

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

THIS MONTH'S TOPICS:-

Ethical Lettings Offer a Win-Win for Local Landlords and Communities

Council Tax bills for 2022/23

Woodlands Park Community Tree Planting Day

Take Care of Each Other

Proposal to Bring Composting to the Community

When the Going Gets Rough

Have your say on constituency boundary changes in the area

Torbay Local Plan Review – Housing Growth Options

Leisure Centre Update

Community Forest planting underway with week of action

£50,000 Funding Available for Climate Change Projects

Community Cycling Event in Ivybridge

#MyPlace Campaign Update

District Council Balances the Budget and Supports Residents

Help us celebrate the Commonwealth Games coming to the UK this July

Have your say: tackling homelessness in the South Hams

£50,000 Community Funding Support Available for Climate Change

Omicron Business Support Grant open for applications in the South Hams

Levelling Up and County Deal

£150 payment towards energy bills

Bank of England raises the Bank Base rate to 0.5%

Compliments for the Business Grants Team

Incredible Archaeological Discoveries

South Hams and West Devon Respond to County Deal

Extra £50k funding now available for local wellbeing projects

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THIS MONTH'S TOPICS IN MORE DETAIL:-

Ethical Lettings Offer a Win-Win for Local Landlords and Communities

Could ethical lettings help solve the local Housing Crisis? SeaMoor Lettings, the innovative South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council-run ethical lettings agency, has launched a new website to make it easier for local landlords to find out more and sign up. It's hoped this will help more local people access private rental properties at an affordable price to alleviate the current shortage.

SeaMoor Lettings is part of SeaMoor Homes, an ethical estate agency run by South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council. It offers a professional management service for landlords with a very low 6% +VAT monthly management fee and other perks. This means landlords can afford to offer property at a lower monthly rent and still enjoy a healthy return on their investment.

Figures show that 32 landlords currently use the service, with 36 homes rented through SeaMoor Lettings across the South Hams and West Devon. The councils hope the new website will encourage more landlords to sign up so more local people can access properties at a below market rate.

Aaron, a landlord who rents their property in Totnes with SeaMoor Lettings said: "I've lived in the area for 25 years and want to give something back to my community – but renting out my property also needs to stack up financially as this is part of my pension. That's why I chose SeaMoor Lettings.

"I'm proud to be part of this initiative that we know really helps those local people who are feeling most tightly squeezed at the moment – people with good jobs but who simply can't afford the current rental prices and are faced with having to move away from friends, family, school and work just so they can afford their rent.

"We've had lovely tenants and the SeaMoor team are on hand to answer questions and sort out essentials like safety certificates, which really makes life easier. The low management fee and peace of mind from perks like the 100% rent guarantee for up to two months if the property was left empty, means it's financially viable for us to set a lower monthly rent – it really is a win-win for me and the community."

Cllr Judy Pearce, South Hams District Council Executive Member for Housing said:

"We're facing a huge housing crisis and we need action right now before more people are forced to move away. Big problems need innovative solutions and together with West Devon we're one of the only councils in the UK to offer an ethical lettings service to get the private rental market to deliver more affordable rental rates.

"Just like opting for ethical banking, SeaMoor Lettings gives landlords the choice to manage their property investment ethically too. Please do take a look at our new website www.seamoorhomes.co.uk and join our ethical lettings revolution. You'll help families and

people who are not already on the housing ladder to stay living close to their schools and workplaces and help our communities to thrive.”

Cllr Barry Ratcliffe, West Devon Borough Council Lead Member for Housing added: “Over the last couple of years, local rents have spiralled out of the reach of many local people including those doing some of the most essential jobs in our communities, such as care support workers. It means that some people on lower wages have to move out of the area. As a result, there is a local shortage of people available to work in these important roles, including care, retail and hospitality.

“I appeal to anyone who has a property they rent out in West Devon to get in touch, By joining us, you will be helping to make sure these local people serving their community can still afford to live here and provide us with the services we need – together we can help our communities to thrive.”

How does it work?

SeaMoor Lettings gives private sector landlords a full property management service at a low 6% +VAT monthly fee that includes extra features like a 6 week rent and deposit guarantee. Because the management fee is lower, you can offer your property at a lower monthly rent and still enjoy a healthy return on your investment. You’ll get a professional, experienced service from our team.

The service includes:

Tenant selection, credit checks and referencing

Preparing tenancy agreements and associated legal documents

Conducting quarterly management inspections including all outdoor spaces

6 week rent and damage deposit guarantee

A 100% guarantee of the rent when the property is empty (maximum two months)

Arranging and paying for your gas, electric and energy performance certificates

Access to affordable finance packages for property improvements

Rent account management

A comprehensive inventory together with digital photographic evidence

In-house support from the resources of the Council

Landlords and anyone looking to rent a property can take a look at www.seamoorthomes.co.uk

There is no salary cap to be eligible to rent a property, however priority will always be given to households with lower incomes.

Council Tax bills for 2022/23

On 22 February 2022 the Council Tax Setting Panel formally approved the council tax resolutions for 2022/23 in which the council tax is set for each parish and town within South Hams.

Following approval of the 2022/23 budget at Council on 10 February 2022, this in effect sets the level of council tax for the District Council. All that remained was to formally add in the County, Police and Crime Commissioner, Fire Authority and Town & Parish precepts to arrive at the overall level of council tax for 2022/23. The table below shows how an average Band D council bill is made up for South Hams District Council for 2022/23 as compared to the previous year.

The Annual Billing process of calculating the whole areas council tax charges will now commence and all council tax bills will be produced and issued around Friday 11 March 2022.

Woodlands Park Community Tree Planting Day

A community tree planting event is being made even more special with the planting of a tree to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee by South Hams District Council's Chairman, Cllr Richard Foss, this Saturday 26 February from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

After South Hams District Council's recent planned improvement work, following a community survey late in 2020, things have been progressing well to make the area an even more inviting community space for people and wildlife.

