

Ward Report Saddleworth South – Councillor Helen Bishop

Although I have only been elected 9 months ago, I have wasted no time in tackling some of the ward's most pressing issues head-on and representing the views of residents to those in decision making positions. In no particular order, these are:

Health

This is perhaps the most critical issue immediately facing the ward. We have seen decades of housing developments with no additional health services, and residents are forced to travel to access those that should be available locally. I have held multiple meetings with local health chiefs to reinforce the urgency and have been assured that action is underway to address problems with accessing a GP, and a pathway to the provision of outpatient services. This would not be the case without my questions and intervention, and I shall continue to drive it forward until its completion.

Flooding

I have consistently lobbied for action to be taken on areas at severe risk of flooding, including the unblocking of gullies and grids. Some have been actioned, but others still need attention, and I shall continue to press for this to be done, as well as campaigning for a much more robust and sustainable solution.

Planning

I ensure that residents are informed about upcoming planning applications that will affect them and giving them the tools to make effective representations, coordinating community responses. This has led to several refusals for Green Belt applications in the ward, decisions which have been supported by the Planning Inspectorate on appeal, such as the repeated attempts to build on land adjacent to St Anne's Church in Lydgate and also in Greenfield. We are now currently fighting the unnecessary destruction of mature woodland in Grasscroft. As well as the impact on our heritage sites and Conservation Areas, hillside developments are having a disastrous impact on the environment, removing land that provides soakage and increasing the water run-off that makes its way down to the valley bottom, damaging road surfaces and threatening people's homes. In short, whilst we need new homes, we need the right type, in the right place, and with the necessary infrastructure.

Footpaths

Again, due to erosion, complaints about the state of the many footpaths that are scattered across the ward are many. I have recently made representations about a number of popular footpaths, such as the one from Beech Avenue in Greenfield down to Wellington Rd, near the Playing Field, which is currently being priced up and will hopefully see improvements in the very near future.

Children and Young People

I have been listening to and addressing concerns that have been raised with me about the educational experience of young people in Saddleworth with additional needs, including those with social, emotional and mental health challenges, and whether their needs are being appropriately met. These have been raised both at full Council and with the relevant council officers and I am awaiting the outcome of reports that may shed more light on the situation. I shall also be liaising with CAMHS and the School Improvement Team to ensure that concerns are taken seriously and

acted upon. Listening to our young people is one of the most important ways to both safeguard them and improve their life chances.

In addition, I have worked hard to protect the delivery of family services in the ward, including those delivered from the Children's Centre. I fed my concerns back into the consultation and robustly challenged any attempts to reduce provision. Following this, and a meeting on site with the cabinet member for children and young people, I am hopeful that a solution can be found that meets the needs of the community.

Highways

Some of Saddleworth's roads are in a terrible condition. Potholes have been reported and filled but are then replaced by others. Carr Lane is in a dreadful state and needs resurfacing, which has been requested following the completion of the ongoing drainage works.

Speeding is another oft-raised issue, and a Community Speed Watch Scheme is now in the process of finalisation, in order to give some control back to residents. As a party, the Lib Dems have also managed to successfully bring a motion to apply 20mph limits across all appropriate residential roads in the borough.

Rivers and Sewage

With the disclosure last year of the level of sewage being pumped into the River Tame, I have liaised with United Utilities and the Environment Agency to take action to clean them up. This work is ongoing. In the meantime, I did ask the River Rangers to attend both Chew Brook and the River Tame within the ward to assess, remove debris and test the water quality. I shall continue to build on this work.

Dovestones

I have continued to call for improvements to the infrastructure at Dovestones. This led to an increase in financial contribution from Oldham Council towards marshals and a commitment to improve signage, which I am chasing up. I have another meeting organised with United Utilities to ask them to contribute further to the marshals, and also implement aspects of their 2020 Action Plan that have yet to be realised e.g. A Resident's Forum and an electronic signage system.

Crime and anti-social behaviour

I liaise regularly with the local, neighbourhood police team and raise community concerns with them about the increase in vehicle crime and burglaries, as well as incidents of anti-social behaviour.

Community work and presence

In addition to the more critical work, I have participated as much as possible in the delivery of community events, because I believe them to be one of the best ways of meeting and hearing the views of residents and building a strong relationship and trust with them. Being accessible and transparent is essential. With this in mind, as well as raising vital funds for local charities and community groups, I have assisted with events including the Whit Walks and Band Contest (bucket rattling and raffle ticket flogging at the park entrance), The Saddleworth Show and Well-i-Fest (litter-picking, assisting visitors and general gophering)) and St Mary's School Fair (cake-pushing and kettle boiling), the Satellite Christmas Market and more.

Ward Budget

With my ward budget, I have either provided, or am in the process of providing, financial support for:

Saddleworth Rangers - Under 15's tour of Jamaica

The Noel Ashworth Memorial Bench

Whit Friday Band Contests in Uppermill, Greenfield, Friezland and Lydgate

Uppermill and Greenfield Whit Walks

The provision of Christmas Trees and/or lights in Uppermill, Greenfield and Lydgate

Greenfield Street Scene – money towards the repair and replacement of planters

Greenfield Band Contest – an additional sum to be used to ensure the future sustainability of the event, which if it is as successful as I hope, I shall roll out to others in the ward.

Priorities moving forward

- Working to bring about a better understanding within OMBC about the problems particular to the ward, especially our delicate but vital ecology, geology and heritage, sustainable drainage and continuing to push for proactive approach.
- Infrastructure - tackling the huge disparity in health care facilities and services. Bringing outpatient services to Saddleworth.
- Improving Highways and pavement access for people with mobility issues.