



**Councillor Richard Keeling's Report July 2026, to Chudleigh,
Hennock, Ashton, Bridford, Christow, Doddiscombe, Dunsford,
Mortonhampstead, Tedburn St Mary & Trusham.**

Dear Colleagues,

Firstly I would like to thank all that have contacted me over various road schemes throughout the Valley, this summer is critical to get all the work done in preparation for winter months, so that we don't repeat last winter's epidemic of potholes.

June has been an intense month. The prolonged hot and dry weather has affected our roads, farms, rivers and public services, while several major announcements have raised important questions about the longer-term future of Devon. These include proposals for a strategic mayoral authority, a new national roadmap for farming, more flexible library opening, investment in extra care housing.

The extreme heat has also had a direct impact on Devon's highways. Devon County Council has been using a process known as "dusting" on some roads, spreading a fine layer of stone to stop bitumen becoming soft and sticky. Road surface temperatures were expected to reach around 60°C during the June heatwave. The treatment has been focused on major routes, although motorists have been advised to take additional care on rural and recently treated roads. If you've seen our road gritters out and about, you were not hallucinating from the heat! We swapped the grit for sand and used the same vehicles as we use in the winter.

This is another reminder that climate change is no longer an abstract or distant issue. It is affecting the practical work of local government now. A cold and wet winter damages foundations, road edges and drainage systems. A very hot summer then softens surfaces and creates further deterioration. The Council must increasingly plan for both extremes.

The answer is not simply more reactive repair. We need better drainage, stronger road foundations, appropriate surface materials and preventative maintenance that reflects the conditions we are now experiencing. The additional highways investment agreed this year is welcome, but climate resilience must be built into how that money is spent. We are in the process of preparing the highways contract for tender next year, we will be opening up for bids to take on the £900 million contract for 5 years, to cover the creation of any new unitary authorities.

I continue to raise local defects with our Neighbourhood Highways Officer, particularly where drainage problems cause the same section of road to fail repeatedly. Parish councils are extremely helpful in identifying where water regularly collects, where drains and gullies are blocked, or where small defects are likely to become much more expensive failures. Please continue to report these through the online system and send me details of persistent or especially serious problems. I would like to see each parish produce a volunteer road warden who would be trained free of charge, to be able to make minor repairs to B, C and U roads within 30 and 40 mph zones.

One of the largest political developments this month has been the proposal that Devon could become one of the first areas to establish a new strategic mayoral authority. The Leader of Devon County Council has said that Devon could be ready to hold a mayoral election as soon as May 2027, subject to agreement and support from government. The stated ambition is to secure greater local control

over areas such as housing, infrastructure, economic development, education, welfare and opportunities for young people.

I support genuine devolution. Decisions about Devon should, wherever possible, be taken in Devon rather than by departments in Whitehall. A strategic mayoral authority could provide access to long-term funding, strengthen Devon's voice with government and allow transport, housing, skills and economic development to be planned across a wider area.

There is a strong argument that the South West has missed out compared with areas that already have mayoral combined authorities and multi-year investment settlements. A clear, accountable Devon-wide voice could help us make the case for better rail infrastructure, rural buses, affordable housing, skills, broadband, coastal investment and support for important sectors such as farming, tourism, defence and renewable energy.

Devolution should bring decisions closer to communities. It should not simply move centralisation from Whitehall to a distant office elsewhere in Devon. A mayoralty must not become an exercise in personality politics or place too much unchecked power in the hands of one person.

It is also important to distinguish strategic devolution from local government reorganisation. A mayoral authority can coordinate investment and strategy without necessarily determining the structure of the councils delivering day-to-day services.

Parish and town councils must be part of that discussion. Whatever structure eventually emerges, there needs to be a meaningful place for community-level decision-making. Local knowledge cannot be replaced by a larger administrative map. The people who understand a blocked drain, an unsafe junction, a struggling community building or an isolated resident are usually those closest to the problem.

Another important announcement this month was the publication of the Government's Farming Roadmap 2050. Farming is fundamental to Devon's economy, landscape and identity. Nationally, farmers produce around 65% of our food, manage approximately 70% of England's land and underpin a £153 billion agri-food industry. The roadmap attempts to provide a clearer direction for the next 25 years, based around farming that is profitable and productive, environmentally sustainable and resilient to future shocks.

The commitment to long-term planning is welcome. Farming businesses cannot make sensible decisions about land, buildings, equipment, succession or environmental management when policies and payment schemes repeatedly change at short notice. Farmers need stability, fair markets and a government willing to recognise that food security is a strategic national priority.

I also welcome the recognition that food production and environmental recovery should not be presented as opposing choices. Healthy soils, clean water, functioning ecosystems and better management of nutrients all help farms remain productive and resilient. Farmers are often the first to experience the consequences of drought, flooding, disease and changing weather patterns.

The real test, however, will be delivery. The roadmap must translate into schemes that are understandable, properly funded and accessible to smaller family farms, not just large businesses with the resources to employ specialist advisers. Farmers must receive fair returns for producing food and for the public goods they provide, including nature recovery, flood management, carbon storage and care for the landscape.

Infrastructure matters as well. Rural businesses need reliable broadband and mobile coverage, an electricity network capable of supporting new technology, appropriate planning rules and access to the skills and labour they require. A rural economy cannot thrive if every service is designed around the assumptions of a large town or city.

There has also been a further positive development for Devon's libraries. Open Plus technology is due to be installed at 11 libraries between July 2026 and March 2027, following a successful trial in Cullompton and a further trial at Northam. Registered members who complete a short induction will be able to enter participating libraries outside normal staffed hours, potentially including mornings, evenings and weekends. They will be able to borrow and return books, use computers and Wi-Fi, study, work and use photocopying facilities.

Crucially, staffed opening hours are being retained. Technology should expand access rather than replace librarians and other staff. Many residents need help to use computers, access public services, find information or simply feel confident using the library. Open Plus should complement that human support.

A library that can be used after work, after school or at weekends can provide a valuable study space, workplace and community resource.

The scheme is part of the wider library investment programme agreed following the consultation earlier this year. It is encouraging to see the decision to protect staffed hours being followed by practical work to increase access. Our aim should be a library service that is growing in usefulness and reach, not one being managed into decline.

In Adult Social Care, work has now started on a £20 million extra care housing development in Cranbrook, which I visited 2 weeks ago. The scheme will provide 58 affordable homes for older people and adults with additional support needs. All of the homes will be available for social rent, with Devon County Council helping to enable the project by providing the land at no cost.

Extra care housing allows people to retain their own front door and independence while having support available when it is needed. It can help prevent or delay admission to residential care, reduce isolation and allow couples to remain together when their care needs differ.

My Locality Budget remains open for applications, although demand has already been high. I am keen to support projects that provide a clear community benefit, particularly those that help children and young people, reduce isolation, improve access to nature, protect community facilities or strengthen local resilience. Please encourage suitable organisations to contact me before submitting an application. I have recently agreed to funding for 50 children from low income families to access free swimming lessons at the Chudleigh pool.

Finally, I would like to thank town/parish councils for their ongoing contribution. Their local knowledge is invaluable in identifying issues early and supporting effective engagement with the Council.

Road Defects

Please note that you can report online and track your issue quickly, link here [Report a problem - Roads and transport](#)

Please contact me if you have any questions on Devon County Council or Teignbridge District Council.

Kind regards



Councillor Richard Keeling, MLoL

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