

Division members report to Buckerell PC, 19th November 2024 -
DCC Cllr Phil Twiss

An interesting few weeks where the impacts of the recent Budget are yet to fully understood or realised in Devon. Things will no doubt become clearer in coming weeks and months where at the County Council we are expecting to be asked to do more with no significant terms uplift in funding, but live in hope!.

Devon colleges and council collaborate to enhance SEND education

Colleges in Devon are working with us to provide more places specifically to support the further education of hundreds of young people with special educational needs and disabilities, (SEND).

At least 350 additional post 16 education places for young people with SEND will be created at Exeter College and PETROC College's two campuses in Barnstaple and Tiverton, thanks to a multi-million pound bid to the Department for Education (DfE) and Devon County Council.

The plans involve creating new on-campus facilities at the three sites, Exeter, Barnstaple and Tiverton, with dedicated, purpose-built spaces designed to meet the requirements of young people with a range of additional needs. The courses that the colleges will offer are currently under review and will be confirmed shortly.

The funding from the DfE is essential in providing quality further education, local to families in Devon that will help young people achieve better educational outcomes, leading to improved employment prospects and independent living.

The colleges are also developing a wide-ranging programme of support for young people with SEND, beginning even before students attend to help make the transitions from school or other educational setting to the colleges as positive as possible.

Devon prepared for winter

Whatever the weather, Devon's highway teams are prepared and ready to keep the county moving this winter.

Last winter's biggest issue was the prolonged wet spell which caused extensive damage to Devon's highway network. This led to a 31% increase in pothole repairs between January and April, compared to 2023, and 94% more than the same period in 2022.

However, in terms of dealing with icy conditions, last winter was relatively quiet, with Devon County Council's gritting teams only using around 6,200 tonnes of salt, which was less than half the amount used the previous winter.

However, more time was spent cleaning gullies and clearing debris from roads due to torrential rain and several named storms.

This highlights that Devon's highway teams have to be prepared for all eventualities over the next few months where a generally dry winter would be preferable!

Honiton & Feniton Railway Stations

I recently chaired a meeting of the East Devon line stakeholders (6 stations from Axminster to Pinhoe) with representatives from SWR, Network Rail, community railway groups and others where the Outline Business Case for a passing loop/s at either Whimple/Cranbrook, Feniton or Honiton was discussed, yet again. This would provide a twice-hourly rail service in to Exeter from Honiton and an hourly service from Feniton,

Network Rail has put a £1million bid in to the EDDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund to help with preparation of the OBC and some of the costs for the case for it to be prepared, with DCC contributing £50,000 from its general fund to the OBC project. Railway infrastructure does not happen quickly and if the OBR is prepared quite soon it is unlikely that work would be completed on whichever loop is decided as the best option until 2031/32, in advance of the current rolling stock reaching the end of its working life in 2034.

On a more positive, note the refurbishment of Feniton Station waiting room will happen in 2025/26 and the painting of Honiton Station in this financial year 2024/25.

The Morocco - UK Power Project

Positive and exciting news about renewable electricity generation that positively affects Devon. The Xlinks Morocco-UK Power Project will be a new electricity generation facility entirely powered by solar and wind energy combined with a battery storage facility. Located in Morocco's renewable energy rich region of Guelmim Oued Noun, it will be connected exclusively to Great Britain via 4000km (2485 miles) HVDC sub-sea cables.

This first of a kind project will generate 11.5GW of zero carbon electricity from the sun and wind to deliver 3.6GW of reliable energy for an average of 19+ hours a day. This is enough to provide affordable, clean power to the equivalent of over 7 million British homes and once complete, the project will be capable of supplying 8 percent of Great Britain's electricity needs.

Alongside the consistent output from its solar panels and wind turbines, an onsite 22.5GWh/5GW battery facility will provide sufficient storage to reliably deliver each and every day, a dedicated, near-constant source of flexible and predictable clean energy for Britain, designed to complement the renewable energy already generated across the UK.

When domestic renewable energy generation in the United Kingdom drops due to low winds and short periods of sun, the project will harvest the benefits of long hours of sun in Morocco alongside the consistency of its convection Trade Winds, to provide a firm but flexible source of zero-carbon electricity.

Four cables, each 4000km long, form the twin 1.8GW HVDC sub-sea cable systems that will follow the shallow water route from the Moroccan site to a grid location in Great Britain, passing Spain, Portugal, and France.

Agreement has been reached with National Grid for two 1.8GW connections in Devon. Voltage source convertor stations will enable the Xlinks project to secure high value balancing contracts with National Grid, and a HVDC Technical Feasibility study has been completed to validate reliability and cost.

ENDS