

# Ward Councillors Report– April 2018

This is a long report so I have added some links below (Ctrl and click) so you can just read the parts you are interested in. I am also now including a monthly report in the parish magazine.

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## Security of your houses, cars and sheds.

A resident reported to me yesterday that she had seen 3 men who she believed were behaving suspiciously on footpath 1 which runs along the back of properties in Capper Close. There has been a spate of burglaries in Sidmouth and the resident was concerned they were looking for new territory. She has reported this to the local police.

You can buy ‘screaming padlocks’ from the local police station in Sidmouth for around £6-7.00 to help secure your sheds and outbuildings etc.

## **EDDC Scrutiny meeting - review of Election arrangements for the May 2015 and June 2017 elections.**

As a member of EDDC Scrutiny, we have been asking Chief Executive and Returning Officer (RO) Mark Williams to address the Scrutiny Committee since July 2015. Mr Williams did present a 'report' to Scrutiny in July 2015 following the election but members felt it lacked financial information and did not really address all the issues of concern. Furthermore, as many councillors were newly in post, they did not have the confidence or experience to press for information. After numerous postponements Mr Williams finally presented another report to Scrutiny this month. The agenda papers sent out prior to the April 2018 meeting had numerous appendices/links, 3 of which did not work.

Appendix 2, (Link did not work), was the most damning. You can read the full agenda papers here:

<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/2438835/190418-scrutiny-agenda-combined.pdf>

**Here are the contents of Appendix 2.**

### **Count observation – East Devon District Council**

Observation time – From 21:30 until 00:15 on Thursday 7 May and from 10:00 to 14:30 on Friday 8 May 2015

Location – East Devon District Council, TheKnowle, Sidmouth, EX10 8HL

Purpose of observation – to observe local government election count

Commission representative – Elizabeth Gorst

Feedback for the attention of Mark Williams, Returning Officer:

- 1) You explained to me that postal vote identifiers were not checked for postal votes delivered to the count. You should ensure that you make provision to check 100% of postal vote identifiers, even for postal ballot papers being delivered last-minute to the count. A 100% check is now a legal requirement.
- 2) Some less experienced candidates and agents were not clear on the processes being followed to count the multi member wards – separation of block votes, grass skirts etc. At one point this resulted in a heated exchange between an observer and a non-supervisory member of count staff as to whether there was a better way to count the votes! We would recommend that you provide a written guide to attendees in advance of the event of the processes that will take place.
- 3) Some count staff themselves did not appear to be clear about the processes they had to follow and particularly in respect of the multi member count. For example I noted staff at the start of the count who were not familiar with extraction of block votes or the use of grass skirts and were initially looking puzzled/confused about the

processes they were being asked to undertake. This in turn impacts on the confidence of observers. Additionally, as I raised with you, during verification there was a mixture of face up and face down verification being carried out. We would recommend that you review your provision of training to count staff. Also that written instructions are provided in advance of the event to all count staff.

- 4) You announced the start of each local government ward count (no PA system in place). It is also helpful if the ward name on the empty ballot box is positioned in such a way as to be visible to observers throughout the count. The same advice applies to verification.
- 5) When the ballot papers have been removed from a ballot box at verification or count stage, the empty box should be shown to agents and observers so that they can be satisfied that it is indeed empty.
- 6) A PA system should be in operation to ensure that all attendees at the count can clearly hear announcements
- 7) We recommend that you review your processes for stacking and signposting ballot papers on the individual counting tables. As an observer it was difficult to see what the various piles of ballot tables on the paper related to. Staff were also confused by moments about what ballot paper should go where. Sorting trays with labels would improve transparency and auditability.
- 8) We recommend that you develop a suite of paperwork for count staff and supervisors for recording counted votes. I noticed staff on count tables relying on A4 pads of paper to add up the total number of votes for each candidate.
- 9) Count staff seemed to be missing other stationery items – personal mobiles phones were being used as calculators and I noted staff working on grass skirts having to share pencils.
- 10) Because of space constraints there was at times insufficient room on the tables for ballot papers. Completed grass skirts and other items were having to be stored on the floor beneath the tables. Wider tables would have alleviated this to some degree, but we would recommend that the detail of the count processes you will undertake are considered at an early stage as part of the selection and layout of your venue.
- 11) I was not clear that candidates and agents were being consulted on provisional results before proceeding to a declaration. Our advice to Returning Officers is that ‘you should advise candidates and election agents of the provisional result and seek their agreement on the announcement of the result..... This process should be undertaken within the framework of maximum openness and transparency..... so that all candidates and agents can have confidence in the processes and the provisional result provided.
- 12) I was also not clear on the process for adjudication of doubtful ballot papers. Because there was no distinct tray on the counting tables for doubtful

papers (see point 6), it wasn't easy to see the audit trail of those papers and how they were being adjudicated on and who was carrying this out. I also couldn't see that agents were being given the opportunity to review rejected ballot papers.

