

Philip Atkins OBE

Member of Staffordshire County Council for Uttoxeter Rural

Abbots Bromley, Admaston, Beamhurst, Blithfield, Bramshall, Combridge, Crakemarsh, Croxden, Denstone, Dodsleigh, Ellastone, Gratwich, Kingstone, Leigh, Loxley, Mayfield, Newton, Okeover, Ramsor, Rocester, Stanton, Stramshall, Withington, Wootton,

Uttoxeter Rural Division Annual Report February 2025

This year my usual Annual Report for Annual Parish Meetings is earlier as the County Council Election is next May and sees Uttoxeter Rural Division changing. East Staffordshire gains an extra County Councillor around Burton while Tamworth loses one, reflecting house building and population changes. Uttoxeter Rural Division gains some of the new houses west of Uttoxeter near the A50 in Heath Ward, in place of Abbots Bromley. Blithfield has maintained its connections, while Abbots Bromley joins Barton under Needwood, Yoxall and Hoar Cross in Needwood Division.

Looking back on 2024, we have plenty to be proud of in Staffordshire. Many employment sites supported by the county council are providing the well paid jobs we all need, and Staffordshire unemployment continues to be lowest in the West Midlands. The opening of the Staffordshire History Centre brings our county's rich history to life. While the county highways crews, who have worked tirelessly to keep our roads safe, have repaired over 30,000 potholes and completed 26 major resurfacing projects since April, most of the county council work is adult and children social care taking 67% of total expenditure and the Staffordshire Family Hub Network will make it even easier for families and young people to access the help and support they need across the county.

The General Election last July brought much change with Labour taking control at Westminster with a massive majority. Locally both Burton and Uttoxeter and Lichfield returned a Labour MP as did Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire. However, since July it appears the new Government's honeymoon has come quickly to an end.

Following the new Government announcements, the County Council is talking with Staffordshire partners at the proposals for changes to local government, and nobody in Staffordshire wants a Mayor. If rural areas such as Uttoxeter Rural were included in a Unitary council with more urban areas such as Stoke, rural areas like ours would become a vast forgotten hinterland and lose out on spending priorities and allocations.

The October Budget announcements included measures that will affect all Uttoxeter Rural residents either directly or indirectly, from the increase in the living wage and the increase in Employers National Insurance (NI) contribution of 2% and lowering the threshold, to the abolition of business property relief and the £1 million threshold for Agricultural Property relief. There are also changes to dual cab vehicles and car tax levels. There has been much outrage, and I attended the November NFU Rally in London and am still awaiting a reply from my MP. I expect more actions will continue.

The NI cost to JCB is about £10 million and local hospitality are already feeling the effects of increased costs. While the NHS, Police, Fire, Teachers and local government

officer employers are exempt from the increase in NI, our care providers who are privately run are affected which will increase service costs to the county council.

The Number One issue raised with me is the state of our roads and despite the pressures on our care budgets, the County Council announced back in May that it would be investing heavily in our roads, and I am pleased to see this work continuing in our local area. The work these extra crews are doing will make such a difference to the people who live and work in Uttoxeter Rural and will improve journeys for everyone.

The crews will also do their best to minimise any disruption while carrying out pothole repairs and tackling drainage issues. You have told me how important good roads are to you, so hopefully with the work going on in our area, we'll see a massive improvement in the conditions of our roads.

The extra crews are the result of a nearly £8 million investment the county council is making into Staffordshire's roads, to help repair the damage done by one of the wettest winters last year on record, and to ensure we are prepared for this winter's weather.

All this is in addition to the £30 million investment the county council is making in maintaining and improving Staffordshire's highways over the next two years, alongside a total of £53 million being spent on a range of major projects, vital road improvements and general road maintenance in 24/25. You can check on road works at [Causeway one.network.org](https://one.network.org).

I would also like to thank those farmers and residents who recently quickly cleared fallen trees or snow that blocked our roads.

After the General Election our minds focused on how we tackle these local issues, and with straightened finances we will have to prioritise efforts to deliver essential services. Thankfully the county council is in a far better position than most councils, with a balanced budget for the next 5 years. Council tax will increase by 1.99% for the council and 3% for social Services, which continues to take over 67% of the county council's budget. We are the third lowest county council tax in England.

I still have a busy life farming at Ortons Pasture in Rocester and a Rocester Parish Councillor, as well as Health Scrutiny, Pensions Committees and representing Staffordshire on the Rural Services Network. I am also an accredited LGA Member Peer who help other councils with reviews, mentoring and coaching.

