

## District Councillors Report

### Flood Recovery

I make no apologies for writing at length again about the flooding of 9<sup>th</sup> May. This was one of the biggest events to affect the parish in the past decade or more and, with more than 60 properties flooded internally, it touched many lives.

The multi-agency Recovery Coordination Group (RCG) has been meeting roughly fortnightly since the flood. The group has been comprised of representatives from Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, the Environment Agency, Devon & Cornwall Police, South West Water and Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service. Within those organisations there have been experts looking at every aspect of the event. The group has been led by East Devon District Council. In last month's article I questioned why the initiative hadn't been grasped by DCC but I have since been told that this was because the event was so localised to just East Devon.

The group has a number of objectives. In the short term it is to ensure that any vulnerable people are protected, assistance is given to help with clearing up and the infrastructure is brought back to functionality – in effect the recovery. The medium term objectives are to produce a report into the event with recommendations and agreed actions. These actions will drive the long term objectives.

We have been focussing the attentions of the EA and DCC on improving the immediate protection of properties which have already been flooded. Behind Burrow Lane the deluge of 9<sup>th</sup> May shifted a huge amount of soil from farm fields and raised the soil levels behind garden walls and hedges. A lot of work has already been undertaken but there is still more to do. In addition we have been chasing up the progress on jetting and clearing blocked drains. The future jetting programme will undoubtedly form part of the consideration of the committee's report.

Rather than the provision of skips as was first suggested EDDC's Street Scene have been undertaking the kerbside collection of flood damaged goods and mud. That operation is still continuing for the time being, at the time of writing. Should you need material collecting please contact me at [chris.burhop@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:chris.burhop@eastdevon.gov.uk) or call 07741 646266. I know some people have been critical that the recycling centre at the Bowd did not allow vans with flood damaged goods to unload there. I do sympathise but also see it from both sides. It would have been very difficult for EDDC workers to distinguish between "commercial" vans and flood victims, hence the decision to undertake kerbside collections. There have also been some understandable complaints regarding the lack of help to clear mud from gardens. Again, I really do sympathise but EDDC do have finite resources and do not have a limitless supply of workers - the help undertaken so far has all been on top of workers' "day jobs".

It is of course worth reiterating the thanks from so many affected people to so many residents who rallied round to help their friends, neighbours or even complete strangers. There really was a tremendous community spirit.

As I write there is still an enormous amount of activity being undertaken. Footpath 3 (down towards the tennis courts) has been repaired. Other local footpaths including those in the countryside are being surveyed and contractors will be tasked with helping to cut back the vegetation, some of which has been flourishing amidst ideal growing conditions. The Environment Agency are surveying Back Brook including identifying damage and looking at the silting up which has occurred. It's important to note that the EA work strictly to their own rules on "riparian" responsibilities regarding who is responsible for maintaining and where

necessary repairing the riverbanks. They have also surveyed farmland both on the ground and using a drone & this information will drive their future actions.

DCC Highways have been busy trying to restore damaged road surfaces. Residents of Nothmostown pointed out the serious damage to Back Lane and DCC are working with utility companies whose pipes and cables run down that track to arrange for it to be reinstated properly. They have circulated a map of surveyed roads, showing the damaged areas which have been identified so far. Feel free to contact me for a copy.

The RCG also staged 3 drop-in events in Newton Poppleford, Colaton Raleigh and Tipton St John with the intention of helping to answer affected residents' questions and keep them informed regarding what has been and will be done, as well as to listen to residents' views on what happened.

The RCG are proposing a property flood resilience scheme for affected properties. This would be a community application to DEFRA by the EA on behalf of all affected residents. This would provide flood resistant doors and barriers to those residents who wanted them. It may, however, take 12-18 months to get them. They may apply for PFR funding for Colaton Raleigh, Newton Poppleford, Venn Ottery and Tipton separately. I am concerned that we ensure we get a true record of all affected properties to make sure everyone who qualifies can benefit from these measures. It's also important that the scheme(s) don't simply move the problem along the road, so to speak.

In Harpford I have raised the land management issues in Harpford Woods. DCC have responded that they are aware that this has been an ongoing issue for many years. The promising news is that one of the DCC officers is working with Clinton Devon and Westcountry Rivers Trust to put some funding in place for some work to help to reduce the future risk of flooding. I will keep you posted as & when I hear any more.

The EDDC emergency planning officer is currently working with the parish councils which have been affected by this event to look at localised emergency planning & where already in position, to improve them if necessary.

## **Highways**

In spite of the flood, DCC Highways have undertaken some more significant pothole filling, although not yet down Four Elms Hill. This happened shortly after Lib Dem MP Richard Foord was filmed on ITV Westcountry complaining about the state of Devon's roads – and he chose Newton Poppleford to highlight it! Perhaps it's just a coincidence...

There is still a deep pothole on the bridge outside Woodley's woodyard which I have reported myself to DCC at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/report-a-pothole/> This is the site to use to report damage to roads etc.

I'm pleased to say that I have been appointed as one of the three EDDC councillors to have been elected to the East Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee which is run by DCC. The first meeting is on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> July & I will endeavour to report back on that. Hopefully it will give you, the residents of the ward, a bigger say in the operations of Highways Department in East Devon.

## **Footpaths**

As mentioned above some of our most used footpaths were damaged by the floods including footpath 3, which runs from Venn Ottery Road to Back Lane by the tennis courts. I'm pleased to report that DCC were quick to repair this footpath. What residents may not realise that our volunteer footpath warden, Ted Swan, was himself flooded out on May 9<sup>th</sup>.

Unfortunately, like so many others, he and his wife have had to move out of the property and are currently living in Sidmouth until their house is deemed habitable. This is of course a personal tragedy for him but it has also meant that the 20km of footpaths that he looks after have become increasingly overgrown. Ted has said that he hopes to get back to maintaining at least some of the footpaths. The PC has also contacted DCC to see if they can help using a contractor. I hope that residents can be patient whilst this situation is resolved. Whilst residents should not attempt to trim or brush clear the footpaths themselves, I myself took a pair of secateurs with me on a recent walk from the village to Otterton and pruned back some overhanging nettles and brambles... Just saying.

### **District Council Annual Meeting**

At the Council's Annual Meeting on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May Councillor Eleanor Rylance was elected Chair of the council, whilst Cllr Paul Arnott was again elected Leader of the Council. To explain the difference between these roles, the Chair is there to Chair council meetings, whilst the Leader of the council is able to appoint a cabinet and drive council strategy and key decisions. The Council's Chief Executive also reports to the Leader.

I was unfortunately not able to attend the meeting but was able to watch it live streamed on You Tube. I personally hope that the Local Government Act 1972 can be reformed so that hybrid meetings (where people can vote on-line) will be allowed at some point in the near future. Back in 1972 the internet wasn't even imagined and many houses had "party line" telephone lines, if you were lucky enough to have a phone! So it is about time that the Government caught up and at least recognised that we have hit the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

**Chris Burhop**  
**June 2023**