

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the special Meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held at East Devon Business Centre, Honiton on Thursday 8 May 2008

Present:	Councillor Graham Brown(Part of the meeting only) Donovan Galling Nigel Harrison Troy Stuart Tim Ford Angela Wright Chris Lane Rowan Carter Robin Carter Peter Halse David Lockwood Bill Murray Noreen Haskins Councillor Bob Buxton Graham Sindle Richard Harris Nick Agg Manning Mark Shepherd Paul Duriez Dave Moore Janine Banks	Chairman Vice-Chairman Economic Development Manager, EDDC A E Stuart & Son Fords of Sidmouth Crealy Park EDDC FWS Carter & Sons Ladram Bay Caravan site Halse of Honiton Stags Michael Thorne Construction Ltd Parsons Nationwide Distribution Honiton Development Trust Thomas Westcott Honiton Garage Land Rover Experience Waitrose Sidmouth Chamber of commerce Greendale Business Park South West Planning
Apologies:	Karime Hassan Val Baker Councillor Sara Randall Johnson Sue Payne Chris Down Peter Halse Councillor Paul Diviani Alec Carter Tim Spores Zoe House Louise Mayor Graham Godbeer Chris Taylor Malc Sherry	Corporate Director Blackdown Hills Business Association EDDC Woodbury Park Crealy Park Halse of Honiton EDDC FWS Carter & Sons Fields of Sidmouth Ladram Bay Skinner Construction Axminster Vet Hospital C & C Electrical East Devon Chambers of Commerce

The meeting started at 7.35 pm and ended at 9.05 pm

32 Welcome

Donovan Galling, Vice Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum welcomed everyone to the meeting, and thanked members for attending at such short notice. He reminded everyone that the reason for holding the meeting was because the Chairman of the East Devon

32 **Welcome (Cont)**

Business Forum, Councillor Graham Brown had been asked to vacate his position as Member Champion for Business by Sara Randall Johnson, the Leader of East Devon District Council.

The Donovan Galling, Vice Chairman, informed Members that this special meeting of the East Devon Business Forum had been held because he understood that it was the intention of East Devon District Council to end the Chairman of the Business Forum, Councillor Graham Brown's role as East Devon District Council's Member Champion for Business.

Members noted that the change was likely to be effected at the annual meeting of the Council on 14 May 2008. The Vice Chairman felt that this decision could have serious implications for the Business Forum and was keen, along with other members, to discuss this with members of the Business Forum in the hope that the considered response to the situation could be communicated to the Council before the weekend.

33 **The position of Graham Brown as the Member Champion for Business**

Councillor Graham Brown thanked members for the opportunity to address the Forum and explain the current situation. He reported on how he had seen his role as Chairman of the Business Forum and Member Champion for Business and the success he had felt this had brought to business in East Devon. He had tried to shape the way East Devon reacted to business in a proactive way.

Councillor Brown then explained the circumstances behind the decision by the Leader of the Council to remove him from his position as Member Champion for Business. He reported that he would lose his position because of accusations of impropriety involving planning applications within East Devon. This was mainly to do with perception and innuendo, there had been no substantive evidence produced. He confirmed that outside the Council he ran a planning consultancy agency, but felt that this did not conflict with his work as Business Champion, as it dealt mainly with house extensions and often planning applications from outside the District. He was not a member of the Development Control Committee and therefore he could not directly influence planning applications. He felt that there was no way to defend himself against the accusations and innuendo and would lose his position as Business Champion at the Annual Council on 14 May.

Councillor Brown confirmed that all the meetings he had held as Member Champion for Business had been logged with the Economic Development Manager and that he ensured that he had been scrupulous in his actions. He stated that there he had not been guilty of any wrong doing that he knew of.

Members expressed their disappointment for this possible change to Councillor Graham Brown's position as Member Champion for Business as they felt he had done much to further business in East Devon during his time in post. They felt that his removal from post would be to the detriment of the East Devon Business Forum and the business community in East Devon. However, they accepted the Leader of the Council's right to change positions within her cabinet as she saw fit.

33 **The role of the Council's Business Champion**

Nigel Harrison, Economic Development Manager advised that Councillor Sara Randall Johnson, Leader of the Council had given her apologies as she had another meeting. However, she had emailed a message to him, which she had wished relayed to members of the Forum. This was that the Business Champion had not had a role on the Business Forum. Since the Business Forum was formed the ruling party at East Devon District Council had never taken the Chair. Alderman Ron Mudge had been the first

33 **The role of the Council’s Business Champion**

Chairman, which was a deliberate decision taken by the leadership to encourage the Business Forum to be independent. The District Council had only offered secretarial support. Councillor Brown was the NFU representative and the District Council representatives were the Leader of the Council, Economy Portfolio Holder, Councillors Diviani and Mrs Graham.

Nigel Harrison, saw the task of Business Champion as being one of ensuring that business perspectives and imperatives were given due weight within the Council. Councillor Brown had brought energy and enthusiasm to that task and he had enjoyed working with him. The Local Development Framework informed by work on the Regional Spatial Strategy would shortly be coming forward. In his view, it was vitally important East Devon’s business community played an active part in shaping the delivery of the new planning system. For this reason he hoped the Forum would continue its collaboration with the Council and looked forward to working with Graham Brown, as Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum.

At this point Councillor Graham Brown, Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum left the meeting.

35 **The Way Ahead**

Members then discussed the way ahead and considered a letter prepared by Janine Banks of South West Planning to the Leader of the Council expressing the Business Forum’s support for Councillor Brown and requesting that the accusations of wrong doing be substantiated.

Members confirmed that Councillor Brown had been highly supportive of business in East Devon and wondered whether he had been attempting to make too much progress on its behalf. Some Members of the Forum wondered whether it was possible that he had upset some of the established interests in EDDC, who were not receptive to change. The Forum were also concerned that if Councillor Brown was to be replaced as Business Champion it should be with a more competent person. If he was not, this could be harmful to the prospects of business in East Devon.

The Business Forum wished to confirm that in the absence of specific substantiated allegations they wished to support Councillor Graham Brown as their Chairman. However, if he was no longer Member Champion for Business, he may not be as effective in his position as Chairman.

RESOLVED that subject to the minor alterations made at the meeting, the letter presented to the meeting be signed by the Vice Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum and sent to Councillor Sara Randall Johnson, Leader of East Devon District Council.

Councillor B Buxton wished it to be recorded that he abstained from voting on this item.

Chairman Date.....