

Report to Parish Council from District Cllr Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin

External Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

We heard from Andy Bell from North Devon Biosphere.

The Biosphere was designated in 1976 and extended in 2002 to cover a much wider area. It covers 4 District Authorities, over 5000 farms 2 National Parks and 1 AONB. The Biosphere comprises of 35 organisations working in partnership. Funding: £70k from DCC, £31k combined from TDC and NDC

They have secured £12M project funding over the next 5 years (primarily from Environment Agency and DEFRA.

Whole ethos of Biosphere “creating a positive future by connecting people and nature”. Looking at the benefits from the environment and ecosystem services.

Key areas of work: tourism, farming, forestry, fishing, technology, climate change adaptation.

They’re in the very early stages of a project relating to regenerative farming and carbon payments. Looking at farms possibly becoming accredited for regenerative farming, allowing them to sell at a higher price and creating more local farms shops/food hubs. “Farm to fork”

They have a Biosphere explorer app. 80% of visitors here come for environmental factors.

The green economy group working with Uni Plymouth and Exeter, and MET office, working on natural flood management.

They are doing a lot of work with farmers to reduce pollution risks. Also working with Farmers on access to nature- engaging with landowners- for example looking at community Woodlands.

The importance of salt marshes and mud flats. Sheep can also still graze salt marshes (and apparently taste better too...?!)

Marine work- offshore renewables, X-Links cables, aquaculture- seaweed. Impact of storms, is it sustainable? All needs careful consideration and also looking at wider benefits in the area. ‘Marine net-gain’ coming forward in the future? Lundy “no-take” zone a success and fishermen wanting more of it because they can see the benefits- more fish spilling out into the other areas.

Working with cultural partners eg Beaford Arts, connecting with people in different ways- theatre, art, photography etc

Engaging young people- teacher training across 12 schools locally, about climate change and the local environment.

Working with Southwest water- looking at natural solutions to pollution of rivers

Extraordinary Full Council re Local Gov Reorganisation.

Devon and Torbay Combined Authority (CCA) is already on the way through previous government (devolution).

The new government's ambition is for unitary councils to cover England. Currently, there are 21 County Council areas (shire districts). Ambition on a collaborative basis. Prefer to avoid boundary changes and want to move at pace.

10th January deadline for councils to express they'd like to move at the fastest pace and postpone May elections.

Devon District Council leaders signed a joint statement not supporting a single unitary for Devon as it's too big an area. They recognise the government ambitions but believe it needs proper consideration and shouldn't be rushed through. They also agreed that Devon County elections should not be postponed and should go ahead in May 25.

Torridge District Council voted by majority to send a letter to the Minister for housing, communities and local government Jim McMahon, Reiterating the points made in the joint statement. 19 For, 1 against, three abstentions.

JOINT STATEMENT: Devon District Councils - update on devolution and local government reform

This joint statement is made following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper

"The Devon districts are fully supportive of genuine devolution of powers from Whitehall to local government. However, following the publication of the Devolution White Paper, and subsequent statements by the leader of Devon County Council, we would like to make it clear that we do not support the creation of one unitary council for Devon.

"Our county, including Torbay, is diverse and made up of nearly 1 million residents across urban, coastal, and rural areas. Any reform of local government in Devon should follow a period of proper consultation with residents, businesses, elected representatives, and stakeholders. Looking at the evidence, we should decide collectively what is best for our area. A single unitary council for the county risks diminishing local representation, with decision-making that is remote from the communities we serve.

"We do not support postponing the county council elections scheduled for May 2025. The government has indicated that this will only happen in priority areas who have clear

and agreed plans. This is not the case in Devon, so we cannot be in the first phase of these reforms.

“We recognise that the government’s white paper sets a clear direction of travel. As Devon’s city, district, and borough council leaders, we want to work collaboratively with others in particular with our neighbouring unitary councils to agree how we respond to this. Any changes must be carefully considered, transparent, and inclusive, ensuring that residents and businesses are fully engaged in shaping the future governance of Devon.

“Our objective must be to get this right for our residents and businesses. That cannot be achieved if we make rushed decisions that have not been given the serious consideration that they deserve.”

Statement agreed by the following leaders:

Cllr Paul Arnott, East Devon, Cllr Phil Bialyk, Exeter, Cllr Julian Brazil, South Hams, Cllr David Clayton, North Devon, Cllr Mandy Ewings, West Devon, Cllr Ken James, Torridge, Cllr Richard Keeling, Teignbridge, Cllr Luke Taylor, Mid Devon