

Report from Hilary Bastone – (My February notes for Parish Councils)

THIS MONTH'S TOPICS

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FREE E-Transition Workshop For Harbour Authorities, Marine Businesses and Sailing/boat Clubs

Raising Awareness around the Cost of Living

Orchard Tree Planting in Kingsbridge

Sherford Consortium Tender for Businesses

Waste Recycling Centres in the South Hams

Coronation Street Party Applications Now Open

Funding improves village hall, outdoor space and cricket club grounds

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THIS MONTH'S TOPICS IN MORE DETAIL:-

Garden Waste

Letters and bin stickers have started arriving to subscribers of our new garden waste service who signed up by 8 February.

Those who signed up after this date will receive their sticker(s) - with an informative insert, but not the full letter - before their collection starts. This will be the process going forward.

From 1 March, residents can check their garden waste collection day on our website by visiting www.southhams.gov.uk/findmycollectionday

Residents have asked us 'Where does the sticker we've received need to be fixed to on the bin?'

The sticker should be fixed to the front of the bin (under the South Hams logo) or to the top of the lid so it's visible when the lid is fully shut, so it's visible for our crews when the bin is presented for collection.

Autism Awareness training

Places are available on the Autism Awareness Training on Tuesday 14 March, either at Follaton House in the morning or Kilworthy Park in the afternoon.

The training is being run by Beyond Autism and each session is three hours long.

South Hams continues to stand with Ukraine one year on

The 24th February 2023 marked one year since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Council invites the South Hams community to join them in this important moment of reflection and pay tribute to the bravery of the Ukrainian people around the world.

Since the devastating full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, South Hams has welcomed 217 guests over 97 family groups.

In what has been a deeply unsettling year for the people of Ukraine, here in South Hams, several programmes and projects, led by the Council have been successfully embedded to ensure those displaced from the war, find a place of safety and support.

A dedicated Homes for Ukraine Team working across both South Hams District and West Devon Borough councils was formed in 2022 to ensure those arriving to the area in very distressing circumstances, have access to housing and the essential services they so desperately need.

The Government's 'Homes for Ukraine scheme has seen the Council providing a range of services to ensure suitable living arrangements which meet the immediate needs of those arriving. Support has included property inspections, welcome visits, and guidance for host families. Support from the Council has often extended past the initial six-month sponsorship and continues to this day.

Partnership working has been at the forefront of the Council's work in ensuring the Ukrainian community are being cared for. The Homes for Ukraine Team have spent the last year collaborating closely with community and voluntary groups to provide familiar and welcoming places where Ukrainian people can get the help they need. This work has been instrumental in opening up opportunities for employment, education, training, and volunteering.

With many Ukrainian residents arriving in South Hams feeling traumatised, isolated, and scared; mental health and making personal connections have been high on the Council's priorities. Events, support groups and workshops, commissioned through the Council for Voluntary Sector (CVS) have encouraged community spirit and offered respite from the

troubling times. Many Ukrainians have brought their personal and professional skills to these forums and now facilitate or support these important programmes.

An extended service from Citizens Advice has meant that Ukrainian people have had the support they need with claiming benefits, jobs, childcare, education and immigration enquiries. This practical support has been key in ensuring the stresses of everyday life can be eased whilst coming to terms with the enormity of events.

The Council recently hosted a fun-filled event for 200 Ukrainian guests, including 40 children who have moved to the District since the outbreak of war. Held on Saturday 18 February at The Watermark, Ivybridge, the Council brought the community together with the help of its Homes for Ukraine Team, Citizens Advice and CVS. The Council Chairman, Cllr Lance Austen and other District Councillors supported the event by getting involved with fun activities with the children and talking to families and organisations about their experiences, and the work taking place throughout South Hams to support the Ukrainian community.

The wider community have also been working hard the past year to support the Ukrainian community as much as possible. Businesses, church groups, schools and residents have provided donations as well as much needed practical and emotional support.

Cllr Lance Austen, Chairman of the Council, said: “We join together today to pay tribute to our Ukrainian friends, here in South Hams and across the world who over the past 12 months, have faced the most difficult and unsettled of times.

“We also take this time to look back over the past year and reflect on the fantastic work being done to ensure our Ukrainian guests feel part of our wonderful South Hams community. Thank you to the organisations, charities and residents who have offered their homes and hearts to the people of Ukraine.

“As we look forward, our work is not yet done, and the future very much remains uncertain for our Ukrainian friends. Today is an important day to pay tribute to all those who have lost their lives or find themselves displaced. As a Council and community, we will continue to stand with Ukraine, now and in the future.”

Does the South Hams need more car charging points?

A survey is being launched to find out what residents of the South Hams think of the number of electric car charging points across the district.

