

County & District Councillor's Report 20th July – Coffinswell

Reacting to the Prime Minister's statement, Steve Brown, Director of Public Health Devon reiterated a message of caution. "The government's intention is to no longer make it necessary by law to follow restrictions that include the wearing of face coverings and social distancing. Instead, it will be down to us all to be personally responsible for our behaviours and actions.

"I am pleased to hear clarification from our Prime Minister that the wearing of face coverings in crowded places – which would include public transport and any indoor space where there are other people – is still recommended, despite it no longer being a legal requirement."

Case numbers in Devon are rising sharply, mostly in the younger age groups. Thankfully, that's not reflected yet in the number of coronavirus-related hospitalisations or deaths in the county, but those numbers are also rising.

Coronavirus is airborne, and it spreads more easily when people are close to one another. So try to keep your distance from others when in public spaces. Continue to wear face coverings when indoors in public places where there are other people. That includes public transport, and it may include shops and other indoor premises.

Wash your hands properly and regularly. Good hand hygiene is especially important as a protector against viruses.

Try to arrange to meet friends outside rather than indoors as the risk of catching or spreading coronavirus is greatly reduced outside. But if you're indoors, please make sure that there's plenty of fresh air. Please look out for each other. Know who may be struggling and support them. If in the company of someone who is uncomfortable with others not wearing face coverings for example, wear your face covering.

School communities across Devon completed over 23,000 active journeys during this year's Sustrans Big Pedal, the UK's largest walking, wheeling, cycling and scooting to school challenge.

During the competition, which took place between 19-30 April, Devon school children were physically active – walking, cycling, wheeling and scooting to school, and completing physical activities – for a total of nearly 240,000 minutes.

Data released by Sport England suggests there was a decline in the physical activity levels of children due to the pandemic, with almost a third of children engaging in less than 30 minutes of daily physical activity in the 2019 – 2020 academic year. If the children taking active journeys during Sustrans Big Pedal had travelled to school by car instead, this could have created 14 tonnes of CO₂ and 27kg of NO_x. That's enough to fill over 510,000 party balloons with harmful CO₂ emissions.

The devastation inflicted on future generations and the environment if we don't act to reduce carbon emissions now, was laid bare at Devon's Climate Assembly last week by one of the UK's top climate scientists.

Professor Richard Betts MBE, of the Met Office and Exeter University, is a Lead Author on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and led the Technical Report for the UK's 3rd Climate Change Risk Assessment.

He gave a 'sobering' analysis on what would happen if countries didn't achieve net-zero by the middle of this century – and global warming continued unchecked. The presentation was part of the first weekend of the Devon Citizens Assembly – a vital part of the Devon Carbon Plan process.

A new study has concluded that community-owned energy schemes have significant environmental benefits and can save local communities money. The Report was commissioned by Devon County Council (DCC) and the South West Energy Partnership, part of the European Local Energy Assistance programme.

The report concluded that for a 30MWp solar farm the additional benefits would generate an additional £15.9m in economic value to the Devon economy. The initial fund created by the group is then able access further funding to invest in community projects, generating additional value. Evidence shows that investing in these community projects generates more in benefits than the cost of the investment.

As this money is spent in the local economy it will generate further rounds of economic activity, supporting additional jobs.

From solar PV to hydro projects, Devon has approximately 25 community energy schemes, more than any other county in England – and the majority of these got off the ground following support by Devon County Council. The report was completed by CAG Consultants and is based on Treasury Green Book compliant methodology to determine the socio-economic benefits.

The latest progress report on Devon County Council's (DCC) Devon Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2022 has been published. The plan has been drawn up in partnership with the police, health and mental health providers, the voluntary and community sectors, Network Rail, Highways England, The Samaritans, the Devon Prisons Service and Exeter University.

Suicide is a rare event, but when it does occur it can have a devastating impact upon families, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and, therefore, suicide prevention and support for those bereaved by suicide is a priority for Public Health.

While the latest data for 2020 does not show any significant rise in suicides in Devon, the rate has been rising since 2018, in line with the national trend. And, as a result of the pandemic, there has also been an increase in common mental health problems in the county, often triggered by the loss of a loved one, lockdowns, losing a job or money worries.

In response to this in 2020/2021, 400 people from 60 agencies across Devon have received training in 'Understanding Grief', 'Suicide awareness' and 'Suicide Bereavement'.

The Suicide Bereavement Service has been commissioned, which will include the Devon STP area of Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay, a further £705,000 (over three years) has also been awarded by NHS England to develop a suicide prevention programme across the area.

Other projects include the production of an interactive map to help identify high frequency locations, and an online hub is being developed which will provide information, resources, and information for bereaved families on where to get support. This is because being bereaved by suicide can increase the risk of a person ending their own life.

Alistair Dewhirst – alistair.dewhirst@devon.gov.uk / Tel 07836 704127