

- Devolution

This time last year we were about 6 weeks away from the EU referendum and contemplating the likelihood of resolving the future governance of Hampshire after that referendum. The alternatives on the table were a Solent Authority or a Hampshire-wide Unitary Authority, neither of which would have been particularly beneficial for East Tisted or other rural areas. After the referendum and the resultant change of leadership of the ruling Conservative party, it became clear that the incoming team had far less enthusiasm for devolution, to the extent that no new devolution agreements have been made since that date. The few mayoral elections that will occur around the country later this week are the result of agreements made prior to the EU referendum.

EHDC are not anticipating any change in this position in the short term, certainly not prior to Brexit occurring, although the shift away from central government funding for local authorities is expected to continue, and this will place greater emphasis on EHDC investment-led income generation strategy.

- Investment Strategy

For a number of years EHDC has been attempting to mitigate the reduction in central government funding by using innovative (for local government!) investing strategies to generate income, so you may have noticed that EHDC purchased the Iceland store site in Alton during the year and is building office accommodation in Liphook, both of which will generate significant on-going revenue streams. This strategy has allowed EHDC to reduce its council tax charge for a second consecutive year, this year by 2.5%. It is the only local authority in England that has been able to achieve this, but unfortunately most residents will not realise this as all the other constituents of your council tax bill, Hampshire County Council, Fire, Police and the local precept, rose swamping the reduction that EHDC was able to achieve.

- Grants

In terms of local funding, this year I have provided a grant of £1000 to cover part of the cost of replacing the vinyl floor covering in this hall, following on from the upgrade to the carpet that I supported last year.

- SDNP Local plan

Turning to planning issues, these form a significant part of my councillor workload. The SDNP Preferred Options document is available for viewing on the SDNP web site – this will form the basis of the SDNP Local plan so it is worth reading through. East Tisted is barely mentioned – which is good news as it means that they do not plan to add any significant housing in the village, although the plan still has a shortfall of around 750 dwellings across the park that will need to be filled as windfall sites.

- Boundaries

As you may be aware the recent County Council elections were fought on revised boundaries. The Boundaries Commission decided to move Ropley and East and West Tisted to the Petersfield Hangers division in order to rebalance the electorate size of the Alton Rural seat that has seen substantial growth in Four Marks and Medstead. The Boundaries Commission has started a review of the District Council wards and there is a possibility of changes to District wards in 2019.

- Ferris

Finally on EHDC activities, our long serving leader of the Council, Ferris Cowper has decided to slow down a little as he approaches 70 years of age. From the next full council meeting in June, Richard Millard, currently the deputy leader and councillor for Headley, will become leader and Ferris will become his deputy. This is anticipated to remain the situation until the 2019 District council elections, when Ferris intends to leave the cabinet and return to the backbenches as councillor for Grayshott. During the next two years Ferris will continue his special responsibilities for the Whitehill and Bordon regeneration project.