Local residents were eager to see improvements and will already have seen some made at the park. This includes work on the wildlife pond area, including the pond dipping area. There have been new benches provided and the play area will see additional equipment later this summer. The plan to plant new trees is well underway, with a day scheduled later in the spring for volunteers to get involved with tree planting too.

Organised by ParkLife South West, Saturday's community event will include District Council Chairman, Cllr Richard Foss, planting a special tree to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee under the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.

Ivybridge West Ward Members, Cllr Lance Austen and Cllr Louise Jones have funded the community tree-planting event, including the trees, materials and ParkLife support. This generous funding is taken from their District Council Climate Change and Biodiversity Locality Funds.

16 standard size trees will be among those planted; including an avenue of eight flowering cherries. These trees go some way to meeting Climate Change and Biodiversity aims for the District Council, along with health and wellbeing ones for the community.

South Hams District Council's Chairman, Cllr Richard Foss, said: "It's a privilege to plant a tree in honour of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. This way we have a longstanding reminder of her service to the country.

“Our parks and public spaces are precious to our residents and planting trees in this way will play a small part in protecting them for future use and help the environment too. Anything we can do in the fight against climate change is definitely encouraged.”

Cllr Lance Austen, South Hams District Council’s Ward Councillor for Ivybridge West, said: “We’re really looking forward to Saturday’s community tree-planting day and we hope that people will come along and join in. We know that this is a great space for locals to enjoy. I’m pleased to use my Council Locality Fund to help add more trees to this space to make visiting the park more enjoyable for all its users.”

Cllr Louise Jones, South Hams District Council’s Ward Councillor for Ivybridge West, said: “Woodlands Park is a great space for people of all ages to come together. The recent improvements are beneficial for both wildlife and local people and the addition of these trees, planted by residents will only add to that appeal.”

Ivybridge has also benefited from investment in other tree schemes recently. Funding through the Woodland Trust’s Emergency Tree Fund (ETF), has seen the start of planting of 4,000 broadleaf whips (young trees) across the South Hams by the end of March. Ivybridge is set to gain hugely from the scheme.

The ETF scheme is being carried out by a partnership of local councils, community groups and schools. Woodlands Park, along with Torr Park, is one of two Ivybridge sites owned by the District Council to be included in the scheme. Filham Park, owned by Ivybridge Town Council (ITC), is also included.

SHDC, along with ITC and Wembury Parish Council, were among the first to take part in the initiative. The fund highlights how tree planting helps to address climate change, absorb carbon and support nature recovery.

For the ETF scheme, ParkLife South West will again be co-ordinating the work on the ground in partnership with Devon County Council. The not-for-profit social enterprise provides opportunities for individuals and groups to get involved with environmental projects in and around their local settings.

Keith Rennells from ParkLife South West, said: “This community event and Jubilee tree planting is above and beyond the bigger Emergency Tree Fund scheme that is seeing 4,000 trees planted at 14 sites in the South Hams, seven of which are in Ivybridge. It’s the icing on the cake, so to speak, so come and get involved. Tools and refreshments are provided, but please bring your own spade and work gloves if you have them.”

“If you’re interested in joining in with a tree planting project, you can see where our latest projects are taking place and find out how to get involved through our Facebook page.”

If you’re interested in joining in with tree planting projects, please email parklifesw@gmail.com or message ParkLife through their Facebook page.

Take Care of Each Other

Cllr Judy Pearce 2021

It has been a very challenging two years since the start of the Covid pandemic and I'd like to thank South Hams' residents for how they have supported each other during this difficult time.

It is important that as we come to the end of the legal restrictions for Covid, that we remember that we still have vulnerable residents, and visitors, who are at risk, so if you have symptoms, please stay at home.

Continue to look out for friends, relatives and neighbours, as you have throughout the pandemic, and allow people the time and respect to do things at their own pace.

You have been wonderful at supporting our local businesses and I hope you continue to do that. If we all work together, we can help them to recover as soon as possible from the difficulties they have faced over the past few years.

Cllr Judy Pearce, Leader of South Hams District Council

Devon's Director of Public Health

Stay at home if unwell

The Public Health Director, Steve Brown, gave some good advice to the public to continue to look out for one another after the Prime Minister's announcement on the end of legal Covid restrictions for people with coronavirus to self-isolate from today.

continue to look out for each other

do what you can to reduce risk, especially for the most vulnerable

be respectful of other people's concerns and personal situations

if you test positive for coronavirus, or show symptoms of having it, including a high temperature or cough, stay at home and avoid contact with others

The same as you would for any other infectious illness, such as flu, vomiting or diarrhoea

Living with Covid: What Has Changed?

The Government has published its plan for living with COVID.

From Today - Thursday 24 February:

people who test positive for COVID-19 will no longer be legally required to self-isolate, but will still be advised to stay at home and avoid contact with others for at least five full days

routine contact tracing will end, so fully-vaccinated close contacts and those under 18 years old will no longer be legally required to test daily for seven days or advised to self-isolate

workers will no longer be required to tell their employer if they need to self-isolate

the £500 self-isolation support payment for people on low incomes who test positive for COVID-19 will no longer be available

COVID-19 provisions for increased statutory sick pay will apply for a further month.

From Tomorrow - Friday 1 April:

free mass symptomatic and asymptomatic COVID-19 testing for the general public will end, and will instead be targeted towards the most vulnerable

people with COVID-19 symptoms will be asked to exercise personal responsibility when deciding whether to stay at home - until then they are still advised to do so

current government guidance on COVID-19 passports will end and it will no longer recommend venues use the NHS COVID Pass

Covid Testing

COVID-19 Testing

Access to free COVID-19 testing for lateral flow device (LFD) testing for people with no symptoms and PCR testing for people with symptoms will change from tomorrow.

Free access to all types of COVID-19 testing will end, but with some exceptions.

Social care staff and vulnerable people most at risk will still have access to free tests. Those considered to be 'at-risk' are still to be agreed, but it's thought to be those people eligible for antiviral treatments aimed at preventing hospitalisation.

