

District Councillors Report for 2023 -24 to the Parish Annual Meeting.

The South Hams has a population of 88,600 people living in its towns, villages and rural communities. The population has increased by 6.6% in the last ten years but it remains amongst the lowest 10% for density across England – that's 0.7 people per football-pitch-sized piece of land!

More than half (53%) the residents are in employment, just under a third (31.7%) are retired and almost three quarters (70.5%) own their homes outright or with a mortgage. Across the South Hams the average house price is £447,000 and 8.2% (1 in 25) of our homes are second homes, obviously in areas of this Ward it is considerably higher both in terms of average price and percentage of second homes.

The year began with elections held at District, Parish and Town Council. The elections saw Cllr Mark Long being re-elected and Councillor Samantha Dennis elected to serve as the two District Councillors for Salcombe and Thurlestone Ward. At the same time seeing many changes of District Councillors across the South Hams with a new Liberal Democrat majority administration running the Council for the next four years.

At first meeting of the new Council in May, Cllr Julian Brazil was named as Leader of South Hams District Council for the next four years and announced *"We intend to be an inclusive Council and not worry about people's political allegiances; we're interested in people who want to work for their communities. We will be stronger together and therefore we will be asking all councillors, from all parties to work with us to deliver what our communities want."*

The weekend after the local elections also saw Coronation celebrations held across the area, congratulations to all the organisers.

A new Council Plan has been worked on since May reflecting the priorities of the new administration, Residents, Town and Parish Councils were consulted.

At the Full Council meeting last month the new Council Plan was approved that will cover the period for 2024-2028 and the delivery plan for the coming year to 2025.

Also at that meeting reconfirmed was the premium (up to 200% council tax) for second homes, this will come into effect from 1st April 2025. It is the intention of the District Council that all the premium raised from this will be ringfenced

for affordable and social housing, the District Council is pressing Devon County Council to look at doing the same for what they will receive from this premium.

The South Hams has the only Freeport in the South West, in partnership with Plymouth City Council and Devon County Council. Collectively the councils have secured £25m of government seed funding and a 25-year economic development programme that will hopefully secure £350m of inward investment and high skilled jobs for years to come.

The award of well over a million pounds of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) means the Council currently has an ambitious programme of research and change to support our economy which will see projects for agricultural diversification, agritech, regenerative farming advances and decarbonisation of the marine sector in the South Hams, along with studies to encourage active travel and a Local Walking and Cycling Plan.

The Joint Local Plan has provided the policy framework to ensure that we have continued to deliver and indeed exceed our national housing delivery targets. Nevertheless, the challenge of delivering local affordable housing remains. One of many statutory services that law mandates the Council must provide is a homeless strategy for homelessness prevention. In January the average number of households in temporary accommodation was 42. While low compared to other areas in Devon, there is an increasing trend. The availability of housing in the area is resulting in them not successfully securing accommodation before they become homeless. We have seen no reduction in the cost of private rented accommodation with rental rates remaining high resulting in a high reliance on social housing to meet local housing need.

The Council has set a target of reducing organisational carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030. One innovative way we are leading positive change is by harnessing the power of our Joint Local Plan, future development must now consider embodied energy, construction materials and the carbon footprint of demolition as part of the planning balance – we are stretching and testing the powers of the planning system and going further than building regulations.

Following implementation of a Planning Improvement Plan, 100% of major planning applications are now determined within the 13 week timeframe or with an agreed extension of time. The success of the plan can be seen through the overall improvement in planning performance and an improving relationship with agents, developers, partners, and importantly the Parish and

Town Councils. Hopefully you will have noticed some improvement in the speed of planning decisions being taken as there is a more stable planning team supported by a range of innovative recruitment initiatives, although fully resourcing planning remains a problem not just for us, but for most councils. A new Planning IT system went live in November improving the online capabilities and the mapping system. Planning activity in general continues to be very busy in the ward, but it is excellent news that all the parishes now have neighbourhood plans in place, with a number now looking at modifications or preparing for full reviews. The first revision of the Joint Local Plan has been delayed awaiting clarity and implementation of proposed national planning reforms.

Cllr Dennis and Cllr Long were part of a Council Task and Finish Group (chaired by Cllr Dennis) that reviewed Planning Enforcement, looking at existing policies, handling of complaints and the resources required for the service, this has led to a new Plan and processes coming forward, we are pleased to already see the number of enforcement cases open finally decreasing in number, reflecting an improvement in performance.

Your District Councillors have both a Sustainable Localities Fund and this coming year a new Climate Change and Biodiversity Fund - £2,000 each year per fund to support projects in the local communities. We have used the Localities Funds this past year to support the Energy Fair in Kingsbridge, works to improve Hangar Marsh North Sands, install new heating at Malbrough Village Hall, install new windows and lighting in West Alvington Village Hall, Coronation mementos for children in the Parishes, contribute towards the Christmas lights in Salcombe, a temporary stage for Kingsbridge Fair Week, the park and ride bus for Salcombe CrabFest, and a beacon that will be lit in Salcombe on June 6th to mark the 80th Anniversary of D-Day, as well as a number of replacement benches around the area.

We could not have an annual report without talking about waste and recycling.

Since bringing the recycling and waste service back in-house in October 2022 following the major problems experienced, the service has stabilised after a considerable amount of work. However, we were still delivering three different types of recycling and waste collections to residents. Some still with clear and blue sacks and no food waste collection, some comingled with no food waste collection, and some on the full recycling service collection.

In November 2023 the Council made the final changes to the remaining 24,000+ households to a full weekly kerbside recycling service, so that all residents across the South Hams can recycle the same materials, including food waste and glass, at the kerbside.

This meant every household across the District was affected by the changes in one way or another. For some, it meant a change in their collection day. For others, it meant a change to how they present their recycling and waste on the kerbside.

After procuring new vehicles and making major changes to the Council waste depots, rerouting and rescheduling almost all the waste and recycling collections for residents across the District, this was all completed successfully only 6 weeks before Christmas, traditionally one of the busiest times of the year for the service.

As well as the waste and recycling collections - street sweeping, toilet cleaning, waste bin emptying and fly tipping are all part of the service that has come back in-house. Work is ongoing to improve all the services. The Brown bin garden waste subscription service has been running for a year and has had a good take up among residents.

We will continue to attend the monthly Parish and Town Council meetings to update on District Council activities and respond to questions.