- 13) It may be that the points I mention in 11 and 12 were being undertaken, but because there was no PA system, I was unaware that candidates and agents were called by the Returning Officer to hear the provisional result and review the rejected ballot papers. Usually the candidates and agents are called over a PA system to receive the provisional results. This ensures that all those entitled to hear the provisional result are aware that the Returning Officer is ready with this information.
- 14) You mentioned to me the space constraints of the venue and your consideration of other venues. Certainly for the local government count, the number of observers present meant that it was impossible to move freely around the count tables and clearly observe the processes taking place. We would recommend that you consider venues other than the council offices for future counts – not only in terms of the number of observers, but also the number of count staff you require to conduct the count to your planned timescale.
- 15) Your actual count timings varied from the estimates you had announced. High turnout, three-way verification, the complexity of the multi-member local government counts, available staffing resource (determined by venue size) and the lesser ability of some count staff all impacted on this. You will have gathered some valuable experience on timing and we would recommend that for future elections you review the experience of 2015 and factors influencing the timing of the count in establishing your resource requirements. For future events, it could be worth making calculations of likely numbers of ballot papers to be processed and then producing a sample of mock ballot papers on which you carry out tests of your timings and processes.
- 16) At the local government count on Friday morning, there was no control of admission to the count. Given that only certain individuals are permitted by law to attend the count, such controls need to be in place.

At the end of the meeting Cllr Marianne Rixson recommended that the above recommendations should be adopted. I seconded this recommendation. Mr Williams said that was an insult to all his staff. Also that he knew Elizabeth Gorst of old, and that the above was merely her opinion, based on a short period of observation. I pointed out that this was not a reflection on his staff but a reflection on processes which needed improvement – that is the role of Scrutiny. Improved processes would support his staff. My comment was dismissed. No Conservative or Liberal Democrat Councillors supported that the above recommendations should be adopted and therefore the recommendation did not go forward.

The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) has introduced health checks as a service to members. This is the final part of their conclusions, released in February 2018.

## Conclusions

...We believe a Council-wide approach to delivering elections is beneficial and will help mitigate risk at future polls. We feel consideration of issues relating to staffing levels and staff development will also assist with future delivery. We would also raise concerns for how well the staff transition to their new working environment. Whilst none of the issues raised within this report are cause for immediate concern, there are numerous areas worthy of thorough consideration and we believe that if additional resource is not made available, there is a significant risk that the legal duties of the ERO/RO will at some point not be carried out.

## Key Recommendations

- To increase the establishment to four full-time members of staff
- To consider expanding responsibilities in relation to electoral services functions to other areas of the Council e.g. using the skills and expertise of the Council's Customer Services Team to answer resident enquiries
- To review processes related to the employment of casual staff to ensure all legal responsibilities are being met
- To ensure comprehensive process notes exist for all key functions
- To consider the arrangements for election counts once space at the new office becomes clear
- To ensure sufficient storage, secure facilities and working space is available to the Electoral Services Team at the new office in Honiton

It was recommended by me that the above should be adopted and auctioned and Mr Williams said they had already been addressed.

The report from the Returning Officer also stated that no voters were disadvantaged by incorrect instructions being sent out to vote for only one candidate in multi-candidate wards (rather than voting for two candidates). I do not think there is evidence to support this claim.

Having observed elections over the past three years at EDDC, they are, in my opinion, chaotic as indicated in Elizabeth Gorst's report. Counts are not discussed with candidates before being announced as final results and some candidates are allowed a re-count, whilst others are not. Mr Williams said it was a matter of his professional judgement whether a recount should be allowed. Cllr Hull gave an example of where he asked for a re-count having lost an election by 500 votes and then another 500 ballot papers were found somewhere in the room in his favour...

## Full Council Meeting April 2018

A motion was put forward by EDA Cllr Marianne Rixson and seconded by me:

“That this Council resolves to welcome the proposal of the Devon CCGs to develop placebased health care, the RD&E's launch of community health conversations in Eastern Locality towns, and the aim of community involvement in supporting statutory services. Noting also the CCGs' intention to announce their Estates Strategy following these conversations, this Council requests the NHS organisations to observe the following principles:

1. All community hospitals which have lost beds should be maintained as health hubs.
2. Wherever possible, services and clinics should be moved out of Exeter to local community hospitals.
3. More outpatient services should be provided in each community hospital, with no overall cuts to the level of services in any town in order to minimise complex journeys between towns.”