For the rest of the public, tests will need to be paid for privately.

Booster for Vulnerable Groups

Booster

Vulnerable adults over 75 years old and the most vulnerable over 12 year olds will be offered an extra booster vaccine this spring.

The additional dose will help to protect against these vulnerable groups against severe reactions to Covid.

Fourth doses, eligible six months after the last vaccine, is available to:

adults aged 75 years old +

older adults residents in care homes

young adults aged 12 years old and over who are immunosuppressed or have weakened immune systems

This is only a precautionary measure from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and does not mean there is any current danger.

Proposal to Bring Composting to the Community

A proposed scheme to use £200,000 to support community composting schemes will be discussed by the Executive Committee at South Hams District Council on Thursday 3 March.

The scheme, if agreed, would be designed to support up to six new community composting sites each year, and will continue to support existing groups, to compost their waste locally.

A range of practical help and information would support the local groups over a two-year period, along with funding for set up costs to the value of £7,500 on a match-funded basis.

So what exactly are community composting sites? Community compost sites are local sites where South Hams' residents could go to recycle their garden waste. The sites then store and process the collected green waste. Usually kept in compost bays with the finished product called a 'soil conditioner', which are then used locally to fertilise soil for the best growing conditions. Residents would then be able to benefit from the fertilised soil on their own gardens and allotments.

The Council's Grounds Maintenance Team would visit up to eight times a year to provide a 'turning and shredding' service using heavy machinery. This use of Council machinery would result in huge savings for these groups, while also reducing safety concerns.

Run by volunteers, the sites would be self-sufficient and mostly funded by donations from the local community.

By creating groups spread across the District, it would support gardeners and allotment users, but also encourage recycling awareness and education. Often these locally run schemes benefit from volunteer opportunities and training which would be beneficial for economic development.

Cllr Keith Baldry, South Hams District Council's Executive Member for Environment, said: "This is a really positive scheme that has the potential to address the need for community-based recycling of green waste that is easy to access for our residents.

"It's a win-win for us as we'll be helping to bring community groups together to recycle, but also offering a way to get volunteers working together. It would be good to get all ages involved in this project with education and sharing of skills."

To make sure residents across the South Hams would have the best possible access to recycle their green waste at a community compost site, the Council would be looking to prioritise sites across the District.

Read more about the report and watch the Executive meeting live here:
www.southhams.gov.uk/Executive

When the Going Gets Rough

Dartmouth Lower Ferry staff have once again helped residents cross the Dart amidst Storm Eunice, while making sure safety is top of the agenda.

The friendly team at the Lower Ferry are well known for their cheerful natures and friendly smiles. Despite the gusty winds brought by Storm Eunice and hot on its heels, Storm Franklin, the rotating team of nine pulled their collars up and battled on to get residents, workers and visitors across the Dart. They were also supported by five relief maintenance and crew teammates.

South Hams District Council who own the heritage ferry have stringent safety measures and risk assessments in place to make sure that their staff, and passengers, are always safe during bad weather crossings.

Cllr Jonathan Hawkins, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing for South Hams District Council, said: “They are a fantastic team who go out in all weather, rain or shine and they really help to keep the transport links open. It’s vital to a lot of people and saves a long journey around if you need to just get quickly across the river.

“Luckily the wind was blowing in the right direction, so it was safe for our ferry to continue to operate carefully and safely. I’d like to say thank you for their hard work and dedication in such trying circumstances, because safe or not, it couldn’t have been fun out there in that wind!”

The ferry operates all year round, except for Christmas Day and as demonstrated, in all weather. You can now buy a Saver Travel Pass on the Ferry for £2. Once you have your pass, simply top it up online whenever you need to.

Andy, a local ferry user, said: “They always take a lot more interest, interaction and are more personal. The saver ticket pass works out such good value making the lower ferry an all-round win, win! Oh, and your saver ticket never expires!”

To find out more about the Dartmouth Lower Ferry, go to:
www.southhams.gov.uk/dartmouthlowerferry

Have your say on constituency boundary changes in the area

Constituencies are changing - have your say now via bcereviews.org.uk, or at a public hearing in your region.

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is required by Parliament to undertake an independent and impartial review of all constituencies in England. This is done to rebalance the number of electors in each constituency.

The 2023 Boundary Review also requires that the number of constituencies in England increases from 533 to 543.

The Commission is holding a secondary consultation on its initial proposals for new constituencies, which takes place from 22 February to 4 April 2022.

During the consultation, public hearings will be held across the country to allow members of the public to provide their views in person.

To have your say, submit your views in writing via the consultation website bcereviews.org.uk, by email, or letter; or speak at a public hearing in your region.

Find your nearest hearing and book a slot to speak on the BCE website.

On the consultation website, you can also view and take into account the responses sent in during the first consultation.

Follow @BCEReviews on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to keep up to date with 2023 Boundary Review news.

Torbay Local Plan Review – Housing Growth Options

Torbay Council has commenced a review of its local plan housing policies and allocations, and has published a paper setting-out options for different levels of future growth.

There are five growth options - ranging from low growth (no further greenfield allocations), through medium growth (one or two further urban extensions), to high growth (allocation of all identified sites to meet the housing needs in full), plus the potential to develop a 'hybrid' option are presented.

The Council, as one of Torbay's Duty to Co-operate partners, will be submitting a letter of response setting out the following main points:

Following on from the Planning White Paper, the Government may introduce significant changes to the plan-making process. This is likely to require a more comprehensive review of issues such as climate change, and not just housing.

The current calculations on which the review is based use the 2014 population and household projections. These give Torbay a significant challenge if they are to accommodate additional growth without causing environmental harm. Much has changed during recent years, including Brexit and Covid-19, and the Census 2021 will provide new data and forecasts. It is, therefore suggested that Torbay should sense-check their review process and be informed by up-to-date evidence. The scope for brownfield development and urban renewal should be maximised, and this means revisiting previous assumptions around factors such as density and building heights. Maximising the potential within the current built-up areas of Torbay will reduce the pressure on greenfield development. These issues are of particular relevance to the lower and medium growth options.

