

Parish report from your District Councillors

20th July 2026

Local Government Reorganisation



Towns and Parishes have received an initial briefing from SHDC on the impacts of the Local Government Reorganisation announced last week.

We will give an oral update at your Parish Council meeting. Briefly Devon will be divided between four unitary authorities based around expanded areas for Plymouth, Exeter and Torquay, and the remaining ‘rump’ of coast and countryside Devon, in which the whole of South Brent District Ward falls.

The new Devon is likely to face considerable financial and organisational challenges. It will be the largest local authority by area in England, at more than 2,000 square miles, with a population of 255,000. It will have to cope with rurality (distance between homes and other amenities), sparsity (having to deliver services to people living in isolated and difficult to reach areas), and an ageing population, with all the extra costs that brings. Furthermore it has little of the commercial, industrial and technical wealth of the others, such as Devonport Dockyard or Universities. It is 110 miles from North to South and there is no natural administrative centre. Barnstaple (population around 32,000) and Tiverton (22,000) would seem likely contenders. Other towns include Okehampton (7,300), Tavistock (13,000) and Totnes (9,300).

Planning changes

The Government is making changes to the way in which planning applications are to be determined by most local authorities, **but not National Parks**, from 31 October. After that date Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026 introduce a national scheme of delegation for all planning decisions.

The Government’s objective is “to introduce greater clarity and consistency in the role of planning committees in development management decision-taking”. The intended effect is that there will be fewer applications decided by planning committees and more delegated to officers.

The 2026 Regulations adopt a two-schedule structure. Schedule 1 applications must be delegated to officers unless the application is one that is being made by the Council, or by an officer or member of the Council.

Schedule 2 applications, which are the more significant applications, are subject to a presumption of officer determination but may be referred to committee where the nominated officer and nominated member agree that the statutory criteria for referral are met.

The Council is taking time to work through the regulations and how it should adopt its processes to comply with them.

We will then have all member briefing sessions to ensure that members are fully up to speed with their role in the new decision-making process. This is a fundamental change to how planning operates which we have no choice but to implement.

Town and parish councils remain consultees and their comments on applications will remain relevant considerations. A briefing for these councils has been arranged for September.

Ex-council house disposals by LiveWest

In the last few years, we have gradually seen an increase in the number of properties being brought forward by LiveWest and earmarked for disposal through the open market. We have been lobbying on this issue and raising awareness wherever we can, however we have had very few levers to pull as legally there is nothing to stop them doing exactly as they please. The Social Housing Bill currently making its way through Parliament introduces a clause making it a requirement for Registered Providers to notify Local Authorities when they are making a disposal. LiveWest already do this so it is not much of a concession, nor does it give any opportunity to block the disposal. As this is an issue for both South Hams and West Devon, Cllr Denise O'Callaghan and Cllr Mark Renders - Lead Members for Housing in both Councils- have written jointly to all the MPs in South Hams and West Devon to ask them to engage in the debate and with some proposals we would like them to consider. [The letter is attached](#) for your information.



Crisis and Resilience Fund

Councillors are encouraged to help raise awareness of the Crisis and Resilience Fund with residents who may be struggling financially.

The fund is designed to support low-income households in the South Hams who are facing an unexpected financial shock, such as a sudden loss of income, the breakdown of an essential household item, or another urgent cost they cannot afford.

- The fund can also provide housing support, financial advice and wider services to help people avoid future crises and build longer-term resilience.
- Residents must be aged 16 or over and live in the South Hams as their main home.
- If councillors are contacted by residents in need of support, they can encourage them to check the eligibility criteria and apply online using this link



southhams.gov.uk/benefits-and-support/other-available-support/crisis-and-resilience-fund

The team understands that not all residents are able to complete online applications. We can provide support by telephone and, longer term, we hope to develop a face-to-face offering.

If Members have any general questions or queries, please email the team on CrisisandResilienceFund@swdevon.gov.uk

Land transfer - Hope Wood

We have approved the freehold transfer of a seven-acre field at Hope Wood in South Brent to Sustainable South Brent. This will help to secure the long-term future of community food growing and orchard management at the site.



The decision builds on the success of Hope Wood since we bought the 65-acre site in 2024. Since then, nearly 25,000 trees have been planted, with grassland restoration under way, a habitat bank has been established, new public access has been created and a community orchard has taken shape with strong local involvement.

Volunteers from the South Brent community have played a major role in shaping the site, with more than 1,000 people of all ages getting involved.

The transfer will allow Sustainable South Brent to develop its plans for a thriving market garden and orchard within the field, building on work already under way and supporting local food production, biodiversity and community wellbeing.

The project is part of the wider vision for Hope Wood as a place where community wellbeing, nature and environmental improvements come together.

Support Arts Council England and Devon's Councils in mapping Cultural Assets

Arts Council England is working with South Hams District Council and other councils in Devon to map cultural assets.



Following feedback, the deadline for town and parish councils to respond has now been extended

Messages for Members:

- Information has been sent to town and parish councils because they have a good understanding of communities and assets in their areas so have been invited to take part in this project.
- Following recent feedback, the deadline for the consultation has been extended to **Friday 14 August**.
- Arts Council England and Devon's Councils have jointly commissioned Always Possible to carry out this work.
- Information on cultural assets should be emailed to:
letitia@alwayspossible.co.uk

Categories of cultural assets in scope:

- Museums, collections and archives
- Theatres, galleries and arts centres
- Artists' studios
- Festivals and events
- Cultural and creative networks
- Performing arts producing companies
- Community arts organisations
- Funding relationships and grant schemes that cover creativity and culture

The following are out of scope:

- Sports and leisure centres
- Heritage buildings and organisations focused purely on history or heritage
- Commercial creative industry businesses
- Stand-alone cinemas
- Libraries: Libraries are handled on a separate track, in line with the live Devon County Council consultation. Please do not include them.

Boundary cases:

- Heritage

A heritage building or organisation is in scope where it receives public funding for cultural activity. It is out of scope where it does not, however significant it is historically. The question is the funded cultural use, not the heritage status.

- Mixed use buildings

Some buildings are part cultural and part commercial, for example a venue that hosts funded art activity alongside commercial lettings, or a village hall that hosts an arts group. Include these.

Community Engagement Round-Up

- **Local Plan - 16 July to 24 September 2026:**
Scoping consultation to understand the challenges and opportunities that the next local plan will need to consider.
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