

County & District Councillor's Monthly Report Cllr. Jacqi Hodgson - Date: 4th March 2024
Devon County Councillor for Totnes & Dartington
(incl. Harberton, Harbertonford, Staverton, Landscope & part of Berry Pomeroy)
South Hams District Councillor for Dartington & Staverton
SHDC Executive Portfolio Councillor for Waste and Composting

Devon County Council: key issues

DCC Full Council meeting 15.02.24. The budget and the Council tax precept, as set out in my February report was formally approved. As part of the Independents and Green group of members, we tabled the following statement and amendment:

The Independent & Green Group Welcomes and supports:

1. The overall 6.3% increase in the budget, specifically the 10.4% in Children and Young People's Futures and 6% in Integrated Adult Social Care, while recognising this does not meet the Inflationary, National Living Wage & Demand pressures facing us and does not help with the years of cuts by government to our core funding.

We Support

(a) The £2.3 million increase in the internal and external fostering budget, and the increased number of in-house foster carers by 30, and £3.2 million investment in the development of three in[1]house children's homes reducing the reliance on out of county placements and independent fostering agencies, something we have pushed for, for many years.

(b) The increase of 525 places in Devon's Special School estate.

(c) The increase in Member Locality Budgets to £8,000 per Member, as local members can help support their communities.

(d) Welcome the extra £1.152m in cyclic Maintenance of the Highway. We have pushed for this in many years.

(e) We reluctantly support the 4.99% Council Tax increase, recognising that failing to do so, will put at further risk, the services that our communities rely on, particularly our most vulnerable residents.

We will support the Cabinets Budget, if the following amendments are accepted, as we believe if we are again asking the public to pay more, that they see an improvement or at least services maintained.

A – The £175,000 reduction proposed to Devon library Services are reversed, recognising the positive impact Libraries have on our communities.

B – An increase of £250,000 to the Public Rights of Way & Cycle Network budget from £750,000 to £1,000,000.

C – Increase PROW Wardens by 4, to cover the 3000 miles of footpaths, split 2 extra for North & South Team. Total Cost including on costs £180,000

D – An increase of £100,000 to £250,000 LTP Budget for 20mph Zones supported by Parish Councils.

E – The Administration commits to look at the management Structures across the council, to seek to reduce the number of Managers we currently have.

F – Commit to write to each Devon Conservative MP, outlining the severe underfunding Devon County Council gets for School Funding & High Needs Block funding, asking them why they voted for a settlement that continues to disadvantage Devon's Children. We are 114 out of 151 in the funding Table.

This has led to the severe situation the Council finds itself in, being the Authority with the biggest SEND accumulated overspend on its books forecast to be £163M by the end of the year.

Devon's Children are underfunded by £213 each per Year.

We have 94,302 Children, meaning Devon is short changed by £20,086,326 against the average.

High Needs Block Funding we are underfunded against the national average by £96.06 per head.

We have 9,401 children in this bracket, meaning we are down by £868,478.46 a year against the average.

Devon is underfunded for Schools & High Needs block by almost £21 million a year, meaning our children cannot get the support others get. This of course leads to children falling behind and needing expensive interventions later on. This has gone on for years, so we say Devon is not overspent, it is underfunded. We are now in this budget, asked to put £5m from capital projects to the safety valve for our negotiations with

government to pay back the overspend, it will of course involve committing to not supporting so many children in the same way going forward. Which capital budgets will this come from, most probably our crumbling road network.

G – Public Health, we are worse off than School Funding, being 139 out of 150 that receive Public Health Funding. We receive £37 per head of population, whereas the national average is £70-£80. Its hard to get the exact figure, but lets assume we have 800,000 residents and if its £70 that's a staggering £26.4 million we don't get against the average! Just imagine what we could do for our communities, if we just got the average. So we write to the Government & all Devon MP's asking why they see it fit that Devon is so badly funded.

We believe F & G proves that we are not being levelled up, but levelled down by this government and its an insult to the people of Devon, when we hear Devon MPs and Government ministers talking about how they are levelling up. The fact is, they are using money taken from us originally. £150m in Core Grant a year gone since 2010, meaning we now spend officer time and money on bidding for pots of money.

Our Budget Amendments A-D have been checked by the Finance Team and confirmed as Legal & Appropriate for consideration by Council.