Potential cross-boundary issues need to be assessed fully and presented as robust evidence. This will include landscape impact (especially on the Dart Valley part of the AONB), ecological impact (including the South Devon bat SAC), and infrastructure considerations including highways/traffic generation (including potential impacts on the A385 route through Totnes and the AQMA).

The higher growth and hybrid options are likely to have the greatest cross-boundary implications for areas such as the South Hams. All of the potential implications and possible unintended consequences need to be identified and assessed. If Torbay is unable to accommodate its housing needs this could have significant implications for neighbouring areas. This will need to be considered fully under the Duty to Co-operate.

Given that the Government is likely to introduce changes to the standard method for calculating housing need, and may make significant changes to the plan-making system, and that new demographic and household data will soon be available, it is suggested that Torbay Council should enable the review process timetable to be able to take these into account.

The deadline for submitting responses is 28 February. If any Member wishes to see the full letter of response please contact: graham.swiss@southwestdevon.gov.uk

The Housing Growth Options and supporting documents produced by Torbay Council can be found on the Torbay Council website.

Leisure Centre Update

Our leisure centres have had a great start to the year with January seeing over 60,000 visits across all the sites, the highest since re-opening last April and getting back to pre-COVID numbers.

During the last few weeks, centres have been busy hosting public open days, membership offers and putting on new activities and events such as;

Moonlit swims at Ivybridge with the roof open

Roller discos at Dartmouth with 80 young people enjoying the fun

Open day at Quayside and Totnes hosting one next week

More details can be seen across the social media pages and websites of the centres, including February half term activities.

Community Forest planting underway with week of action

The planting of the South West's new community forest is now underway, with children and young people at the heart of the action this half term.

The Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest is a partnership between Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council, National Trust, Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission, Forestry England, Devon Wildlife Trust, Plymouth Tree Partnership and Dartmoor National Park and is funded through the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs' Nature for Climate fund.

As announced last summer, the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest will stretch from the heart of the city to the edge of the moor, encompassing 1,900 hectares of land to form a mosaic of different forest habitats.

Unlike traditional forests, the community forest won't be geographically restricted to one place. Instead, it will encompass a mix of community woodland, private woodland, on street, urban woodland, wooded habitat corridors and hedgerows.

Now, to celebrate its real life, trees-in-the-ground launch, a series of events will take place from 24 February to mark a week of action in the project.

Aimed at getting as many young people involved as possible, the week will see schools and youth groups, green-fingered experts and amateur arborists get stuck into planting trees at a number of exciting activities.

Public events for all ages will also form part of the week with residents young and old able to get involved in...

POOLE FARM TREE DAY, Plymouth

Thursday 24 and Friday 25 February

Join us to kick off Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest's Week of Action to plant a tree at Poole Farm and journey through the life cycle of a tree.

We'll introduce the Community Forest Tree Nursery, learn about re-wilding, beavers, tree identification, woodland management and finish off with fruit tree pruning.

TREE CARE COURSE – AMENITY TREES – RADFORD ROAD TENNIS COURTS, Plymouth

Monday 28 February, 10am to 12.30pm

Come and learn how to care for your trees. We'll look at watering, techniques to keep roots healthy, pruning and everything you need to help your trees thrive.

TREE CARE COURSE – YOUNG ORCHARD TREES – PLYMOUTH HOE

Monday 28 February, 10am to 12.30pm

Come and learn tips and techniques to help trees thrive and the importance of looking after our new and existing orchard trees as part of the Community Forest.

Councillor Patrick Nicholson, Deputy Leader of Plymouth City Council, said: "I'm so pleased to see the community forest move from concept to action and I'm even more pleased to see young people at the very heart of it all.

"The week of action will certainly help us create a buzz around the forest and ensure that we deliver skills development and job creation will be relevant to today and tomorrow's young people."

South Hams District Council's Leader, Cllr Judy Pearce, said: "This community forest is truly a wonderful project that expands beyond the city, into the South Hams and towards the moor. It is so important for creating rich habitats for now and future generations to come.

"The planned week's events invites children and young people to get involved in the planting of trees. The very people who are so very passionate about our planet's future and they need to be, because it's their future too. Not only will the week's events increase habitats of a range of animals, insects and birds, but it will also offset a proportion of our carbon footprint. Trees that will stand for decades and perhaps centuries to come. So go along to one of the events and get involved."

Toby Fox, Assistant Director of operations for the National Trust in the South West, said: "Trees and woods are good for both people and for wildlife and they also help to address the climate and nature emergency.

"This new community forest will give more people access to nature and will connect up habitats, helping wildlife to thrive. It also offers young people an opportunity to shape the environment for their own and future generations."

Ross Kennerley, South West Regional Director, Woodland Trust, said: “It is great to be part of the part of these crucial first steps in the creation of the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest.

“UK woodland cover currently stands at 13%. We need to hit 19%, if the UK is to meet its carbon net zero target by 2050. The young people planting trees at these events, are taking very real action in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss right here in Plymouth and South Devon. These trees will lock up carbon and improve these greenspaces for people and wildlife.”

The week of action marks the beginning of an exciting journey for the community forest. Over the next ten years, the area will benefit economically from more than 350 new jobs while environmentally, with the increase capture carbon/Co2 in the Plymouth area by 83% from current levels once full established.

£50,000 Funding Available for Climate Change Projects

The Council is launching a £50,000 Climate Engagement Fund to help the District reduce its carbon emissions by supporting community engagement and behavioural change projects.

Ideally, the Council are looking to fund proposals that improves awareness and action among the public.

With a total of £50,000 to spend, the Council want to spend the money wisely on a few well-selected projects. Applicants can bid for funds ranging from between £3,000 and £25,000, projects with match funding or those leveraging in additional funds being looked upon more favourably.