With the ongoing changes in agriculture with Sustainable Farming Incentive and the end of Basic Payment Scheme there has been a lot of work behind the scenes understanding the policy changes along with prices fluctuating beyond many people's experiences, particularly in commodity prices, energy and supply costs along with fluctuating prices.

Highways in 2023/24

We have had a spate of accidents that have sadly resulted in fatalities. The first was on the B5030 with a head on crash, two motorcyclists had a head on collision near the Marsh Farm Tea Rooms on the B5013 followed by a collision between a motorbike and a

school bus nearby at the Rugeley Turn and B5013/4 junction. Since then, a scooter has hit a car head on at Admaston. And finally, a van ended up in the Blythe at Burndhurst Mill after hitting a lorry. The bridge has been repaired. I am working with County Council staff on drawing up potential and appropriate solutions at each place.

Watery Lane Crossroads, Kingstone

Plans were in place after the initial survey work funded by my Divisional Highways Programme fund. Kingstone WI have gained £25,000 from ESBC with Cllr Colin Whittaker's help. Uttoxeter Rural and Kingstone Parish Councils along with the County Council have agreed to fund alterations to this crossroad. There are also changes to the speed limit being put in place from this crossroads to the Blythe.

However further investigation has revealed a pressurised sewer close to the site and rather than construct a staggered crossroads, a traffic light solution will be put in place. This will cost considerably more.

The new traffic light project will be delivered in the next financial year with the free dedication of the land by the landowners to facilitate the project. Thanks to all of them and all involved for in delivering a unique project.

Uttoxeter Quarry

After the success of restrictions on importation of scalping's into Uttoxeter Quarry for washing, the delivery of the Sports Hub has progressed with the successful planning application for an initial 7 football pitches. Because of this development I have asked for a review of the speed limits across the whole B5030 Rocester Corridor and A518 route.

The quarry has a further two years of extraction and two years conservation work.

B5030 Rocester Corridor

I have taken to challenging interested people to name all the changes in speed limits from Denstone village centre to Stafford Road in Uttoxeter in the correct order. They are all there to denote changes in the road, and with the sports hub coming a review is sensible. I have asked for a review of the speed limits on the B5030 and A518 with the imminent sports hub. There has been much social media speculation about changes on parts of this road but there is a larger scenario.

I have also asked for the layby vegetation to be cut back and a look at cycleways from Uttoxeter towards Rocester. We are already seeing extra road markings on the B5030 with more work to come.

Admaston Gateways and Blithfield Reservoir

Following the Section 53 notice being placed on the causeway which allows the Police to confiscate vehicles being used for racing or cruising, speed monitoring has taken place. The damaged sign has been replaced and drivers prosecuted.

I have asked for prices for Village Gateways on the B5014 and Blithfield PC for their support. This should further strengthen the road safety in this area. We cannot stop irresponsible driving, but we can deter people and ask the Police to enforce the law.

Gully Emptying and Drains

The list of gullies being emptied is long and some, such as Norfolk House, High Street, Abbots Bromley and High Street and College Road in Denstone and Stanton, have thrown up even more issues with CCTV required to ascertain the extent of the damage, and sometimes who is responsible. In many cases other utilities have damaged the road infrastructure, which lead to further delays. I will keep pursuing these and other cases.

On a positive note, Ellastone Level and Middle Mayfield have been improved with either drain cleaning or new pipes and Watery Lane Beamhurst and Watery Lane Kingstone are repaired or on the rota. As remarked later Birchcross will be repaired soon.

In the next year there will be a targeted enforcement on landowners with drainage assets affecting the highway such as ditches.

Fauld Mine

The operators at the Mine have restarted the liaison committee and it is worth noting they have a community fund that has helped Renew Church in Uttoxeter. The material they mine is now being added to the cement at Cauldon Low. This is some 200,000 tonnes a year. This is a hidden gem who are willing to work with our community.

Marchington Flooding

After MPs have called meetings involving the Environment Agency, Severn Trent and SCC Highways to explain what they are doing, we need to see bodies have delivered the parts of Marchington's Section 19 Flood Plan they are responsible for and plan ahead.

The flooding at Birch Cross is caused by a damaged pipe which should be repaired this year. However, we can't avoid weather is changing and flooding causes issues not in plain sight, such as carers not being able to make visits when roads are impassable. I am arranging further meetings to see how we can work together as a community to stem the flow of water further upstream.

