



## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held at East Devon Business Centre, Honiton on Thursday 20 April 2006**

<b>Present:</b>	Councillor Ron Mudge	Chairman/EDDC
	Graham Brown	Vice-Chairman/NFU
	Nigel Harrison	Hon Secretary and Economic Development Officer, EDDC
	Karime Hassan	Corporate Director, Environment, EDDC
	Donovan Galling	Martha Mockford Ltd
	Chris Taylor	Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce and Industry
	Councillor Paul Diviani	East Devon District Council
	Graham Godbeer	Coombefield Veterinary Hospital
	Roy Stuart	A E Stuart & Sons
	Noreen Hoskin	Parsons Nationwide Dist. Ltd.
	Les Kinch	Federation of Small Businesses
	John Ward	Cranford Nursing Home
	Alec Carter	Carter & Sons Ltd
	Mal Sherry	East Devon Chambers
<b>Apologies:</b>	Clare James	Clinton Devon Estates Ottery St Mary
	Derek Baxter	East Devon Tourism Group
	Les Christiansen	Heart of Devon Enterprise
	Councillor Peter Halse	EDDC
	Geoff Myers	Exeter International Airport
	Councillor Sara Randall	EDDC
	Johnson	

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 8.16pm

#### **1 Welcome**

Councillor R Mudge, Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked members for their time.

In giving his apologies, Derek Baxter had advised that he was retiring as Clerk of Ottery St Mary Town Council. He hoped that his successor would be in post on 1 June 06. He extended his best wishes to the Forum for the future.

#### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held on 26 January 2006, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

4 **Matters arising**

Business Matters

Nigel Harrison again invited Members to submit news items and other copy for inclusion in the Business Matters publication. Good news stories from the business community would be particularly welcome.

Economic Regeneration

East Devon District Council had commissioned an independent review of employment land (Employment Needs Assessment) to provide the Council with the evidence necessary to ensure an appropriate balance was achieved between housing and employment land in developing policies for the Local Development Framework.

Councillor Diviani confirmed that economic development was a key priority for the district council and to help progress this, he had expanded his Think Tank to include elected members with particular experience and knowledge of business economics. The Think Tank would consider the major economic projects and initiatives and make recommendations to the Corporate Overview Committee for consideration and further debate.

The number of planning officers employed by EDDC had been increased. There would now be a stronger liaison and integration between the planning and economic development sections within the Council. This was seen as a welcome and positive step forward.

5 **Strategic Development proposals and delivery of the new planning system**

Karime Hassan, Corporate Director – Environment updated members of the Forum on the major projects east of Exeter. These had previously been referred to the Forum for discussion and information.

Intermodal Freight Facility – the planning application for phase one of this facility and distribution centre had been considered and approved by the Development Control Committee in April subject to legal agreement.

The next major step was to further improve access to the east of Exeter with a by-pass at Clyst Honiton to connect the airport, Skypark and the intermodal freight facility. Under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement, planning permission had to be secured for the IMFF before the Church Commission would release their land on which the proposed by-pass would be built. Planning permission had now been granted for the Clyst Honiton Bypass.

Skypark and Exeter airport were now being marketed separately. Devon County Council was preparing to re-submit its planning application for Skypark on this basis.

Another major step forward was in respect of the Science Park. The Structure Plan had identified a need for this facility. A partnership of relevant parties was being formed to progress this development. The Council has employed consultants to produce baseline work and supplementary planning documents for the University of Exeter Science Park. This document would be referred to Development Control Committee in the first instance and it would then be put out for public consultation. An options paper would need to be agreed followed by the preparation of Supplementary Planning Document before the planning application for the Science Park could be considered.

The Science Park would attract high paid knowledge-based jobs. A major challenge would be drawing the economic benefits from this area to the towns within East Devon. A planned agenda would be needed to achieve this and to make sure that opportunities were not missed.

## 5 **Strategic Development proposals and delivery of the new planning system (cont)..**

The poor road links between Exmouth and Exeter were raised as an issue to be addressed. Karime acknowledged this problem and advised that the Government preferred to fund potential areas of growth which would unlock private sector investment. It was unlikely to fund improvements to the Exmouth to Exeter road link if the aim was to simply improve access.

The South West Regional Partners had submitted a funding bid to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to improve access and urban growth in the South West. Specific bids had been made for the improvements to M5 Junctions 29 and 30. These bids had been given top priority which meant that there was a good chance that they would be successful. A further bid particularly relevant to Exeter and East Devon was for funding towards public transport issues – to connect the airport, Skypark, Science Park, Cranbrook to the city by a new network. This would represent a step change innovation in public transport. A £60M bid had been made last year by Devon CC under the Transport Innovation Fund.

Karime advised that over the last 12 months the 'Way Ahead Advisory Group' had discussed how the South West would respond to growth issues. The Group had set itself a challenging growth agenda which had been launched the previous week in Bristol. Eight areas had been identified as growth areas in the South West. Of the eight areas, four were identified as potential new growth areas and these included Exeter and East Devon. On the strength of this identification, a bid had been made for additional rail loops between Exeter and Axminster to entice further funding and for the enhancement of community facilities in Cranbrook. Exeter and East Devon would benefit from being identified as a growth area as this would attract main stream funding.

Councillor Diviani advised that the Regional Rail Users Study Group was close to achieving agreement for 2 passing loops between Axminster and Exeter and Axminster and Chard. This would facilitate an hourly service to Waterloo and a half hourly service between Axminster and Exeter.

