**Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service.**

The so called ‘Safer Together’ public consultation closed on **22nd September 2019**. The fire service is expected to save £8.4 million over 5 years. I am concerned about the cuts and sceptical about the statistics presented. This view is backed up by former senior fire fighter Tony Morris who provides more technical evidence on his blog-spot.

<https://stopfirecutsdevonandsomerset.blogspot.com/2019/08/first-intimidation-now-inducements-plus.html>

“I spent 32 years in the fire service in Bedfordshire and West Sussex. My last six years in the service were as Operational Planning Officer responsible for contingency planning. I was then Senior Emergency Management Adviser for West Sussex County Council for 15 years, covering all areas of emergencies and business continuity. *I served on several inter-agency groups at local, regional and national level dealing with major incident procedures & training, maritime and airport emergencies, incidents involving hazardous materials (CBRN, COMAH etc.), telecommunications and other critical infrastructure.*

*I have studied how fire services operate and how major incidents are handled in different parts of the World. All this has given me a good understanding of the complexities of emergencies and how to deal with them, as well as a keen eye to spot inadequacies in planning, training or resources.*

Now fully retired I am free to challenge ill-considered cuts to the fire & rescue service and my blogs are intended to alert the public to the truth behind the spin. The first blog covered West Sussex, where I live, and the second Devon, where I was born and raised.”

In talking to some local members of the fire service in Sidmouth I found out.

**Fires**: Topsham was the first on scene at the major fire in the Royal Clarence Hotel in Exeter. However, this does not show up in their statistics as it was not a 'primary fire in their area'. **Road Traffic Accidents:** The same applies, if its not in your specific area, it doesn't show up in the stats, if its not the right sort of accident, it doesn't show up. **Flooding:** Barely shows up in the statistics and yet in the floods of 2012 appliances couldn't get to enough places to assist, there were simply not enough appliances across the area, and some appliances couldn't get to other areas due to flooding, road congestion due to stuck vehicles, rescuing people from their houses, pumping out roads  etc.

**Colyton Station:** Costs £120,000 per year to run, gets £140,000 in council tax funding. It certainly pays for itself.

**Additional tasks:** There are numerous duties they also carry out, rescuing animals, lifting of fallen trees, search and rescue etc all essential tasks that don't make the stats. The fire service problem solve and rescue in many different ways. If we dial 999 we expect our fire service to arrive in a timely manner. In areas where they have already lost their fire stations, outcomes have been very poor for residents unfortunate enough to have a fire. Once we lose stations and appliances, that is it, we wont get them back. Our Fire Service is our insurance we pay for out of our council tax and hope we never have to call on.

**Pebble-bed Heaths Consultation – public Consultation starts 23rd September 2019 – 4th November 2019.**

The East Devon Pebble-bed Heaths is an area of rare lowland heath in East Devon. They consist of: East Budleigh Common, Lympstone Common, Bicton Common, Woodbury Common, Colaton Raleigh Common, Hawkerland Valley, Harpford Common, Aylesbeare Common and Venn Ottery Common.

The heaths form part of the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and it is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protected Area (SPA) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). It covers 2,778 acres.

**At a briefing at EDDC Cabinet on 5th September 2019 it was explained that we need to protect the pebble-bed heaths from damage caused by greater population numbers and numbers of people visiting the heaths. For example, did you know that dog waste changes the chemical constitution of the soil which in turn has a knock-on effect on the plants that can grow there and the wildlife that depends on them? That is why it is so important to pick up dog poo even in very rural areas. Grazing animals do not have that effect as they only ‘recycle’ the existing nutrients. The heaths have ground nesting birds that can be disturbed by dogs.**

**New ways of enjoying leisure time on the water also brings pressure on natural space for birds, for example the growth in paddle-boarding means more birds are disturbed on the Exe Estuary. Bike riding, horse riding and increased footfall from walkers can cause erosion and run off from tracks and pathways. New dwellings within 10 kilometres of these precious sites can cause pressure on them and we have the prospect of 30,000 new homes being built within 10K of these sites. Do look out for the consultation on their website and respond to it. The consultation will focus on Entry to the heaths, Managing the car parks, Moving visitors away from more sensitive areas, Promoting less sensitive areas.**

