

District Councillor Allen Report for March 2025

Devolution.

Lots and lots of changes down the line for SHDC and Totnes – the biggest of course, being devolution, whatever that finally looks like – draft proposals are to be sent in by councils by March 21st and then full proposals by November. District Councils are submitting a statement on Friday 28th Feb, as to what they would most like to see happen. At the moment it looks as though Plymouth is interested in taking a sizable amount of the South Hams and has already approached several parish councils on its borders about the possibility of joining Plymouth City, our proposal would see us become part of a unitary along with Torbay, Teignbridge and West Devon, so shared services etc with them. Torbay being a unitary already will be an interesting challenge. In my view as devolution will cost the Devon council tax payer between £50 – 100 million, create chaos for a considerable amount of time, reduce services and reduce local representation, it's a mess.

There are also ongoing challenges to government about the housing numbers for the South Hams, which are one of the highest in the country and decided on by what is potentially challengeable data – we no longer have an accepted Local Plan, so that will need to be redone, we might lose Sherford and Woolwell, so that will skew numbers even more – its all a bit of a minefield and Totnes will be directly impacted, we just don't know quite know by how much at the moment.

On a better note, the South Devon National Landscape (which I'm council rep on) has been restoring the salt marshes down the Dart, which has been a fantastic project and which is entering its fourth phase. There is a weekend of events 21st-24th March to celebrate this. The National Landscape secured quite a large grant for its Life On the Edge project in 24, which is looking to support rare and endangered insects on the South Devon coast, so there will be lots of initiatives around that coming up. I'm also talking to the CEO of the Devon Wildlife Trust soon about their work around Bowden Pillars.

There's been some confusion around the second home council tax, as people who have had to move out of their houses to allow repair work to be done, have found themselves hit with the second homes tax. This has been clarified now, so that anyone who has had to move due to repair work, has a 50% rebate for the first six months.

The food hub initiative in Dartington, CROP is hoping to encourage local Totnes businesses to join in with taking up space at the Cider Press Centre in the form of pop ups or franchises – letters will be going out soon to every business explaining the business plan. This is not about relocating, its about expanding, so hopefully supportive of the High St. I'm part of the Estate Framework group at Dartington as the Totnes rep, so that will mean some input into what will happen on the Totnes end of things – lower lane development, Kevicc lower field etc. It's a slow process, but an important one.