

**Report to STC**6<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Cllr. Hilary Frank

**1. Closure of Adult Education Centres**

After protests, the consultation period for the proposed closure of six Adult Education centres in Cornwall was extended to allow for further input. Although we made a strong representation, the decision was announced earlier this week that the Saltash centre would still be closed, along with four others. Launceston was given a reprieve.

This is extremely disappointing for Saltash, especially given the strength of feeling locally and the proactive role Saltash Town Council has played in promoting and supporting Adult Education. I've been in discussions with the Adult Education Service in the last couple of days since the announcement, however, and I'm encouraged by the apparent appetite to work with local stakeholders to explore possibilities for creating a new delivery model in Saltash, where we 'buy in' the courses we would like to have.

**2. Investment in Saltash Leisure Centre**

Saltash Leisure Centre is set to undergo a transformation into a multi-purpose community hub. This initiative, led by Cornwall Council in partnership with GLL, will see a major investment that will integrate a range of additional community services under one roof while still keeping the swimming pool and other leisure facilities.

Threatened with closure in 2021, the centre was saved following strong community protest. Since then, GLL has worked hard to deliver improvements, including expanded fitness programmes and a café. The support from Saltash Town Council has been invaluable, particularly through the working group meetings, leading to increased school and club use, as well as a rise in membership.

This investment from Cornwall Council recognises the local commitment and builds on this progress, and will help to secure the centre's long-term sustainability. The upgrade, due for completion by the end of the year, will include refurbished changing rooms and deliver a base for the registrar service as well as a Safe and Well Hub.

Work is scheduled to begin in late spring and will be carried out in phases to minimise disruption, with the leisure centre remaining fully operational throughout.

**3. Belle Vue Car Park**

The results of the consultation on various parking matters, including the proposed lease of 28 car parks (including Belle Vue West) to a private company, are due to be released tomorrow (7<sup>th</sup> February). Part of the problem is that governments have not authorised local authorities to use Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR). This means that all local authorities, towns and parishes included, have to rely on traffic wardens and parking machines, which is inefficient and costly. We need to lobby government to authorise ANPR machines for local authority use.

In advance of the consultation publication, I've written requesting that if any leases are signed with a private contractor, then they must include clauses that:

- set a grace period of at least 15 minutes between parking and payment (too many private contractors only give 5 minutes, which is unreasonably short)
- require the private operator to get agreement from Cornwall Council before any price hikes are introduced
- set a break clause agreeing that Cornwall Council can take the car parks back if circumstances change/councils are authorised to use ANPR technology.

#### **4. Delivering Devolution with Cornwall, not to it**

On 16th December, just before Christmas, the government published the Devolution White Paper. It represents the biggest change to local government structure in 50 years, introducing Strategic Authorities and abolishing the two-tier structure of district councils within a county council. Here in Cornwall, we already have a unitary structure, with Cornwall Council holding the powers and responsibilities of a county and district councils, and we already have what is known as a Level 2 Deal for devolution.

The government's aim is that Strategic Authorities should be one of three types:

- i. Established Mayoral Strategic Authority
- ii. Mayoral Strategic Authority
- iii. Foundation Strategic Authority

Areas like Cornwall that have secured a Level 2 Deal will be known as a Foundation Strategic Authority. The Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will enjoy the greatest level of devolution.

The government has also made clear that the new Strategic Authorities should have a total population of over 1.5 million, although it has also said that lower populations may be permitted under some circumstances.

The government invited all local authorities who are currently in 'two tier' areas to submit their vision of how their area would look in this new Strategic Authority landscape. The government's intention is to prioritise successful submissions. Since Cornwall is already a Foundation Strategic Authority, we are not in the first tranche of this 'devolution revolution', and weren't invited to submit a bid, but by the deadline of January 10th, Plymouth City Council had told the government that their vision would be to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority that would cover Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall. (Devon has a population of 1.2 million.)

On 17th December the 6 MPs in Cornwall met with Deputy PM Angela Rayner, and in what they called 'a clear and open exchange of views' they said the Deputy PM was aware of the Cornish situation and explained that there were two possible paths open to us:

1. to engage early in the process for a Combined Authority and a Mayor
2. to remain on the Foundation Level and continue to campaign for a Cornwall-only footprint

There would still be 87 councillors on Cornwall Council if we decided to enter in to a Mayoral Strategic Authority, but powers and funding for aspects like strategic transport and housing would be given to a directly elected Mayor.

We debated devolution in a meeting of all 87 Cornwall Councillors on 21<sup>st</sup> January, where the overwhelming majority voted to campaign for a Cornwall-only footprint.

On 5<sup>th</sup> February Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner announced that the review of the areas that had submitted a bid in the first tranche had been completed, and six areas would be in the priority programme of devolution with a view to mayoral elections in May 2026. These areas are: Cumbria, Cheshire and Warrington, Greater Essex, Hampshire and Solent, Norfolk and Suffolk, and Sussex and Brighton. Lancashire is also deciding its mayoral devolution options and their proposals will apparently be looked at in the autumn in parallel with the local authorities in the priority programme.

There was no mention of the 'Devonwall' proposal. Later in the House of Commons, Camborne, Redruth and Hayle MP Perran Moon asked the Deputy Prime Minister to guarantee that a draft devolution deal would not contravene the letter or the spirit of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on National Minority Status, which confers Cornish people with ethnic minority status. In response, Angela Rayner said she recognises the Council of Europe status and that: "We'll continue to have conversations to make sure we're acutely sensitive to the needs of the Cornish people and that we take devolution forward in a way that it's intended to deliver for people across Cornwall and to do it **with** them not **to** them."