

Parish report from your District Councillors

December 2024

Councillors may lose powers to block development



Angela Rayner, the Deputy Prime Minister and Housing Secretary, has announced plans to end the influence of 'nimbys' on housebuilding, stating they will "no longer have the upper hand." The proposed reforms aim to streamline planning rules, allowing developments that meet specific criteria to bypass local council committees. Where an area has been allocated for development in the Local Plan, Officers

would be given the powers to decide on planning applications without taking them to the Planning Committee for approval. The Government says too many applications are being blocked by Councillors for 'subjective' reasons. This represents a significant shift in planning regulations, potentially sparking opposition from Labour councils. Rayner emphasised the urgency of addressing the housing crisis, warning that inaction is unacceptable. She said: "The question is where the homes and the local services that people expect alongside them get built, not whether homes are built at all." The Government aims to deliver 1.5m new homes over the next five years, with councils required to submit local plans outlining housing developments. Last week, Sir Keir Starmer pledged to "get Britain building again" to improve the supply of affordable housing. Writing in The Times, he said the UK was being "held to ransom by blockers and bureaucrats" who were "suffocating the aspirations of working families". It is not clear whether this would apply to National Parks as well as authorities such as South Hams Council.

Arts Festival Postponed



An Arts Festival spanning towns and villages in the South Hams planned for next year has been postponed until 2026. A report to the South Hams Executive Committee said there was uncertainty in securing the match funding anticipated, and the short timeframe available meant it was preferable to defer the project for a year. Members agreed to postpone the festival until June 2026 while supporting a

funding application to the Arts Council. Work with local towns and villages will continue.

Council Funding



The Government has announced that the Rural Services Delivery Grant will be withdrawn in the coming year. This grant compensates authorities in rural areas for the additional cost of delivering services to people living in more thinly populated areas than in large urban conurbations. The full impact of this measure will not be known until the Finance Settlement for Councils is published

– around 19th December.. Support will be provided for authorities to help offset the increase in employer National Insurance contributions, but the New Homes Bonus is to be withdrawn after 2025-26. This rewards councils for encouraging development and has been a valuable additional income stream. The maximum District Councils can raise Council Tax for 2025-26 remains at 2.99% or £5, whichever is higher. There will be a Business Rates baseline reset in 2026-27, when the Government will also implement wider reform, including a Fair Funding Review.

A White Paper is expected shortly on **Devolution**, and on the shape of Local Government in the future. Hints that District Councils will be abolished to make way for **Unitary Authorities** are becoming heavier.

Rural Local Authorities unite

Fifty-seven local authorities across England, including South Hams District Council, have united with the Rural Services Network (RSN) to address the unique financial challenges they face and to advocate for equitable funding in the forthcoming Local Government Finance Settlement. In a joint letter to the Rt Hon Jim McMahon MP, rural councils have come together to emphasise the need for fair resource allocation to sustain essential services in sparsely populated regions and unlock growth and prosperity in rural communities. The letter to the Minister states “Over the years, rural councils have had to increase council tax to balance the books, resulting in council tax in rural areas now being on average 20% higher per head than in urban areas.”



Bathing water classifications

The Environment Agency has released the results of the new classifications for bathing waters in the South Hams. Five new sites in the South Hams were awarded Bathing Water status for the first time earlier this year, so this is the first time that they've received a classification. The new bathing waters and their classifications are as follows:



Name	2024 Classification
Stoke Gabriel, Dart Estuary	Sufficient
Steamer Quay, Dart Estuary	Poor
Dittisham, Dart Estuary	Good
Warfleet Creek, Dart Estuary	Excellent
Coastguards Beach, Erme Estuary	Poor

Bathing Water Regulations Consultation. Due to changes in the way people use and view bathing waters, Defra has launched a consultation that proposes a number of changes to the Bathing Water Regulations. Details are available on the Defra website and the consultation closes on 23 December. The main proposed reforms are as follows:

Core reform 1: Remove the automatic de-designation provision from the Regulations. Currently, bathing waters are automatically de-designated following five consecutive years of 'poor' classification. This is often too short a time for investments and improvements to be made. De-designations would instead be based on review and recommendation by the EA and NRW.

