Ward Councillors Report – April 2019 for Newton Poppleford and Harpford Parish Council

Last Wednesday 24th April I attended what is potentially my last EDDC Full Council Meeting depending on the outcome of Thursdays vote. It is always a rush to arrive for the 6.00 pm start when finishing work in Exeter at 5.00 pm.

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# Blackdown House

The new building has a strange set up for Full Council meetings, with a top table facing out into the audience and then tables of 3 councillors herringbone towards the front from each side and tables of two councillors in the middle isle face directly to the top table. Thus members of the public get to see the back of a lot of heads while matters are being debated and indeed, if members of the public speak, they speak to the back of a row of heads. It does not seem very inclusive.

# Notice of Motion on Climate Change

In his last EDDC meeting after 24 years of being a local councillor Roger Giles had put forward a motion for the meeting to discuss climate change, as had Cllr Matt Booth at the Full Council meeting in February. In February the Chief Executive refused to allow this debate, saying it was premature and important to wait until DCC had debated the matter. Cllr Booth pointed out that Bristol City Council had passed a motion to be carbon neutral by 2030. DCC subsequently debated the matter and aim to be carbon neutral by 2050, in line with the government’s very unambitious target.

Furthermore Teignbridge District Council on 20th April, debated the matter and agreed to *aim* to be carbon neutral by 2025 in view of the acknowledged climate emergency. Teignbridge council pledged to do what they can to tackle global warming and become carbon neutral. No specific action as to how to achieve it has yet been agreed, but a task group, that will include the community, businesses and schools, is to be formed and to report back in six months outlining how the council will address the climate emergency.

At the April 24th Full Council Meeting, furious that the CE would not allow such an important matter to be debated, Cllr Giles called the Cabinet Minute as follows:

*CABINET MINUTE 193  3 4 2019*

*The report on Climate Change which went to Cabinet on 3 April contained a large number of initiatives. It is hard to imagine that anyone would object to any of them.*

*But that is the problem. The proposals are very modest. They show a lack of ambition.*

*The report does not recognise or address the seriousness or urgency of the situation.*

*I had hoped that this council - all 59 of we elected representatives of the people of East Devon - would collectively debate and vote on the greatest threat facing mankind tonight. I had hoped that we would agree strong action. I had hoped that we would exercise strong and decisive leadership. I had hoped that we would complete our term of office leaving a responsible legacy, and placing a challenge before our successors.*

*However the Chief Executive refused to allow my Notice of Motion to appear on today`s agenda, saying it was "superfluous"!*

*Instead, I was left to call this minute. Instead of strong and decisive leadership, we are asked to leave the Cabinet - just 10 councillors - to look at this matter again at some unspecified time in the future, and agree some unspecified action.*

*That really is not good enough. The brilliant 16 year old Greta Thunberg met the major political party leaders in Westminster yesterday. They made time for her and her concerns. Contrast that with our response. Just  what kind of message are we sending to Greta, and to the young people of East Devon who will suffer the consequences of our inaction?*

*Chairman, I move that Cabinet minute 193 be amended by the deletion of all words after "RESOLVED"*

*and replaced with:*

*"This council agrees to declare a `climate emergency`. Regrets the lack of ambition by Devon County Council of seeking to achieve carbon neutrality in Devon by 2050. And seeks to be a community leader, by setting challenging targets in a short timescale to avert the consequences of climate change, and the alarming consequential impacts on future as well as present generations."*

The CE dismissed this, saying an amendment was not the correct process, the decision would not be changed and the amendment could not stand. He said that Cllr Giles should know that. Cllr Giles said he had never heard that rule. Furthermore the CE stated he did not see the point of such aims, ‘aims’ being meaningless….

A number of Tory councillors attempted to defend the EDDC record on its carbon footprint. However, when another opposition councillor suggested that EDDC car parks should have electricity hook ups, this was also dismissed.

Several times during the meeting, digs were made from Tory councillors about councillors who do not attend meetings. Looking around the chamber at the demographic, some long standing councillors seem to have completely forgotten that councillors of working age are far more restricted about attending daytime meetings (which is most of them) and even attending meetings that start at 5.30, 6.00 and even 6.30 sometimes can be difficult. The historic situation whereby councillors are all retired or wealthy or self employed and can dictate their own hours is not very healthy or balanced.

