

# Parish report from your District Councillors

8<sup>th</sup> March 2025

## SHDC Budget



At its February meeting the Council agreed to a rise of 2.99% in its share of the Council Tax. That's the maximum allowed by the Government without a referendum, and also the increase the Government expects SHDC to agree when it calculates Council spending. The increase, roughly £200,00 will be totally swallowed up by the increase in Employers' National Insurance contributions, for which the Government has only provided partial support. Our Rural Services Grant, worth £500,000 and which compensates rural councils for the extra cost of delivering services in a sparsely populated area, has been abolished. No members voted against the budget. The average increase in Parish and Town precepts across the District is 21%, reflecting the additional burden being shouldered by these because of the tight grip on spending by bigger authorities.

## Local Authority Reform



**. The Devon District Councils – minus Exeter – have issued the following statement on their preferred option for Local Government Reform:**

“National government signalled in December 2024 its intent to end the current system of District and County Councils and smaller unitary Councils. Instead, these are to be replaced by unitary Councils covering much larger areas, with a guideline minimum population of 500,000 people. We are proud of our track record in delivering high quality and cost-effective public services. Each of our Councils is well established and has, over many years, built a connection with local communities such that we understand how best to tailor the delivery of these services to meet the needs of local residents. We are also very concerned that the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as stipulated by government including the timetable runs the real risk of financial unsustainability from inception. The most significant funding challenges facing the people of Devon concern Adult and Children Social Care, SEND, and NHS funding. Government proposals address none of these, but rather risks uprooting the very organisations holding the line today.

However, it is our duty to respond to answer national government's demand for structural change through LGR.

We are united in our belief that the interests of the nearly 1 million people of Devon and Torbay will not best be served by a single ‘mega’ Council covering the entirety of this area. As districts, we have therefore reached initial agreement to work towards the formation of two new Councils that combine our existing areas as follows;

- A Unitary combining the South Hams, Teignbridge and West Devon areas with Torbay
- A Unitary including East, Mid and North Devon alongside Torrridge District and the City of Exeter

There is considerable further work to do to develop these proposals. We want to maintain local distinctiveness whilst seeking to secure ongoing service improvements. We are having to move at pace to meet the initial deadline set by national government for Interim Plans to be submitted by the 21st March. Final decisions on the content of the Interim Plans will continue to be made by individual Councils and we will engage with all our Devon council colleagues on an ongoing basis. We are mindful that the LGR process is fast-changing still and until submission date further options may need to be considered in addition to the currently preferred option.

We are in active dialogue with Torbay Council concerning the potential for a new unitary council covering a wider geography encompassing the 4 areas described above. We also recognise that Plymouth City will be looking to change their boundaries, which is a matter for government to decide on. We are resolute in our shared commitment to engaging with our residents, partners and stakeholders to help shape these proposals going forward. This includes in the period through to November and the submission of final proposals. We will provide ongoing updates as we reach key milestones.”

## Go ahead for residents’ discount parking scheme



The Executive has agreed to go ahead with a two-tier parking fee scheme. Prices will rise for visitors to the area, with discounted fees for local residents. Prices haven’t risen for four years, and the Council is seeking extra revenue to meet the increased cost of local services. The new fees will bring South Hams into line with neighbouring authorities. Prices will go up from April, rising yearly after that in line with inflation. Households will be entitled to apply for residents’ permits, which will operate via a mobile phone app.

Residents who don’t have a smartphone can apply for a card which would allow them extra parking time. After consultation with the public and towns the fees for residents will increase slightly more, and those for visitors slightly less.

Residents can now sign up for the Resident Discount Parking Scheme.

- You can get discounted parking at all our car parks for a £5 yearly admin fee.
- Please have one of the following documents at hand before you visit the website:
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- 👉 V5 log
- 👉 Motability Agreement
- 👉 Leasing Agreement

- You can find further information from our FAQs and apply online at: [www.southhams.gov.uk/residents-parking-scheme](http://www.southhams.gov.uk/residents-parking-scheme)



## Investing in council homes

Our Executive Committee has agreed to purchase the three remaining properties at Holywell Meadow in St Ann's Chapel, Bigbury as part of our drive to tackle the

affordable housing crisis. Originally planned for the open market, the three 3-bedroom homes will now be available for rent, supporting our drive to help local people who have a housing need.



## Protecting trees and woodland



After the recent success of Hope Wood in South Brent where 8,000 trees have already been planted, we are making significant progress towards our goal of planting a tree for every South Hams' resident by mid 2027. The Tree, Woodland, and Hedge Plan for 2024-2029, which outlines how we plan to expand, protect and improve these things was also unveiled at this week's Executive meeting.

## Bottle bank closures

The third and final phase of bottle bank removals taking place across the district is due to start from 17 March. There are eight banks in total being removed in this final phase:



- Totnes, Morrisons car park
- Salcombe, Shadycombe Car Park
- Dartington, Meadowbrook Car Park
- Ugborough, Hill Head Cross
- St Anne's Chapel, Holywell Stores
- Kingston, Yelland Car Park
- Dittisham, The Ham Car Park
- Aveton Gifford, Layby

The following sites will retain their bottle banks once the removals are complete:

- Dartmouth Park & Ride
- Dartmouth Mayors Avenue
- Kingsbridge Cattle Market
- Totnes, Heaths Nursery
- Malborough, Community Centre Car Park
- South Brent, Station Car Park
- Totnes, Pavillions Car Park
- Lee Mill, Tesco
- Torcross, Car Park

## County Council Election 'purdah'



Between Tuesday 25 March 2025 and Thursday 1 May 2025 we will be in the pre-election period ahead of Devon County Council's local elections. During this time, the Council must comply with restrictions outlined in Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 and recommendations in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. What this means: In general, it is business as usual and the Council can carry on with its ordinary functions. However, it must not issue any publicity which seeks to influence voters.

We must not:

- Publish any material or hold any promotional events which could directly, or be perceived to, influence public support for a political party or candidate. This includes press releases, consultations, leaflets, adverts, newsletters as well as social media and website content.
- Use council facilities or resources which could directly, or be perceived to, influence public support for a political party or candidate.

However, we can:

- Continue to promote and carry out normal council business which isn't related to the Devon County Council elections or candidates.
- Provide information relating to the poll e.g. how to register to vote, reminders to vote and opening times at polling stations etc.
- Publish factual information to counteract misleading, controversial or extreme coverage.

During this heightened period of sensitivity elected members are still able to publicly express their personal opinions and views relating to the election, but they must not be attributed as official council statements.

## Coming up...

- **Wednesday 12 March: Town and Parish Council Briefing - National Planning Guidance via MS Teams at 5 p.m.**