Community Cycling Event in Ivybridge

Please find details below about the Big Bike Revival Community Cycling Events in Ivybridge on Sunday 20 February, at 10 a.m. at the Watermark, Ivybridge.

Join in with the Big Bike Revival for three family cycle rides around Ivybridge! Trained cycle leaders from Big Bike Revival will lead the 2 mile ride, and each cyclist will receive a £1 voucher towards breakfast at the Watermark afterwards!

Children must wear helmets and be accompanied by a parent or responsible adult.

#MyPlace Campaign Update

The Placemaking and Communications teams have been working together toward delivering objectives within the strategic plan’s Stimulating a Thriving Economy theme.

The roll out of the #MyPlace marketing campaign in November 2021 aimed to encourage residents to visit our towns and support local businesses in the run up to Christmas, boosting footfall, dwell time and spend.

This proved to be a great way to engage with our town councils to bring together a comprehensive campaign that promoted events and activities across our region. With European Regional Development funding, adverts were placed in local publications and across social media.

We will also be carrying out further advertising and social media activity to promote our towns and high streets through February and March.

Analysis has been undertaken from the Christmas campaign to gain insight into our digital activity, showing for example which posts were more successful at engaging the public. This will be used to help better shape both Christmas marketing activities for 2022 and general promotions through the year.

We have also collected visitor numbers to our car parks and footfall to some of the key events which will be used as part of a wider town health report project.

A snapshot of some of the digital data is below and shows really good reach figures across our social media and website pages which we hope to build on over the coming months.

#MyPlace Social Media Statistics

South Hams Social Media Stats

In South Hams on Facebook, overall impressions were 68,430, with an overall reach of 61,528.

On South Hams Twitter, impressions were 13,200 and potential reach 406,183.

On South Hams Instagram, impressions were 4,438 and reach was 4,190.

Gathered around laptopStats for the Christmas Landing Page

Please see the stats below for the South Hams District Council website visits to the Landing Page which listed the Christmas events between 22 November and 31 December:

1,005 hits, of which 543 were unique visits

125 entries on the page came directly from social media (94% of those were from Facebook, 6% from Twitter)

The rest were a mix of direct entry (where they entered the web address manually) and homepage click-through.

The average time spent on the page was 1 minute and 17 seconds.

From the landing page...

205 people left the site entirely

13% clicked through to Totnes events

12% to Dartmouth

11% to Ivybridge

11% to Kingsbridge

24% returned to the main homepage

29% left to other pages on our site

No stats were recorded for Salcombe or Modbury (they'll be in the 29% others)

District Council Balances the Budget and Supports Residents

South Hams District Council is coping well with the financial challenges from Covid-19 and continues to support vulnerable people within the community.

On Thursday 10 February, Full Council heard proposals for how it would set a balanced budget for 2022/2023.

Councillors agreed to a small increase in Council Tax of £5 per year, meaning a Band D property would pay £180.42 this year to the District Council for all of its services. This figure amounts to an increase of less than 10p per week.

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

These factors, along with Covid-19, are issues that have caused financial strain for all councils up and down the country where they have found themselves in a 'perfect storm'. However, due to careful financial management, and difficult decisions, South Hams District Council is well placed to meet the current financial challenges.

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 is ready and willing to give support to the people of the South Hams and this Budget ensures that they will be able to provide it to those in the District who most need it. In the past year alone, the Council has supported residents in the following ways.

£84 million of vital Covid Business Grants have been paid out to support hard hit South Hams' businesses during the pandemic. A lifeline to many, protecting businesses and jobs to keep the economy of the District alive.

Throughout the pandemic, in Test and Trace funding, the Council has paid out £360,000 and supported 720 residents who desperately needed help. South Hams has also provided assistance with issues such as debt, domestic abuse or safeguarding. Without this dedicated service, these residents may never have received the care they needed.

One of the Council's main priorities is to support residents with the housing crisis the South Hams is currently facing. So, they are working on a variety of housing initiatives to help wherever they can. Through their Emergency Housing Fund, £158,000 has been allocated to help vulnerable residents with a further £50,000 paid out through the Household Support Fund.

Support for vulnerable homeless people continues through the valuable work of a permanent Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker who helps those who sleep rough, or are at real risk of doing so.

At the moment, the Council is supporting over 5,100 households and has awarded over £5.8m to reduce residents' bills through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Together with an extra £112,000 in Discretionary Housing Payments, with £20,000 more to follow by the end of March. To help prevent further worry, financial advice is also given.

A grant bid for £1.75m has now been secured which will help improve energy efficiency in South Hams' homes occupied by some of the area's most vulnerable residents. This will not only help the wellbeing of those residents and cut their energy bills, but will also help towards the Council's climate change target to be net zero in the District by 2050.

In line with the Council's 'Better Lives for All' goals to fund projects that will contribute to a net-zero South Hams, £200,000 of funds is being allocated towards a community composting initiative.

The Council continues to support not only the local economy through leisure facilities, but also the visitor economy, providing business support and advice and providing grants for key town and coastal areas.

Cllr Judy Pearce, Leader of South Hams District Council, said: "This Budget proposes an increase in Council Tax of £5 a year, an increase of less than 10 pence per week.

"Whilst any increase is regrettable, it is right that we raise funding by a small amount to ensure that we can deliver our services to everyone, and especially those who need our help the most. Our residents are facing a significant rise in the cost of living and there is no doubt that the support this Council provides will be needed by more people, more often. We are ready and willing to give that support and this Budget ensures that we will be able to.

"Each year the Council annually spends around £750,000 resourcing crucial services for those who need it, providing housing services, benefits services and schemes such as the green homes grants. At the same time, through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, we ensure that those in financial hardship are able to pay less Council Tax, but get the full range of support services.

"The positive impact and help this Council can offer more often than not goes unseen and unspoken, as indeed it should. But just occasionally, at times such as now, we must take the time to articulate the role the Council has and the difference it makes to people's lives."