# Conservative Leader Resigns

In a bizarre turn of events, it turns out that the Leader of the Council, who Chaired the Full Council meeting, had already resigned from the Conservative party earlier in April and is standing as an ‘Independent’ in the forthcoming election although he will show as a Conservative’ on his ballot paper. Indeed, he will still be Leader of the Conservative Council until the Annual meeting on 22nd May 2019. Strange timing - just before the election in a time when the Tory reputation is somewhat tarnished. Sceptics could ask themselves if this is a tactical move given that the Tory party does not seem very popular in many quarters.

It will be interesting to see what election day - Thursday 2nd May brings.

# S106 Funds

S106 funds – these are still extremely slow coming forward despite promises made last year that by the spring 2019 town and parish councils will be able to easily see what money they are owed and easily access that money. It is simply unacceptable.

# Yellow lines in Newton Poppleford.

DCC/HATOC is at last consulting with the parish council on proposals for yellow lines at the entrance to:

Capper Close

Otter Reach

Millmoor Lane

Green Bank – a very short stretch

Cllr Claire Wright has been pushing for these to be done. I would also like to see the same yellow lines at the junction with Back Lane and also in the turning area of Millmoor Vale where residents are often unable to get in or out of their drives due to other people (often non-residents) parking in the turning area.

# Four Elms Hill

However we are still waiting to see if the long promised traffic survey by contractor Jacobs brings results for Four Elms Hill. This matter is due back on the HATO agenda for July 2019. We are hoping for double white lines and a speed reduction at the top of the hill between Bowd and Four Elms Hill to 40 mph. Cllr Claire Wright has been supporting the parish by asking for this for the past two years. A resident pointed out to me whilst I was out canvassing that although many drivers ignore the speed limit, MOST abide by double white lines.

EDDC onsultation of Supplementary Planning Document on Affordable Housing. **Consultation closes 10th May 2019.**

I have been through these documents and they read well. The problem comes in the implementation and as usual the detested phrase ‘where viable’ continues to feature highly. We have already read that Cranbrook is now only set to deliver 15% affordable housing due to ‘viability issues’ PLUS it is proposed that CIL rates will be £0.00 per sq metre. Independent reports show that there is plenty of profit for developers per house in this area yet EDDC are so keen to appeal to developers to keep on building they change the rules accordingly. I am sure it depends whose figures are taken as a starting point the ‘viability’ discussion and if EDDC simply accept what the developers are saying, we will not see the affordable housing we need coming forward.

This is what is says on the EDDC website:

*The* [*East Devon Local Plan*](http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-2013-2031/) *promotes the delivery of new affordable housing in the district, through policies relating to affordable housing targets (Strategy 34) and exceptions sites (Strategy 35).*

*We have prepared a supplementary planning document (SPD) to provide guidance and advice on implementing Local Plan policies on affordable housing.  The SPD explains when and how affordable housing will be secured to deliver sustainable communities in East Devon.*

*The draft Affordable Housing SPD and accompanying documents are being published for consultation, available through the links below:*

* [*Draft Affordable Housing Supple mentary Planning Document*](http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/2864523/Affordable-Housing-SPD_approved-at-SPC-26319.pdf)
* [*Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document – Screening report for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations*](http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/2864598/AH-SPD_screening-assessments_SEA-HRA.pdf)
* [*Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document – Equalities Impact Assessment*](http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/2864595/Affordable-Housing-SPD_EqIA.pdf)

*If you would like to comment on the draft Affordable Housing supplementary planning document and/or the accompanying documents (Environmental and Habitats screening reports, Equalities Impact Assessment), please email us at* *planningpolicy@eastdevon.gov.uk* *or post comments to Planning Policy, East Devon District Council, Blackdown House, Border Road, Heathpark Industrial Estate, Honiton, EX14 1EJ.* ***The consultation period runs from Thursday 28 March until Friday 10 May 2019 (at 5pm).***

There are some useful introductory statements from the start of the document:

*What is affordable housing?*

*2.1 There are four broad types of affordable housing, as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework4:*

*“Affordable housing: housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers); and which complies with one or more of the following definitions:*