The South West Region had made a bid to Government for £80M to set up a regional infrastructure fund. EDDC, Exeter and Devon CC had been lobbying GOSW for this over 18 months. If secured, this would help resolve how we fund the upfront infrastructure to the east of Exeter area. If the fund could be drawn down, the infrastructure could be progressed in advance of the development. At the Bristol Conference it was announced that the project to improve access east of Exeter would be one of 2 pilots financed from the fund. This could resolve the problems of access and would effectively reassure the new community partners.

Work would be carried out with consultants to model how the improvements to access could be achieved.

Karime also advised that the Council had now considered the Inspections report on the Local Plan. Most of the Inspectors' recommendations had been agreed. This would give the Council the opportunity to progress the Local Development Framework which replaced the Local Plan system. Base line surveys would need to be carried out and the first one of these was the employment need survey which (as reported above) had already been given the go-ahead by the Executive Board. Other studies required as core statements included the Axminster Area study and the East of Exeter study.

Partnerships were being formed to progress the proposed World Heritage Coast Centres at Exmouth and Seaton. These would consider how the two major interpretation centres could be delivered. It was vital that these were world class facilities of appropriate size and scale. Bids had been submitted to the Living Landmarks Lottery Fund and Karime was able to report that the projects had been short-listed.

5 **Strategic Development proposals and delivery of the new planning system (cont)..**

The Rural Development Agency had announced that it had committed some £7.5M to the Heritage Coast information projects and some £2.75 had been made available for the Seaton and Exmouth Centres. The RDA would not wish to fund free-standing projects and was supportive of the wider reaching Heritage Coast initiatives which it believed were sustainable.

The successful creation of 2 world class centres in East Devon would have significant economic implications. The centres would be used to regenerate Seaton and Exmouth, although a challenge would be how to progress this in Exmouth without the major supermarket as the key driver for economic growth.

The Council did not have in-house expertise to progress the work on the centres and innovative consultants had been employed to make sure the projects were viable and would achieve the necessary 'wow factor'. A lead consultant would be employed to deal with procurement matters for the whole project.

Councillor Diviani said that it was important to get the content of the centres right so that they would attract interest and attention. Councillor Mudge referred to interest shown in the Exmouth project from the RSPB and the Met Office.

Seaton did not currently have a tourist infrastructure to support a world class tourist facility. Karime agreed that developers had to be sold the bigger picture. The centre would provide the opportunity for tourism infrastructure growth. Car parking at both towns would have to be addressed although this was difficult to achieve before the facilities were in place. The aim would be to extend the tourist season. It was very important that the business community was involved and supportive of the development.

Good PR was a vital ingredient to achieving the success of the centres. There was a need for the public to accept and welcome the projects. The positive support of businesses and councillors would add weight to the PR exercise and help overcome any local resistance to change. Inward funding would stimulate and support local small businesses and would ultimately benefit all aspects of the district.

Karime advised that the Council was close to getting the Regional Spatial Strategy in the public domain.

Councillor Diviani advised that the East Devon and Blackdown Hills AONBs were bringing forward positive economic development policies for rural areas.

The Chairman said that the news on the Heritage Coast was welcome and very exciting. The development would have a major impact on the economy of the area. He thanked Karime and his team for all the work they had done in progressing the initiative. The Vice Chairman supported these views and said that much had been achieved in finding and securing funding which would strengthen the economy of the area.

Karime said that he would be happy to attend any meetings of business groups if representing the views of the business community.

**6 Developing the East Devon Business Forum**

Nigel Harrison asked Members to discuss the future development of the Forum. A Development Group had been set up at the AGM. Members representing business groups on the Forum were invited to speak about their group, how it could benefit from membership of the Forum and how the Forum could adapt to increase its relevance and bring the various business elements together effectively.

Les Kinch of the Federation of Small Businesses said that although most of its members were businesses of under 200 employees, it was the largest business organisation and therefore cumulatively generated high revenue. The views of small businesses should be taken into account when strategic decisions were being made. The Federation gave businesses a collective voice which should be listened to.

Malcolm Sherry of the Association of East Devon Chambers of Commerce advised that the Association was particularly strong in the larger cities. It was currently looking to identify its direction and set down objectives over a 3 year period. The need for businesses to help and support each other was acknowledged and a mentoring scheme had been suggested. Businesses should be encouraged to be positive, outward-looking and proactive, taking action rather than just talking about it. The Forum was a useful link between different businesses and business organisations.

Graham Brown, Chairman of the East Devon Branch of the National Farmers Union emphasised the importance of the rural economy to East Devon. He welcomed the networking between organisations within the business community. It was important that the Forum was not just a 'talking shop' but that it made quality and relevant decisions. Small farmers were increasingly vulnerable due to the single payment scheme. More diversification should be encouraged together with adding value to the end product. Businesses need to listen more to what the public wanted. The Forum was a useful vehicle for networking and developing ideas.

Nigel Harrison spoke of the Heart of Devon Enterprise Agency Business Club which met monthly for lunch to network and discuss business.

Non-business organisation members were also encouraged to say what they felt were the benefits of the Forum. They agreed that the Forum should be run by a business person. A vibrant economy was needed in the district and more than ever, particularly with fuel prices, there was a need for regional and local suppliers. Individual businesses felt that the Forum was a good way of sharing and discussing ideas. There was a need to think positively and progressively. A good two-way communication with East Devon District Council was essential and it was important for businesses to be consulted before decisions were made.

Additional members volunteered to join the Development Group which would report to the next meeting on how the Forum could proceed.

**7 Dates of future meetings**

13 July 2006

19 October 2006

Chairman ..... Date.....