

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

THIS MONTH'S TOPICS

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New Year, New Knowledge and New Skills!

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THIS MONTH'S TOPICS IN MORE DETAIL:-

The Deletti Project - Electric Vehicle Charging Points

The Deletti Project, led by Devon County Council is a partnership between local authorities and a selected energy supplier, to facilitate electric vehicle charging point installations in nominated council owned car parks.

Project funding was obtained from the European Development Fund and following a procurement & selection process, Scottish Power were the successful energy supplier selected for the partnership.

The Council have granted 10 year leases to Scottish Power who will install EV chargers within our car parks, in return for a small profit share of EV charger income. We continue to receive parking income from the spaces. Scottish Power are responsible for the full requirements for the installation including:

Legal Issues

National Grid i.e. provision of surveys, quotes and works programming

Wayleave Negotiations

Supplier Issues

Third party contractors & supply chain

Whilst the project has suffered unforeseen delays, this partnership has facilitated the installation of EV charging points in our selected car parks without the Council funding, procuring, or managing the installations.

Furthermore, the EV charging infrastructure will be managed and maintained throughout the lease term by Scottish Power.

A separate agreement with SWARCO operates at Glanvilles Mill car park, Ivybridge through the Highways England project to provide EV chargers on the A38 corridor. This provides a rapid charge for two parking bays and has been in operation since September 2020.

Project Update

Officers attend weekly meetings to continue to drive the project forward and manage the concession agreement.

All EV charging points must be completed by April 2023 as per the funding agreement. The latest update as per meeting of 27 January 2022 is as follows:

Mayors Avenue Car Park, Dartmouth – Live since June 2022 to date it has had 515 charging sessions up to December 2022

Creek Car Park, Salcombe – Live since August 2022 to date it has had 79 charging sessions up to December 2022

Pavilions Car Park, Totnes – Live since December 2022 however, awaiting lining of the car parking bays in February 2023 to complete works. Had 3 charging sessions in December 2022.

Poundwell Meadow Car Park, Modbury – Live since December 2022 however, awaiting lining of the car parking bays in February 2023 to complete works. Had 5 charging sessions in December 2022.

Quay Car Park, Kingsbridge - Due to be commissioned in February 2022

Park & Ride Car Park, Dartmouth - Leases completed awaiting DNO date, civils, meter and commissioning

Fore Street Car Park, Kingsbridge - Due to be commissioned in March 2023

Victoria Street Car Park, Totnes - Due to be commissioned in February 2023

Heaths Nursery Car Park, Totnes – Unable to secure all necessary consents to meet the funding deadline.

N.B. To ensure the same electric charging point provision is achieved in Totnes (6), the charging points allocated for Heaths Nursery will be provided in either Victoria Street or Pavilion car park

Going Forward

The Deletti Two project, another partnership with other local authorities led by Devon County Council has obtained ORCS funding and is being provided by GAMMA, will deliver an EV charger installations at Lower Union Road and Duncombe Park Car Park, Kingsbridge and Steamer Quay and North Street car park in Totnes.

This project is also facing significant delays and is currently 6 months behind schedule. The delay mainly relates to legal issues relating to the concession agreement and National Grid. Officers have fortnightly meetings to drive this project forward.

South Hams Council Tax Reduction scheme designed to help more people than ever

South Hams District Council is looking at helping more residents than ever through its Council Tax Reduction scheme, to help with the impacts of the cost of living crisis.

The authority's Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme offers significant reductions to council tax payments to households facing financial pressures. The scheme is more important than ever, with many households struggling with the cost of living crisis.

Every year, the Council must review its CTR scheme, to decide if they are going to continue with the same scheme or revise it. The authority held a public consultation throughout October and November 2022 to gauge the opinions of residents.

58 people responded to the consultation questionnaire, either partially or fully.

Among the most significant proposed change to the CTR scheme is to "uplift" bands 2, 3 and 4 of the scheme by 20% (above current inflation) to take into account the cost of living crisis. This would give those households in these bands the opportunity to increase their income and still remain eligible for support. 70% of those who responded in the consultation supported these changes.

Other proposed changes include a change to the minimum income floor for self-employed people with caring responsibilities, which has support from 70% of respondents, and tweaking the earnings disregard to make it easier for the council to administer the scheme and make it easier to understand for residents, which was supported by 72% of those who took part in the consultation.

