

Axminster Division Report February 2024

As we have literally weathered the storms, of post-Christmas, let us hope that we are able to move beyond what passes for winter this year and look forward to more spring like condition quite soon.

Damage to our highways in January has caused the DCC Highways teams considerable headaches in keeping up with emergency repairs and those of a temporary (prior to resurfacing) and permanent repairs. Further down this report is quite a lengthy section about Devolution, which really is a big deal for Devon, together with Torbay Council.

Highway repairs: is almost a permanent fixture in County Councillors E-mail in boxes is potholes and residents' concerns are shared with us and the Officers & staff, on 4th October 2023, the government announced £8.3 billion of additional highways maintenance funding over the period 2023 to 2024 and the next 10 years for local road resurfacing and wider maintenance activity on the local highway network. This includes £2.8 billion for Local Authorities in the East, South East, South West and London.....Devon's share over 11 years is £222 million which consists an additional funding allocation of £6.663m in each of 2023/24 and 2024/25: Currently potholes repairs in Devon are funded by '**in year**' revenue, where for more permanent patching and repair of a higher quality this must be funded by longer term capital investment with the minimum qualification area being 1 square metre. Significantly, it has now been agreed that DCC are able to reduce this qualification to half a square metre funded by capital funding, which will provide for better-quality, long-lasting repairs, rather than less durable 'temporary' fixes. (It is important to remember that emergency repairs are often temporary before a more permanent repair is made).

Devolution – levelling up

In what is regarded by many as a very positive step forward devolving powers and money Devolution for Devon and Torbay has taken a big step forward with the publication of Government proposals for a ground-breaking deal that could re-draw the future relationship between local government in Devon and Torbay, and Whitehall. It's hoped that additional powers with the cash that follows will happen in future years. This would enable more decisions to be made locally, by people who know their areas best and on things that matter to local people, such as building more affordable homes, investing in new quality jobs and skills, and improving public transport. This could see the transfer of a range of powers and funding to a Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (CCA), subject to public consultation. Under the proposals, the new body would have direct control of adult education to create up to 50,000 new training and retraining opportunities by 2030. Through Local Skills Improvement Plans, the proposed CCA will work with business and education leaders to create a stronger, joined-up relationship between Employers, Schools, Colleges & Universities to provide the skilled workforce the local economy needs for the future. The Government is proposing to transfer over £16 million of new funding to invest in new green jobs, homes, skills, and business growth and accelerate Devon and Torbay's transition to a net-zero economy, capitalising on the area's world-leading expertise in green science and technology.

The Government is offering a stronger partnership with Homes England, capitalising on the Affordable Housing Programme and Brownfield Infrastructure and Land Fund to create a joint action plan for affordable housing schemes for local people and reduce homelessness. The proposal includes additional land assembly and compulsory purchase powers and would facilitate greater Community Land Trust-led delivery.

On transport, the proposed Deal builds on Devon County Council and Torbay Councils' long history of working well together on local transport planning. The proposed Deal will strengthen this joined-up approach with Devon and Torbay working as equal partners on a CCA and improving the efficiency and co-ordination of public transport. There is an ambition to introduce a single ticketing system for travellers and investment in services to provide greater access to public transport. The Government is also offering to transfer responsibility for developing, designing and delivering the next stages of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund from 2025. The CCA would be responsible for working with Devon County Council, Torbay Council, District Councils and the business and education sectors to support high growth business sectors such as advanced marine engineering, defence, photonics and digital, and improve the look and feel of local communities with street and town centre enhancement.

Do you have community equipment you no longer use?

Devon residents, who have been loaned community equipment that they no longer need such as walking frames, are being urged to take advantage of the final week of an equipment 'amnesty' and to arrange for it to be collected, free of charge. Every month, around 5000 items of equipment are returned, more than 80 per cent of which are refurbished, sterilised and then put back onto warehouse shelves ready for reuse. Almost 70 per cent of the equipment collected and refurbished in this way is reissued within a month to someone in the community. Returning these items not only reduces how long people who need them have to wait it also saves on having to buy new equipment – it saves up to £100,000 a month which could then be spent on other things. There are hundreds of pieces of community equipment, such as four-wheeled

walking frames, toileting equipment, hospital beds, clinical mattresses, pressure cushions and hoists that are not being used, sitting in garages and in storage for instance. So, Devon County Council, NHS Devon CCG and Millbrook Healthcare Ltd, which provides community equipment to people on their behalf, launched an equipment 'amnesty' last month, asking those who no longer need their community equipment, to organise a collection free of charge. The previous amnesty in 2021 resulted in hundreds of items being returned, refurbished, sterilised and put back into use in the community. This amnesty is now in its final week and will run until Monday 5 February. People should call 03301248214 to arrange a collection. Wheelchairs, however, are not part of the amnesty, because these are not provided by the community equipment service Millbrook delivers. Collection of the equipment from people's homes is free, and Millbrook staff will collect the items from the property.

Devon funding news

Just a reminder..... that Devon funding news is a mine of useful information for individuals and organisations supporting the community and the Rural Services Network equivalent is also a useful source on information and possible funding. See <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/category/rural-funding-digest> . Sign up at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/fundingnews/> if you haven't already.