*a) Affordable housing for rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the Government’s rent policy for Social Rent or Affordable Rent, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent).*

*b) Starter homes: is as specified in Sections 2 and 3 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and any secondary legislation made under these sections. The definition of a starter home should reflect the meaning set out in statute and any such secondary legislation at the time of plan-preparation or decision-making. Where secondary legislation has the effect of limiting a household’s eligibility to purchase a starter home to those with a particular maximum level of household income, those restrictions should be used.*

*c) Discounted market sales housing: is that sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains at a discount for future eligible households.*

*d) Other affordable routes to home ownership: is housing provided for sale that provides a route to ownership for those who could not achieve home ownership through the market. It includes shared ownership, relevant equity loans, other low cost homes for sale (at a price equivalent to at least 20% below local market value) and rent to buy (which includes a period of intermediate rent). Where public grant funding is provided, there should be provisions for the homes to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for any receipts to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision, or refunded to Government or the relevant authority specified in the funding agreement.”*

*Who delivers new affordable housing?*

*2.2 Planning policies require a certain proportion of affordable housing, or off-site contribution for their delivery elsewhere, in order for planning permission for new housing to be granted – it is through this process that the vast majority of affordable housing is delivered.*

*2.3 In most cases, new affordable homes to rent are constructed by private developers and sold to registered providers5 (RPs) at a discounted price. The RP then lets out these properties to eligible households – the maximum level of rent that is covered by housing benefit (being replaced by Universal Credit) is set according to the number of bedrooms and the location.6 The RP is responsible for their ongoing management (apart from Build to Rent affordable housing, where the landlord need not be a registered provider). RPs currently operating in East Devon can be seen in chapter seven.*

*2.4 New affordable homes to buy are also generally constructed by private developers and either sold to RPs, or made available directly by the developers. These homes can then be purchased by eligible households at below market values. Another route to affordable home ownership is in the form of rent to buy, such as homes provided by ‘Rentplus’, who purchase new properties and lease them to RPs to manage and let to eligible households at an affordable rent (set at 80% of market rent). Tenants are given five-year renewable tenancy agreements by Rentplus, and have the opportunity to purchase the property at five yearly intervals up to 20 years – all Rentplus homes are sold after 20 years, to the occupier or RP or, if not, then on the open market.*

*2.5 Other, less common, routes of affordable housing delivery include schemes funded by Government grant, or schemes led by RPs who may obtain planning permission and construct affordable homes to rent or buy themselves.*

*2.6 In some cases, completed affordable homes may be passed to EDDC to add to its own housing stock or to the councils’ local housing company East Devon Homes.*

*5 Registered Providers are independent, not-for-profit companies set up to provide affordable homes for people in need. They are funded and regulated by Homes England. 6 Local Housing Allowance rates are used to set the maximum level of rent that can be charged by an RP.*

*2.7 Community land trusts (CLTs) can also deliver affordable housing. These are non-profit organisations for the ownership and/or management of assets (e.g. housing) for the benefit of the local community, and can be set up by communities in towns as well as more rural areas. Once a CLT has been set up, they can own land and commission the construction of homes that are made affordable to rent or buy for local people (for example through leasing the homes to a RP). The CLT then remains a long term steward of homes and assets.8 A notable CLT in East Devon is Beer Community Land Trust, which has already delivered affordable housing in the village, and has plans to deliver more.*

 *Affordable housing delivered by Beer Community Land Trust*

*2.8 Finally, East Devon District Council spend receipts from the ‘Right to Buy’ to purchase dwellings on the open market, which are then managed by the council as affordable housing to rent. The council has a target of acquiring 20 dwellings per year via this method.10 Right to Buy receipts have to spent within three years, otherwise they are returned to Government (with interest), although the Government is considering more flexibility on this.*

*How much affordable housing is there in East Devon?*

*2.9 There are a total of 68,370 dwellings in East Devon, of which 6,520 are “affordable”. East Devon District Council own 4,200 of these affordable dwellings, and the other 2,320 are owned by RPs.*

*2.10 Around 25 social rented homes are purchased by tenants from the council each year under the ‘Right to Buy’ – where council housing tenants have a right to buy their home at a discount, with the amount of discount dependent upon the length of time as a social tenant.*