The recommendations went before the Council's Executive on 26 January, with the recommendations to be fully agreed by Council on 16 February

Cllr Nicky Hopwood, South Hams Executive Member for Benefits, said: "We know how hard the cost of living crisis is hitting our residents here in the South Hams. The changes we're suggesting to our Council Tax Reduction scheme, including its simplification, should offer some more support to those who could really use it right now."

This scheme will run alongside the government's Council Tax Support Fund, which is offering additional support to the 3.8 million households already receiving Council Tax support (reduction), while also providing councils with the resources and flexibility to determine the local approaches to support other vulnerable households in their area.

Council using funds to support households in the South Hams

South Hams District Council is set to use £50,000 of Government COVID-19 grant funding to support vulnerable households through the cost of living crisis this winter.

Each year, the Council receives a Discretionary Housing Payment Fund from the Department of Work and Pensions. This year, the Council received £91,382 to support residents struggling with rent, security deposits and to supplement shortfalls in Universal Credit and Housing Benefit.

The fund was exhausted in December, due to the exceptional circumstances created by the cost of living crisis, and the additional pressures being put on the finances of residents.

However, the Council has been eager to continue supporting residents through the crisis, and has identified that a further £50,000 can be added to the fund from money left over from COVID-19 grant funding.

Cllr Nicky Hopwood, South Hams Executive Member for Benefits, said: "I am really pleased that we will be able to support residents further with this funding.

"There is no doubt that this money is needed and it's just another step that the Council is taking to help people through the cost of living crisis. We will continue to explore every avenue to help our residents where we can."

You can find out about the range of help the Council is offering through the cost of living crisis by visiting our website: www.southhams.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help

Council agrees how it will spend recent £1m funding to improve sustainability

Plans have been released for how the District Council plans to spend the £1m funding announced recently to help support the economy and reduce carbon emissions in the District.

The Council's Executive Committee met on 26 January 2023 and agreed how recent funding of over £1m would be used to support a wide range of ambitious programmes committed to creating 'Better Lives for All' for residents, communities and businesses across the District.

The overall programme which will run for three years will see up to £257,856 spent in its first year with the remaining funding spent by the end of the 2024/2025 financial year.

The Committee has agreed to a number of programmes and projects within four key priority areas.

Active and inclusive travel for all. The Council has agreed to the commissioning of a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to improve both walking and cycling

routes across the District. The outcomes of the LCWIP will inform the Council's next steps in developing more inclusive and eco-friendly travel provisions and infrastructure.

The Council's roll out of its specialist advisors programme will see wider business support and consultancy across the South Hams business community. Advisors will work with organisations to set out pathways to decarbonise their activities and for local construction businesses, help ensure they are ahead of the curve in order to meet future planning and building regulations. Support will also be given to Community Energy Groups to enhance their important work in ensuring energy efficiency.

Feasibility studies and future planning of local marine activities and provisions will help to support the decarbonisation of the local marine economy. Projects will include work with the Lower Dart Ferry, Salcombe Water Taxis and Salcombe Harbour to develop new technologies and processes in order to reduce carbon emissions and promote positive climate change.

Partnerships will be developed across the local agriculture sector, knowledge organisations, businesses and tech companies to develop a community of research and development in order to ensure the culture of regenerative farming. Work will include the roll out of programmes with organisations such as the Devon Agri-Tech Alliance to move farming into new sustainable ways of working. A new distribution project will also help increase opportunities for locally produced food and drink to reach local marketplaces, reducing the carbon footprint.

Councillor Hilary Bastone, Deputy Leader of South Hams District Council, said: "We are delighted to be able to share more detailed plans of how this important funding will be used in the next three years.

"These important projects within our marine, agriculture, transport and wider business sectors will continue to drive our work in ensuring 'Better Lives for all' for the entire South Hams community now and in the future."

These are only some of the range of projects currently planned with some activities set to begin in January, and others scheduled to run from April 2023 until the end of March 2025.

You can watch the full Executive meeting online here:
www.youtube.com/user/SouthHamsCouncil

The next scheduled Executive meeting is Thursday 2 March at 10 a.m.

Details can be found at www.southhams.gov.uk/Executive

More Flexibility and Support for Residents

A range of measures to increase the way vulnerable residents and tenants in privately rented homes will be supported have been recommended for the next stage of approval by the District Council's Executive.

At a meeting held on Thursday 26 January, the Executive recommended to the next Full Council at their February meeting that a number of home and enforcement policies should be updated.

