

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held at East Devon Business Centre, Honiton on Thursday 6 March 2008

Present:	Councillor Graham Brown	Chairman
	Donovan Galling	Vice-Chairman
	Councillor Chris Tratt	EDDC
	Nigel Harrison	Economic Development Manager, EDDC
	Councillor Sara Randall Johnson	EDDC
	Chris Taylor	C & C Electrical, Sidmouth
	Troy Stuart	A E Stuart & Son
	Tim Ford	Fords of Sidmouth
	Chris Down	Crealy Park
	Chris Lane	EDDC
	Rowan Carter	FWS Carter & Sons
	Jannine Banks	South West Planning
	Terry Kingdon	Allwood Ltd
	Tony Collins	Exmouth Town Council
	Councillor Philip Skinner	Worldwide Trading
	Mark Williams	Chief Executive, EDDC
	Peter Halse	Halse of Honiton
	Pat Graham	East Devon District Council
	Karime Hassan	Corporate Director, EDDC
	David Lockwood	Stags
	Keith Annett	Tru homes
	Mark Shepherd	Waitrose
	Councillor Pat Graham	EDDC
	Councillor R G Franklin	EDDC
	Councillor A W J Reed	EDDC
	Chris Bolton	Axminster Carpets
	P Durveyor	Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce
	Michael Dart	Darts Farm
	S Rayner	Exeter Airport
	William Casely	Otter Nurseries
	Tim Harris	Honiton Garage
Apologies:	Louise Mayor	Skinner Construction
	Graham Sindle	Thomas Westcott
	Simon Witts	Flybe
	Tim Spores	Fields of Sidmouth
	Bill Murray	Michael Thorne Construction Ltd
	Councillor Paul Diviani	EDDC
	Simon Dutfield	Axminster Carpets
	Noreen Hoskins	
	Roy Stuart	A E Stuart & Sons
	Graham Pateman	May Gurney
	John Ward	Cranford Nursing Home

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.05 pm

12 **Welcome**

Graham Brown, Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum welcomed everyone to the meeting, expressed his delight at the number of business people present and thanked members for their time.

13 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held on Thursday 31 January 2008, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

14 **Matters Arising**

Report of the Leader of East Devon District Council (Min No 4 refers)

The Chairman advised that he and Nigel Harrison had prepared and sent a letter to the Highways Agency asking for the Agency's plans for road improvements in the East Devon District. He had also had a radio interview on the matter with Radio Devon and Malc Sherry was seeking a meeting with the Minister about roads in the region.

15 **Flybe and the Government's skills pledge I**

Members noted that Simon Witts, Flybe's Director of Safety, Quality and Training was not available to attend this meeting and would give his presentation to the next meeting on 10 April 2008.

16 **Local Government Reorganisation**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Sara Randall Johnson, Leader of East Devon District Council and Mark Williams, Chief Executive to the meeting as well as Councillor Ray Franklin Deputy Leader and Councillor Tony Reed, Chairman of Development Control Committee. They explained to members of the Forum plans for reorganisation of Local Government in Devon and how this could affect business in the District.

Members noted that the Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission was to carry out a structural review of local government in Devon with the intention of formulating recommendations for a structure of unitary local government within Devon by the end of the calendar year.

The District Council had met with the Boundary Committee on 3 March 2008 where the timetable for the review was outlined, as were the steps that the District Council was expected to take by way of participating in the Structural Review. A reply was needed by 11 April 2008.

The District Council had been asked to identify concepts for new unitary councils which relate to the five statutory criteria of strategic leadership, neighbourhood empowerment, value for money in the provision of services, affordability and a broad cross section of support.

Mark Williams outlined various conceptual options for a unitary system of Local Government in Devon. Members of the Business Forum had an extensive debate and noted that the potential for a unitary Council for all of Devon did bring with it potential economies of scale. However, Members were mindful of the need to balance out issues of strategic leadership and neighbourhood engagement. In particular they considered that a unitary Devon County Council would be too large and remote for the needs of business. Members were of a mind that the Council should promote the concept of a new unitary

16 **Local Government Reorganisation (Cont)**

Council reflecting the economic realities of the area, particularly the wide Exeter travel to work area. Such an area for a new Council would match the economic reality and bring with it greater effectiveness in providing the necessary strategic leadership. Furthermore a Council covering such an area would not run the risk of being too big and possibly perceived as remote by local people. In addition it was a potential concept/model that could apply to the north and south of Devon.

