

## **District Councillor's Report – September 2023**

### **Travellers**

Along with many residents I was dismayed to receive reports of travellers arriving in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Webber's Meadow field in August. Their arrival signalled a worry for many as, unfortunately, travellers bring with them a reputation for causing nuisance and problems. It was the first time in my >30 yrs in the village that I could recall travellers actually camping within the village. I do recall some 15 or so years ago travellers camping nearby which coincided with a lot of driveways being laid / re-laid in double quick time... and to varying degrees of success.

Therefore, being a relative novice of these things, I was grateful to be able to have a community of fellow District Councillors to call on for advice in this instance and, as some of them had a fair bit of experience of dealing with travellers, they quickly came up trumps and provided details of a local enforcement company used by EDDC on many occasions who outlined the process and costs involved. With the land belonging to the Parish Council EDDC couldn't do too much more than provide advice and so I passed this information on to Cllr Susan Tribble, Chair of the PC, who acted swiftly to employ the enforcement company and, as we now know, within 48hrs the travellers had moved on. We'll never actually know if that had always been their intention but we are grateful that this was a relatively short stay. Unfortunately the clean up took around 2 weeks to make the field safe but now I am pleased to see the field is open again for public use.

The Romany community have a bad press and, in truth, probably have had for generations. On the one hand I respect their wish to have an alternative lifestyle. However, whilst living a nomadic existence is one thing, these travellers often do themselves no favours by allegedly undertaking petty crimes, thefts, attempting to do door to door work or sales and then doing a shoddy job or getting aggressive when people dispute their work etc. Then they move on and leave heaps of rubbish (and worse) behind which is left for the community to clear up at their own cost. No wonder empathy for their way of life quickly evaporates.

### **Flood**

Not too much more to report at the time of writing I am afraid. I am still awaiting the promised report from DCC. I continue to receive and respond to correspondence. I know, more than 4 months on, that a significant number of residents continue to be displaced from their homes whilst still more are having renovations and repairs whilst they are still in the property. I believe that the promised clearing (including de-silting) of Back Brook was undertaken by the EA but if anyone knows differently or has any questions please let me know.

I have been contacted by a resident who's experience of EDDC's discount for council tax is different to what I had previously reported so i am following that up with EDDC directly.

### **Fireworks**

The Parish Council has resolved to organise a bonfire night and fireworks event again on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November and I am again happy to support this community event which attracts between 500 and 700 local people each year. I am aware that the PC has received several complaints about the proposed event however this is something that is clearly enjoyed by many people and whilst I understand and appreciate the arguments against such an event, there are plenty of arguments for it too.

I started to organise the village bonfire night nearly 10 years ago following decisions by the then school PTA not to undertake their own event (following a few, er, incidents) and also following the winding up of the NP carnival at around that time as I recognised the importance of village events that bring the community together. It also helps to prevent private bonfire parties which can be disruptive and noisy to neighbours without notice and which are being actively discouraged by various authorities. As the RSPCA say, a professionally organised scheduled event is much preferred. I hope that the community will once again support this event.

### **EDDC Public Toilets**

There has been quite a bit on-line about EDDC's plans for public toilets much of which, in my opinion, is somewhat misinformed. The council long ago (in fact during the previous Conservative administration) highlighted the potential closure of some public toilets, the transferring of others to Parish councils (in fact ours in Newton Poppleford was transferred to the PC around 5 or 6 years ago) but, following a consultation in 2021 (where 1300 responded), EDDC undertook to also go ahead with the refurbishment and improvement of 14 other "Category A" facilities. That consultation also persuaded EDDC to change their minds over the potential closure of 6 more public toilets in the district and look to alternative ways of providing these facilities.

EDDC have, in some cases, negotiated commercial leases with companies who take over older lower category toilets and renovate them to other uses but inclusive of access to toilet facilities as a condition of their lease. This happened when a friend of mine took on the lease for The Hideaway cafe in Seaton. It was completely renovated as a cafe and the newly refurbished toilet facilities were made available to the public.

6 "Category C" toilet facilities have been offered to relevant PC's to take on their upkeep. If no - one comes forward for those then EDDC will be closing them as surplus to requirements. The lists of affected facilities can be found in the EDDC website.