South Hams District Council has launched the online survey as part of its electric vehicle strategy. The Council is seeking opportunities to provide charging points for those who struggle to access them, or lack sufficient off-street home charging.

The survey is asking residents what actions the Council should take to help improve the number of charging points in the South Hams.

Cllr Tom Holway, South Hams Lead Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity, said: “Since declaring a climate change and biodiversity emergency, the Council has been committed to lowering our own impact on the planet and making the district a greener place in general.

“A key part of that pledge was to work with partners to reduce carbon emissions across the district. Our efforts to increase the number of car charging points in the South Hams is a key part of that. If you fill in this survey, it will help us have a better idea of where we should focus our efforts and what need there truly is across the area.”

The electric vehicle survey is available online at: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/south-hams-ev-survey

The survey closes on 17 March.

To find out more about the Council’s electric vehicle strategy, visit:
www.climatechange.southhams.gov.uk/ev-strategy

Support On its Way for Over 1200 South Hams’ Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Businesses

South Hams District Council has been announced at their Full Council meeting today [Thursday 16 February] a new business rates relief scheme for retail, hospitality and leisure properties, which will support over 1200 businesses in the district.

The District Council administers the scheme funded by the government, which was announced in the Autumn Statement late last year. They use their own discretionary powers to adopt a local scheme, which will reap the most benefit for their businesses.

The Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Scheme will provide eligible, occupied retail, hospitality and leisure properties with 75% relief up to a cash cap limit of £110,000 per business for 2023/24.

There is also a Supporting Small Business scheme valid until 2025/2026. This will cap bill increases at £600 per year for businesses losing eligibility for some or all Small Business Rate Relief or Rural Rate Relief at the 2023 revaluation.

Cllr Hilary Bastone, Deputy Leader of South Hams District Council, said: “This new business rates relief scheme for retail, hospitality and leisure properties will help support South Hams’ businesses. It will help to make our high streets and town centres a success by helping them to adapt to changing consumer demands.

“Although this rate relief is fully funded by Government, it is being delivered through discretionary powers and therefore it is for ourselves as an individual local billing authority to adopt our own local scheme and determine each individual case in accordance with the guidance. Some types of business properties will benefit from 75% relief, which applies to the 2023/24 financial year only. The government has set a cash cap limit of £110,000 per business, Under the cash cap; no ratepayer can exceed the cash cap across all their properties in England.

“As a new Rating List comes into effect from 1 April 2023, some rateable values have increased meaning that some small businesses will lose their existing entitlement to small business rate relief. The Government has also introduced a supporting small business relief scheme which will cap bills at £600 per year for business losing eligibility for some or all

Small Business Rate Relief or Rural Rate Relief at the 2023 revaluation. The District Council will automatically award relief to eligible properties.

“I’m really pleased that we are able to help so many businesses with this well-thought out scheme and by making the decision now we can make sure the relief is applied to the 2023/24 business rates bills. As always we get the money out of the door quickly so that we can reduce the rates our businesses have to pay as soon as possible. We know how hard it is for them at the moment and we will continue to do whatever we can to support them and all of our residents during this difficult time.”

Around 1,080 businesses will receive support from the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief and a further 153 businesses through the Supporting Small Business Relief. With the Business Rate Relief being applied automatically to those eligible through their annual bill, which are due to be issued in a few weeks’ time, this will be welcome news for many of South Hams’ businesses.

To read the report and to watch the meeting in full, please go to:
www.southhams.gov.uk/Full-Council

District Council votes to adopt 100% Council Tax Premium on Second Homes

South Hams District Council has formally adopted proposals for second homeowners to pay a fair share of Council Tax. The proposals agreed will see second homeowners paying double the Council Tax amount for the area and was unanimously agreed by the Council today.

It means that the Council will adopt a 100% Council Tax Second Homes Premium as soon as legislation allows.

The Council declared a housing crisis in September 2021 and backed their declaration by a 12-point action plan. One of those actions included lobbying Government to allow local councils to be able to charge 200% Council Tax on second or holiday homes to ensure they contribute fairly towards the services they receive.

Their lobbying proved successful when in May 2022, the Government published the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which included proposals, aimed at addressing the negative impact of second homes on the supply of homes available to meet local housing need.

The Bill proposes that councils will be allowed to introduce a Council Tax premium of up to 100% in respect of second homes, meaning second homes would pay double the amount of Council Tax for an area.

The Bill is likely to become law from 1 April 2024 at the earliest.

Cllr Judy Pearce, Leader of South Hams District Council, said: “I’m very pleased that we as a Council have adopted these proposals. It’s yet another objective on our Housing Crisis that we can tick off.

“The level of second home ownership in the South Hams has detrimentally affected the long-term viability of our communities. House prices are pushed upwards by the sheer quantity of

second homes. Local residents can be denied a home as prices are pushed outside of what they can reasonably afford, a problem that is especially acute for the younger generation and first-time buyers.

