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## Links to the latest EDDC resident and business updates re CV-19

Residents' weekly Coronavirus update: <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/latest-updates/east-devon-residents-coronavirus-update-26-june-2020/>

Business weekly Coronavirus update: <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/latest-updates/east-devon-business-coronavirus-update-25-june-2020/>

## Red Bridge in Harpford

Our DCC Councillor Claire Wright organised a site meeting at the bridge in Harpford attended by DCCs Nigel Laws and Steve Gardner, myself and Ted Swan. DCC now has some more funding and it looks hopeful that they might consider doing some repairs to the bridge in situ in order to keep it open for a while longer. The main issue is the work needs doing before September as once the winter comes DCC do not consider working near the rivers to be safe. A petition will shortly open which we are asking residents to sign asking DCC to please go ahead and do this work. If you use the bridge please sign the petition and ask anyone else you know to sign it too. This bridge is a vital link between Harpford and Newton Poppleford and the only safe walking route to school, not to mention being a highly valued walking route and part of the East Devon Way. My thanks to Claire for her negotiation and support with this really important issue.

## Walking across local fields where cows are grazing

This issue was raised at last month's parish council meeting. More people have been walking the area recently due to lockdown. Some residents have complained that the cows in the fields in Harpford are not fenced off. While I understand the concerns of some residents I do think we need to remember that farms are a working business that we have permission to walk across, they are not country parks and therefore the fields need to work for the farmer as a first priority.

Examples were given at the parish council of a person who runs through the field with dogs and wonders why the cows follow and of another person who felt they had to send their dogs in to chase the cows away. Both these scenarios are likely to escalate and excite a herd.

The local farmer does test all his mature cows for temperament before turning them out in the local fields keeping any less suitable cows on the home farm fields. The cows have generally been inside all winter and are very happy to have their heads down and eat the grass, especially as many are calving or about to calve. The bulls in the fields are very content, having a full herd of young ladies to serve. The cows are only out in the fields for a relatively short time in the summer before some go off for the final fattening up stage elsewhere (and ultimately slaughter) while the younger cows will be in calf for the winter (and back indoors) and calve the following spring/summer.

I know that the young calves are very curious and they will follow walkers and runners, the faster you go, the faster they will follow you. There are only two short stretches where you can come into contact with cows. The cows tend to be at one end of the field or the other, never at both sections at the same time so we thought it would be useful to give the following advice to walkers which is backed up by Countryfile (link provided below) and alternative walking routes to those new to walking the area:

- Remember this is a working farm, not a country park.
- Be quiet and calm around the cows.
- Walk steadily, don't run.
- Keep dogs on leads and do not allow them to bark at cows.
- Close all gates carefully, check they have closed properly behind you.
- **Pick up all dog poo**, it's not OK to leave it even in the long grass (dog faeces contains bacteria which can cause cows to abort).
- If not confident in walking near the cows, consider taking the alternative route.

The advice if you do find yourself in trouble around the cows is to let dogs off the lead.

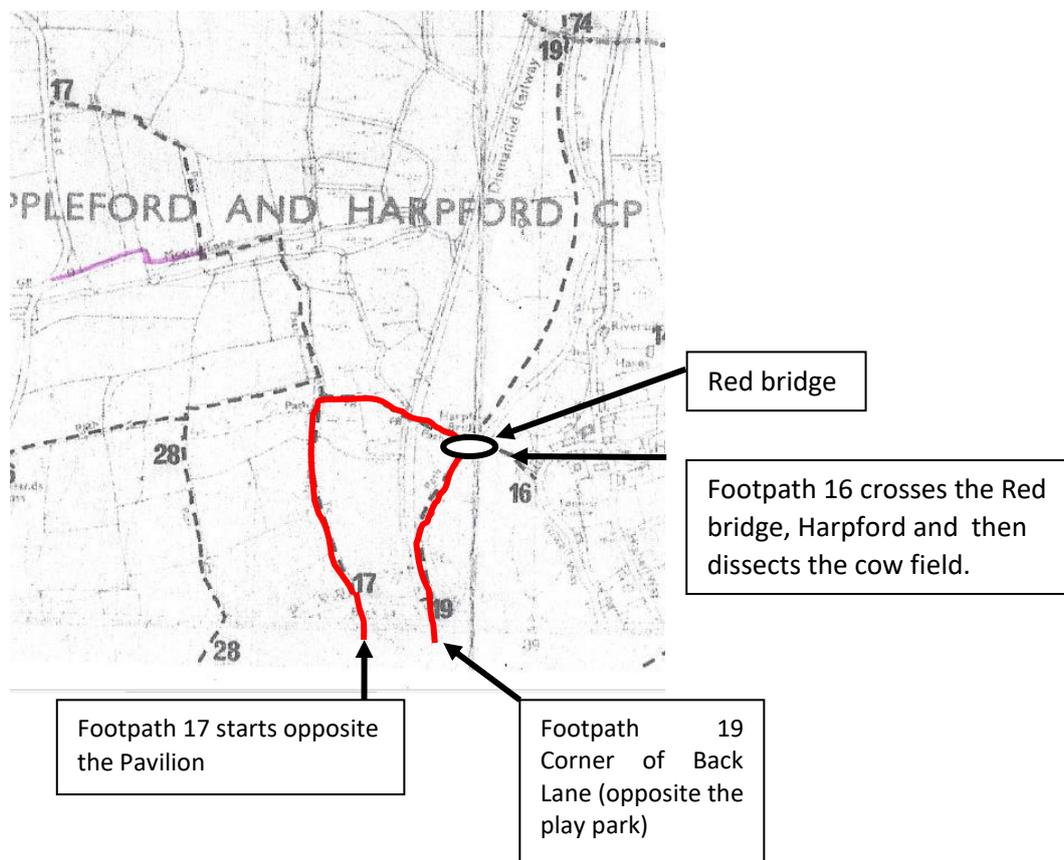
<https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/walks/how-dangerous-are-cows-to-walkers/>