A50/A500 Growth Corridor update

While Project A as it is known is completed and is a major piece of engineering and a huge success and delivering many economic benefits, while also improving road safety, there is more to be done. After the General Election funding is uncertain.

The latest idea is a flyover at Uttoxeter with the roundabout beneath allowing the A50 to flow freely over the junction with traffic joining from the roundabout below. The Festival Park or Hanford junctions are good examples.

Community Fund 2021 to 2024

Across Uttoxeter Rural we continue to see incredible acts of generosity and courage along with the volunteers, communities, neighbours, and businesses, stepping up and doing their bit to keep local people safe, fed, and healthy.

Each County Councillor has up to £2,500 to allocate. This can be spent in smaller amounts and there is no set minimum. County Councillors are also able to jointly fund projects which work across their local areas, or even to fund projects working districtwide or countywide. I have focused on local projects.

The focus of the Community Fund aligned with the principles of SCC's #DoingOurBit campaign. This means that it supports projects aimed at helping residents look after themselves, the people around them, and the places where they live.

In 2024 I supported applications from many community organisations and clubs including Men's Shed, Juniors Football Club, Village Festival, Bowls Club and Cricket Club.

In 2023 I supported bids from communities to celebrate King Charles III Coronation from Rocester, Blithfield and Draycott, Abbots Bromley Millenium Green play area and to renovate Wootton Reading Room.

In 2022 I supported bids by Friends of Marchington Village school to promote good health, Abbots Bromley towards the purchase of Gallimore's Field and the Queens Platinum Jubilee and Draycott for two benches.

In 2021 I supported bids from Dove School for a library, Camera Club for equipment, Abbots Bromley for maintenance of their Sports field and the Scouts to increase activities after Covid.

On the Climate Change funds I have supported bids by a School for LED lighting, Kingstone and Bramshall and Loxley Village Hall lighting efficiency and Ryecroft on waste reduction. Recladding of Denstone Village Hall, LED lighting at Staffordshire University Academy Trust, green heating system at Renew Church, hand driers at Draycott Village Hall and a willow dome at St Peters Marchington.

'We Love Uttoxeter' Community Foundation

There is also funding available from the Staffordshire Community Foundation. You can apply for £100 to £1000. Details available on their website.

We Love Uttoxeter – The Community Foundation for Staffordshire

MyStaffs App and the shift to digital

More work is ongoing on Digital Working and Superfast Staffordshire Website shows when New Broadband will arrive. North Staffordshire has a project with Connect Fibre and Mary Freeman is their liaison. You can find when and where the faster fibre broadband will be available at the Superfast Staffordshire website

www.superfaststaffordshire.co.uk/

With the copper network disappearing and more people working from home because of the pandemic, the need for 5G and faster broadband has become even more pressing. It is a good job we have done what we have, but there is more needed.

You can access all your council services on the move with the 'My Staffs App', free and available on Apple devices, android and Google platforms from the Apple App store and Google Play.

What is the MyStaffs app? It's a much quicker and easier way in which customers can talk to us with new technology using smart phones. If you need to report an issue, make a transaction, or request information, with the free app you access key services anytime, anywhere. You can even specify your location so that you receive information about the services which just apply in your area. What's more is that the app doesn't just feature key county services but some at district and borough level too, which means you can access everything all in one place, at the touch of a button.

Looking to the future

Much more than this is happening in the Uttoxeter Rural area and there is always something that needs my attention, particularly blocked gullies and collapsed drains. Many of our rural roads were designed when modern traffic volumes were not even dreamt of and we will soon have the additional weight of electric cars.

With electric vehicles a looming issue is the National Grid capacity to provide enough capacity for electric cars and heat pumps.

With parts of Uttoxeter coming into the Division I will continue to lobby for a proper bypass to the West of Uttoxeter. The opportunity for a bypass provided by the new housing estate is a lost opportunity, which I place at the feet of the developers and ESBC, then controlled by a Labour/Independent coalition. It could have been designed as in Cheltenham as a road on the edge of the town with small roundabouts with link roads into the estate.

All these issues need a rural slant to them alongside the majority urban one.

As the Staffordshire representative on the Rural Services Network, I ensure our voice is heard, as we live in a peri urban area, a rural area on the edge of large urban areas and as a result our needs can be easily forgotten or overlooked.

And that is the reason most of us chose to live in the beautiful Uttoxeter Rural area.

This is only a snapshot of the many things that I come across in a year and if anyone wishes to know more on any subject do not hesitate to contact me.

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