

## **Ward Report**

### **Torridge District Council**

The start of the redevelopment of the old Torrington Creamery demolition is to commence this November and last for 8-10 months. This project is being carried out by the joint administrators of Waterside Construction South West Ltd and Valley Estates South West Ltd (in administration) that own the site, with support of Farm Finance Ltd, TDC assistance, Devon and Cornwall Police and Fire and Rescue Services. This move has been welcomed by Torridge District Council. Developments next stage will be to go to tender for a development and the site will contain Houses, retail units and a public open space.

Victoria Park Bideford a total of £330k being spent on play equipment with the majority grant funded. Planning permission was granted last week.

Market House in Torrington (entrance to Torrington's pannier market similarly being restored using external grants. The contractors are doing a beautiful job by the same people who are restoring the RAAM - Museum in Exeter.

### **External Scrutiny-**

Our last meeting was concerning education and apprenticeships - Harland and Wolff Appledore shipyard, CTMG, Torrington. Both offering increasing their apprenticeships offers encouraging more adults, lifelong learning and attracting more females in the workplace.

Emma from CTMG stated main challenges are lack of affordable housing and public transport deterring people from applying.

Levelling up- still awaiting confirmation on how much we will receive. Apparently £400M is going into the 20 most deprived areas.

At a recent advisory group in Torrington police inspector Euan Seear talked about increase in rural crime over winter and by shutting gates and installing CCTV would act as a deterrent against crime. Devon Communities Together - £24 per year and can be particularly helpful in supporting village halls.

Torridge District Council Strategic Plan consultation has finished today, and the Final Plan is to be reviewed in December.

Mobile Libraries were unfortunately axed by DCC Cabinet on the 8th of November 2023 however mobile services still operate until towards the end of February 2024. Core funding from central government to DCC has been cut drastically from 10 years ago 140 million to half a million today. No wonder we are seeing cuts in our services.

### **Planning - Petrockstowe**

1/348/2019/OUT, 1/0246/2020/OUT - Rectory Rise

1/0450/2017/FULM and 1/0950/2021/REM

All Applications have been decided though awaiting feedback from Helen Smith regarding present status.

## **DCC Update Report for Petrockstowe Parish Council – November 2023**

Dear Councillors,

I am sorry I can't be with you this evening but please find my update report which I hope is useful.

**Devolution** – It has now been announced that the Government have approved a Devolution Deal in principle for Devon and Torbay (Plymouth have dropped out). Negotiations on finer details remain ongoing but at the very least the deal will involve a £16 million fund for environmental skills and infrastructure projects, a devolved Adult/Further Education Budget which will involve a closer working relationship with Petroc and Exeter Colleges, further funding for local transport infrastructure projects, and a joint investment plan for housing, working with Homes England to unlock potential affordable housing sites. More details as and when they are announced.

**Highways** – Thanks to the cancellation of HS2 DCC will be receiving an extra £6.663 million this financial year for capital highways funding. It will be followed by the same amount next year, and then there will be a minimum of £208.6 million between now and 2033/34. I will be working with my Neighbourhood Highways Officer to put further sites in Torrington Rural forward for consideration for patching and resurfacing.

Dragon Patching of sites in Torrington Rural has now largely finished for the year with the weather becoming more autumnal. We are now looking at sites for Dragon Patching next year and with my Neighbourhood Highways Officer we are looking at potential sites within or adjoining Petrockstowe.

**Budget Position** - Currently there is a projected £13.6m overspend on DCC's Budget for this financial year, mainly relating to pressures on Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care placements. Work is ongoing to address the overspend and I would, at this stage, expect this number to come down as we get towards the end of the financial year. It is important that we do so. A restructuring of Council staff teams has started. Although the Council has enough in reserves to cover off this overspend, experience from other Councils shows us that if you don't tackle the overspend in year, they usually continue and get worse in the following financial year(s). An example of that is our neighbours in Somerset who, unlike Devon, failed to balance their budget last year and had to take £18 million out of their reserves to cover the overspend. They had to take money out of their reserves again this year to set a budget and are now facing a projected overspend of £21 million this financial year.

**Mobile Libraries** - Cabinet upheld the decision to end the Mobile Library service, which will cease at the end of February. There are a number of alternative measures including:

- Using nearest library building (the mobile van did stop at several stops very near to Torrington Library, including a residential street within the town)
- Using the Home Library Service – volunteers collecting and delivering books to people.
- Using the Good Neighbour Scheme – similar to the home library service but instead nominating friends and family to collect/deliver books. This is an already established scheme in Devon and across the Country and has had a good track record.
- Increased use of Digital subscriptions/reading options.
- Developing a rural outreach / Community Libraries.

The Council is looking to run a number of pilots with different community libraries, including one hopefully in Langtree. Books can be ordered in advance with a delivery/drop off at a village hall or

other community location for collection by residents on a 2 or 4 week lending cycle. Library books currently move all around Devon – for example if you ordered a book from Torrington Library that was in Ivybridge or Axminster, it will be moved to Torrington for you to collect. The plan is to utilise this delivery network to get books out into the community. Further funding (£15,000) will be made available for grants to support the setting up of Community Libraries via the Growing Communities Fund.

A further £25,000 transition fund will also be used to support vulnerable users to access alternative provision. The old mobile service cost over £200,000 a year to run, the majority of that on staffing costs. Leasing 4 new vehicles for 5 years would have added an extra £160,000 on top of those costs. Purchasing four new vehicles was estimated to be over £600,000.

Along with the high costs, across the whole of Torrington Rural in 2022 on average 83.6 people were using the van out of a population of 14,293, so an average of 0.58% of the population. I want more people to be accessing the library service in the countryside, but it is clear to me we have to develop different ways of delivering this service as the old mobile van was no longer, sadly, accessible enough for many of our residents and as you'll have seen from the figures above, not cost effective to run.

**Support for Residents struggling with the Cost of Living** - DCC has received funding from Central Government via the Household Support Fund to help residents struggling with the cost of living crisis. For this coming winter, Devon's district and city councils have over £2 million to offer 'one-off' financial help to those who are struggling to pay for their food and utility costs or other household essentials. Help may also be available for unexpected or exceptional circumstances, for example, rent arrears prior to being in receipt of appropriate housing benefits.

DCC are also working with the Devon Community Foundation to provide grants to voluntary sector organisations supporting communities that don't always get the help they need. Their 'Food, Fuel and More' grant scheme was very well received earlier this year and will re-open this winter with a further funding pot of over £260,000. The scheme will offer large grants of up to £25,000 to organisations that support homeless people or people in temporary or insecure housing.

Further details as to what help can be provided can be found online at [www.devon.gov.uk/cost-of-living](http://www.devon.gov.uk/cost-of-living)

That's it for this month. Any issues you'd like me to look into please let me know.