with people taking up roles in local business with the ability to commute to the local area from other areas in the region.
- i. **Opportunities for the next generation.** The decision to support or oppose the campaign for a Chard Junction Railway Station will impact the campaign, and those who could use such infrastructure in coming decades. Supporting this now, could provide the next generation with the educational and employment opportunities they need for a better future.

With all best wishes,



Cllr Connor Payne

*Somerset County Councillor – Chard South
Opposition Spokesman – Environment & Climate Change*