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Right toilet in the right place – a public toilet review 2021

This is just a reminder asking residents to respond to EDDCs public toilet review in the next few days. Please do search for Public toilet review on the EDDC website and give your opinion or click on the link below. You only have to answer the questions that interest you, such as the toilets in Sidmouth if they are the ones you use, or Budleigh Salterton or Exmouth. You don’t have to comment on all the toilets in East Devon.

As I stated last month my own view is that we should not have less toilets in terms of location. We could have less cubicles in some locations. I disagree that an 8 minute walk is reasonable in a town if you are incontinent, have a health issue, have young children and so on. Having recently been unwell, I have now come around to the fact that I would be willing to pay a small amount to use a clean and well kept toilet, but would not be willing to pay to use the current facilities which are often unclean and unpleasant to use. I would hope that some toilets and car parks will be offered to town and parish council to take over and they can make the best decision on how best to provide a good service for local residents.

I have heard back on some of the options put forward so far and apparently there have been some interesting and innovative responses such as changing the use of some buildings but still retaining a toilet for public use as part of the lease.

<https://eastdevon.gov.uk/community-engagement/public-toilet-review/>

A reminder the review closes on 1st October at 5.00 pm

I wrote back in May 2021 about the history of public toilets and how originally the public paid to use them. I repeat that information here as a reminder.

Public toilets history

Councils do not have a statutory duty to provide public toilets. This is some background to what started the provision of public toilets according to Historic England:

“In 1851 the Great Exhibition took place in Hyde Park, London. The refreshment rooms featured public conveniences for which a small charge was made. By the time the exhibition closed over 800,000 visitors had paid more than £2,000 for use of the facilities. And so was born the concept of ‘spending a penny’ to use the loo”. [Spending a Penny: an Exploration of England's Public Toilets | Historic England](#). Certainly I remember having to pay for public toilets until my twenties I think. They were often built underground so as not to be unsightly; they were often quite grand inside. Initially only available for men, public toilets later became available for everyone and over time the penny charge was dropped. We have now come to expect to use public toilets at no cost.

At some point we have all been very grateful for access to a public loo, and more so with children, for the elderly, for anyone with a medical condition and so on. One problem is now that loos are unattended, they are sometimes misused and deliberately vandalised often in the most disgusting way, they are old, tired and not places you would choose to go ideally. Our own WCs in the car park Newton Poppleford cost £5,000 a year to clean and its not even possible to guarantee they are clean when you visit them, depending on who used it last. CV-19 has meant additional cleaning routines have to be in place for the public toilets that have remained open, this all puts up costs.

So EDDC is having to look at what it needs to do to upgrade or replace toilet blocks and how to fund this. A resident has written to the council suggesting we lobby for the government to make the provision of public toilets statutory as this would hopefully bring some funding with it, I think this is a good idea. It is likely an EDDC consultation will be taking place in the near future about how to best fund an upgrade to our tired and run down council owned public toilets.

Broken street Lighting in Turner Close

Two street lights in Turner Close have been broken for around 18 months now. Initially there was a debate over whether it was the responsibility of DCC or EDDC but EDDC now agree the responsibility lies with them. Parish Chair Cllr Chris Burhop has chased this hard with EDDC and residents have very helpfully kept us informed about the lack of repairs being carried out. I received this communication from officers on 24th August.

Following the recent communication regarding the street light issue at Turner Close, Newton Poppleford I can only apologise that the matter has still to be resolved.

Whilst we have raised orders for the repair of the lighting in question it transpires that this request is not as simple as it sounds and cannot be delivered; we have been in further contact with SSE and they have now advised that as the lights in question are mounted on wooden Western Power Distribution (WPD) poles they can no longer be repaired. SSE Operatives are no longer permitted to scale poles owned by WPD, this being the case the lights currently mounted on the WPD have to be removed together with all their electric supplies and replaced with new light standards sited away from the WPD poles.

We are currently in communication with SSE and are awaiting their proposals and quotations for the supply and installation of replacement light standards. It should be noted that depending on the final agreed location there may be a need to enter into Wayleave Agreement/Easements, if that is the case then that may unfortunately lead to further delays.

Indications are that we should receive the lighting proposal and quotation from SSE by the end of this week however the electrical element delivered by WPD may take three weeks plus to come through. We have asked for timescales for the work from receipt of order to be included when they submit their proposals/quotations.