**There is a public event at Joney’s Cross on 17th October from 1-5 pm as part of the consultation.**

**CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) Public Consultation – 21 August – 2nd October 2019**

This is once again coming out for public consultation. CIL is supposed to pay for infrastructure necessary as a result of new development. It is a failing tax. East Devon is currently £270 million short of the money needed for infrastructure. Ed Freeman of EDDC stated recently that CIL was never intended to pay for all infrastructure. The good news about CIL is that it is a set fee. The bad news is that large developers at Cranbrook, are being let off CIL, just at the place infrastructure is so needed. EDDC officers claim that S106 money can be agreed with developers for supporting infrastructure but the problem is that developers claim that it is not viable for them to pay the S106 owed and re-negotiate what they have to pay. EDDC are desperate to have their housing numbers met and so let them off with reduced S106 liabilities. Under the new proposals less CIL will be collected overall than under the previous system. Developers have to pay CIL generally on new properties that are over 100Sqm. In Newton Poppleford CIL payments would be £150 per sq Metre if approved. CIL payments are not negotiable. Independent research shows that major developers are making a very healthy profit per house (average £70,000, up from £20,000 just a few years ago) and it seems ludicrous that smaller developers are paying the highest CIL rates whilst the major developers pay nothing. The good news is the schedule for payment of CIL is now clearly defined so payments cannot be left to drag out.

**Fire Beacon Hill Consultation.**

You may remember there was a previous consultation at the end of 2018. There were several public events in September 2019 which I was not aware of last month and which will have already happened by the time you read this. Proposals including fencing the areas of fire beacon Hill, FB plantation, Harpford Common and Core Hill Wood to allow wider grazing of animals as has happened on our local commons in Newton Poppleford. For more information or to make a comment contact RSPB – tel: 01395 233655 or email FBHconsultation@rspb.org.uk

**General Complaints received this month**:

Drivers parking on double yellow lines at the entrance to Meadow Drive making it very difficult for those entering and exiting the road due to poor visibility and reduced road width etc. The police have previously given out warning stickers but I imagine will now up the pressure and issue parking tickets. The parish council have requested that most roads joining the A3052 in Newton Poppleford will have double yellow lines at the entrances and I think this will result in more regular patrols by enforcement officers.

Advertising signs on the A3052 by a local business at the eastern end of the village which continues to flaunt local policy on advertising in the AONB (this has been passed onto enforcement who have an ongoing battle with this business).

Blocked Flood Relief Channel which runs under the A3052 close to Otter Reach. Residents reported concerns over this and after much to-ing and fro-ing with various agencies DCC have now agreed it is their responsibility and they will be clearing it before the winter, ecology constraints permitting.

Fly tipping on Goosemoor Hill – EDDC were very quick to react to my request to clear the rubbish dumped on the hill on 12th September 2019.

Bird Scarers - I had a chat with one of our local farmers at the western end of the village about bird scarers. He explained he puts them on from June to September when the brassicas (cauliflowers and broccoli etc) are growing and the volume can appear different depending on where in the village you live and where the scarers are placed. Once the vegetables are big enough to survive interest from the birds, they are turned off.

**The Adventure Trust for Girls** *- www.adventuretrustforgirls.org.uk*

On 9th September I had a very enjoyable evening hearing from around 15 girls who had benefitted from a grant from the above trust which I previously knew nothing about. The girls spoke to us about their travels and challenges and some of the very worthwhile volunteering they had done; each had been helped financially by the trust. Girls do have to raise a good proportion of funds themselves in addition to receiving grants but the trust helps to advise on this. Grants are available for girls aged 10-23 who live or study within an 8mile radius of Exmouth where the charity is based. Newton Poppleford, Southerton and Colaton Raleigh all fall within the area, you can find the map on their website. So if you know girls who would benefit from this support, do pass this information on to them. Here is a quote from the site:

