

District Councillor's Report – June 2024

D-Day 80th Anniversary Commemorations.

Although the parish did not host a formal event to commemorate D-Day I was pleased to see that the Parish Council raised a commemorative flag on the village's flagpoles on Greenbank. I assisted with the siting of the remembrance silhouette under the flag too.

With the general election upon us imminently you may well be "sick of the campaigning". Our brave servicemen and women fought to liberate Europe from the threat of dictatorship and fascism and to ensure that we can enjoy the democracy that we live in today. We owe them so much. Whichever political party you support or even sympathise towards I would say this; honour those who sacrificed themselves for us by going to vote on 4th July.

Local Plan

The Strategic Planning Committee continues to work on the components of the new draft Local Plan. For those new to this, the District Council is required by law to have in place an up to date Local Plan which is then used as a reference document for development throughout the District by planners and developers alike. The existing Local Plan is approaching the end of its "use by" date and hence the need for a new plan. If the council's plan goes out of date then developers can legally choose to ignore it and would not be subject to its rules.

The latest Strategic Planning Committee considered some of the rules associated with the how we go on to draft our plan. I was questioned by a resident who was concerned that the proposed rules may appear in some cases to be counter-intuitive. Specifically that the draft plan will be "informed by" the availability of land proposed for development by the district's landowners. Surely the plan should start from the premise of protection of our landscape, rivers and coastline?

I have some sympathy for the question and yes, logically that would seem to be the best way to draft our plan, however we are hamstrung by our statutory duties compared to our non-statutory desires. What I mean by that is that the government's rules on planning are that councils have to show (currently) a 4 year land supply – they have to be able to prove that there is sufficient land available to be developed in the district. This is inevitably extended when a council is trying to put together a strategic plan that covers 15 years. That means that the protections that we seek are necessarily subservient to the ability to show an adequate land supply. As I have said before in this column, the government currently requires us to be able to show where we would build around 950 houses per year. If we cannot show that then, once again, developers can legally challenge refusal even in the "National Landscape" areas (formally known as the AONB).

On the question of building land availability in the ward, in their latest draft EDDC have initially rejected any submitted building land suggestions for the ward with the primary intention of protecting the national landscape (formerly the AONB). Cllr Tribble and I attended EDDC recently to discuss the draft and I did suggest that some parcels of land may become acceptable in certain circumstances on the basis that, over the course of the plan through to 2040, we should be able to

accommodate some building within the ward, within acceptable parameters. EDDC's planners were going to take the suggestions away to consider the practicalities.

Draft Local Plan Consultation

As previously discussed I would urge the PC to submit comments on some or all of the aspects of the draft local plan which are being consulted on as per below; Following feedback on our last consultation, we are now looking for your input on eight specific topics which were not fully addressed in the original (Regulation 18 Draft Plan) consultation which ran from November 2022 to January 2023:

New Housing and Mixed Use Site Allocations
New Employment Site Allocations
Designated Neighbourhood Area Housing Requirements
Clyst Valley Regional Park
Town Centre Retail Areas
Coastal Preservation Area
Green Wedges
Sustainability Appraisal

This Further Local Plan Consultation is also at the Regulation 18 stage.

You can answer as few or as many questions under each topic as you like, but please make sure you reach the final page of the topic you're reviewing to ensure your responses are received. **The consultation is open until June 27th 2024.**

Red Bridge

I was encouraged to see that, with many thanks to County Cllr Jess Bailey, the subject of the dilapidated state of Red Bridge footbridge which connects Harpford and Newton Poppleford and forms part of the East Devon Way was put on the agenda for DCC's cabinet in May. A subsequent briefing note has been released by DCC to say that, as negotiations with landowners for the siting of a replacement footbridge have taken so long, DCC will start to look at a compulsory purchase order to acquire the land required for the footbridge in parallel with continuing to try and reach a negotiated settlement. This is a significant step, never taken lightly by councils and seems to indicate that DCC are increasing the sense of urgency around this vital matter.

Public Toilets

At the Parish Council's monthly meeting in May the question of public toilets in the parish was finally put to bed when the Parish Council voted to keep a modernised public toilet facility in the Robert Way car park even if it meant that a "pay for use" system was installed. I strongly support this approach which was something that I originally proposed when Chair of the PC myself. Hopefully the PC can crack on with the work to modernise the facility.

You may be unsurprised to hear that questions around public WC provision are not limited to this parish. I have had correspondence from residents from Exmouth and Sidmouth about concerns over public WC provision in those areas too, with all correspondents asking that public WC provision is maintained in their areas. Whilst it's not a statutory duty of either the parish, district or county councils (I believe it

should be) I continue to believe that it is an invaluable service that separates us from the dark ages of no public facilities.

I think it all comes down to money. I believe the reason the provision of public WCs is not a statutory service is because if the government suddenly decreed that it was compulsory councils up and down the country would suddenly put their hand out for more central money.

Residents' Issues

I have been fairly active recently with several residents' issues such as assisting with EDDC housing swaps, parking issues and the question of double yellow lines. In the case of the latter, with some residents keen to see double yellow lines extended I do have sympathy with the fact that this can take away precious on-street parking places - vital for those many residents who are not so fortunate as to have their own parking space. Devon villages, dating back as they do to mediaeval times, were not designed for the amount of vehicular traffic that we have today. This is Devon and we need to be mindful of that.

Knapp Copse Nature Reserve

With the arrival of some welcome warm weather my wife and I went along to an Otter Valley Association walk organised by Ted Swan. This may well be written about later in this magazine but suffice to say it was an excellent walk and a pleasure to be guided around some of the beautiful countryside that was new to me and yet on our doorstep. Why mention this here? Knapp Copse, near the Hare and Hounds, is actually a former DCC landfill which, having been closed in 1982, has subsequently been managed and cultivated as a nature reserve by EDDC and is a designated County Wildlife site. We walked through wonderful wildflower meadows and saw several deer on our 3 hour, 5 mile walk. Shorter routes are available within the site too. Thoroughly recommended.

Cllr Chris Burhop