“In November, I went to Westminster to speak to a House of Lords Select Committee to discuss the challenges around short-term lets and the impact that has in the South Hams. It's truly concerning that with just under 4,000 second homes in the District, this means that nearly 1 in every 12 homes is a second home.

“We have taken this action to level the playing field for our local residents, making it easier for them to find somewhere to live, let alone somewhere to buy. It's not an attack on second home owners, but us standing in solidarity with our residents, because they all have a right to have somewhere decent to live.”

Cllr Julian Brazil, Leader of the Opposition, said: “I'm delighted that the proposals have finally been agreed. On this issue, the entire Council speaks as one.

“This is absolutely the right way forward. It will make a massive difference to us. To people who say it is an attack on second homeowners, it is not. What it is, is asking them to pay a fair share to our communities. They're in the lucky position to own not one, but two houses, when many of our local families here struggle to own just one.

“The fact that they pay a little bit more should be compared to the increase in value of their second homes. Before the latest hiccup in the economy, house prices in the South Hams increased by around 25% in the last year. Increases of hundreds of thousands of pounds. We are asking them to pay a little bit extra to support the services that we struggle to deliver.

“I'd like to pay tribute to the Leader of the Council. She has worked incredibly hard lobbying MPs for them to understand the issues. I've been campaigning for this over 15 years – it's the right decision.”

Council Tax is charged to households to help fund the services that the area's local Town, District, County Council, Police, Fire service and Crime Commissioner provide.

These services are essential for a community to function and are designed to improve the quality of life for the people who live in their communities.

District Council balances its budget while continuing to support South Hams residents

South Hams District Council has laid out its plans for how it will cope with the financial challenges of the year ahead, while doing everything in its power to help vulnerable people through the cost of living crisis.

On 16 February, the Full Council heard proposals on how the authority would set a balanced budget for 2023/24. To balance the budget of £11.7m, the Council has identified £2.4m in savings and additional income. However, the Council is still forecasting a £0.3m budget gap by 2024/25.

Councillors agreed to a small increase in Council Tax of £5 per year, amounting to an increase of less than 10p a week. This means a Band D property would pay £185.42 next year (2023/24) to the District Council for all of its services.

Recent changes to Government funding means the Council no longer receives any Government grant (Revenue Support Grant), a loss of £4 million per year, so the Council has to be self-sufficient to fund all of its services.

However, the Council continues to face considerable financial challenges as a result of uncertainty in the wider economy and constraints on public sector spending.

A difficult few years, with the COVID-19 pandemic and rise in energy and fuel costs have put added pressure on the finances of councils up and down the country, including South Hams District Council.

Strong financial management over many years and the continual drive for efficiency has enabled the Council to accommodate service pressures while still maintaining a low level of council tax. The Council has continued to work in partnership with West Devon Borough Council which has allowed South Hams to achieve annual savings of £3.9 million and more importantly protect front line services.

The Council has taken a hard look at where it can save money to keep balancing the books.

The budget agreed will leave the Council on a stable financial footing and will help the Council manage the uncertainty of the future reforms of Local Government finances, which are increasingly stretched.

Through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, South Hams District Council will ensure that those in financial hardship are able to pay less Council Tax, and receive the full range of support services.

At the moment, the Council is supporting 4,900 households and has awarded £5.6m to reduce residents' bills through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. To help prevent further worry, financial advice is also given.

The Council continues to do everything it can to ensure that residents, businesses and front-line services come first.

Along with the main services that residents already know about, there are many others they may not be aware the Council provides. Those that help to protect residents' wellbeing and the District's economy to help keep the South Hams a beautiful place to live, work or visit.

The Council declared a housing crisis in September 2021 and backed its declaration by a 12-point action plan. Today the Council unanimously agreed proposals for second homeowners to pay a fair share of Council Tax. The proposals agreed would see second homeowners paying double the Council Tax amount for an area. This would become effective from 1 April 2024 at the earliest.

Cllr Judy Pearce, Leader of South Hams District Council, said: "Today, Council have agreed to increase Council Tax by £5 for next year.

“While any increase is regrettable, particularly during a cost of living crisis, it is right that we raise Council Tax by a small amount to ensure that we can maintain and improve our core services to everyone across the district, especially those most vulnerable. We’ve been working very hard to help people through the cost of living crisis and the support that South Hams District Council provides will be vital in the months ahead for many people.

“The Council runs crucial services for those in need, including housing and benefits services. Our Council Tax Reduction scheme ensures that those in financial hardship will pay less Council Tax, but get the full range of support services.”

“These are only some of the very many services that the District Council offers for less than one tenth of the annual Council Tax bill. The Council offers real value for money, with only 8p of every £1 paid (8%) in Council Tax being received by South Hams District Council to pay for their services.”

