

## **DCC Update Report for Petrockstowe Parish Council – March 2024**

Dear Councillors,

As promised here is my written report.

### *Devolution/Local Government Reorganisation*

Since January's meeting the Government have confirmed that elections for DCC will now take place in May, even though they have reiterated their intention to abolish the two tier structure and sweep away Devon County Council and Torridge District Council. The Minister has set a deadline of **March 21<sup>st</sup>** to submit interim proposals. Currently the Ministerial timeline asks for final proposals to be submitted by **28<sup>th</sup> November**.

If you believe the Minister's Letter to councils in Devon, new unitary elections could take place as soon as May next year. So, good news for election aficionados. We will have elections in May this year for the County Council and then potentially have elections for the new shadow unitary council in May next year!

Is that likely? Probably not in my personal opinion. I imagine the target will be to have the new unitary elections in May 2027 instead of the District Council Elections, however there are 8 other local authority areas chosen ahead of Devon to reorganise first. Any delays there will almost certainly have a knock on impact on Devon unless the Government rapidly scales up capacity in the Ministry of Local Government...

So, we have a deadline to work to and following further guidance from the Government, it has been agreed to submit multiple proposals to the Government. A Special Full Council meeting will be held on Thursday to discuss this and a huge amount of work has taken place on these indicative proposals, working with a myriad of community partners to assess the pros and cons of the following potential models:

- two unitary authorities – one covering Plymouth and another covering the rest of Devon
- a two unitary north Devon/South Devon split, with one council for Plymouth, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay and another for Exeter, East Devon, North Devon, Torridge, West Devon and Mid Devon
- a two unitary south west and north east split, with one council for Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon and another for Exeter, East Devon, Torbay, Teignbridge, North Devon, Torridge and Mid Devon
- a three unitary option of Plymouth, greater Exeter (formed of Exeter, East Devon and Mid Devon) and the rest of Devon
- a three unitary option, with Plymouth remaining on existing boundaries, a new unitary council formed of Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge and another made up of Torbay, South Hams, Teignbridge and West Devon
- Also modelled for benchmarking purposes only is the option of a single unitary authority covering the whole of Devon.

**The proposals align with ministerial guidance which says that new unitary councils should have minimum populations of 500,000 people each and align with existing district council boundaries.**

These proposals are **indicative** only. Within the tight deadline the Government gave us, none of the Councils in Devon have the data available or analysed properly to work out which options work or do not work.

With the County Election on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, its important that this document is a sound basis for the new Council to pick up the work over the coming months. The new Council will make the decision on what to submit to government on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2025.

The two key points I would make, whatever is finally agreed is 1. **The Unitary/Unitaries has to work for the residents of Devon.** 2. **It has to be financially sustainable.**

#### *Other Matters*

*DCC Budget* – The final budget will be agreed by DCC Full Council in February. Despite the loss of the rural services grant, additional income from the second homes council tax has ensured we have a balanced budget and no major service reductions or cuts. There will be an additional £4m going into the Highways Budget... though had the Rural Services Grant not been taken away I think we could have found an extra £10m from the Second Homes Council Tax for Highways. Instead, this funding has had to go into other services to prevent major cutbacks within Adult Social Care or Children's Services.

Overall the net revenue budget rises to £784 million. Of which approx. £383 million is for Adult Social Care (up 8.2%) and £237 million is for Children's Services (up 5.5%). That leaves a rather more modest circa £164 million for everything else from roads to libraries.

Again, happy to talk in more detail on the budget at the next meeting.

*And finally* – as you may have seen, I will be standing down from the County Council in May to pursue a new career in the aviation industry as a commercial pilot. I have outlined my reasons why in the email I sent to the Parish Clerk so won't repeat them here. However, I would like to thank the Parish Council for their support over the eight years I've had the honour to represent them in local government. I will really miss working with Petrockstowe Parish Council, it is a lovely community to represent and, despite all of the challenges, I think working together these last 8 years we've been able to get lots of road repairs done from the main road through the village, the road up to Gribble, the Merton Mile, and a new and safer pedestrian exit/crossing on the Tarka Trail by Petrockstow station. As ever, there is still more to do but we have made progress over the last 8 years.

I would have liked to have seen a resolution to America Lane but that unfortunately has been further delayed into the summer as the Public Rights of Way Officer is still carrying out her research and so that will be decided by the new committee later this year.

I remain fully committed to my role until polling day on May 1<sup>st</sup> so any problems between now and then please do get in touch as I am still here to help until then!

See you around,  
Andrew

## **EXTRAORDINARY FULL COUNCIL**

Torridge District Council has announced that it has been awarded just over £20,070,000 in capital investment with £250,000 revenue funding to support several projects to benefit residents across the district. The projects announced by government, are being funded as part of the Community Regeneration Partnership Scheme (previously known as Levelling Up Partnership) and will support the council's strategic ambitions and deliver lasting benefits to Torridge. We are very pleased to have been awarded this government funding for our communities.