I attach a map here of alternative routes:

To avoid footpath 19 which runs along the river from the double gates on the corner of Back Lane (opposite the play park), take the path opposite the pavilion (Footpath 17) if walking north and walk along that wooded footpath, turning right to join footpath 16 heading for Harpford and the red bridge to rejoin footpath 19 along the river.

To avoid walking across the middle of the field along footpath 16 (which dissects the cow field) either follow footpath 17 back to opposite the pavilion or take Footpath 19 from the corner of Back Lane opposite the play park.

I do appreciate how scary the cows can be; I would not feel so confident in a herd I did not know the background to, especially out of area and people are absolutely right to be cautious. The following article gives more information and explains that cows feel more threatened by dogs than walkers:



## The importance to keeping to the public footpaths

In turn I have spoken to farmers who have said that some walkers completely disregard the public footpaths and walk wherever they like across their fields. This is not following the countryside code. Regular walkers will have noted the increase in dog poo not being picked up is revolting. Walkers are reminded that the level of dog poo left on the ground can change the PH of the soil and change what is able to grow there (especially on the commons) and that dog poo is dangerous to grazing animals in fields and highly annoying to anyone who has the misfortune to step in it!

## Bird Scarers and gun shots

I know a numbers of residents have concerns about their dogs and horses being frightened by these, including one accident last year of a rider falling from their horse and being injured having been frightened suddenly by a bang. Its that time of year again; my own dog at the age of 12 has developed an enormous fear of bangs from both bird scarers and guns despite not minding these at all when younger and I have to be really quick if she hears them to catch her before she legs it terrified. I have found some free 'desensitisation' tracks (bangs, fireworks, thunderstorms etc on the Dogs Trust Website. These are really for young dogs to teach them not to be fearful in their early lives but I am going to give them a go. Read the notes carefully, the idea is to de-sensitize them gently over time, not terrify them!

<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/dog-behaviour-health/sound-therapy-for-pets>

Good news on another front of the rough collie (Lassie dog) that was lost and advertised on posters around the village. It was caught on Harpford Common this week I understand by a charity specialising in trapping lost dogs and has been safely returned to its home.

## Toilets to open in local towns

Shoppers and visitors to the town may be interested to read that four more public toilets are to re-open in East Devon from Monday 29 June, adding to the ten facilities across the district that opened up a month ago to give better access for the public.

Opening hours for all 14 toilets will be extended from 8am to 8pm during the summer at a cost of almost £77,000 to ensure they are cleaned to stringent Covid-19 standards. The toilets will be cleaned four times a day in the summer with viracidal cleaning products and three times a day in the winter. Every week the toilets will have a full site disinfected deep clean.

The council's street cleaning summer budget of £62,000 is also restored to help deal with the expected influx of visitors in the coming weeks.

The re-opening of further toilets would be kept continually under review as Covid-19 restrictions are further relaxed.