*Travelling through Asia, experiencing cultures far removed from our lives here in Exmouth! Teaching children to speak English in an African Village! Performing to thousands at the Royal Albert Hall! Living in a rainforest and learning to survive for 6 months! Conducting research in places around the world! All of these sound like a once in a lifetime opportunity, an adventure beyond your wildest dreams? The Adventure Trust for Girls wants to help you make these dreams become reality! To qualify for financial assistance you must be over 10 years old and under 23 years old on the first day of your adventure and live or at least attend school within 8 miles of Exmouth Town Hall in Devon, and to the east of The River Exe and South of the M.5.*

**King Alfred Way – No Doctors Surgery**

I met a resident of the new houses in KAW recently who commented how disappointed his family were about CDE abandoning plans to build the new doctors surgery. He pointed out that Newton Poppleford school children are considered out of catchment for Kings School Ottery and expected to attend Sidmouth College, yet patients are expected to go to Ottery for a doctor’s appointment and cannot sign on at Sidmouth. I write this the Beacon Medical Centre, Sidmouth, Manager confirmed that Sidmouth are still not taking on Newton Poppleford residents.

I wrote to Lord Clinton recently outlining our disappointment and asking for his intervention. As always, he passed the letter onto the Managing Director who re-iterated there will be no new doctor’s surgery. As expected.

**EDDC Matters**:

Greater Exeter Strategic Plan – the committee is set to be larger in the new administration with 10 representatives from each partner (Exeter, Teignbridge, Mid Devon, East Devon). Meetings are proposed to be more open and transparent. The additional 5 councillors from East Devon are supposed to be agreed at the next full council based on proportional representation from each political party at EDDC. There were formerly 5 representatives from each partner and meetings where highly ‘confidential’. I hope to see a challenge to the proposed housing numbers for East Devon which the Campaign to Protect Rural England believe are hugely inflated.

Staff turnover: The proportion of employees leaving EDDC has again increased from 10% to 12% and even 17% in some departments. There have been some decisions not to replace staff due to budget limitations but this seems very short-sighted and must be impacting on existing staff. The HR lead said she could not identify any trends in why so many staff leave.

The Local Plan should be reviewed every 5 years. However, EDDC has said this cannot happen until GESP is completed and it is unlikely the review will be completed by the end of this administration. This seems ridiculous to me. That would make it an 8year review. It’s time to challenge officers on this.

School Lane Car park will come under scrutiny in 2020 as EDDC seek to earn more money from their assets. I am completely against this given the lack of alternative parking options. EDDC plan to routinely charge over the entire 24 hours in car parks generally (as is already the case in some car parks), for ‘fairness’.

All EDDC recycling is now processed in the UK. Residents are entitled to ask for additional recycling bins if they need more in order to encourage more recycling. EDDC are not currently recycling crisp packets and toothpaste tubes as the recycling can produce more carbon than it saves.

Councillors emails and I-pads - EDDC continue to be unable to resolve their own self-imposed security measures which would allow councillors to have EDDC emails on their personal phones, as they have for the past 4 years, rather than carting the i-pads around everywhere which is totally impractical.

EDDC Consultation on Council Tax Low income families in East Devon could benefit by an estimated £270,000 in extra support towards paying their council tax in a scheme which is being consulted on from Thursday 12 September. East Devon District Council’s Cabinet has given the green light [to consult on a draft Council Tax Reduction Scheme](http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/ctr-consultation) which proposes to increase the amount of council tax support for low income working age households. Pensioners will not be affected by the proposals. Under the current scheme, low income working age households receive a council tax reduction which involves a lengthy means test with complex legislation.

The council is looking to significantly simplify the reduction scheme by putting more money into the current system and introducing ‘Income Banded’ discounts. This means that council tax discounts of 85%, 70%, 50% and 25% would be awarded depending on a claimant and partner’s weekly income and the number of dependants living in the household. Under the proposed draft scheme, 92% of claimants – around 3,000 households - many of whom are families adversely affected by recent welfare reforms, would be better off.

https://eastdevon.gov.uk/news/2019/09/consultation-begins-on-proposals-to-increase-council-tax-reduction-support-for-low-income-working-age-households/

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