

**Minutes of the Meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held
at East Devon Business Centre, Honiton on
Thursday 11 December 2008**

Present:	Councillor Graham Brown Donovan Galling	Chairman Martha Mockford
	Norren Haskins Nigel Harrison Chris Lane Rowan Carter Councillor Philip Skinner David Lockwood Graham Pateman Councillor Malcolm Florey Tim Ford Councillor Bob Buxton Val Baker Bill Murray Simon Wood Troy Stuart Geoff Harding Richard Harris Keith Annear	Parsons Transport Economic Development Manager, EDDC EDDC Greendale Industries Worldwide Trading Stags May Gurney EDDC Fords of Sidmouth Honiton Development Trust Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership Michael Thorn Construction East Devon Chamber of Commerce A E Stuart & Son Bank of England Honiton Garage Tru homes Ltd
Apologies:	Councillor Peter Halse Karime Hassan Roy Stuart Councillor Sara Randall Johnson Councillor Pat Graham John Ward Sue Hawkins Louise Mayor Graham Sindle Councillor Paul Diviani	Halse of Honiton Corporate Director, EDDC A E Stuart & Son Flybe EDDC Cranford Nursing Home Woodbury Park Skinner Construction Thomas Westcott EDDC

The meeting started at 6.05 pm and ended at 8.05 pm

20 Welcome

Graham Brown, Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum welcomed everyone to the meeting and wished everyone a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

21 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held on 11 December 2008, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

22 **Matters Arising**

Visit to Flybe at Exeter International Airport

Members confirmed that they had found the visit to Flybe very useful and informative and noted that Simon Witts hoped to update the Forum on progress with the Skills Academy in the New Year.

23 **The Economic Downturn**

Members welcomed Geoff Harding, the Deputy Agent for the South West, Bank of England to the meeting to discuss the current economic downturn.

Members noted that the work of the Bank of England agent had focussed on monetary policy in recent years. The Bank had two representatives in the South West, an Agent and Deputy Agent who were talking to business people. They spoke on average to 100 business people, from a cross section of businesses, in the South West each year. The Bank of England Headquarters in London received a monthly report on business activity in the South West.

Members of the Forum noted that an Agent's summary of business conditions was produced each month and a copy of the November 2008 issue was circulated for members information. In August 2008 the Bank had conceded that there would be a recession for the UK. Various methods were proposed to overcome this, which included a large reduction in interest rates and a subsequent fall in the value of the pound. It was hoped that this would help; there was also the need to ensure that normal bank lending being resumed.

At present all areas of economic activity were contracting except the Government sector and the outlook for business investment remained poor. UK unemployment was increasing and rising at its fastest rate in 17 years, whilst the vacancy rate was reducing. The rate of inflation, including commodity prices was also falling. But the Bank expected the country to come out of recession at the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010.

Key uncertainties for the recovery of economy included:

- Recovery in credit availability
- Depth and persistence of the slowdown in demand
- Extent of spare capacity
- Extent of easing wage cost

Members asked Geoff Harding a number of questions, which included:

- Who guaranteed Government borrowing?;
- Was the Government actively trying to reduce food prices?;
- When did borrowing by the Government stop?
- Would the Bank of England consider different borrowing rates for business?
- Who soon would it be before the UK was in the Euro zone?

During discussions the following points were noted:

- the general lack of confidence in the economy was a serious problem;
- that the Government was not taking active measures to reduce food prices;
- that members would like to see business allowed to move money from one bank account to another in 24 hours for no cost;
- that the Bank of England would not consider different borrowing rates for different sectors of the economy;

- 23 **The Economic Downturn** (Cont)
 - that a meeting should be held between Councillors, Officers and the business community to discuss the problems being experienced by the business community, including problems experienced in obtaining planning permissions;
 - that District Councillors should be better prepared to listen to the needs of business;
 - that Local Government had limited ability to help business in the current economic conditions;
 - the need for a better and more aggressive liaison between the Business Forum and East Devon District Council;
 - that issues involving obtaining planning permission were unlikely to improve until the adoption of the new Local Development Framework;
 - the view that planning policy was often used as a defence by Councillors and Officers to avoid making decisions;
 - that the Business Forum needed to use its Press Officer more effectively in order to have its opinions more widely heard and have greater interaction with the media in East Devon;
 - that members of the Business Forum often underestimated its influence on policy at East Devon District Council, an example was for the need for more employment land in the District;
 - that conflict sometimes occurred between the needs of business and the needs of the District Council;
 - that there was a will amongst newer members of the District Council to make things happen;
 - that some businesses report that they find working with East Devon District Council difficult.

A report would be referred to at the Annual General Meeting on 5 February 2009 on issues raised at this meeting.

The Chairman, Councillor Graham Brown, warmly thanked Geoff Harding, Deputy Agent for the Bank of England, for his interesting and informative explanation of the work of the Bank of England and the economic downturn.

- RESOLVED**
- (1) that the Corporate Overview Committee be requested to include a bi-monthly report on the activities of the Business Forum on its agendas;
 - (2) that a meeting be arranged by the Councillor Malcolm Florey, Business Champion, Councillor Graham Brown, Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum and Nigel Harrison, Economic Development Manager, between business, officers and members to discuss the economic downturn and its effect on business and also issues surrounding the planning problems being experienced by business in East Devon.

24 **Bill Murray**

Bill Murray, Michel Thorn construction, informed the Forum that this would his last meeting as he was changing employers. He wished to thank all those present for their company and positive input for the last 4 or 5 years and confirmed that he had always enjoyed attending Forum meetings. It was a very positive Business Forum and was an asset to the business community and East Devon. He then entertained Members by singing a witty ditty.

25 **Annual General Meeting**

The Annual General Meeting would be held on Thursday 5 February 2009.

Chairman Date.....