

DC Report March 2023 Petrockstowe.

Rates for Villages Halls

As a result of the financial situation at Torridge (and indeed Councils as a whole) several decisions have been taken to both cut back on expenditure and also to increase income. To date business rates for Village halls within Torridge received mandatory 80% relief and for several years an additional discretionary relief of 20% thus their business rates were covered and placed no financial burden on the halls. However this is changing for the forthcoming tax year. The 20% discretionary relief is being withdrawn as a cost saving measure. This does not mean that halls will need to find the full 20% as Central Gov't has provided what is known as Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief (RHL). Parish Halls are eligible for the 75% RHL relief on their remaining 20% liability meaning that only 5% of the business rates need to be found.

Torridge meetings

There are still a couple of TDC meetings being held via Zoom. Committee meetings have returned to the Town Hall in Bideford. The exception to this is Full Council. The meetings are broadcast live on You Tube and can also be viewed at a later date. However at present the video from the Town Hall is very good but the sound is extremely poor. I have asked what is being done about this and I understand the sound engineers are returning shortly to work on a solution to improve the sound quality.

Police Station Front Desks

In 2014 many front desks in police stations were closed giving an estimated saving of £760,000 per year. D&C Police precepts have increased year on year and one area of expenditure that has seen a boost has been the re-opening of front desks. Offices in Newton Abbot and Tiverton in Devon, and Falmouth Truro, Bude and Penzance in Cornwall have reopened. The office in Newquay is also now open permanently, having been open on a temporary basis since 2020. It is proposed to open six more front desks this year. They are Devonport (Plymouth), Looe, Ilfracombe, Honiton, Okehampton and Kingsbridge.

Council Tax

At a recent Full Council meeting it was decided to raise Council Tax by 2.99%. Since 2016-17 Torridge tax has increased by 23.77%. Contrast that to DCC (35.34%) the Police (51.33%) Fire (21.03%) and Parish precepts (43.44%). As a result of the aforementioned increases Torridge District Councils proportion of total collected C/T has dropped from 8.96p in £ in 2016-17 to just 8.18p in £. Increases this year are DCC 5%, D&C Police 6.08%, Devon & Somerset Fire 5.45%, TDC 2.99% and average Parish precept 5%.

Bideford Library

DCC have just announced that the library in Bideford, presently situated next to the TH, will be moving in June to its new home in the recently refurbished art school next to the Post Office.

I mentioned at the last PC meeting the photo ID requirement at the forthcoming Election on May4th.

I said that acceptable forms of ID were passports, a UK driving license and an older persons bus pass amongst others. A full list of requirements is given on the TDC website. From the Home page select Elections and all the information will be displayed.

Potholes

.JCB have a new m/c called PotholePro. This m/c scrapes damaged surface, removes damaged substructure and prepares base for repair. This includes cutting vertical sides in boundary of repair. M/c costs £200,000 to purchase but I believe can be used via a contract. I have seen a couple of videos of this impressive m/c in action and it was stated in both videos that the m/c is 5-6 times faster repairing road damage than the manual method. One video actually pits an experienced repair team against the m/c. The task is for each to repair a 20sq m area of damaged road surface in the same street. The JCB team took 13m9sec to cut crop and clean the area for reinstatement whilst the manual team took 1hr 19min and 4 secs for the same work to be carried out.

I have written to Meg Booth who is the Highways Manager at DCC, outlining the benefits of this m/c, and also sent her a link to a video showing what I described above. I mentioned the extra money that has been announced in today's Budget for UK road repairs, which I believe is around £150million, and suggested that some of DCC's share would be well used by investing in one of these machines. The response I received was not hopeful. It would seem that DCC Highways have evaluated this m/c and decided it is not suitable for the vast majority of roads that we have in this County. i.e. poor substructure.

•