

County Councillor Gilbert

#### COVID-19

Devon is 146<sup>th</sup> out of 150 areas at risk in England. So at present very low risk.

As at 30<sup>th</sup> June there were now two positive cases per week.

The government has placed responsibility for local Covid-19 outbreaks with upper tier authorities. Devon (DCC) has an advanced 'Local Outbreak Management Plan' LOMP in place, should it be necessary.

#### ECONOMY.

About 30% of workers in Devon have been furloughed or made redundant, with up to 90% in tourism.

Tourism = 5.5% of Devon's economy and employs 12% of the workforce being about 63000.

DCC Economy (my portfolio) is working hard to restart, regrow and reset the economy with the main sectors being

Tourism, Retail, Construction and Agriculture food & drink.

#### BROADBAND.

Mobilisation of new CDS Devon and Somerset contract set for early 2021. There are six lots to tender individually or as a group.

There is plenty of interest with contract completion by December 2024.

BT Gainshare has provided £6Million to date which has allowed an additional two thousand hard to reach properties to be connected. The take up has been 65% as against the national average of 61% which has improved the Gainshare monies.

Libby Simmons of Bentham has been in touch and am trying to help resolve a defective BT pole issue.

Still no more news on Edmeston traffic lights since my last update to you on 12<sup>th</sup> June.

Rufus

DCC Cllr. Rufus Gilbert

Cabinet Member Economy & Skills

District Councillor Pearce

**REPORT to Thurlestone Parish Council for the meeting on Monday 6 July 2020**

With the Season officially opening up on 4<sup>th</sup> July, it might be useful to report on where we are in Devon with COVID-19, in order to reassure residents, now that second homes can be used and everywhere is likely to be very busy, at least until the schools reopen in September. The rates of infection in Devon generally, and in the South Hams in particular, are very low at the moment, with only one positive test in the whole of Devon in the last five days (as at 30 June). Track and trace, when needed, should work well here. Local councils are well versed in the system from tracking other infectious diseases, and there are excellent relations between the local public health officials and Public Health England, which means that more and better data will be shared. Very surprisingly, this apparently relies on a trust relationship between the agencies. That between the South West and the centre is said to be the best in the country.

Relaxation of lock-down rules originally started before the spring bank holiday in May and the beaches were very busy for a number of days then because of the fine weather. South Hams opened all their beach car parks and their public toilets as possible so that day visitors could access the beaches, but nothing much else was open. Notices were placed in all car parks and on social media advising people to pay in advance by the Ringo app so no cash would be involved. Contrary to local fears, there has been no apparent increase in Covid cases since that date. The Thurlestone toilets opened on June 23<sup>rd</sup> as part of a phased reopening programme, and as arranged, are being cleaned by SHDC.

There has been much in the media about chaos on beaches, with isolated complaints from residents. South Hams beaches have been very busy on some days when the weather has been fine. The day after the last parish council meeting, I spoke to our MP Anthony Mangnall to ask if the government was going to do anything about imposing social distancing or limiting access to beaches. Nothing has materialised on this from central government, so I have done some research myself as to whether the situation is any worse than usual. So far, particularly as far as Bantham is concerned, access has never reached higher parking figures than those recorded in past summer days – notably lower than on record days in the 1970s and '80s, and many dates since. Whilst there has been a lot of traffic in the lanes, this can in no way have endangered local people as far as infection is concerned, because all cars have parked up on the beach car park. The question of emergency service access remains the same as ever. For real emergencies, the Air Ambulance could be called out.

Both the Bantham and Thurlestone shops have remained open, and they have regulated access well and within the rules and provided a very valued local service. The Golf Club 'overflow' car park has been well used on busy days, as has the Links car park. There have been a few instances of parking on the road outside the Links car park and it is to be hoped that the County Council on-street civil enforcement officers will be persuaded to come round at appropriate times, and when necessary visit Bantham too, but this is not within the District Council's remit.

I hope all this will reassure residents, because it is very important that the visitor economy should be allowed to open up so that businesses that rely on tourism are able to operate as near normally as possible within the rules and regulations, in order that the economy of the area does not fail. It will no doubt be very difficult for many and some may falter, but let us wish them all well, welcome the visitors and wish everyone a good summer and as good a time as is possible whilst respecting social distancing and the remaining emergency regulations.

As regards other matters: South Hams will be passing an emergency budget in September. We are still hoping for more relief from central government, as our income streams have been badly hit by the pandemic. In particular, the collection fund has suffered, where legislation makes us pass on the percentage of council tax we collected last year to the County Council and blue light services this year, even though we may be collecting substantially less than last year because many people are seeking discounts or arrangements because of severely reduced incomes. Since we only retain about 9% of the amount collected, the shortfall can present us with a cash flow problems. Whilst the situation is not rosy, we do have some reserves, so we are not expecting not to be able to balance our budget whatever happens, unlike some other councils, even nearby in Devon, where the situation is much more serious.

Finally, the planned improvement in waste collection and recycling is having to be postponed until the spring, because of delays due to the emergency in rebuilding the depot in Ivybridge, delays in the delivery of the new kerbside recycling vehicles and containers, and Christmas now getting in the way of an earlier, but still late, roll out of the service, which had originally been planned for September.

The ramifications of COVID-19 will no doubt haunt us for some time yet. Once again, I would like to thank all the volunteers and the local shops and businesses for all they have done to help and sustain parish residents through this difficult period, and to reassure you that your superlative efforts have not gone unnoticed and are very much appreciated.

Judy Pearce, Ward Councillor and  
Leader of South Hams District Council

30 June 2020