After considerable discussions, members expressed particular support for unitary Councils which reflected their travel to work areas. They felt that this would provide more outward looking Councils and be better for business.

- RESOLVED**
1. that the Forum invite Vision Exeter and Exeter Business Forum to a joint meeting to discuss Local Government Reorganisation in Devon;
 2. that the Business Forum wish to work together with East Devon District Council regarding the direction of reorganisation for Local Government in Devon be noted;
 3. that the East Devon Business Forum would wish to support a unitary Eastern Devon Council taking in Exeter, Crediton, Cullompton Dawlish and East Devon based on the Exeter Travel to Work Area as the best solution for business in East Devon.

17 **Report of the Regional Spatial Strategy Sub Committee**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Regional Spatial Strategy Sub Committee, which met on Thursday 28 February.

Members noted that in simplified terms the RSS directed the majority of growth to urban centres, including Exeter and the immediate surrounds. The examining panel assessed and endorsed this strategic approach and rejected the option of more general dispersal of development. The Strategy proposed economic growth and therefore business opportunities within the East Devon area.

The Business Forum considered that the positioning of the new town was badly thought out, as it was proposed to be on the flood plain and also partly situated on National Trust land. The Sub Committee had a general discussion about the Regional Spatial Strategy and further details of the RSS would be discussed at a further meeting of the Sub Committee at a date to be arranged.

- RESOLVED** that a further meeting of the Sub Group be held to look at details of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the membership be expanded to include Michael Dart.

18 **Reports on the activities of constituent business organisations**

a) East Devon Association of Chambers of Commerce

Chris Taylor of the East Devon Association of Chambers of Commerce reported that his organisation had not had a meeting since the 31 January, so he had nothing further to report.

b) East Devon Branch of the Federation of Small Businesses

The Chairman reported that the East Devon branch of the Federation of Small Businesses had now reformed and it was hoped that the Chairman, Delia Colgate, would be able to attend the next meeting in April to give a report.

c) East Devon Branch of the National Farmers Union

Graham Brown representing the NFU, reported that although there was an air of optimism returning to farming, pig prices were still significantly low.

d) Blackdown Hills Business Association

Members noted the contribution that Councillor Paul Diviani had made to promoting the Blackdown Hills and that he supported economic growth in the area. It was felt that the social and economic wellbeing of AONBs should be included in East Devon District Council planning policy.

19 **The East Devon Business Forum in 2008/09**

Nigel Harrison reported that the purpose of the Business Forum was to obtain the practical experience and views of the business community throughout the District. It was an opportunity to discuss first hand what went on in business in East Devon. The driving aim was to hear the views of the business community. Members confirmed that economic growth issues and planning were crucial to the Business Forum.

20 **Items for future meetings**

Karinme Hassan, Corporate Director asked members of the Business Forum if there were any issues that they would wish to see discussed at future meetings. William Casely spoke about the need to discuss more practical items of interest to members of the Business Forum and not concentrate solely on planning issues.

Amongst the issues members raised were: Retraining, affordable housing, learning skills, apprenticeships, recycling of commercial waste, signage and health & safety.

- RESOLVED**
1. that when the agenda for the next meeting is circulated, a slip be included asking members for any topics or ideas which they would wish to see discussed at future meetings;
 2. that Graham Brown, Karime Hassan and Nigel Harrison hold a meeting to discuss items for future agendas of the Business Forum.

21 **Dates of Future Meetings**

Members were reminded of the following dates for future meetings:

- Thursday 10 April 2008
- Thursday 10 July 2008
- Thursday 11 September 2008
- Thursday 11 December 2008
- Thursday 5 February 2009

Chairman Date.....