### **Planning**

The PC and I, along with other concerned residents, fought against a recent application to replace and enlarge outbuildings of a private residence within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and outside the Built Up Area Boundary of the village (BUAB). This application, which apparently contravened many of the policies in our Neighbourhood Plan, went to the planning committee where it was subsequently voted through by 4 councillors who are from outside our village.

I write this not because I and the PC lost our fight, but because I believe the application was wrong. It was wrong that it was submitted, transgressing so many of the NHP's policies.

These aren't the council's policies, these are *your* policies, democratically voted on by you in 2021. Worse, it's not just the applicant that has ignored these policies it is EDDC too, both their planning officers and the planning committee.

I am in the process of investigating how this can have happened and what it means for the future. More on this later...

### **EDDC recycling**

Every 5 years EDDC undertake a formal household recycling survey. This involves taking the waste from c250 ED households across a range of socio-economic groups. The recovered waste is then separated into a wide range of categories and each category is then weighed. The results have been assimilated and reported on - in fact this is being fed back to residents with "bin flyers" (a pdf of these is attached).

- 32% of what's going in our black (non-recycled) bins could still be recycled if we could be bothered to separate it out.
- Of that 32% nearly half is food waste...

We are one of the best district councils in the country for recycling but we can clearly still do better! So come on people, please let's try a bit harder!!

For information, the green sack should only be used for

1. Mixed plastics (bottles, tubs, pots and trays), washed and squashed please!
2. Food tins and drinks cans, washed and squashed please!
3. Foil wrap or foil food trays, washed and squashed please!
4. Aerosol cans.

### **Car Parking**

There has also been a fair amount of misinformation bandied about regarding car parks lately. Please see below an explanation written by a DC colleague of mine, Cllr Geoff Jung, from Woodbury.

#### **Council income from car parking.**

In East Devon most of the car parks are run by **EDDC** (East Devon District Council), and on street parking by **DCC** (Devon County Council).

**DCC** is responsible for "on-street parking" and is restricted by Government legislation to ensure any surplus after expenditure from fees is required to be spent on enforcing parking, contributing to off-street parking provision and, if the provision of further off-street parking is unnecessary or undesirable, funds can be spent on public transport or highway improvements only.

*\*20% VAT is not applicable to on street parking and therefore it is "zero rated".*

**EDDC** is responsible for "off-street parking" in their car parks. Under Government legislation any surplus after expenditure can be used for "environmental improvement" which can include.

(a) The reduction of environmental pollution (as defined in the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999)

(b) Improving or maintaining the appearance or amenity of a road or land in the vicinity of a road, or open land or water to which the general public has open access.

(c) The provision of outdoor recreational facilities available to the general public without charge.

Therefore, in the case of EDDC this could include waste collections, street cleaning, public conveniences, recreational open space, expenditure on the countryside or commons.

*\*20% VAT is required to be charged for off street parking therefore 20p in the £ goes directly to the Government.*

#### **Consultation for off street parking requirements**

If parking charges are to be introduced at new locations that were previously free, then under the RTRA Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 an Authority is required to carry out a full "public consultation".

If prices are to be changed, it is perfectly legal for a council to make a "parking order" and to simply provide a "public notice" at each car park and council office and website to inform the public of an intended price change.

#### **Government funding reduction**

Since 2010 EDDC along with all other authorities have seen significant cuts in general Government funding to support core service delivery, in fact a reduction in funding of 50p in the pound since that point.

**Government Funding to EDDC for General Services 2010**

**£7m**

**2010 funding indexed link to 2023**

**£10.3m (what £7m**

**would be worth in today's money)**

**Actual Baseline Funding 2023**

**£5m**

#### **The facts**

- East Devon is the only District Council in Devon not to borrow from reserves or cut services for this current year and we continually provide a balanced budget.
- There is not a government requirement that car park charges are invested back into car parks.
- Government funding has halved in real terms since 2010.
- The Government benefits from car park charges at 20p in the pound.

I hope the above helps. Rest assured there are still no plans to charge for parking at Newton Popleford's School Lane car park.

#### **Turner Close Play Area**

EDDC have informed me that the play area has been closed due to "extreme vandalism". The safety surface has been ripped up and the climbing unit has been damaged leaving it dangerous. EDDC will endeavour to get contractors to repair it enough to re-open and assess the damage to the climbing unit further. Very disappointing. It appears that there is a spate of vandalism and anti-social behaviour underway in the village.

**Chris Burhop**