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 statutory services, including Fire, Police, County Council and Town and Parish Councils. It is often assumed that all the money collected goes to the District Council, however that is clearly not the case.

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

Help us celebrate the Commonwealth Games coming to the UK this July

We are looking for communities, charities, local people, schools, and individuals to come forward with ideas for where the Queen's Baton Relay could go on 4 and 5 July.

From 4 to 8 July, the Queen's Baton Relay will be travelling around England and stopping of to celebrate six important themes:

Common Ground - Celebrating Commonwealth Communities and our links to the Commonwealth.

Journeys That Matter - Making better communities / spaces / ways of living for tomorrow and championing sustainability.

Untold Stories - Showcasing people, projects and places that have an inspiring until story.

Digital Innovation - Celebrating innovation, engineering and technology.

Youth - Keeping young people at the heart of our celebrations.

Sporting Excellence - From grass roots to elite athletes.

We have been asked to put ideas forward where the baton might be able to stop in Devon.

Are you, your community or your local area holding any events or could hold an event on 4 and 5 of July at which the Baton Relay could stop?

At this stage we are just looking for ideas and locations. If selected the baton could be coming to your event.

When letting us know about your idea or event, be creative - we are looking for highly visual good examples from Devon that fit into one of the Queen's themes.

As the year of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, it's also a wonderful chance to celebrate Her Majesty's reign and show off the best of Devon.

Let us know about any ideas or community events you are holding at that time by sending an email to communications@swdevon.gov.uk

Nominate a baton bearer

Kadeena Cox Launch Baton

Do you know somebody who is ready to step forward, make a change and take it on?

The event organisers need 2,022 baton bearers, each with inspiring stories, to take on the special experience of carrying the Queen's Baton through England in summer 2022.

They are looking for individuals from England that meet one or more of the following criteria:

Always willing to take on a challenge and has a unique and inspiring story

Has made a meaningful contribution to sport, education, the arts, culture, or charity

Is a figure of inspiration that positively challenges others to achieve their best

Has taken on a challenge or cause and made a positive impact within their community

The Queen's Baton Relay will travel to every region in England, before arriving at the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games on 28 July 2022.

To nominate, simply tell us how your nominee is making a difference in their community and why they deserve to take on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Let's take it on, together. Nominate a local hero to be a baton bearer in England.

Have your say: tackling homelessness in the South Hams

Have you or friends or family faced homelessness? With spiralling local rents and the increasing cost of living, are you concerned about how you or others can put a roof over your heads? Now is your chance to have your say on how the Council prevent and relieve homelessness with the launch of a six-week public consultation.

The district is currently in the midst of a housing crisis. A recent council report highlights that there are four types of household who are at high risk of homelessness. It outlines that single and couples households, families, and people with additional needs must also be prioritised alongside rough sleepers to tackle the issue effectively.

A preliminary consultation with councillors took place at the start of 2022 to discuss ways to effectively prevent and relieve homelessness in the area. Working with partners to put the necessary support in place to prevent people from becoming homeless remains a significant focus. The plans also highlight the need to ensure there are enough of the right sort of homes available to meet the diverse needs of people at risk of homelessness. For example, identifying effective new ways to increase the availability of affordable family-size homes in the district. This includes offering a financial incentive to under-occupiers to downsize, and working with private landlords to increase the availability of more affordable private rented homes.

The consultation gives local people the opportunity to have their voice heard. This will help make sure the proposed plans cover the right priorities and will meet the needs of everyone in the community. The results will be collated and used to inform a new Homelessness Strategy, which is due for review.

Cllr Judy Pearce, South Hams District Council's Executive Member for Housing said: "Your views really matter. Taking part in this consultation will only take a few minutes of your time but could make all the difference for many people and help our communities to thrive.

"Whilst working with partner agencies to support people who are sleeping rough will always be a vital part of our homelessness strategy, we know there are more layers to the issue of homelessness. Increasing rental prices coupled with a rise in the cost of living means more and more local people find themselves at risk of having nowhere to live.

“People are relying on staying with friends and family to keep themselves in the area close to schools and jobs - something that just isn’t sustainable. They may be forced to move away because they cannot find affordable homes locally, and we face the very real threat of many people who carry out essential jobs, like caring, leaving our area and leaving a huge void.

“Our homelessness strategy aims to do something about that. It is part of our five year Housing Strategy and specifically looks at the needs of all people who may be faced with homelessness, including those being priced out of our area.

“In our Better Lives for All plan we have promised local people that no one should find themselves without a roof over their head. Now we need your help to deliver that promise. Taking part in our consultation will help us to understand local issues even better so our plans truly meet local needs. Please do spare a few minutes to get involved – it could make all the difference to your children, neighbours and friends.”

Helping people who are sleeping rough

The Council works extensively with people who are sleeping rough to provide support and housing options. Working with multiple agencies, this approach finds a suitable long-term home for someone who is homeless. By ensuring people are engaged with support from partner areas, it also significantly increases their chances of keeping the accommodation and making positive life choices. While not everyone chooses to take up this offer, the mix of intensive support, outreach work and open offer of accommodation has resulted in low numbers of people sleeping rough in the District. At the last rough sleeper count in November, two rough sleepers were identified, a reduction from the seven counted three years ago.

Tackling the shortage of affordable local homes

In September 2021, South Hams District Council declared a Housing Crisis. 12 points of action were set out. These are:

The District Council will lobby government, through MPs and the Local Government Association, to allow a Council Tax charge on housing plots with planning permission if they have not been built after a specified period. This would encourage developers to get on and build their sites without delay.

They will also lobby Government to review all holiday accommodation. This would ensure that it is properly regulated, complying with local planning policies and taxes. This could include an extension of the 90-day short let legislation, a proper planning class for short lets and proper licencing for them. This would prevent people finding loopholes in the taxation system and prevent too many local homes being converted to holiday accommodation.

The Council should also immediately review all holiday letting in the District to ensure that the owners are paying the correct amount for the removal of waste and recycling. Businesses should not be on the normal domestic recycling and waste collection.