The toilets that will re-open from Monday 29 June with opening hours from 8am to 8pm in the summer months are:

- Cliff Path (West End, Steamer Steps), Budleigh Salterton
- Magnolia Centre, Exmouth
- Phear Park, Exmouth
- Market Place, Sidmouth

Toilets that re-opened from May and will have opening times extended from 8am to 8pm during the summer months from Monday 29 June are:

- West Street Car Park, Axminster
- East End (Lime Kiln), Budleigh Salterton
- Jubilee Gardens, Beer
- Foxholes Car Park, Exmouth
- Manor Gardens, Exmouth
- Queens Drive/Old Lifeboat, Exmouth
- King Street, Honiton
- West Walk, Seaton
- Connaught Gardens, Sidmouth
- Triangle, Sidmouth

As it made its decisions, the Cabinet took into account a number of factors that are impacting on the district following the government's gradual relaxing of lockdown restrictions where people are able to spend more time outdoors.

These include:

- The difficulty of those who need access to a toilet more often and the health hazard of people relieving themselves on the streets

- The re-opening of high streets and the need for public toilet facilities as cafes and restaurants who may normally provide them remain closed
- An exceptional increase in the number of visitors during April and May during the fine weather where the council had to clear more litter than in the busiest summer periods
- An expected increase in day trippers to the district's towns, coast and countryside as holidaymakers are unable to go abroad this year
- The possible reopening of the hospitality sector and the need to provide facilities to support the visitor economy
- The significant costs of opening all toilets to meet the government's Covid-19 enhanced cleaning

The council has 27 toilets in total and councillors discussed the list of selected sites and the associated costs of opening them with the enhanced cleaning required. They agreed there was a wider debate around the opening of all toilets and Cabinet has asked for further costings to be produced for re-opening all facilities with amended opening hours.

Cabinet reviewed several options for the opening of the toilets including:

- Extending the opening times of the 14 sites from 8am to 8pm in the summer and 8am to 5pm in the autumn/winter (October – March) which is the chosen option costing £76,962 for the next nine months.
- Increasing the opening hours for the existing ten toilet sites from 8am until 8pm.
- Opening an additional four sites alongside the ten toilets that are already open until only 4pm each day.
- Extending the opening times from 8am to 8pm across 14 sites.
- Re-opening all 27 toilet sites from 8am to 8pm all year round.

The options ranged in additional costs from £53,282 to £213,135, taking into account the extra staffing required.

The council has a communications plan in place to ensure residents and visitors know about the new toilet re-openings and extended times of the toilets already opened. Information regarding toilet opening hours, and steps the public should take when using these sites can be found at [www.eastdevon.gov/publictoilets](http://www.eastdevon.gov/publictoilets)

Each toilet site will have a map displaying where the nearest public toilet is and their opening times.

Cabinet also agreed to a review of all public toilets in the district and a report on the financial implications of building adaptations to make the facilities Covid-19 secure and of a better standard will be discussed at a later date.

## Virtual Council Meetings

These are up and running and generally open to the public to tune into, you can listen in via your computer and see the speakers and hear what they have to say. The meetings are live streamed to Youtube and Facebook. Residents can watch the meeting whilst in the comfort of their own home with a cup of tea (or drink of choice) which is very civilised.

Here is the link to some recent meetings (extraordinary full council, Cabinet, Scrutiny).

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmNHQruge3LVI4hcgRnbwBw>

What is becoming more useful now are the voting buttons, so councillors can easily vote by ticking a green arrow or red cross to vote for or against a particular matter. In online meetings as a councillor requests to speak, administrators can see the order in which these requests to speak are put in by councillors which overcomes the system in normal open meetings where a request to speak by raising your actual hand can sometimes be overlooked!

## Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP)

On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020 EDDC councillors were finally given a whole council briefing and report by Ed Freeman – Service Lead – Planning Strategy and Development Management on GESP. This information is considered confidential to members and the detail is not to be disclosed to the public until 5.00 pm on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June (just 4 days after most EDDC councillors were informed of the contents) although regular readers will have read my concerns about it for some time. The GESP seeks to determine where residential and business development will take place in East Devon in the period 2020 – 2040. GESP concerns itself with housing sites of 500 houses or more. The government calculator states East Devon must build approximately 844 new houses per year (this figures can be averaged out across years), but due to complexities of the calculator according to Mr Freeman we should actually be building more than this to keep ‘on a trajectory’. For example this year there has been 1060 new houses built in East Devon. Mid Devon only has to build 363 new houses per year in the GESP plan according to the government calculator. In total 57,200 homes are to be built in the GESP area by 2040.