They total £705,000 which will be paid for by:

A – The Citizen Engagement Budget , formerly known as Communications, is reduced by a further £500,000 from £1,061,000 to £561,000 as we do not believe we need 28 staff effectively acting as spin doctors for the administration. We have 60 councillors that regularly engage with our communities.

B - £205,000 is taken out of the Executive, Legal & Democratic Services , reducing it to £8,186,000 from £8,391,000. This could be done by reducing the number of staff from 111 – 106

A & B are moved into the relevant budget lines.

I also made the following statement:

Regarding youth services, universal access to youth services was stopped by DCC in 2013. We now have a situation where high levels of anxiety and stress in young people , some as young as 8 years old, coupled with rises in knife crime and drugs in teenagers. We urgently need the re-establishment of proper youth services to address this.

We have heard a lot about the problems of this lack of guaranteed funding and that we have to await various government handouts that are for specific projects, programmes and services. We have become puppets struggling for the next windfall which sometimes doesn't come and often is far less than needed. Yet it is us who get the blame for poor services when the real problem is this government's mess and a crazy political ideology.

Today's announced recession, based on the last 2 quarters of 2023 will be a disappointment to many but simply proves mis-management of our economy and poor decision making. The gap between the haves and have nots is growing and the cost of living crisis and housing crisis is further evidence. There is a serious disconnect between our Government and its duty to the people.

I might add that we should look at some of our additional DCC decisions that are high cost and simply rolling out the government's policies which quite frankly I view as Local Authorities effectively laundering government initiatives for so-called levelling up. Particularly, the South Devon Freeport, where a £60M investment of public funds is being made available to private bodies and includes DCC's borrowing of £15.9M; this would be better off borrowed and spent on our young people.

The Devolution Deal is yet more money being spent on moving the decision making deckchairs. We should have learnt from the inadequacy of performance by its predecessor the Heart of South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

Rather than the endless spend on private and commissioned services, we would have more control and better value for money to bring back in house services as a matter of urgency.

We have problems and won't solve them all today, but in an attempt at a modest improvement to the budget, I support the amendment proposed by Cllr Biederman on behalf of the Independent and Green Group. It includes carefully considered measures that could provide a better balance to assist the people we represent in these difficult times. How we borrow and spend public funds and who we prioritise, defines who we are as Councillors and citizens. I urge you to support the Independent and Green Group amendments

The amendment was not supported across the chamber and therefore fell.

Question from Councillor Hodgson - Re: 20MPH speed limits

How do the costs compare between our current process of assessment, scoring, selection of applications and subsequent implementation of between 4-6 new 20mph speed limit roads each year, rather than the once-off cost of the implementation of a county wide policy to make 20mph the default speed to replace the current 30mph speed limits? (Cornwall County Council has done this and could provide a useful model for this comparison – they aim to reduce both death and serious injury by 50% on their roads by 2030 and believe 20mph speeds will support this)

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES - *In the past two financial years (22/23 and 23/24) a total budget of £250,000 (£100,000 and £150,000 respectively) has been allocated to the provision of new 20mph limits in our communities, the assessment has been that this would provide for a total of 10 new speed limits.*

The cost of introducing a new 20mph (or any other) speed limit comprises of design, legal and physical implementation costs. If a County Policy were adopted and changes to existing 30mph speed limits dealt with in a single tranche the vast majority of costs would remain; design work would still be required, and (unless there were change in national legislation) signing would need to be changed in the same manner at the same cost. There would be a small saving in the public Advertising of our Traffic Regulation Order as a single entity, however this accounts for less than 10% of current delivery costs.

My Supplementary question: Why do they need design works for a simple switch over of 30mph to 20mph. Even the signs could simply be repainted.
(No further reply)

Public asked to have their say on Devon and Torbay devolution deal: A six-week public consultation has been launched on the draft proposal to create a Combined County Authority (CCA) for Devon and Torbay to oversee new powers and funding transferred from the Government.

“The ground-breaking devolution deal [announced by Levelling Up Minister Jacob Young last month](#) proposes to create the CCA, which would be a formal partnership of elected members drawn from the councils of Devon and Torbay, including district councils, together with representatives from business and education. People are being invited to have their say on how the CCA would work, the powers that it would have and the functions it would be responsible for. These include investment in local economic growth, delivering affordable housing, improving public transport, and meeting net zero ambitions.

Read the full story on the [news page of our website](#). For further information about the consultation, including how to respond, [please visit the Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal website.](#)” The public consultation runs from 12th February – 24th March '24.