South Hams District Council will also ask the Joint Local Plan project team to review the amounts of affordable housing in the Joint Local Plan and see if this can be increased, so that the percentage of "First Homes" on a development is in addition to the existing requirement for 30% affordable housing.

The District Council already runs a letting agency to encourage landlords to make properties available for local families in need. There should be further promotion of this and regular landlord forums to encourage more properties to become available.

The District Council works closely with registered providers on many housing projects across the District; they will now be working with them to ensure the best use of those properties, such as to encourage tenants to downsize where possible and make larger properties available for larger households.

In addition to this, the District Council is proposing to use some of the affordable housing revenue to increase payments made to those tenants downsizing to make the move more attractable and affordable.

The Council is committed to using Section 106 affordable housing contributions as soon as possible, to help fund developments anywhere in the District where the terms of the Section 106 agreements will allow.

The Council also wants to campaign for changes to the Broad Market Area, to better reflect the costs of rents in the South Hams.

The Council would encourage the development of an exemplar site of low carbon modular housing such as ZEDpods, to show that developments like this can be both stylish and great to live in.

South Hams District Council also agreed to actively seek opportunities to invest in Council owned social housing with highly sustainable specification.

To lobby Government to allow local councils to be able to charge 200% Council Tax on second / holiday homes, as they do in Wales.

The proposed action to offer a financial incentive to encourage under-occupiers to downsize was implemented in January and has generated significant interest. And in January, the Government announced it would close the second homes tax loophole, a change the Council had actively campaigned for.

More details on the proposals and a quick questionnaire where you can share your views can now be found at www.southhams.gov.uk/homelessness-strategy

The consultation will close on 23 March 2022.

It is anticipated that a final draft of the strategy will be presented in Early Spring, with formal adoption from April 2022.

£50,000 Community Funding Support Available for Climate Change

South Hams District Council is launching a £50,000 Climate Engagement Fund to help the District reduce its carbon emissions by supporting community engagement and behavioural change projects.

For the South Hams to become net zero by 2050, behaviour change is critical. We hear a lot about Net Zero, but what actually is it? Net zero is the balance between the amount of

greenhouse gas produced, and the amount taken out of the atmosphere. Net zero is reached when the amount we add, is cancelled out by the amount we take away.

It is critical because it is the best chance to tackle climate change to reduce global warming. By reducing emissions in the future, everyone must work together to find ways to cut the carbon we produce.

That is why the Council is encouraging groups, clubs, schools, charities, parish councils and not-for-profits organisations, from all backgrounds, to apply to help them tackle climate change and reduce emissions within the District. The Climate Engagement Fund will help by investing in district-wide engagement activities or ideas for behaviour change.

Ideally, the Council are looking to fund proposals that improves awareness and action among the public. With a total of £50,000 to spend, the Council want to spend the money wisely on a few well-selected projects. Applicants can bid for funds ranging from between £3,000 and £25,000, projects with match funding or those leveraging in additional funds being looked upon more favourably.

The funding can be used towards events, equipment, research, feasibility studies, staffing or most costs associated with delivering community-based climate change project work.

In this first round, the Council are asking for expressions of interest about projects that produce measurable outputs. This could be shown through collected individual carbon footprints, changes over the life of a project or the numbers of people the project has engaged with.

South Hams District Council's Cllr Tom Holway, Executive Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity, said: "There are so many brilliant community groups and organisations in our district who are passionate about Climate Change who have ideas that we can help bring to life through this funding pot of money.

"We urge them to apply to us by Monday 7 March so we can select the projects we think meet our requirements.

"The process is simple, if they meet the entry criteria, they send in an expression of interest application. It will take us around four weeks to assess which projects will best benefit our communities. Those groups through to the second round will be invited to tell us more information about the project and if successful, they'll receive the Climate Engagement Funds to continue their project with our support. This will help us work with our community partners towards our aim to become carbon neutral so it's win-win for everyone."

To find out if you are eligible to apply, and to complete the Expression of Interest form, go to the grant information page on the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity website at:

www.climatechange.southhams.gov.uk/climate-engagement-fund

Applications close on Monday 7 March 2022.

Please email your completed Expressions of Interest to: climatechange@swdevon.gov.uk

Omicron Business Support Grant open for applications in the South Hams

A brand new support grant is available for businesses impacted by the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in late 2021 in the South Hams.

The Additional Restrictions Grant Omicron (ARGO) is a grant designed for businesses who felt the effects of the Omicron strain, but may not have qualified for the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant.

Businesses may qualify for the ARGO if:

It had to close as a result of the Omicron variant

It experienced supply chain issues as a result of the Omicron variant

It suffered cancellations as a result of the Omicron variant

It was impacted by Omicron, but is not eligible for the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant

In order to be eligible, your business must:

Be able to evidence the impact of Omicron on your business via cancellations, loss of stock, closures due to illness, etc

Have been trading on 30 December 2021

Cllr Hilary Bastone, South Hams Executive Member for Economy, said: “The quick spread of the Omicron strain of COVID-19 in the final months of 2021 had widespread consequences for all kinds of businesses across the South Hams.

“This new grant will hopefully help bridge the gap on lost revenue from the tail end of last year, including for those who are not eligible for other grants.

“I would urge business owners in the South Hams to look into the ARGO, see if they are eligible and apply.”

Applications for the grant must be submitted by 18 March 2022. Payments will be made by 31 March. There is a simple online application form for businesses to fill in to apply. Visit <https://southhams.gov.uk/ARGO> to find out more.

Levelling Up and County Deal

The long-awaited Levelling Up White Paper was published this week.

The White Paper sets 12 ambitious goals for Levelling up by 2030.

The pan-Devon area (including Plymouth and Torbay) has been identified as a pilot area and invited to develop a ‘county devolution deal’.

This is an opportunity to make the case to Government for the things our residents and communities need e.g. affordable housing.

This is not about structural change (local government reorganisation) or a directly elected mayor.

