

CONTENTS

Purdah.....	1
Postponement of a number of council meetings	1
Sidmouth sea defence plans paused to explore ‘bigger and better’ options.....	2
New Vaccination centre, Greendale.	2
#StayLocalShopSafe campaign to encourage local and safe shopping.....	3
Re-Development of the Knowle.....	3
VAS camera data.....	4
Vacancy for a Harpford Parish councillor – co-option is now possible.....	4
Newly elected Parish Councillor for the Newton Poppleford vacancy	4
New double yellow lines Millmoor Lane.....	5
The cows are back in the fields in Harpford	5
Residents’ complaints and concerns.....	5
Moving bus stops at the western end of the village on the A3052 close to Burrow Lane.	5

Purdah

We are coming to the end of purdah in the run up to the Devon County Council elections. Purdah describes the period of time immediately before elections or referendums when specific restrictions on council communications are in place. The term 'heightened sensitivity' is also used. Pre-election rules restrict activity wider than just publicity and covers use of council facilities and resources; *the member’s code of conduct, developing new policies and holding of events - including some meetings – articles and pictures featuring elected officials should all be carefully considered during a period of heightened sensitivity.* This has all further restricted activity at the council although for office staff at EDDC, their normal working days continue. This month’s report is therefore shorter than some months to ensure that Purdah is not accidentally breached.

Postponement of a number of council meetings

In April quite a few council meetings were cancelled because of news of the death of Prince Philip. Apart from cancelling meetings as a mark of respect, the council cannot legally hold any meetings without giving three clear working days’ notice after issuing an agenda according to the Local Government Act of 1972. However, days during a period of ‘national mourning’ are not classed as working days and as such it has been impossible at times to issue agenda in time for the scheduled date of a council meeting. National mourning days (lasting from Friday April 9 until April 17, the day of the funeral) are not counted as clear days in accordance with that act. Meetings that were due to be held during that period will now be rescheduled, for example the next Full Council meeting is this coming Wednesday 28t April, postponed from 21st April.

Sidmouth sea defence plans paused to explore 'bigger and better' options

East Devon District Council's (EDDC) cabinet voted to put an existing £9million scheme on hold – as previously dismissed options may now be affordable. Permission for temporary rock armouring at crumbling Pennington Point will be sought in the meantime. The move – made possible by a funding boost – could mean that the realisation of a scheme for the town is delayed by up to two years.

[EDDC's](#) current preferred option for Sidmouth is to spend £9million on a new rock groyne on East Beach and raising the height of the seafront splash wall. Modifications to the River Sid training wall and shingle replenishment and recycling would also be carried out.

Now, other options are back on the table as extra money has been made available due to changes in eligibility for funding from various bodies.

In 2017, Sidmouth town councillors backed a scheme with four additional semi-obscured offshore 'reefs' that decrease in size towards East Beach. As this cost up to £20million – the most expensive of all the options – it wasn't taken forward. Other rejected ideas included modifying the rock groynes at Bedford Steps, York Steps and East Pier Rock into 'T' shapes and placing a slope of large boulders next to the sea wall.

EDDC engineer Tom Buxton-Smith told a cabinet meeting on March 31: "There is a desire to see if a better scheme can be delivered than the one proposed, but, to do so, it will need us to pause the project to see if they are technically viable." He said of temporary rock armouring at Pennington Point: "In the short-term, it will slow down erosion rates, meaning the cliff edge will be kept away from residents' houses for longer, the mouth of the River Sid remains better protected from south-easterly storms, meaning a reduction in flood risk to Sidmouth town, and removes pressure to deliver the BMP [Beach Management plan] quickly, which will allow time to further assess other options and allow further post pandemic public consultation." But he added: "It is possible that temporary planning permission will not be granted, the rock armour will be unsightly, and will be the first thing residents/visitors see of the World Heritage site when looking east from The Esplanade, and placing rock armour in front of the cliffs could be argued to be desecrating a pristine site with many important designations, albeit temporarily."

Cabinet members voted in favour of pausing the project for six months to look at the viability of other, previously dismissed, options for engineers and specialist consultants to review and assess the various alternatives.

Members also approved investigating securing temporary planning permission for the installation of rock armouring at East Beach.

New Vaccination centre, Greendale.

Soon Westpoint will close down as a vaccination centre, owing to the need to take bookings for shows and public events as lockdown restrictions continue to ease. Greendale has been approved by the government for 2 new sites, one for a walk-in vaccination centre at Greendale and the second a drive through vaccination centre at the Greendale Farm Shop.

Both these locations are in the open Countryside. The walk-in centre is a permanent building that is going up because it was found to be cheaper than a temporary marquee.

There is no requirement for planning permission or consultation for this type of building and its use as the government is able to make that decision without consultation. The site now being used was formerly developed by Greendale without planning permission. EDDC refused the retrospective planning application and the applicant appealed. The appeal was dismissed by the inspector and Greendale were tasked with removing the previous building from the site. Once the emergency is over both locations will require Local Authority planning permission if they are to remain as permanent buildings.

#StayLocalShopSafe campaign to encourage local and safe shopping

#StayLocalShopSafe campaign encourages residents to rediscover the high street and support local businesses, now that lockdown restrictions are lifted.

The Reopening of the High Streets programme is supporting a campaign, #StayLocalShopSafe, to inform residents and visitors about how to use their high streets and town centres safely and showcasing how local businesses are responding to the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic by adapting, evolving and reaching out to their community. This includes offering safe and responsive ways to access the goods and services that they need.