DCC briefing for DCC Councillors session: recording at this link:  [Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal consultation – briefing for DCC members-20240226 103750-Meeting Recording.mp4](#)

Dissolution of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HOSW-LEP). The last and final meeting of DCC Scrutiny Committee that has scrutinised the work of this body for the past 5-6 years took place on 21.02.24. HOSW-LEP CEO David Ralph reported to the committee on the winding up which will see this HOSW-LEP dissolved and its work, assets and remaining funds transferred to other publicly funded bodies. The report explained that the LEP had commissioned Hardisty Jones to complete an impact report of the LEP Local Growth Funding, Getting Building Fund and Growing Places Fund:

The Chief Executive of the LEP highlighted that the vast majority of the projects undertaken by the LEP had been completed, and that it was anticipated that all projects would be completed by March 2025. The Government would continue to monitor the projects that would continue post-dissolution. Also highlighted was that there were some projects, such as those related to infrastructure that, although technically completed, would represent (hopefully significant) economic impact in the future by their very nature.

Members were particularly interested in lessons learned in relation to some infrastructure projects that had not delivered the economic benefit or employment figures that were anticipated upon originally bidding for these projects. It was explained to the Committee that this was partially due to national economic factors, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic; but that the Chief Executive felt that the mechanisms for bidding for growth deals acted to incentivise over-ambition, as bodies were more likely to maximise potential benefits of their planned projects in order to improve their chances of securing funding. It was posited that Government did not have robust procedures in place to monitor this, and that taking this lesson forward could be difficult were Government not to develop better protections against this.

Other discussion points included:

- The importance of local authorities finding ways in the future to incorporate business voice into strategic decision making in the absence of LEPs;
- Other work being done on lessons learned from the LEP, including work with the County Councils Network (CCN) by the HotSW LEP, and Government evaluation of LEPs; and
- Social mobility, in particular as it relates to rurality and peripherality, and to infrastructure (particularly transport).

South West Water online [‘Let's Talk Water’](#) stakeholder webinar on Tuesday 12th March at 2:00-4:00pm.

“As you may already know, we have statutory duties regarding conservation, access and recreation (CAR), which require us to contribute to the improvement of opportunities for public access to land and water for a wide array of recreational activities. We (South West Water, Bournemouth Water and Bristol Water) primarily achieve these access and recreation duties by working in partnership with [South West Lakes Trust](#), but many of our CAR duties are also delivered by our internal teams working with external delivery partners. In addition, in 2024, we will also be developing our own CAR Strategy in collaboration with our partners and stakeholders.

In light of this, the 8th Let's Talk Water event will be a 2-hour webinar to share with you the full breadth of our conservation, access and recreation projects and initiatives. During the event you will be able to meet and question some of the key SWW and SWLT people delivering this important work, plus some of the other partners and stakeholders we are working with in this area. You can now register to attend this online event using this link – [Let's Talk Water - Stakeholder Webinar - 12 March 2024 Tickets | Eventbrite](#)”

Education / Local Schools:

The Wave Academy has been reporting in flooding, which may exacerbate the need for the school to be moved as soon as a possible alternative site has been agreed.

KEVICC site sales – No update on sales. A concern has been raised that the school will be ceasing the Arts Foundation course from this coming September. I currently have no further information on this.

Robin's Children's Home, Dartington. DCC has approved taking over as in-house services Robin's Children's home that offers both specialist residential care and overnight respite services for families with children with complex disabilities. It has taken some months for DCC to take over this provision from Lifeworks.

MOBILE LIBRARIES CEASING - COMMUNITY LIBRARY SUPPORT FUND – FUND CLOSES 31ST MARCH 2024.

The fund is in response to our commitment to rural areas following the decision to decommission the mobile library fleet to take place at the end of February 2024. The aim of the fund is to provide more community spaces for local people to enjoy and expand their love of reading alongside existing activities providing access to social opportunities in your local area. So, if you already have a corner or room that is used as a book swap library or are looking to create one this fund is for you. You can apply for a grant of between £100 and £300 which can be used for a range of things including: Shelving, Comfy seating, Books, Lighting etc. All you need to do is fill in the form giving us some details about your organisation and what you would like to spend the money on. This fund closes on 31st March 2024 or sooner if the funding has been spent. SEE ONLINE FOR APPLICATION: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/communities/community-library-suppo...>

Families invited to help shape future support services: Devon County Council is inviting families, professionals and community organisations to help shape services that support young families. The council is changing the way that young families are supported at Children's Centres, and is inviting those who use the services, as well as professionals and community groups, to help influence the changes. It follows a national move, announced by the Government last year, for Children's Centres to become Family Hubs, as part of its Start for Life Programme initiative.