We would be able to build on the successful collaboration of DCC and Devon Districts throughout the pandemic and now during the recovery phase (Team Devon).

The White Paper also includes the following:

Councils will be given the power to require landlords of empty shops to fill them if they have been left vacant for too long.

All homes in the Private Rented Sector will have to meet a minimum standard – the Decent Homes Standard.

£150 payment towards energy bills

Information on the Scheme

The Chancellor announced that households in council tax bands A to D will receive a one-off payment of £150 towards the rising cost of energy bills. Billing Authorities will need to use their council tax data to identify households who will be eligible for the £150 payment (properties in Band A to D, excluding second homes and empty properties who are not eligible for the payment).

The Government has said that they expect residents who pay by Direct Debit to receive this money in April, with Local Authorities using bank account details to credit their account with a one-off payment of £150.

For households in Bands A to D who do not pay by Direct Debit, a process will need to be put in place for the payment to be made. The guidance which will be issued next week will set this out.

On top of this £150, discretionary funding of £144m will also be provided to support vulnerable people and individuals on low incomes that do not pay Council Tax, or that pay Council Tax for properties in Band E to H.

Separately, the Energy Bills rebate will provide around 28 million households with an upfront discount on their bills worth £200. Energy suppliers will apply the discount to domestic electricity customers' energy bills from October, with the Government meeting the costs. The discount will then be automatically recovered from people's bills in equal £40 instalments over the next five years. This will begin from 2023, when global wholesale gas prices are expected to come down.

Bank of England raises the Bank Base rate to 0.5%

The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee voted by a majority of 5-4 to increase Bank Rate by 0.25 percentage points, to 0.5% at its February meeting. Those members in the minority preferred to increase Bank rate by 0.5 percentage points, to 0.75%.

Compliments for the Business Grants Team

We would like to share with you a couple of compliments that the business grants team have received on the grants they are processing. Well done to all of the business grants team.

Dear Team - Now that is impressive, a swift reply and on a Sunday. Well Done.

Dear Sir/Madam – I would like to say thank you for your very professional dealings relating to the recent government sponsored hospitality grant, and specifically in my case, the speed of your response to my application which was dealt with within 1 week.

Thank you so much for your continued support throughout this terribly difficult time, especially for small businesses and their families, greatly appreciated. And your staff are amazing, so supportive if ever we have a query on the phone.

Incredible Archaeological Discoveries

Archaeologists have made a number of rare and nationally significant discoveries during investigations at Sherford, offering a unique glimpse of Ice Age Britain.

Amongst the amazing finds are well-preserved remains of several species of animals, including woolly mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, wolf, hyena, horse, reindeer, mountain hare and red fox.

It is hoped the Sherford discoveries will provide new insights into early Britain and enrich what is already known.

South Hams and West Devon Respond to County Deal

Following the news that the Government has given the go-head to negotiate a County Deal for Devon: See news story from Devon County Council:

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/news/government-gives-go-ahead-for-county-deal-for-devon-plymouth-and-torbay/>

South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council have issued the following statements:

A Spokesperson for West Devon Borough Council said: “We have been working well with our partners Devon County Council and the other Devon District Councils throughout the pandemic and we recognise the benefit of this close working relationship to deliver what our communities need. We are pleased to be invited by the Government to negotiate a County Deal with our partners across the pan Devon area.

Cllr Judy Pearce, Leader of South Hams District Council said: “During the COVID-19 pandemic we have greatly expanded the close working relationship we already enjoyed with our local authority neighbours. This has demonstrated just how effective we can be as a Devon-wide team when we all pull together. I welcome the opportunity we have now to negotiate this Devon wide County deal, and I see it as a way for us to further develop those working relationships for the benefit of all our residents and businesses. Furthermore, we may be a small rural and coastal District but South Hams has big ambitions for the future. A

County Deal has the potential to help us deliver against our strategic priorities, including much needed affordable housing, more job opportunities, helping us tackle our climate change challenges and the huge potential provided by the Plymouth and South Devon Freeport.”

www.southhams.gov.uk

www.westdevon.gov.uk

Extra £50k funding now available for local wellbeing projects

Voluntary groups in the South Hams are invited to apply for their share of a £50,000 funding pot to support wellbeing projects across the District.

South Hams District Council has launched a new grant for local voluntary and community groups. Worth up to £2,500 per group, the money can be used for any project or scheme that makes a positive difference to the health and wellbeing of local people. Community groups should apply for a grant at www.southhams.gov.uk/covid-community-fund by 7 March 2022.

The £50,000 funding has been sourced via Devon County Council. It is part of the District Council’s stated commitment to take positive, practical action to improve health and wellbeing.

Applications are welcomed from all voluntary community groups in the South Hams, from local youth groups and befriending services to community transport organisations and sports clubs. Grants worth up to £2,500 will be made to those groups who can demonstrate that the money can be used to improve health and wellbeing. This could include, but is not limited to, projects to make it easier for more people of all ages and abilities to:

Develop new friendships and reduce loneliness

Learn new, healthy cooking skills

Gain confidence or a sense of belonging

Explore our natural environment and countryside

Play a new sport or physical activity

Enjoy gardening

Get creative with art and crafts

Cllr Jonathan Hawkins, South Hams District Council’s Executive Member for Leisure, Health and Wellbeing said: “Our voluntary groups and organisations across the South Hams are doing amazing work already, supporting their communities and making a real difference to health and wellbeing. They understand what support and activities local people need and are perfectly placed to genuinely help others to get active or improve mental health. By working together with these valued volunteers and organisations by giving them the money they need to do even more good work, we know that we can genuinely improve wellbeing for local people.

“Whether your local community group or club needs money to organise a special event or to give you the resources to help more people, get in touch. Tell us what you want to do to improve wellbeing in the South Hams and how the money will help you achieve this. The online form is quick and simple to fill in and your group could benefit by up to £2,500.”

Community groups should apply for a grant at www.southhams.gov.uk/covid-community-fund by 7 March 2022.