Once we are in receipt, have reviewed and accepted the detail proposal we will issue the necessary orders without delay; if there is a need for Wayleave Agreements/Easements then we will request that our Corporate Estates Team expedite the same so that work can be carried out at the earliest opportunity.

Finally, please be assured that we are committed to resolving this situation and will update you further as and when the requested information from SSE.

A resident suggested it would be helpful if EDDC circulated a letter to all Turner Close residents to keep them informed of the situation and this has been agreed. Hopefully this saga will not drag on as long as Four Elms Hill remedial work....

Extraordinary Consultative meeting of Full Council – 7th September 2021

An emergency meeting was called re the following which is taken from the EDDC website.

Honorary Alderman Award

To consider withdrawing the title of Honorary Alderman awarded to a former East Devon District Councillor, John Humphreys, following his recent trial and conviction at Exeter Crown Court.

Minutes:

The Chair introduced the item by reminding those present of the recent trial and conviction of a former East Devon District Councillor. He went on to outline that John Humphreys had been found guilty of ten charges, relating to the sexual assault of two young boys between 1990 and 2001. His 21-year jail sentence and addition to the sex offenders' list for life, reflected the gravity of his crimes. Most importantly, the Chair wanted to extend his sympathy and that of the Council, to the two victims and their families, and hoped that the conviction and sentence handed down would offer some level of closure.

In 2019, an Extraordinary meeting of East Devon District Council awarded the position of Honorary Alderman to Mr Humphreys. This position was established under the Local Government Act 1972 and is awarded in recognition of valued service to the community represented and the Council. As Chair of the Council, Cllr Thomas considered that Mr Humphreys' offences, conviction, and sentence, did not make Mr Humphreys a fit person to hold this honour. He had, therefore, called this Extraordinary meeting of Council, to put the sole recommendation, that the award of Honorary Alderman be withdrawn from John Humphreys forthwith. If this was supported, this recommendation would be the first time the award of Honorary Alderman had been withdrawn, further confirming the Council's recognition of the gravity of the crimes involved.

A recorded vote was requested, and it was agreed unanimously that the title of Alderman should be withdrawn. I have long had concerns about the award of the title of Alderman. I would have thought it was for exceptional service, but after many councillors stood down or were defeated in the 2019 elections, Aldermanships were awarded to all councillors who had stood for two terms, regardless of what they brought to the role. Alderman get free car parking for life in East Devon. I would have no

objection to those who have genuinely given 'exceptional' service being awarded Alderman status, although it would need a clear definition of what 'exceptional service' is. This may be reviewed at some point in these budget strapped times.

There was some political point scoring on social media after this news broke, with the Conservative party taking to social media to say they had long argued for DBS checks for all EDDC councillors and anyone joining their party would now be DBS checked, (it has been debated extensively at previous meetings). However, there is a problem with this in my opinion and in the eyes of the legal team at EDDC. Firstly, there are certain criteria for Enhanced DBS checks which is the level needed if they are to be of any use at all. Furthermore, even the Enhanced check only flags up if you already have a conviction or caution for a crime. John Humphreys would have passed a DBS check, so would Jimmy Saville and numerous other notorious abusers because they had no previous convictions. Therefore it concerns me that a clear DBS gives a false sense of security that a person with a clear DBS check is safe to be around children and vulnerable people.

EDDC councillors rarely need to be alone with children or vulnerable people in their councillor role. Arguably DCC councillors who have responsibility for Health and Social Care would be more likely to be in that position. In my view it is more important that children and vulnerable adults are educated and empowered to speak up if they experience anything that makes them uncomfortable and that all councillors understand their role in Safeguarding and whistleblowing, and speak up if they suspect anything untoward about colleagues or have concerns about vulnerable children or adults. Without the bravery of the victims in the John Humphreys case coming forward, he would still be free to continue with the abuse. Concerns were raised historically but not fully followed up as far as I am aware. Hopefully times have changed and victims will be listened to at the time of the allegation.

Beaver Activity in Honiton

While we are used to hearing about Beaver activity on the River Otter locally, on 3rd August 2021 a felled apple tree in Millers Way community orchard was reported by a member of the local community. The Devon Wildlife Trust beaver range, Jake Chant inspected the site and confirmed the presence of at least one beaver in the Gissage River, Honiton.