The recommendations would make a positive difference to the health and wellbeing of South Hams' residents.

The aim of the first policy change is to remove as much bureaucracy (red tape) as possible that surrounds how long it takes to get home adaption grants approved. This means that the Council will be able to get help to people more quickly for essential adaptations through Disabled Facility Grants.

There are a number of grants available through the Government's Better Care Fund. Some grants are 'means tested', this is a financial assessment to decide if the Council will pay towards your application, and some are not.

The Accessible Homes Grant will no longer need to be means tested for 'through floor' lifts, bathrooms and applications for children. This will mean quicker processing of grants for residents. This will be particularly helpful for families where children are waiting for big adaptations like extra care rooms. Importantly, it will also speed up the transfer of care from hospitals back into the patient's home. Something that is crucial for the wellbeing of the patient but also imperative for hospitals and other patients on waiting lists or in need of emergency care.

An example for a children's care room costing £50,000, could mean a Disabled Facility Grant of £30,000 or an Accessible Homes Grant of £20,000, neither of which would now be means tested. The DFGs have never been means tested for children and the AHGs means testing has now been removed.

The Healthy Home Grants would double from £5,000 to £10,000 for home repairs and improvements. The grant would be more flexible, and for example could help to keep residents safer in their homes from slips, trips and falls.

An increase of £1,000 per application from £2,000 to £3,000 to reflect the recent increases in building costs is in line for the 'ECO Flex Top Ups'. Benefitting from a name change to the 'Warm Up Grants' would make the grant more easily identifiable.

Cllr Judy Pearce, Leader of South Hams District Council, said: "I'm really pleased to recommend these reports to Full Council. Often we have our hands tied with unnecessary bureaucratic processes beyond our control. Now we have proposed to amend the policies and make them much quicker and much more flexible.

"This policy is going to mean that DFGs get carried out much faster, which for many people is really important, as people never apply for them until they actually need them and then they need them as soon as possible. This will really make a huge difference for many people who need to apply.

"Some of the grant applications will no longer have the lengthy means testing, which will help our residents in a much more sensible approach to the process. A benefit to everyone involved!"

In an additional policy update recommendation, any landlord who is not fulfilling their duties to their tenants could be fined under new recommendations approved by the Executive to the next Full Council meeting in February.

This would go further in helping to improve the condition of rental homes, and help towards the Council's ongoing Climate Change goals for the District.

Civil penalty fines would be issued for landlords who do not have a valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). An EPC certificate tells you how energy efficient a building is and gives it a rating from A (very efficient) to G (inefficient).

It is important so rental properties don't fall below the accepted standards. Those that do are likely to suffer from damp and mould which is particularly harmful to health, as seen through the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak from Rochdale recently.

There is a risk that landlords who don't follow the rules may also remove properties which are likely to fail inspections, or which do not have valid certificates, from the rental sector. This would add hugely to the already struggling housing crisis in the South Hams

Any increase in changes to enforcement action, and any resulting damp and mould issues found within rental properties would be dealt with quickly and effectively.

Cllr Pearce continues: "For too long there have been landlords who don't give their tenants the properties they deserve. We're in such short supply for housing stock in the District that having greater speed and flexibility to be able to fine those who don't keep to the accepted energy efficiency ratings, and allow damp and mould to run unchecked is completely dreadful.

"This policy change would allow us the chance to stop those landlords from operating in the shadows. We've offered support and incentives in the past, so next is enforcement to encourage them to bring their properties up to scratch and keep them within the rental market. Exactly where we need to keep them."

Both policies will now progress for a final decision at Full Council, which will be held on Thursday 16 February 2023.

Rural Cost of Living Survey

Research commissioned by the Rural Services Network (RSN) last year shows rural areas are suffering more acutely from the rise in the cost of living compared to urban areas.

To help understand more about rural household budgets, at what is a very difficult time for many, the RSN have launched a survey along with the Rural Issues group of Citizens Advice.

To ensure that the survey provides as much insight as possible, please can you promote the survey within your towns and parishes. It closes on Friday 31 March 2023.

Homes For Ukraine Update

You will be aware the Homes For Ukraine scheme is now in month ten of the support that is being provided for Ukrainians that have arrived in our area.

The total number of Ukrainian guests that have arrived in South Hams as their primary location is 213 (and the team are also supporting another 177 in West Devon).

A further 43 visas have been granted for guests who are yet to travel to our area (and a further 32 in West Devon).