In Devon that means extending the age range, from current services that deliver targeted support to 0 to 8 year-olds, to future services that provide targeted and universal support to 0 to 19 year-olds, or up to 25 year-old young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

For information, I attach a presentation recently provided to DCC Councillors. This is the link to the press release and the questionnaire:

[Families invited to help shape future support services - News \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)

The consultation is available by visiting our [Have Your Say](#) webpage. The initial survey will run until March 23. The formal public consultation opens on 1st April and runs until 19th May'24

National dental recovery plan. On 7 February 2024, the NHS and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) published [a joint plan](#) to recover and reform access to NHS dental care.

"This plan is an important next step in improving patient access to NHS dental care and supporting dental services to return to pre-pandemic levels of activity. Supported by £200m of new government investment, the plan sets out how we will grow the workforce, including providing targeted funding for dentists to work in areas that have historically struggled to recruit and retain staff, raising the minimum Unit of Dental Activity value to £28 to help make NHS work more attractive to dental teams, and offering dental practices a new patient premium payment to treat patients who have not been seen for over two years." Devon Stakeholder dental briefing and information available at this link: <https://onedevon.org.uk/our-work/services-and-support/nhs-dental-care/>

Totnes to Littlehempston Cycling and Pedestrian route. The community groups work continues to keep up the pressure for this route to be successful and as such is now part of the priority list developed by the DCC funded / SHDC LCWIP work being carried out to identify Active Travel routes that could be put forward to receive funding from the new Government Department. This is the most recent officer update on this process.

"I am pleased be able to share the latest update from our active travel (LCWIP) project. I will also be sharing this information with town and parish councils and stakeholders. In mid April (after the Easter holidays) we will be running the public consultation with the same information intended to gather feedback from residents on their local knowledge which can be added into any future projects and schemes which arise from this work.

We have previously shared the online mapping showing the routes that were identified as a priority. We took yours and others comments on board and updated those routes where it was practical to do so.

In-person auditing and desktop work has been undertaken to identify the barriers to walking and cycling along the priority routes. These have been split into:

- intra-urban walking and cycling routes (i.e. routes completely within a town)*
- inter-urban cycling routes (i.e. routes connecting two or more settlements).*
- We have also identified packages of interventions in smaller settlements including 15 smaller settlements across South Hams and West Devon*

For each intra-urban route and inter-urban route, high level interventions have been proposed to improve conditions for cycling and/or walking/wheeling along the route. It is important to note that these are not proposed schemes with funding at this stage, but are potential schemes that could be pursued if funding became available.

The link below takes you to the online mapping which identifies the barriers and proposed interventions. The attached document provides details of how to view this mapping by turning on/off different layers, but if you have any issues please let me know.

[Online mapping showing priority routes, barriers and interventions suggested – please click here](#)

*If you wish to make any comments on the barriers or interventions suggested, or comment on the mapping itself please can you complete the table below and **return to me by Friday 8 March**. Any questions please let me know,*

Gemma

Gemma Bristow | *Active Travel & Digital Connectivity lead* “

1. Your name	2. Town or village	3. Route identifier or street name or junction name	4. Is this location on the proposed routes coloured on the map as an inter-urban cycle route or an intra-urban walking and cycling route?	5. What existing issue or barrier or comments do you have for this location?

Local highways matters and Scheduled Roadworks:

Fading, disappearing and missing white lines and other roadmarkings. No updates from the Highways Team as yet

Proposed new Zebra Crossings and traffic calming and safety measures for at St John’s School, Bridgetown, Totnes: I have received the following response from DCC Road Safety team:

- The school’s latest School Travel Plan is a good starting point and that will provide most of the information we require so please arrange that to be emailed to us. Should it need updating a STP template is attached if that helps*
- Re School Crossing Patrol, there is a criteria to determine whether a DCC funded Patrol can be considered. More information is here SCP-Information for schools Simply, the criteria is mainly based around the number of people crossing at a specific point and the number of vehicles at school travel time AND also if there are so many drivers that there are very few gaps in the traffic for children to cross. Most primary*

schools that are the size of St John's , with one class per year group, do not generally meet the criteria. As a response to this schools have the option of Volunteer School Crossing Marshal - a voluntary helper recruited, 'employed' and managed by the School. Marshals can be used when the School community identify that some children would benefit from extra help to cross the road. They are trained by the Council. There is no criteria required for a Marshal. We can, of course, carry out an assessment for a School Crossing Patrol and they should reference this on the STP. It is not the role of a School Crossing Patrol (or Marshal) to manage any parking issues. It is worth mentioning that recruiting Patrols is extremely challenging and there are approx. ten sites (that meet the criteria) in Devon that have been vacant for a considerable number of years.