The 'Reopening High Streets Safely' fund means East Devon District Council has been able to put additional measures in place across towns and public spaces to enable safe trading environments for businesses and customers. The Streetscene team have rolled out a number of temporary public realm changes, this includes the provision of hand sanitiser stations, safety signage and pavement markings. The Environmental Health team have recruited two COVID Compliance Officers whose role is to support local businesses.

On the matter of supporting local food and businesses, conservationist Chris Packham has launched a campaign highlighting the poor conditions that chickens raised for human consumption by major supermarkets like Tesco and Morrisons are being kept in. Its hard to believe in this day and age that these practises are continuing. I was even more surprised to read that the chicken for dishes like pre-prepared chicken curries from Tesco are sourced from Thailand according to the packaging!

Re-Development of the Knowle.

Pegasus Living were given permission to redevelop The Knowle for an assisted living development together with supporting facilities, including a restaurant and an orangery, together with public access. Residents may remember this was quite a controversial decision as the council sold off its former premises to relocate to the new Honiton office. Pegasus Living has now stated it is changing its focus in terms of the types of later living schemes they're likely to be developing in future and are considering their options for the Sidmouth site. We will have to wait and see what the next planning application looks like.

VAS camera data

The data has now been reviewed, including by the police, and this shows that the average speed of vehicles through the High Street falls below that required for the road to an approved site for a speed camera. PC Clatworthy explained that the average speed was calculated as 34 mph. During the discussion it was pointed out that:

- Emergency vehicles could be responsible for some of the unusually high speed of vehicles recorded through the village.
- At times traffic was extremely slow due to road works, volume of traffic, breakdowns on the hill etc and those exceptionally slow speeds recorded brought down the average speed recorded.
- The time scale of the data capture for analysis was too short to be reflective of normal road use.

PC Clatworthy agreed with some of these comments and that the way the figures were calculated did not take the above points into account. A number of parish councillors expressed their disappointment with the news that speeds did not meet the threshold required because they felt their own experience of speeding traffic was more naturally occurring and they were able to filter out these extreme speeds (high and low). It was that some drivers continued to speed through the village. PC Clatworthy assured the parish council that recorded speeds could be looked at again at a future date and the outcome may be different. There is no doubt that traffic has increased enormously across the whole of East Devon since the 12th April changes to lockdown.

Vacancy for a Harpford Parish councillor – co-option is now possible.

Although a resident called for an election for this post, no candidates came forward. The parish council is therefore able to co-opt anyone suitable who comes forward to fill this post. There was a time when very few elections were called for at parish council level and it became common for councillors to co-opt their friends each time a vacancy occurred, thus the whole point of a range of views on the parish council was lost as friends tended to support their friends on voting matters and there was a danger of an entire council becoming a social group for friends rather than carrying out its intended purpose. The plus side of being able to co-opt rather than have an election is the cost savings. Had two candidates come forward for this post and each had to run a 'campaign' to get voted in at the election, there would have been a cost to the parish council of around £1,000 charged out by EDDC to man the election. The fee was lower than we would usually expect as a number of elections are taking place anyway on 6th May, for example for the District Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and for the Neighbourhood Plan. Had an election been run just for the parish council, I believe the cost would have been close to double that.

Newly elected Parish Councillor for the Newton Popleford vacancy

At the last parish council meeting at the end of March Susan Tribble was elected as the new parish councillor for Newton Popleford. The parish council were very happy to welcome her to the team and we all look forward to working with her.

New double yellow lines Millmoor Lane

DCC have been monitoring this and parking enforcement tickets have been issued to those who have ignored the yellow lines and parked on them.

The cows are back in the fields in Harpford

The cows are back outside after a long winter indoors and enjoying fresh grass and sun on their backs. The local farmer, Farmer Snell is very careful to only allow calm cows to graze in the fields here, keeping any that are more boisterous back on the home farm. The cows are either in calf or very young newborn stock. They are often curious about their world and will follow walkers. It is important not to run through the fields, if you run the youngsters will run with you. Do not send your dog in to chase them away, this will just make the mothers anxious as she may see the dog or you as a threat to her calf. This is just a reminder of the advice about travelling through the fields when the cows are out:

- Keep dogs on short leads in the fields where the cows are
- Walk slowly and steadily through the field.
- Do not run, shout, approach or excite them in any way
- All dog poo should be picked up, dog poo can cause cows to abort their calves.
- If you are not confident in walking across a field with cows present, then consider taking the alternative route to miss them out. This is quite a short detour.

Residents' complaints and concerns

Moving bus stops at the western end of the village on the A3052 close to Burrow Lane.

This was not really a complaint, but an enquiry. The question was how does one go about getting a bus stop moved. The suggestion is that the bus stops at the most western end of the village are moved to the more natural pull-in around Burrow from their current sites in a hedge on either side of the A3052. The current bus stop areas themselves are overgrown and so is the area around them, making it very difficult if you are waiting in the hedge for the bus and then want to look up the road to see if the bus is approaching. Even worse is walking along the A3052 without pavements to or from the bus stop, which is a very unsafe and slightly terrifying as traffic races past. A previous resident of Newton Popleford used to allow people to go through her garden and out of the back gate to the bus stop but the new owner has to make the garden dog proof so this option is no longer possible. The parish council has previously suggested this bus stop move and are discussing it at the end of April in the parish council meeting and I would certainly support moving both east and west bound stops. The bus company is happy to negotiate with councillors to find the best solution to problems like this.



View of the bus stop on the A3052 - west bound. Reaching this bus stop is precarious as there are no pavements. Visibility is poor both for drivers and pedestrians.

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