To date, the focus has been on welcoming guests and ensuring they have the ability to settle in the area with support to claim welfare benefits, open bank accounts, obtain national insurance numbers, apply for schooling, registering with health organisations and once settled seek employment.

We have also been supporting our hosts with inflated 'thank you' payments based on the number of guests and having the team available for any support that has been required.

This has been successful and we have only required temporary accommodation on three occasions.

In comparison, our neighbours in Plymouth only have the same number of arrivals as us but their temporary accommodation usage has been four times higher than ours.

Central Government have recently announced an extension to the Homes For Ukraine scheme for a further 12 months making a total of 24 months from the date guests arrive. The extension brings with it a change in the funding available for guests.

As Members will know, until 31 December 2022 for each guest arriving through the scheme, the government provided funding to Devon County Council of £10,500, of which we received 60% to fund wrap-around support, which we can carry forward.

The new guest funding from 1 January 2023 is £5,900 per guest and we are in discussions at Team Devon on how the funding allocations will change based on the new lower amount available.

Due to the extension of the scheme, we have joined colleagues from Exeter and East Devon forming a working party to lead Team Devon's workstream on policy changes required to ensure we are continuing to support our guests as required.

Moving forward we are continuing with the welcome procedures for new arrivals but are evolving towards sustainable living for the guests that have set routes in our area including but not limited to:

Continuing with English speaking lessons and ensuring all of our guests have access to attend

Bespoke English lessons with a focus on specific work needs for highly skilled guests

Working with the Jobcentre to support guests into appropriate employment

Qualification recognition and statements of comparability to UK qualifications as required

Working with organisations to provide CV Writing and Interview Skills coaching

Developing networks of Ukrainian guests to encourage ownership of their time in our area

Working with the schools to ensure they are obtaining the funding to support our guests as required

Working with current and potential hosts to ensure an adequate supply of host accommodation is available in our area

Providing housing advice and working with landlords to support guests into the private rental sector when required

Jubilee Village Halls Fund

Last year Defra announced a fund to mark Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee.

The Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund is to support the modernisation and improvement of village halls so that they are fit for purpose. They should provide activities in their communities which promote one or more of the following:

Improved health and/or wellbeing and/or reduction in rural loneliness.

Positive impact on the local environment, contributes towards net zero.

Support for the local rural economy.

Promotion of community cohesion.

The grants are for capital improvements only so if you are looking to extend or improve facilities in your village hall, apply now!

You have until 11.59 p.m. on 20 January to submit your application.

Find out more about requirements and how to apply visit the ACRE website.

Stalking Awareness Bitesize Agenda

South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership is working with Devon and Cornwall Police to provide professionals with a bitesize awareness session on stalking and harassment.

The partnership is really keen to increase professionals knowledge around stalking, particularly helping improve understanding of the impact this can have within our communities.

We think this session will be valuable to a wide range of professionals and particularly want to focus on those in education and social care settings. Please forward this message to anyone who you think would be interested in attending.

The sessions will be held on Wednesday 1 March at 3.30 p.m. and will be free to attend. Please register for your tickets here.

Stalking Awareness Bitesize Agenda

3.30 p.m. - Introduction and Welcome – Superintendent James Tarr, Devon and Cornwall Police Portfolio holder for stalking and harassment

3.40 p.m. - Temporary Chief Inspector Dawn Perriam Devon and Cornwall Police VAWG portfolio lead and Serious Violence Programme lead and Stalking and Harassment Deputy lead

What is stalking and harassment?

How much is it an issue?

How does it impact on people in Devon and Cornwall?

How to report?

4.10 p.m. - Question and answers

4.30 p.m. – Close

Ivybridge play areas to benefit from new equipment

South Hams District Council has awarded a contract for works at Woodlands Park (The Spinney) and St John's Close Play Areas in Ivybridge.

Both play areas are set to get some exciting new play equipment, thanks to funding from South Hams District Council.

A public consultation was carried out to find out the community's preferences for new play equipment at Woodlands Park (The Spinney) through onsite posters and social media promotion, linked to an online questionnaire. The results showed the community's desire for both a climbing frame and a zip wire.

At St John's Close, an existing climbing frame which has reached the end of its life will be replaced. The equipment at both sites will primarily cater for children of primary school age.

Following a competitive tender process, experienced playground design company, Kompan, have been awarded the contract to install the equipment at both sites. Kompan produce long lasting and high quality playgrounds and their designs were felt to best meet the needs of the community.