- *As a Council, we are encouraging and promoting safer and sustainable travel therefore, aside from practicalities, a drop off zone near the school gates gives the message that driving and dropping children there is a good option. Far better would be a Walking Bus or Park and Stride (livingstreets.org.uk)*
- *Re Flashing amber lights, they "are used to give emphasis to the warning sign where the 85th percentile speed exceeds 35 mph, or on a busy road where a driver's attention is likely to be fully occupied" (ref Traffic Signs Manual - Chapter 4 - Warning Signs (publishing.service.gov.uk) It would need to be determined if this location meets either of these criteria. Road safety do not fund these therefore another organisation or department would need to do so.*

The next step will be to meet with the School head to discuss and hopefully arrange a further site meeting with the DCC Highways Safety team

Totnes: Castle Street: I have received no further updates on signage (I submitted the T.Council views ad requests regarding new signage. I have also requested the following information:

Please could you provide information on the procedure and potential costs for a TRO for a width restriction for this narrow stretch of Castle Street. If this were to be pursued and implemented, would it then be appropriate to use bollards to enforce the restriction?

There is considerable concern regarding the potential for further incidents in this narrow road. Not only in the road too narrow for some vehicles, the pavement is too narrow for some pedestrians, and clearly where have overhanging buildings, in particular ones which are within the town's conservation area, they need protection.

It seems very wrong – albeit very understandable in the current financial climate- to simply leave this open with easy access to further incidents and associated risk of damage and safety. Out of hours some vehicles really speed up Castle Street, bollards would probably be the only real deterrent to those that might subsequently do damage.

The Neighbour Highways Officer's reply was as follows: "I have asked the question as there is the internal process but also an expected new process where parish and town councils will be able to progress schemes themselves. I will let you know."

I will report further when I've had an update on this.

Swallowfields Resident's parking scheme: awaiting further funding in the next Financial year to readvertise the scheme. (not good enough!)

Dartington: (TTRO2455985). From MONDAY 15 APRIL 2024 for a maximum of 18 months. Anticipated Finish FRIDAY 31 MAY 2024

No person shall cause or permit any vehicle to proceed on the sections of Affected Roads.

Roads affected -

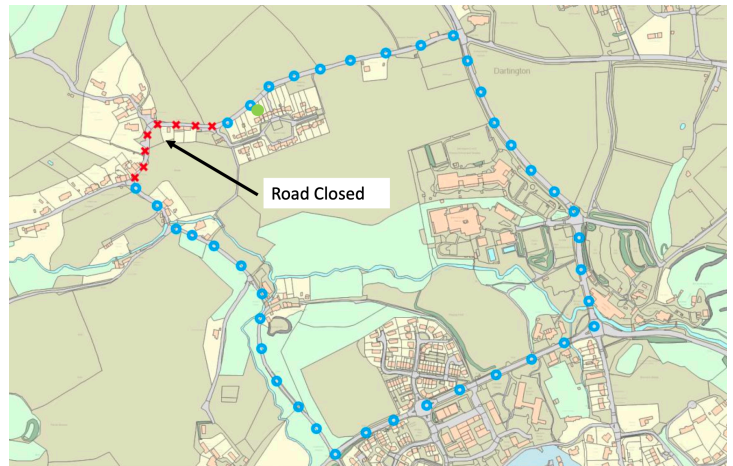
WEEK TO PARSONAGE CROSS AT A384
 HIGHER WEEK ACCESS ROAD
 WEEK TO PARSONAGE CROSS AT A384 ALONG
 ZC201, DARTINGTON

The alternative, signed, route for vehicles will be via -

WEEK TO PARSONAGE CROSS AT A384 ALONG
 ZC201, WEEK TO LOWNARD CROSS,
 WEEK TO LOWNARD CROSS, A385 LOWNARD
 CROSS TO SHINNERS BRIDGE, A385
 LOWNARD CROSS TO SHINNERS BRIDGE,
 HUXHAMS CROSS TO SHINNERS BRIDGE,
 HUXHAMS CROSS TO SHINNERS BRIDGE, WEEK TO
 PARSONAGE CROSS AT A384

ROAD CLOSURE REQUIRED TO SAFELY ENABLE GAS MAINS REPLACEMENT
 WORKS. VEHICULAR ACCESS WILL BE MAINTAINED FOR RESIDENTS ONLY.