- Core reform 2: Include the feasibility of improving a site's water quality to at least 'sufficient' as a criterion for final designation. This would avoid poor value for money, by limiting expenditure where water quality improvement is not feasible or proportionate.
- Core reform 3: Remove the fixed dates of the monitored bathing season from the Regulations. Season dates would be moved into guidance allowing the EA and NRW to adapt the dates to better suit local needs in the future.
- Wider reform 1: Clarification and expansion of the definition of 'bathers' to include other water users. 'Bathers' is currently understood by its common meaning as swimmers only. We are seeking views on whether a wider range of water users should be considered, and if so, what other types of users should be included and how their needs can be balanced against current users.
- Wider reform 2: Use of multiple monitoring points at each bathing water site where useful to classify water quality. We are seeking views on whether additional monitoring to capture water quality variation across sites would be beneficial

South Hams Members have asked the Chief Executive of South West Water to appear in person before the Council to answer questions relating to water quality, pollution of rivers and the company's performance.

Disposing of upholstered furniture

From Sunday, only eight of Devon County Council's household waste recycling centres will accept upholstered furniture for disposal. It follows the introduction of new requirements from the Environment Agency which require Devon's recycling centres to have segregated facilities to handle Waste Upholstered Domestic Seating (WUDS). WUDS include sofas, sofa beds, armchairs, recliner chairs, upholstered kitchen and dining room chairs, upholstered garden furniture, stools and foot stools, office chairs, futons, bean bags, floor and sofa cushions. In the South Hams, the Ivybridge centre will accept WUDS. However, the other recycling centres in the South Hams will not. We have shared information on the changes on our social media and in our residents' email bulletin.



Rough sleeping snapshot

SHDC held our Rough Sleeping Snapshot count on the evening of the 11 November, into the morning of the 12 November. The MHCLG had indicated they were expecting higher counts this year which was in line with our expectations. The number of rough sleepers identified in South Hams was seven, which is an increase from five last year. Whilst we cannot make people access options and support from us, two people will be supported to access accommodation with a neighbouring authority where they have a local connection and referrals have been made already. We will continue to work with the other 5 to source accommodation options. Sadly two refused to engage, although the door remains firmly open.



South Hams Community Awards 2025

The South Hams Community Awards 2025 will open for nominations on Monday 13 January for four weeks. Towns and Parish Councils have also been made aware. Last year nominations could be made for three categories: Young Persons Award (under 18), Community Champion Award (over 18) and Community Organisation Award. This year a fourth category will be available, Green Award – Climate Champion. Further information will be available [on our website](#) when nominations open.



Lots to enjoy locally this Christmas



We have launched our Christmas campaign, encouraging residents to shop and enjoy all things local this festive season. Our [webpage](#) is now live, full of information on what is happening across the South Hams; from Christmas markets and carol singing to craft fairs and late night shopping. You will also find a calendar of events in local publications. On our [webpage](#) you will also find details of the free parking available during the festive season. Please direct your residents to our '[what's happening near you](#)' page for a full programme of activities. You can also share posts on our [Facebook](#)

[page](#). If you know of an event we can help publicise, please post it on our Facebook page, [events in the South Hams](#).

SHDC is offering free parking in its car parks in the run up to Christmas, including

Ivybridge All day - Saturday 7 and Saturday 14 December

Kingsbridge All day - Saturday 14 and Saturday 21 December

Modbury All day - Saturday 7, Saturday 14 and Saturday 21 December

Totnes From 1 p.m. - Wednesday 11, Thursday 12, Wednesday 18 and Wednesday 19 December