The capital projects being supported by the Government are geographically spread across the district and cover a wide variety of themes:

- **Bideford Business Park (£2.6m)** - acquisition and development toward high value manufacturing and engineering facilities.
- **Bideford Pannier Market (£1.475m)** - modernisation and improvements to make fit for future and wider use.
- **Hatchmoor Industrial Estate (£1.6m)** - The project will design a scheme, achieve the necessary consents and then deliver the services and infrastructure to site for future development of workspace for high value manufacturing and engineering facilities
- **Holsworthy Agri-Business Park (£7.3m)** - development of Agri-related innovation, retail, and professional space.
- **Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre (£2m)** - additional funding to support the build.
- **Agri-tech nutrient pilot scheme (£0.3m)** - testing the adaptation of a slurry condensing unit to recover nutrients and reduce the pollutants going into rivers.
- **Westward Ho! Water Quality Monitoring Buoy (£0.1m)** - Installation of water quality monitoring buoy to provide real-time water quality data for beach users, tourism businesses and for managers of environmental systems.
- **Cleave Wood, Bideford (£1.2m)** - The design and delivery of site servicing and infrastructure as a first phase of a residential scheme in response to local housing needs.
- **Social housing decarbonisation and EPC rating improvements (£1.5m)** - pipeline of works to improve 57 properties with E & F ratings to C or B.
- **Bideford Hospital (£0.75m)** - reconfiguration site to create a "Community Health & Wellbeing Hub" with multi-purpose space.
- **The Globe Hotel, Great Torrington (£0.52m)** - Initial capital works on Grade II Listed long-derelict hotel to redevelop into an 11-bedroom hotel and restaurant (in a town with neither) with a strong training presence.
- **Holsworthy Manor Offices (£0.725m)** - Phased redevelopment inc. decarbonisation, remodelling to enable improved accessibility, flow and to increase opportunity for flexible community space (for example, co- working)

The ability to achieve such a diverse spread of projects and themes was made possible through the establishment of the Torridge Place Board. The Board, made up of 20 representatives from a cross section of local businesses and services, was established in February 2024. Since then, it has been responsible for steering a potential programme of works, designed to improve the long-term economic opportunities for the region and deliver positive environmental and health benefits to those people living in Torridge.

## **Notice of Motion**

Cllr Thomas proposed a Motion to support Proportional Representation (PR) which would ensure all votes count, have equal value, and seats won match votes cast. The introduction of PR IN Scotland has increased turnout by 44.8% at the last election in 2022. In Torridge, the average turnout was 33%. It was proposed that the UK Government bring forward legislation to run using a PR voting system and TDC write to the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition to support PR. After short discussion and a recorded vote, the Motion was passed 19 for and 10 against.

## **External Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

We had a very constructive and excellent presentations regarding Arts, Music, theatre and creativity from the Chief Execs Emma Marston, the Plough Torrington, Harriet Copper from the Burton Art Gallery in Bideford and Phil Parker co/founder Director of Artmakers in Bideford and some public speakers! There was a lot of interest and highlighted the importance of Arts and the creative industries in our community for young, old, and reaching out to those with physical and mental disorders, particularly in these troubled times. Involving young people, schools, workshops, plays/theatre, comedy, and being creative by nature, and working with TDC, and NDC, Arts Council, Lottery, and others for funding.,

The Plough in Torrington has a Youth Theatre with 70 members. Between June - August this year there are 29 shows, and 13 venues scheduled including Panto this April. The Plough has 65 volunteers with 7 full time staff currently. It is 50 Years Anniversary of the Plough so watch this space! A better bus service between Barnstaple, Bideford, and the Plough would help especially in the evenings.

Burton Art Gallery in Bideford is 75 years old in October and had over 149,000 visitors including from many parts of UK and overseas. The Burton Gallery is somewhat hidden by trees along Kingsley road and Victoria Park though like the Plough recognises the importance of youth/schools and had 19 school visits. The upstairs gallery is to be developed, and the adjoining Cafe Du Parc does very well with ground floor access to the Burton. Fantastic ceramics, art along with famous artists are on show and noted internationally with free entrance to their galleries.

Artmakers Exhibition is located 1st Floor, The Quay Bideford. Artmakers has a virtual gallery made up of over 200 local artists. Workshops, working with mental health, textile artists and largely voluntary! We are very fortunate to have so much creativity here in Devon. Something we need to be shouting about and there was also discussion about the impact large murals could have in our towns in Torridge. Is a mini-Melbourne a future possibility for Torridge?

Best wishes,  
Cheryl

Cllr Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin  
Shebbear and Langtree Ward,