For additional information contact: WALES & WEST UTILITIES 07977-059947

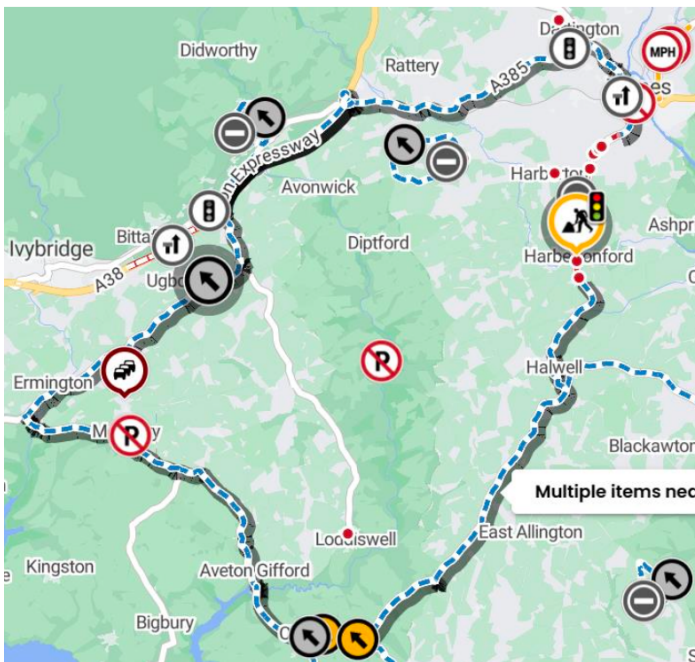
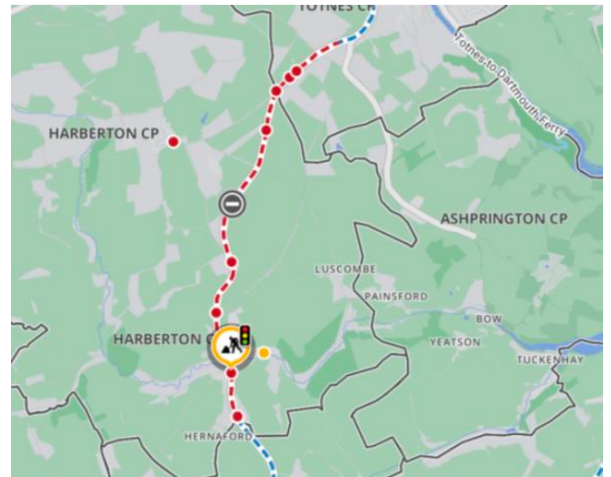


Harberton:

Ref. 240304 Resurfacing and Patching Works

A381 Harbertonford to Totnes

These works are being undertaken by our Highway Partners
 EJW Glendinnings. These works follow on from the drainage,
 prevention works and the move of a
 pedestrian crossing in Harbertonford. Due to the nature of the



works a road closure is required and advance
 signs will also be placed on
 the Highway. These works will commence after
 the current project within Harbertonford.
 DCC has apologised in advance for any
 inconvenience caused, including construction
 noise. They will
 endeavour to keep all disruption to a minimum.
 The planned on-site working hours will be
 Monday 4th March to Friday 15th March 2024
 The road will be closed between 2000hrs and
 0530hrs Monday to Friday nights but will be

open over the weekend. Please see a map showing the area which is being worked on highlighted in red.
 There will be an official diversion route as highlighted by the blue dotted line. Information will also be posted
 on DCC Devon Alerts social media and can be found here. [@DevonAlert](https://www.facebook.com/DevonAlert).
 A dedicated webpage regarding the works can be found at the following link. [Live roadworks information - Roads and transport \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/live-roadworks-information-roads-and-transport). Any questions:
highway.highwayscommunityliaison-mailbox@devon.gov.uk

(TTRO2454766) OLD ROAD, HARBERTONFORD

TEMPORARY PROHIBITION OF THROUGH TRAFFIC

From MONDAY 1 APRIL 2024 for a maximum of 18 months. Anticipated Finish MONDAY 8 APRIL 2024

No person shall cause or permit any vehicle to proceed on the sections of Affected Roads.