My concern was the ‘rationalisation’ of local services, **for example** all the physiotherapy might take place in Honiton, cancer services might be based in Axminster and so on. Bus fares for those without transport are very expensive. Travelling into Exeter is a long, difficult and expensive whichever means of transport you use.

These examples are for an adult and a child return from Newton Poppleford:

return to Exeter - £13.50

return to Sidmouth from Newton Poppleford now costs £11.80 leaving at 8.00 am,  
return to Axminster – 2 hours and 19 mins each way changing in Honiton (56 mins) – cost from £13.30 leaving 10.00 am

return to Ottery St Mary – 1 hour 26 mins via Exeter – cost from £13.30 to £23.10. leaving 10.00 am

Pensioners cannot use their bus passes before 9.30 am. Tough if you have a 9.00 am appointment.

Cllr Rixson was concerned that some hospitals would be found to be ‘surplus to requirements’ and sold off by NHS property services and be lost forever.

Conservative Cllr Mike Allen put forward a long amendment, which had been circulated to several other Conservative Councillors in advance of the meeting.

It was pointed out it was unfair to expect cllrs to digest this long amendment without notice to consider the words. A handout of the amendment was then produced. Independent Cllrs asked why this had not been circulated to them in advance of the meeting.

There were several complaints about process, the observing public were unimpressed. Liberal Democrat Cllr Hull described the amendment as a ‘wrecking amendment’.

Our motion was lost, and the Conservative motion was voted through.

## New Greenwaste Recycling

You may be aware that a fortnightly green waste collection service is available from EDDC planned to start on 14 May 2018. All of the green waste collected will be composted in East Devon and used by local farms. The new service will cost £48 a year, with an introductory offer of a free 240ltr green bin. The service is not being subsidised by the council tax payer as the £48.00 annual fee will cover the cost. The service will be provided for eleven months of the year with a four-week break at Christmas each year.

You can sign up for the service using the EDDC website

<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/recycling-and-rubbish/new-green-waste-service-2018/>

or by phoning 01395 571515.

Properties that cannot be accessed with Suez full-sized vehicles will not be able to subscribe.

## General recycling

Some roads are still having a poor experience with the latest recycling regime for example Capper Close and Otter Reach. Although residents are getting fed up with reporting this without improvement, I would be really grateful if you would continue to contact either me or EDDC directly Tel 01395 571515 to report this, so we can get matters improved. Taking photos of the scene is very valuable to back up your comments and I am happy to send them on for you.

## Four Elms Hill

Weekly accidents continue. There is still no official mechanism for reporting every incident on the hill to DCC, the police only report to DCC accidents that fit a certain criteria (ie were the occupants injured badly enough). How many more injuries or deaths will it take? Our County Councillor Claire Wright is continuing to work on this on our behalf via the Highways and Traffic Order Committee (HATOC) at DCC. A report on DCC findings should come before HATOC in June. In the meantime, if you witness any accidents on the hill please do notify me as I am passing on ALL accident details to DCC to give them a more complete picture than their own records require. Photographs are excellent evidence.

On a brighter note the parish council has purchased and organised the installation of a new frost-free mirror at the exit of Higher Way to assist drivers with a safer exit.

## Local Parking Issues

**Otter Reach-** Drivers are continuing to park right up to the junction of the A3052 which means that drivers turning into Otter Reach often come face to face with drivers trying to exit it. Therefore, the drivers entering Otter Reach often have to reverse back out onto the

A3052, which in itself is dangerous. The police have advised that ideally double yellow lines should be put at the entrance to prevent parking right up to the junction and I have followed this up via DCC. In the meantime, we will need to rely on common sense and courtesy so drivers can enter and exit Otter Reach safely.

**Greenbank**—Residents report an issue at the turning into the garages, where there is a white Access Protection Marking (H bar). This is now very worn and drivers are parking over it making it difficult for drivers to access and exit their own garages on Greenbank. I have also raised this with DCC asking for the lines to be repainted or replaced with enforceable double yellow lines.

## **Transfer of WC to the PC**

The Parish Council and I have been in discussion with EDDC for a number of years about this asset transfer. The Parish Council put in an official request in November 2017 but due to a lack of staff at EDDC this could not be progressed. In the mean-time the petty vandalism continues, at a cost to each and every household in the parish by the mindless few intent on being as antisocial. The Parish Council wish to update and reconfigure the premises and install appropriate CCTV to ensure this facility remains open to the public, in a fit state for users. The Parish Clerk Paul Hayward, Chairman of the Parish Council Hazel Jeffery and I met with 3 EDDC officers on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> April to discuss this transfer. They raised the issue of ownership of the car park and pointed out that EDDC was having a car park review to ensure that all its car parks paid for themselves by ticketing, that the surface of the car park would soon need replacing. NP car park is not in the current review but it is inevitable that it is now on the radar. We pointed out the complexity of this car park, rights of way, private ownership of the garages (EDDC officers seemed surprised that there could be private garages on a council owned car park), lack of parking on the surrounding streets, and the fact this is supposed to be the 'safe' route to school for children.

