

Councillor Alexander Nicoll

Annual Report to PCs in the Wickham Division (April/May 2022)

I was delighted to be re-elected as county councillor for Wickham Division in May 2021 having served previously since 2017. I will be the last councillor to represent the six parishes within the Division as recent local government boundary changes, coming into effect in 2025, signal the move of some of the civil parishes into other Divisions created or expanded by the Boundary Commission review. Meantime, I look forward to working with all the PCs in the Division and their communities over the next three years until May 2025.

Over the past year and in addition to a mailbag (mostly emailbag) of issues raised by local people I have been focused on transport and planning issues arising in large part from several ill-considered proposed developments which have, apart from design and other imperfections, simply led to more traffic on our roads. I have called for the public transport needs of our villages and outlying communities to be taken greater account of during the Section 106 and Community Infrastructure decisions forming part of the planning process at East Suffolk Council (ESC) rather than, as is usually the case, being directed to community bricks and mortar projects which may do nothing to curb the need for private car use. I have managed to secure a meeting soon with ESC planners and involving Transport East (our regional transport body) who are leading work to improve our public transport offer, especially for rural and remote communities.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) with or without Sizewell C (I fear it will be approved and this despite widespread local opposition, including my own, over many years) continue to clog our roads and I am pressing for the HGV Review, carried out by Suffolk County Council last year, to bring forward a better and more co-ordinated strategy for HGV movements, often currently taking unsuitable routes, to curb the current atmosphere of 'free for all' in terms of HGV movements and behaviour. Many PCs within and beyond my Division associate some of the local HGV problems with the intensification of logistics operations at Bentwaters and I continue to work with a group of PCs to see what improvements can be made. A key element is the role and attitude of ESC as planning authority in terms of the impact of HGVs created by new planning consents and adequate monitoring of existing operations on site.

Practical responses to unwanted or anti-social traffic issues always involve cost and legal treacle to wade through. I am, however, delighted to have helped deliver a long-awaited Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) for Ivy Lodge Road in Campsea Ashe which sets a weight limit for traffic using the road but, as ever, enforcement is another matter! I am also helping residents in Friday Street near Rendlesham who have faced both dangerous vehicle activity in their very narrow road and much of this activity has been connected with anti-social behaviour by people entering Rendlesham Forest via Friday Street and both causing ecological damage and

curbing the enjoyment of the many people who want to enjoy the forest. I am providing new signage and am working with local people to get Forestry England to do more to address their concerns.

Over the past twelve months I have been proud to support and promote a number of local community initiatives with funding from my Locality Budget. I have made grants in all six parishes in my Division and in some more than once. Football pitch repairs, BBQ equipment for a Scout group, a covered bike rack, a take a book/leave a book library style trolley, village sign, a Speed Indicator Device (SID) and provision of disabled parking space and associated handrail have all received support from me.

Turning to my wider responsibilities, I was pleased to be appointed Deputy Cabinet member for Transport Strategy in May 2021 and in that role, I lead on bus and rail initiatives across Suffolk working with district councils, bus and rail operators and Transport East. I also chair the East Suffolk Community Partnership Transport Group which has developed a focus on more sustainable and responsive transport solutions like the Katch EV taxi-bus currently being piloted in my Division and out towards Snape. I have been asked to chair the Enhanced Partnership Board required as part of Suffolk's response to the Government's Bus Back Better initiative and this group, involving district councils and bus operators and other stakeholders across Suffolk, meets for the first time on 29 April.

On the rail front I sit on the Great East Mainline (GEML) Taskforce, involving MPs and rail industry bodies, which looks to further enhance journey times between London and Norwich via Ipswich and other stations. If we are serious about climate change and encouraging (all of us) people to reduce private car use, then rail and other public transport services must be widespread and reliable and more affordable! I chair the national Public Transport Consortium of the Local Government Association and have and will continue to talk frankly with Department for Transport and others to increase public transport provision throughout England and Wales. Rail must play its part, for passengers and freight, and I continue to lead the Eastern Group of local authorities (of all political complexions) who wish to see the East West Mainline better connect the east – Norwich, Ipswich, Port of Felixstowe – with the west via the Midlands.

April 2022