Roads affected -

OLD ROAD, HARBERTONFORD

The alternative, signed, route for vehicles will be via -

OLD ROAD, A381, OLD ROAD

This temporary restriction is considered necessary to enable - LV MAINS ALTERATION

For additional information contact: NATIONAL GRID. Telephone: 01271 347735

Please continue to use the Report it webpages on Devon County Councils website to report in any potholes, broken street lamps, overgrown hedges obstruction pavements, simply 'Google' Devon County Council Report It or use this link: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem/>

Let's talk about alcohol in public spaces

SHDC would like your thoughts on Public Space Protection Orders for specific areas within five of our towns, which are due for renewal on Sunday 14 July 2024.

What is a Public Space Protection Order? (PSPO)

A PSPO deals with potential anti-social behaviour in an area which could have a harmful effect on the quality of life for those in the local community. It can ban or restrict certain things, or need specific things to be done, in this case the control of alcohol in public areas.

There are some areas of the South Hams where the public drinking of alcohol is restricted. PSPOs last for three years before they need to be reviewed and the current orders run out in July. We now need to consult on the next set for the following three year period.

The review affects all five current PSPOs in the following towns:

- Totnes
- Dartmouth
- Ivybridge
- Kingsbridge
- Salcombe

For more information on the exact locations of the PSPOs within each town, please [visit the consultation to have your say](#), which runs until Tuesday 19 March.



Current Public Space Protection Orders locations in and around Totnes Town centre

Police and Crime Commission (PCC) elections on Thursday 2 May. Make sure you can vote: If you are voting on 2 May or in any upcoming elections, there are some new rules for postal votes and proxy so take a look below at what's new...

- There are changes to how you vote online by post or by proxy
- Your identity will be checked as part of the application process. Both online and paper applications will need ID verification (except for emergency proxy votes)
- There is now a limit to the amount of people you can be proxy for. You can act as a proxy for two people.
- If you vote on behalf of UK voters who live overseas, you can act as a proxy for up to four people (but only two of those can live in the UK)
- More detailed information will be coming in the next few weeks giving more information on each of these different changes.

Find out more on the [Electoral Commission website](#)

Energy vouchers worth £300 available from Citizens Advice Bureau. Householders can apply for help worth £300 towards the cost of energy bills by talking to [Citizens Advice South Hams](#). They can help householders with complex energy billing issues, resolving matters directly with energy providers, deal with energy supplier issues, including billing and meter problems, understand how to make homes more energy efficient and look at fuel bills and household finances to help save money.

<https://southhamscab.org.uk/projects/#Help-with-Fuel-Bills>

Other matters:

Totnes Climate & Ecological Emergency Working Group. The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 19th March at 6.30pm. Future meetings will take place on the third Tuesday of the month at 6.30pm. All welcome.

Totnes & District Traffic and Transport Forum (T&DTTF): The group held its AGM on 31st January 2024. The Chair Graham Bennet was reappointed, and the two Deputy Chairs are T.Cllr Luisa Auetta (reappointed) and D.Cllr Anna Presswell. A key message from the Forum was the interest in including representation from adjacent parishes at these meetings as much of the work and shared interest going across shared boundaries. It was therefore agreed to invite adjacent parishes to send a representative to Forum meetings and to circulate the minutes of these meetings to the clerks of those Parish Councils to engender interest and collaboration. The next steering group meeting will be Wednesday 13th March at 6.30pm in the Guildhall.

Totnes Rural Area Youth Engagement (TRAYE) Project –The Annual General Meeting of TRAYE project will be held on Friday March 22nd at 3.30pm. (Venue to be confirmed)

Small grants for village halls

The Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has reopened its funded grant scheme for those managing rural community buildings.

**This time, the award threshold is lower to support smaller projects and make it accessible to more groups. Grants of between £2,000 and £5,000, and up to 20 per cent of eligible project costs, are on offer to new applicants who wish to undertake smaller projects such as disability access, toilet upgrades and new kitchens. For more information, please visit the Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) website.

<https://acre.org.uk/press-release-small-grants-made-available-to-village-halls-in-england/>