There was a call for sites for GESP and 700 sites were put forward and I have written before about the size of some of these proposed sites and their adverse impact on Newton Poppleford as vast swathes of agricultural land will be under more concrete as there are no large scale brown field strategic sites in East Devon. The size of the sites and the locations were a real shock for some councillors at last Thursdays meeting. I complained last year about the secrecy with which this whole plan has been put together all in the name of ‘commercial sensitivity’. For example entire new towns are a possibility between NP and Exeter. For anyone who has followed the sorry development of Cranbrook (allegedly a ‘healthy town’ built from scratch and fully driven by EDDC senior managers and the previous Conservative administration, supposedly having its own town centre and jobs on site. It hasn’t been able to sustain its own health centre to date). The thought of a repeat of this is appalling. Cranbrook will eventually be a town of 8,000 properties. Whilst senior officers at EDDC busy themselves with GESP the 5 year review of the Local Plan gets pushed back although Mr Freeman argues it is happening ‘alongside’ GESP.

I asked Mr Freeman what he meant by the council providing ‘local homes and jobs for local people’ citing just one example of the Met Office moving down from Berkshire and bringing many of its existing staff and their families who in turn require houses and jobs and whether he recognised what effect this continual development had on existing residents. He floundered somewhat with this answer before finally admitting that ‘local residents’ means ‘people who live and work here’. In other words it does not mean existing residents, so leave out the word ‘local’ and the sense of the sentence doesn’t change – we must build more residential and commercial buildings because the government says so. There are those who still cling to the 1980s Thatcherite theory of trickle down economics which has long been debunked.

Last January 2019 Devon Live published this article which gives more background to GESP:

<https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/what-greater-exeter-strategic-plan-2492502>

The article included the following information about the Transport Strategy:

- trains every 30 minutes, buses every 15 minutes and high-quality cycle routes between Exeter and key towns
- improve the M5 gateway, A30, A38, A303, A380 & junctions on A35/A361
- double the number of car parking spaces serving Exeter in park-and-ride sites on all main corridors
- a comprehensive network of walking and cycling routes
- a new integrated product which combines sustainable travel modes into a single subscription travel service
- a modern, reliable and low carbon network of urban bus routes

Quite how this gets funded remains a mystery; I asked Mr Freeman how these services would materialise and be affordable to use, since GESP does not include money for infrastructure. He said that more people would use public transport and therefore it would be cheaper, completely dodging the question of how the buses and trains were funded in the first place that so many people would allegedly use.

However, what the existing GESP plan doesn't take into account are the longer term effects of CV-19 which of course was undreamt of when GESP started. Many companies have found their sickness rates are down and productivity is up as a result of home working and feel that they may no longer need the large commercial premises that were once considered essential; workers no longer need to live near to where they work. There may be less people happy to use public transport for quite some time and less needing to do so. The theory that somehow so many people will be using public transport that the ticket price will go down is just bizarre.

EDDC will be discussing GESP at the Strategic Planning Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. I would hope this meeting will be open to members of the public who can view the meeting live via Youtube or Facebook.

## Concerns about shortfall in council finances

Early on in the CV-19 crisis the Treasury assured local councils they would be reimbursed with funding to cover losses and additional costs as a result of their response to CV-19. Cabinet has agreed to lobby its three district MPs for more funding to help the district through the pandemic.

Cllr Paul Arnott, Leader of the council said: *"South West leaders wrote to the Secretary of State Robert Jenrick nearly a month ago appealing for him to honour the Chancellor's pledge to do 'whatever it takes'. Our councils have received no reply as yet"*.

*"But despite this, this council believes it must respond to the change in circumstances. (Just one example of costs increasing are the opening of public toilets and the additional costs of cleaning and staffing mentioned in the section above to be CV-19 compliant) Our coastal towns and major shopping areas must have safe Covid-19 compliant lavatories restored as a matter of extreme urgency. The problem is that this will cost somewhere between a lot of money and a hell of a lot of money."*

EDDC Cabinet member for Economy, Asset Management and Regeneration Cllr Paul Hayward flagged up that some councils such as Redbridge Council (a London Borough) have launched a

petition asking the government to honour its assurances about funding for local councils as it looked increasingly unlikely this would happen.

## The new Administration

The new administration is settling in and positions on committees are being finalised. The live streamed meeting to elect a new Leader for the year had to be taken down mid-meeting owing to the swearing by members of the Conservative group who were both unable to control their own microphones and their own tempers. It turns out that despite frequent references to playing cricket, they are actually very poor losers. Cllr Paul Arnott (EDA/Democratic Alliance) was voted in as Leader. The sense of entitlement from some long standing Conservative councillors is quite breath taking. A new entire meeting had to be set up the following day to conclude the meeting that was disrupted the previous evening. In a separate meeting Cllr Cathy Gardner was elected as Chairman and I was elected as Vice-Chairman of the council for the second year running. I am hoping there will shortly be a full schedule of meetings published for the year and the real business of the council can move on.

Best wishes

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