

This covers my January 2025 report.

Parcel 3 Link Road, footpaths etc:

These issues are now within a planning application to make a variation to the S106 agreements for this area.

Kellands Lane blockage:

The WD Head of Planning and our deputy Executive Director have visited the area, and I was informed before Christmas that WD planners now have plans to resolve this situation in the new year.

Parcel 4a footpath / Crediton Road concerns:

The footpath situation has also been inspected by our planners, but, as yet, no bright ideas are coming forward as to how to resolve this one.

Exeter Road Persimmons site:

I note that this issue is still on the books of the WD Enforcement team.

Forthglade odors:

I had a concerned resident tell me that there were smells coming from the site one evening last month. I informed our Environmental Health Department, and they were going to deal direct with the person concerned, and to check with Forthglade as to what they were doing on that particular evening. Seems the smell was a very pungent fishy smell.

Persimmons Crediton Road site:

As ever, I have not had any new information as to the progress or otherwise of the additional piece of play equipment. I have however been given a contact for the developer, who has agreed to try to chase this up, but to date, no progress.

St James Primary School playing field:

The playing field areas have now been lowered and grass is now growing. However, I have had a report from one of the residents at the bottom of the main playing pitch, that in recent storms, their garden was flooded out due to the runoff water from the pitch. It has never happened before, so the drainage arrangements need to be looked at. The WD Enforcement Team are now involved, and I assume they will keep me up to date with what they intend to do to resolve this situation.

Changes in planning (NPPF)

West Devon has spent a lot of time trying to come to terms with what the Government intentions are, and even after taking legal advice, the situation is still not crystal clear. It is however certain that due to the changes in how our housing numbers are calculated, that parts of our existing JLP is now out of date, and our five year land supply has literally overnight turned into a 2.5 year land supply, which like so many other authorities over the country, will put us at risk when it comes to unplanned development.

National Devolution:

The alterations to the NPPF and the proposals for Devolution could well be linked, which will cause issues in the years to come. The Devon Districts along with WD have put together a strong response to the government, which only allowed for a very short lead in time for us to make decisions on how we would like to see local devolution handled. This meant that senior leaders and staff had to work over the Christmas break to meet the 10th of January deadline.

There are a number of choices that can be made, but it would appear that DCC want to go for a Devon wide Unitary, but Plymouth and Exeter want to individually to go it alone, which if allowed by the Government, would leave little left for a financially viable Devon Unitary Authority. The larger strategic option that would have to be run by a mayor, would have to cover Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay to make the numbers work.

There are far more questions than answers now to be able to provide a real report on how things might go, so hopefully, a full report will be forthcoming from all concerned within the next couple of months.

I believe that DCC have decided that they want to delay this year's elections so that they can concentrate on Devolution, but all of the Devon Districts plus WD are against this proposal, as it can't be justified and is not good for our democracy or indeed for residents who may wish to see changes now. This will all have to be agreed by the Secretary of State before any plans can be made.

WD resolution:

RESOLVED

Following the publication of the Devolution White Paper, and subsequent statements by the Leader of Devon County Council, West

Devon Borough Council does not support the creation of one Unitary Council for Devon, including Torbay.

Devon and Torbay are diverse and made up of over 970,000 residents across urban, suburban, and rural areas. Any reform of local government in Devon and Torbay should follow a period of proper consultation with residents, businesses, elected representatives and stakeholders. Looking at the evidence, all councils should decide collectively what is best for Devon and Torbay. A single Unitary Council for Devon and Torbay risks diminishing local representation with decision-making that is remote from the communities it serves.

West Devon Borough Council does not support postponing the county council elections scheduled for May 2025. The government has indicated that this will only happen in priority areas that have clear and agreed plans. This is not the case in Devon and Torbay and in consequence this area cannot be in the first phase of these reforms. West Devon Borough Council recognises that the Government's White Paper sets a clear direction of travel. It is proposed that all Devon and Torbay councils work collaboratively to agree how best to respond. Any changes must be carefully considered, transparent, and inclusive, SLT ensuring that residents and businesses are fully engaged in shaping the future governance of Devon and Torbay.

The objective must be to get this right for our residents, businesses and staff. That cannot be achieved if rushed decisions have not been given the serious consideration they deserve. In that light, the Council notes that the Government's proposals about Social Care are not taking effect until 2028. As such, this Council strongly opposes the Government's current proposals, as set out in its White Paper, which would result in the abolition or merger of WDBC without full consultation and support by residents. We note the following:

- The Government has no mandate for abolishing district/borough councils as this were not included in the Labour election manifesto.
- There is little evidence that merging rural councils will result in financial savings as many unitary councils are in debt or suffering financial difficulties.
- Devon CC has a budget of £1.837bn in 2024-25, an increase of £127m compared to a year earlier. The total budget of WDBC is minor in comparison.
- Any merger that abolishes WDBC will reduce democratic representation and move decision making away from local people.

Therefore, while we welcome the stated Government objectives of devolving power to regions and local communities, and getting councils back on their feet with long-term settlements, the proposed plan for a unitary council will not achieve this but instead will:

- Divert resources and funds to restructuring at a time when services are already stretched.
- Lead to a reduction in the quality of services where WDBC currently operates, such as leisure centres, public toilets, waste collection, sustainable communities, planning and local housing, environmental protection, parks and open spaces, etc - due to inevitable financial pressures on any future Unitary Council; and
- Lead to a reduction of local democracy, fewer public representatives and less support for local people who need it.

Therefore, the Council:

1. mandates the Leader to write to the Government on its behalf outlining our enthusiasm for genuine devolution alongside this

Council's concerns, including the required pace for change, with all related correspondence being copied to the wider membership (i.e. all Council Members) for their information and reference only.

2. supports the joint statement issued by the leaders of the eight district councils throughout Devon that includes opposing:

(a) a Single Unitary Council Solution for Devon; and

(b) the postponement of the County Council elections in May 2025.

and

3. will widely consult with its residents, businesses, community organisations, neighbouring district councils and town and parish councils to help shape an appropriate plan for re-organisation.

Regards Cllr Tony Leech