Beavers have been living free in East Devon since 2008 and have been studied as part of Devon Wildlife Trust's River Otter Beaver Trial since 2015. In August 2020, the UK Government gave permission for Devon's beavers to stay – a landmark decision and the first to legally sanction the reintroduction of an extinct native mammal to England. The beavers are allowed to expand their range naturally, finding new areas to settle.

Devon Wildlife Trust's Beaver Officer, Jake Chant, said:

Beavers sometimes build dams in streams to create deeper water. The deep water creates a safe underwater entrance to the beavers home, which is often a burrow in the bank. We will regularly monitor the river to identify any activity which might pose a risk and take necessary steps to make sure it's safe. During the summer beavers mainly eat riverside vegetation and in the winter they are more likely to feed on the bark of trees. Tree guards and wire mesh are being put in place to protect some of the trees in the area. If the beavers stay on the Gissage they're likely to breed this winter and have kits in spring. I will be checking in on the beavers regularly.

James Chubb, East Devon District Council's Countryside Team Leader, said:

Beavers on the River Otter have been observed to quickly grow accustomed to people and lose their shyness. This is great from a public enjoyment perspective, but people should remember that beavers see dogs as predators! It's important to keep your distance and keep dogs on leads.

Afghan refugees in Exmouth

The Home office advised EDDC on 16th September 2021 that they were placing 80 Afghan refugees into the Best Western Hotel in Exmouth as an emergency measure. There has been a lot of support from both official routes and local volunteer groups to ensure the refugees are well cared for and as time progresses more information is coming forward about longer term plans and support.

New EDDC councillors voted in Exe Valley and Honiton

Jamie Kemp (Liberal Democrat) was voted in after the resignation of Fabian King who had to resign due to work commitments impacted by Covid. In July 2021 Cllr Jake Bonetta (Labour) was voted in as EDDC ward councillor in the Honiton by-election and at 19 is the youngest EDDC councillor. Both Cllr Kemp and Cllr Bonetta have joined the Democratic Alliance group who are the ruling party at EDDC and comprise members of the East Devon Alliance, Liberal Democrats, Green Party, Labour and some independent councillors. This broader demographics of the Democratic Alliance is working really well to represent residents and has had a huge impact on the old tory strong hold of mainly older, retired, male councillors, often completely out of touch with the modern world. In Feniton in July 2021 Cllr Alasdair Bruce (Conservative) was voted in after the resignation of Independent Cllr Susie Bond who, in an interesting turn of events, endorsed Cllr Bruce as her preferred candidate.

Complaints and Concerns

Dog poo bins in general

Following further concerns from residents about bins not being emptied regularly, I have been in discussions with officers at EDDC. I think it is time for a complete overhaul of the system of inadequate small red or green bins on a post. Dog ownership has increased greatly since lockdown. I have long advocated for the use of mixed use bins over dedicated dog bins which are expensive, fill up far too quickly owing to the increase in dog ownership and occasional abuse from people bringing their dog poo from home to put into the public bins, quite against the spirit of providing poo bins for walkers.

However, I think it is entirely possible that an even better system is being considered which would increase efficiency and bring the service back in house rather than the service being contracted out to Suez. Surprisingly the emptying of the current dog bins is a specific role and the team doing it is very small. As you can imagine, if one person is off sick, it completely disrupts the service. More on this soon.

The Motorbike which speeds through the village every morning.

It has been suggested to me that there is a motor bike that roars through the village every morning around 6.30 – 7.00, returning later in the evening and that the person might live in a local side road off the High Street. If anyone is aware of the person who does this, or can provide a number plate, please do feel free to contact me entirely confidentially so that I can either have a chat with the person or contact local police for advice. I have had so many complaints about this and it has gone on for years. It is entirely possible the person is unaware of the distress this causes. The local police may be able to help if a number plate can be provided.

Crossing the Road at Joney's Cross

Residents have pointed out how difficult it is to cross the A3052 at Joney's Cross when parking at the car park on the south side of the road, and trying to cross over to Harpford Common. Road traffic is so heavy now and that section of the road is national speed limit (60 mph) I believe from the top of Goosemoor Hill until the Halfway Inn. The residents suggested we might request some sort of crossing in that area. I doubt we would get that given how attempts to date to get safer crossings in the High Street to serve school children have fallen on deaf ears with DCC, but I do think it's worth raising with the RSPB and DCC to see if anything can be done to improve safety, perhaps something as simple as signage to warn drivers that walkers will be crossing the road ahead.

With grateful thanks as always to residents for helping to raise local issues so they can be addressed.

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