Agenda Item 9b

Cllr Mandy Ewings
Leader of West Devon Borough Council
Tavistock South West Ward

West Devon Borough Council has bought over 7 hectares near Crowndale to create a community woodland for Tavistock.

Tavistock's first publicly accessible woodland within walking distance of town will support nature recovery, biodiversity and a better landscape for future generations.

Southwest of town beside Tavistock Canal, the site will offer views of Shillamill Viaduct and Dartmoor, complement and connect existing woodland and tree lines, and be accessible from the nearby public footpath.

A break from grazing and hay cuts this year, following last winter's mast year for oak (a bumper acorn crop), has left abundant naturally regenerating oak saplings across much of the site.

Trees grown from seed already on site will be suited to local conditions and more resilient—especially important amid summer droughts. This also reduces tree purchasing, transport and planting, and avoids plastic tree guards.

Plans include a circular walk of around 1.5km, viewpoint seating, information panels on local landscape, wildlife and history, and restoration of damaged stone-faced hedge banks.

I think this is a wonderful, rare opportunity to create Tavistock's first community woodland—a place to walk, explore and connect with nature, supporting the Council's wider environmental commitment.

"Buying this land helps protect an important local site for residents to enjoy for years to come."

The Council has commissioned baseline habitat surveys and soil analysis, and is consulting partners including Tamar Valley National Landscape, the Woodland Trust and County Archaeologist.

An autumn public drop-in in Tavistock will let residents view early plans, ask questions and share ideas.

Necessary Forestry Commission consents will be secured this winter. The Council will apply to the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest for grants towards project delivery, site establishment and maintenance.

WDBC has started work on our budget for 2027/2028 which is progressing well and is pretty much already balanced. A far more difficult year is 2028/2029, most councils across the country thought this budget wouldn't apply to them but with the pause button being pressed by the government on LGR, WDBC is facing a budget deficit of over £1m which is a lot of money to balance for a small authority. However, we are starting to look at what changes we may have to make to balance the budget.

The Christmas High Streets, are being worked on, with the council bringing back its “free after three” car parking scheme. We are also working with the BID and Tavi Helps for their Christmas schemes.

As announced previously the West Devon Waste scheme is being taken back in house from April 2027, the plans for this are going well, with works being carried out at Hayedown to comply with laws as set out by the Environment Agency.

The new leisure provider for Meadowlands has embedded well, the number of memberships has increased, the facilities have had many improvements made especially around cleanliness. The café under new management is also doing extremely well and is a credit to the leisure facility.

West Devon has replied to the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority consultation about the admittance of Plymouth City Council and the push for devolution, seeking the change to become a Mayoral Strategic Authority, with full voting rights for the districts, which we currently don’t have.

On 3rd November we will be holding the first of the Mayors and Clerks meetings with Tavistock, Okehampton, Hatherleigh, Chagford and North Tawton invited.

West Devon is still working on the new Local Plan with South Hams District Council as for the Spatial Development Strategy we are still awaiting a geography from the government.

To end on the topic of LGR and Devolution we are awaiting an announcement by Government as to what the next steps will be, hopefully on 28th October. However, in Devon the Districts are still working together to look at what services we can bring together across the whole of Devon so including Plymouth and Torbay.