The total cost of the works is £52,000. The works at St John's Close will be funded as part of the Capital Play Parks Renewal Scheme and the works at Woodlands Park will be funded from planning development funds (Section 106 funds) from the nearby Harford Mews development.

Work is expected to take place over the winter and take around three weeks. Notices will be put up in the parks before the work commences.

South Hams District Council's Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Jonathan Hawkins, said: "I am thrilled that the Council is able to provide funding for this new play equipment and create opportunities for important outdoor play for children in the area.

“We’re also glad to have agreed a contract with Kompan, who have a proven track record in delivering high quality play equipment for children. I look forward to the spring, when this equipment will be a great incentive to encourage children outdoors again after the cold winter months.”

Senior Marketing Specialist of Kompan, Stephan Woodd, said: “KOMPAN were delighted to be chosen to supply and install these wonderful community projects in Ivybridge and look forward to seeing the play equipment being used and enjoyed for years to come.”

Annual Rough Sleeper Count

Members will be aware that the Local Authority is required to complete an Annual Rough Sleeper Count.

For 2022, the count was conducted on the night of 14 November into the morning of 15 November. While the count occurred in November, the numbers have to be officially verified by Government officials. This has now been completed and I am now able to share the final outcome with you.

This year's count identified five rough sleepers within the South Hams. This is an increase from last year's count of two. Our understanding from our verification meeting with Homeless Link is that this sadly is a trend across the country. When the national statistics are released, we will be doing some comparative analysis. This will be some time next month.

Our outreach team continue to support and engage with all rough sleepers, and all of the five identified have received offers of accommodation and access to other services.

We are pleased to advise that subsequent to the count, two of the five identified have accepted accommodation offers and are no longer rough sleeping. There will always be some people who choose this lifestyle and don't wish to have bricks or mortar.

We are engaging with them to see if there are other alternative types of accommodation they would wish to move in to. We will continue to work with them to see if there are any other solutions we can assist with.

Conducting an annual count across the UK provides us with useful comparative data for monitoring national trends. However, as part of our commitment to ending the need to rough sleep, our team monitor and seek engagement with rough sleepers within our area throughout the year.

Over the past 12 months, our team have engaged with 12 rough sleepers, with seven of these being successfully supported into long term housing. This has been made possible by the hard work of our Outreach Navigators, who work with some very challenging individuals often at a point of crisis in their lives and seek to improve their outcomes and opportunities.

Members will be pleased to know that the two housing first properties purchased in our area are now in use, and providing a valuable opportunity to learn how to sustain and maintain a tenancy, improve health and wellbeing outcomes and enable them to move forward positively.

Let's Talk Pre-Teens

The South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership has been working with a wide range of partners to produce a toolkit to support parents of pre-teens (9-12 year olds).

This has been developed as a result of the resounding success of the Let's Talk Teenagers programme, which has seen 2,497 engagements with parents and carers so far.

Free online sessions through the Let's Talk programme for parents and carers of pre-teens are available this month.

The Let's Talk programme is designed to increase parent and carers' knowledge around the key risks young people face, while giving simple tools and techniques to help them support their child.

The partnership acknowledges that parenting can be really difficult, especially in such challenging times.

Please feel free to forward this information on to any residents that you think may benefit from the sessions and it would be great if you could share any social media posts you see.

Tickets are free and available at Let's Talk Pre-Teens.

The topics covered will be as follows:

Tuesday 17 January

Biology

Difficult emotions

Substance misuse

Tuesday 24 January

Relationships

Exploitation

Pornography

Societal Stereotypes

Tuesday 31 January

Physical risks

Safety planning

Mental health

Self-care

Claire Birch

New Year, New Knowledge and New Skills!

Following on from the success of previous free illegal money lending awareness talks held over the past couple of years, there is to be a series of talks on loan sharks and the wider issue throughout January, February and March.

Should anyone have any difficulty in registering for the talks via Eventbrite, then just email me your preferred dates and I'll add you onto them from my end.

Please feel free to circulate this to your contacts, networks and forums, or if you would prefer a bespoke face to face talk for your team or organisation, please just email me.

What with the current cost of living crisis, these talks and the subjects they cover are more important than ever before, as loan sharks will be looking to add to the 1.08 million people in England that are estimated to be currently using them.

Dave Monk, LIAISE Officer, England Illegal Money Lending Team