The District Council is also responsible for the collection of Council Tax on behalf of a number of other authorities, including Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue, Devon and Cornwall Police, the county council and town and parish councils.

It is often assumed that all the money collected goes to the District Council, but that is not the case, as although the district council collects the Council Tax, the majority of the money is paid over to these other authorities, to fund their services.

To find out more about the report presented at the Full Council meeting, go to:
www.southhams.gov.uk/Full-Council

FREE E-Transition Workshop For Harbour Authorities, Marine Businesses and Sailing/boat Clubs

Blue Environment, supported by South Hams District Council, are delivering FREE interactive workshops on the transition to electric technology within the marine sector.

The first workshop will take place on 28 April at Noss on Dart Marina, in partnership with South Devon College.

These one-day workshops with live on-water demonstrations will look at:

How and why transition from fossil fuels to electric is so important

The latest technologies and solutions on the market

The regulations involved in transitioning

Case studies of those organisations who have successfully transitioned to electric energy

If you have a particular interest or know an individual or organisation who may benefit from this workshop, spaces can be booked online here.

More workshops dates and locations to be announced soon.

Raising Awareness around the Cost of Living

As part of our cost of living action plan, our communications team has been supplying our local Tindle newspapers with articles on the cost of living, for both South Hams and West Devon.

The newspapers in the South Hams include, Kingsbridge and Salcombe Gazette, Totnes Times, Dartmouth and South Hams Gazette and the Ivybridge and South Brent Gazette.

The articles have been running for several months now.

Our last two articles published are:

Cost of Living - Dealing with Mental Health

Cost of Living - Renting

We will continue to raise awareness around these issues and will keep you posted on further promotion we do.

Orchard Tree Planting in Kingsbridge

ParkLife SW need volunteers to plant two new community orchards in Kingsbridge.

The orchards are to be planted with a variety of fruit trees.

The planting sessions will take place at:

Rack Park, Wednesday 15 & Friday 17 February

Wallingford Road, Saturday 11 March

All three sessions will take place from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For information email Parklife SW.

Sherford Consortium Tender for Businesses

The Sherford Consortium is putting out a tender for interested parties to run a temporary convenience store at Sherford, in advance of the local centre being developed and operational.

Waste Recycling Centres in the South Hams

Owners of a private van wanting to use the Ivybridge, Totnes or Kingsbridge Recycling Centres will need a permit from Wednesday 1 March.

Devon County Council has introduced the measure to help stop commercial waste from being deposited at their sites at public expense.

It will also help make it easier for users to access the sites by reducing queues and congestion.

Applications for the permits, which are free, are available online here.

Find out more on the Devon County Council website.

Coronation Street Party Applications Now Open

Devon County Council is inviting communities to apply for a free street party licence to mark the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty The Queen Consort.

If your community wants to hold a street party, the County Council is asking that you apply using their online basic street party application to close off your street available on their website.

The cut-off date is 26 March.

Funding improves village hall, outdoor space and cricket club grounds

Thousands of pounds' worth of funding has made a meaningful difference to the village hall, play area and cricket club in West Alvington.

In 2022, West Alvington Parish Council received a total of £52,869 of funding from South Hams District Council.

£26,191 was given for improvements to the village hall, which will help to replace doors and windows, and provide external cladding, soffit boards and roof covering. The work will ensure the long-term sustainability of the hall, and allow it to continue to be used for sports and recreation including dance, pilates and boot camp classes, as well as other community uses.

£17,416 was given for additional play equipment and adult fitness equipment at Townsend Lane play area and playing field. A further £9,262 was given for further enhancements to the play area and field.

Kingsbridge Cricket Club (which is based in West Alvington) also received £17,337 to help purchase grounds maintenance equipment. This equipment will keep the club's pitch in tip-top condition for youth, men's and women's training and matches.

The funding came from Section 106 money relating to the Home Field planning application, paid to the Council by WestCo Properties Ltd (a subsidiary of LiveWest).

South Hams District Council's Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Jonathan Hawkins, said: "This Section 106 funding for West Alvington is going to make a real difference to the community. It protects the long term viability of an important community resource in the village hall, refreshes the outdoor play equipment and will help preserve the cricket club's pitches.

"It's always really encouraging to see S106 money being spent to benefit so many people, as that is its exact purpose. The West Alvington community should see a profound benefit from all of this work being carried out."

Leon Harris, Senior Development Manager for LiveWest, said: "We were delighted to deliver quality, much-needed rural affordable homes in West Alvington that helped meet local need.

“We are committed to building vibrant communities and it is fantastic to see our financial contribution has been used towards the improvement of local community facilities which will further positively impact the lives of our residents in the local community.”