

# **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held at East Devon Business Centre, Honiton on Thursday 26 January 2006**

|                   |   |   |
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| <b>Present:</b>   | Councillor Ron Mudge<br>Graham Brown<br>Councillor Paul Diviani<br>John Furze<br>Donovan Galling<br>Nigel Harrison<br>Councillor Sara Randall<br>Johnson<br>Chris Taylor<br>Simon Davey<br>Les Kinch<br>Alf Allen<br>Martin Dowse<br>Ian Page<br><br>Councillor Philip Skinner<br>Roy Stuart<br>Mark Williams | Chairman<br>Vice-Chairman<br>EDDC<br>Exmouth Town Manager<br>Martha Mockford Ltd<br>Economic Development Manager, EDDC<br>EDDC<br><br>C & C Electrical, Sidmouth<br>Head of Finance,EDDC<br>Federation of Small Businesses<br>Concorde Copiers<br>Salston Manor Hotel<br>Head of Property & Economic Development,<br>EDDC<br>EDDC<br>A E Stuart & Son<br>EDDC |
| <b>Apologies:</b> | Geoff Myers<br>Mark Shepherd<br>Graham Godbeer<br>Clare James<br>Derek Baxter<br><br>Tim Spores<br>Karime Hassan<br>Ivor Bull<br>Bob Buskin<br><br>Mrs Noreen Hoskin<br>Diccon Pearse   | Exeter International Airport Ltd<br>Waitrose<br>Coombefield Veterinary Practice, Axminster<br>Clinton Devon Estates<br>Ottery St Mary Town Clerk/East Devon<br>Tourism Group<br>Fields of Sidmouth<br>Corporate Director, Environment, EDDC<br>Express & Echo<br>Federation of East Devon Chambers of<br>Commerce<br><br>Corporate Director, Economy,EDDC     |

**NB** In Karime Hassan's absence, a paper on Strategic Development Sites (agenda item 7) was tabled before the start of the meeting (copy attached).

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.15pm

### **1 Welcome**

Councillor Ron Mudge, Chairman of the East Devon Business Forum welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked members for their time. The Chairman reiterated that he felt that the Forum should be run by and chaired by the business members and that it was his intention to stand down from the Chairmanship. He felt that the Forum should act as a pressure group, as well as a consultative body for Government Departments, Local Authorities and other agencies promoting the economy of East Devon and to act as a consultative group for the District Council. It should be the voice of the East Devon Business Community.

Since his election two years ago regular formal meetings had been held, which had been very useful in producing strategies and for fact-finding. Many presentations had been received from East Devon officers and others. These meetings have been both interesting and useful to the Council and indicated to Government bodies that it was interested in the local economy and prepared to consult the business community.

It was noted that the District Council had supported the Forum by encouraging the officers to participate fully, by paying administration costs and by allowing free use of the Business Centre. However, the Chairman expressed his disappointment that the two vacancies in the economic development section had yet to be filled and also the lack of involvement of business members in running the Forum. It was acknowledged that this was due in part to a view that the Forum was only a talking shop and too closely associated with the District Council.

## 2 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the East Devon Business Forum held on Thursday 20 October 2005, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

## 3 **Matters Arising**

It was noted that Alf Allen and Concorde Copiers had agreed to sponsor the printing of the Spring issue of "Business Matters" and would meet a substantial proportion of the print costs. Members expressed their gratitude for this contribution. News items and other copy for inclusion in "Business Matters" should be emailed or posted to Nigel Harrison as soon as possible.

## 4 **Presentation on East Devon District Council's Draft Budget Proposals**

A presentation was given by Simon Davey, Head of Finance with Mark Williams, Chief Executive, on East Devon District Council's Draft Budget Proposals. Mark Williams reported that the Leader of the council had set a target for the Council to be run on a more business like footing and this had meant that some contentious decisions had been taken through the prioritisation process.

However, following some recent painful financial decisions, the budget for 2006/07 was looking more positive. It was hoped that the two posts left vacant in the Economic Development section could be filled and discussions had taken place with senior officers over what role these posts would fulfill. Their work could involve economic regeneration activities and they could also be used to encourage Development Control to take account of the needs of business.

Members of the Forum expressed the view that they would like to see more pragmatism in the way officers looked at economic development proposals. Dedicated officers were needed to support the aims of the Forum and restore the business community's confidence.

The Forum noted that the Council had expenditure of £47,100,000 per annum. Income from fees and charges at £8,100,000 accounted for 39% of its income, with Government Grant at 33% and Council Tax at 28%. East Devon District Council had the nineteenth lowest Council Tax in the country at £107.09 per annum or £2.06 per week for each 'Band D' property. The new refuse and recycling contract, due to roll-out in April 2006, would have a significant impact on the Council's budget and would mean in 2006/07 that the Council would borrow money for the first time in many years.

**RESOLVED** that Simon Davey and Mark Williams be thanked for their presentation.

5 **Constitution and Way Forward for the Business Forum**

Nigel Harrison reported that a Development Group, consisting of Mark Shepherd, Clare James, Angela Wright and Malcolm Sherry met in October 2005 to discuss possible changes to the Forum's constitution. He had met the group a fortnight ago and discussed the District Council's hopes for the future development of the Forum. It was emphasised that resources would be available from the Council to facilitate the activities of the Development Group but it should be led by and focus upon the ideas and interests of business members. There was the hope that others such as, Alf Allen, Donovan Galling and Les Kinch would be willing to participate with a view to its' interim findings being available to the April meeting of the Forum and their full recommendations to the meeting in July.

During a wide ranging discussion the following points were made:

- Importance of providing affordable key worker housing in East Devon;
- The need for the Forum to meet occasionally on an ad hoc basis to discuss topical issues;
- The need for the Forum to be more than just a talking shop;
- The importance of having an objective for every meeting of the Forum and moving forward
- Concern expressed that there was too high a level of criticism of the District Council's Planning function at Forum meetings;
- The need to work with the Council to put across businesses point of view, be more conciliatory and keep the Council's respect;
- Karime Hassan would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Forum and respond to questions on the planning system;

**RESOLVED**

1. that a Development Group comprising Mark Shepherd, Clare James, Angela Wright, Alf Allen, Donovan Galling, Malcolm Sherry and Les Kinch meet to consider the Forum's future development with a view to making an interim report to the meeting on 20 April 2006 and their full recommendations to the meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> July.
2. that planning issues be discussed at the next meeting..

6 **Election of Chairman**

Councillor Ron Mudge was elected Chairman of the Forum.

7 **Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

Graham Brown was elected Vice-Chairman of the Forum.

8 **Appointment of Secretary**

Nigel Harrison was elected Honorary Secretary of the Forum.

9 **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Forum agreed the dates for Future Meetings:

Thursday 20 April 2006  
Thursday 13 July 2006  
Thursday 19 October 2006

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