## **Community Infrastructure Levy and S106 funds**

The PC Clerk Paul Hayward, Hazel Jeffery, Chairman of the PC and I met with EDDC officers in April to discuss the amount of money that is owed to the parish from money paid by developers. Some of this money is ring fenced for either sport or play. If you have any ideas on projects for the village that would fit either of these criteria, please contact our Clerk Paul Hayward. Email: [parishclerk@newtonpopplefordpc.co.uk](mailto:parishclerk@newtonpopplefordpc.co.uk). Pictures of anything you have in mind are always useful. Ideas from children and younger residents are particularly welcomed.

## Community Tree Planting – Venn Ottery

A working party of our comprising PC Clerk Paul Hayward, a number of local residents of Venn Ottery (including Howard Hughes of Bowhayes Trees) and I set about replacing trees on Venn Ottery Green. We look forward to seeing them develop over the years ahead. If you know of an area in our village that would benefit from tree planting please contact our Parish Clerk Paul Hayward 07711 929227. Email: parishclerk@newtonpopplefordpc.co.uk

**TPO Breached** - EDDC have confirmed that the Tree Preservation Order on the Red Oak on Newton Poppleford Green was breached when it was worked on last year. They do not intend to take legal action over this.

## Land South of King Alfred Way

Work has started on this development. Having attended a full day's hearing with the Planning Inspector in January 2017, it was hard to believe that this development was ever approved, given that it is outside the Built Up Area Boundary, within the AONB, that one of the two drainage tanks is not of a standard adoptable by SWW, and the affordable housing element falls far short of the 66% required for exceptional sites. CDE also argued that pepper potting the social housing in amongst the private housing as per EDDC Local Plan Policy would lower the value of their private houses. Every building site has a site Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to try to ensure existing residents (humans, birds, mammals etc) are inconvenienced as little as possible. There are already concerns about management/closure of the footpath. If you have concerns about the management of the site during construction please contact me or EDDC Enforcement Officers directly.

## Greendale Living site – Exmouth Road

Residents reported earlier in the year that construction vehicles were being parked along the Exmouth Road causing disruption to existing residents. This was reported to EDDC Enforcement Officers as a potential breach of planning conditions.

## EDDC Car Parking Consultation ending Noon 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018

EDDC are consulting on the changes to car parking fees and parking permits across East Devon. The consultation aims to bring all charges into line with one another and to pay for resurfacing and ticket machines. The details of the consultation are available on the EDDC website. The frustration is that frequently decisions such as this are often made first and consulted on later. Here is the link

<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/consultation-and-surveys/car-park-review/>

This is a quote from the website:

*You can find out all about our proposals and have your say using our [online questionnaire](#). If the link doesn't work for you, which has been reported by two people out of a few hundred so far, we think it's probably due to your specific computer settings and programs. Please let us know to by email: [jbuckley@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:jbuckley@eastdevon.gov.uk) and bear with us whilst we see if we can do anything to help you from our end, or you can of course request a paper copy of the questionnaire.*

The issue of policy for parking of motorbikes was raised by a resident and needs further investigation. There does not seem to be a clear policy and one car park opposite the Swan Pub does not allow motorbikes at all.

## **Sale of the EDDC Knowle Council Offices – selling off the family silver?**

The Western Morning news reported on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018 that a Freedom of Information request had shown that EDDC had sold the Knowle site for £7.5M yet as a development site it is worth £50M. The purchasers, Pegasus Life, are set to make a £10M profit. This seems to be a very poor deal for the tax payer. Relocation of EDDC offices to Honiton is due to take place in November 2018.

## **The Parish Council**

There are major changes here since the appointment of new clerk Paul Hayward last year. He has brought admin of the PC up to date and his qualifications mean he is able to fully advice the Parish Council on governance and policies to ensure the Parish Council is up-to-date and fit for purpose, meets any legal requirements and best practices. Paul also liaises with our new handyman Steve Silver and ensures that actions agreed by the parish council are actioned in a timely fashion. You should start to notice improvements around the village (more bins, road signs eg the speed camera, better grass management, cemetery management, supporting the allotment, investigating and ensuring the safe installation of the allotment eco-loo etc). You can access more information via the website which Paul also manages and updates.

## **Neighbourhood Plan**

This is at the stage of policy writing – if anyone in the village has expertise in this area and would like to help write these policies, please contact either myself or Clerk Paul Hayward and we can forward your details to the Steering Group.

**Val Ranger, Ward Cllr Newton Poppleford and Harpford, April 2018**