



By Sara Randall Johnson,  
Leader of East Devon  
District Council

## Future of Devon remains on ice

THE FUTURE of local government in East Devon – and the rest of the county – is still on ice, following a decision by Communities Secretary Hazel Blears to postpone a decision on the possible merging of all nine existing local authorities into one giant unitary council.

Ms Blears announced on 9 February that she was giving the Boundary Committee a further five months to consult on the options to either form a single Devon unitary – excluding Plymouth and Torbay – or create a rural Devon unitary with a separate Greater Exeter or assess further options.

The decision to allow more time was described by EDDC Leader Councillor Sara Randall Johnson as “a complete vindication of our decision to take the issue to a Judicial Review.”  
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## Council Tax frozen

**THERE will be NO increase this year in the Council Tax charged by East Devon District Council. The tax is collected by EDDC on behalf of itself, Devon County Council, town and parish councils, Devon and Cornwall Police and Devon Fire and Rescue Service. The element that is payable to EDDC will stay at £2.27 per week for the average Band D property.**

Watch out for a booklet explaining the charges and where the money is spent. The booklet will be delivered with Council Tax bills in early March.

**NO, not a Christmas card, but a lane on Gittisham Common, at the heart of East Devon, in early February.**

The heaviest snow falls for 20 years caused chaos in some areas, disrupting transport and services.

**COPING WITH THE WEATHER – SEE PAGES 4 AND 5.**

## Warm words amidst chill

YOU could be forgiven for thinking there is more than a little wintry chill blowing through this issue of our quarterly newsletter.

At the time of writing, East Devon, like so much of the region, and indeed the rest of the UK, was recovering from the ravages of heavy snow, high winds and low temperatures.

The future of local councils in Devon is still frozen, as we await news of the Boundary Committee’s deliberations. But in the meantime we have to focus on the important business of providing vital services to our residents and local businesses.

To that end, there is plenty of heart-warming news in this issue, with council tax held at 2008 levels, work going on to improve the way of life in East Devon and plenty to look forward to in the district as days grow longer and spring approaches.

If you have any comments on this magazine, or any other aspects of EDDC’s work, please email: [eastdevontalk@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:eastdevontalk@eastdevon.gov.uk)

Or call 01395 516 551.

# Further delay in deciding future for local government

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A High Court Judge who heard the case shortly before Christmas advised that further consultation should be carried out before the Boundary Committee finalised its recommendations.

Councillor Randall Johnson continued: "Following the Judicial Review in December, the Judge made it clear that further consultation should be carried out before the Boundary Committee finalised its recommendations. Neither the Single Devon Unitary, nor the Rural Devon Unitary with a second Exeter/Exmouth Unitary had been properly consulted upon.

"When you are determined to stand by a point of principle, and to protect the future of democracy in Devon, you have to be brave – and you have to be prepared to put your money where your mouth is. That's what we have done and our resolve has been fully justified."

Whilst EDDC's Leader welcomed the Government's admission that more time was needed to ensure adequate consultation had taken place, she was concerned that the further delay prolonged the uncertainty over the outcome, to some extent freezing local government in a form of limbo. She said this was a continuing distraction for Members and staff who were trying to get on with the business of governing and serving Devon.

## Burden

She added: "The weather and the credit crunch are really quite enough for everyone to cope with. This extra burden is both unnecessary and unwanted. I share the frustration felt by everyone who wants this uncertainty to be removed. But such a major change as this cannot be rushed. We happen to think that local government in Devon is not broken and does not need fixing. But if the Government is determined to tinker with it, we will insist with our dying breath that they do their sums and they consult with people properly.

"All Devon councils had already agreed the concept of Integrated Devon – that is a voluntary collaboration on shared services designed to make significant efficiency savings on service delivery.

"What we do know is that around 68% of responses on the Boundary Committee's website are against the proposals, with only 13% supporting a Greater Exeter and just 14% in favour of the single Devon unitary."



# Students love speed dating



SIXTH FORM students from Sidmouth College questioned East Devon councillors at a political speed dating event just before Valentine's Day in February.

Normal Speed Dating rules applied, with students asking each councillor a range of searching questions and scoring their replies, in only three minutes.

Councillors involved were Peter Bowden, Iain Chubb, Christine Drew, Roger Giles, Stuart Hughes, Douglas Hull, Frances Newth, Darryl Nicholas, Tony Reed and Pauline Stott.

This is the third year that EDDC's Democratic Services team has run

the event, giving councillors and young people an opportunity to find out a bit more about each other and their views.

Voting at the end is for fun and invites students to think about which councillor best represents their interests and those of their community.

The winning candidate, Darryl Nicholas (pictured), was adorned with a crown and received a bunch of red roses.

He was full of praise for the event and appreciated hearing the views of students whom he referred to as "the voters of the future".

# Switch over next month

DID YOU know that depending on where you live in East Devon, you could be switching to digital television in just over one month's time?

The countdown's on and Digital UK, the independent body leading the implementation, is urging residents and businesses to prepare.

East Devon is served by two main transmitters. The Beacon Hill transmitter group, which starts switching on 8 April, serves areas including Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Sidmouth. The Stockland Hill transmitter group follows suit on 6 May and



serves areas including Honiton and Axminster.

The best way to check when your area will switch is by visiting [www.digitaluk.co.uk](http://www.digitaluk.co.uk)

and entering your postcode. This will tell you what digital services you can receive before, during and after switchover. You can also contact Digital UK for more information by calling 08456 50 50 50.

Many older and disabled viewers in East Devon are now eligible for assistance from the Switchover Help Scheme.

For more information visit [www.helpscheme.co.uk](http://www.helpscheme.co.uk) or call 0800 40 85 900.

# Nature reserve at the cutting edge

THE NEXT step in the creation of a 200-acre nature reserve on the Axe Estuary has been taken. East Devon District Council, working in partnership with the Environment Agency and Natural England, has created a new wetland for the reserve.

Black Hole Marsh is now a large saltwater lagoon featuring islands for wading birds to roost on and a new freshwater reed-bed for priority species such as Reed Bunting and Reed Warbler. It lies close to Colyford Common and Seaton Marshes Local Nature Reserves, EDDC's existing reserves on the Axe Estuary.

The lagoon is filled using cutting edge technology developed by the Environment Agency. A self-regulating tide gate will allow salty water to enter the site, whilst still preventing flooding of adjacent land.

When public access to the Axe Estuary Wetland Project is completed, people will be free to explore the site along a network of screened paths, suitable for wheelchair and pushchair use. Until then, there is a great view from the tramway.



The Environment Agency's Mike Williams explains his tide gate to visitors to Black Hole Marsh.



# 'Don't delay' message aims to help with debt problems

WITH the economic downturn having an impact on families across the country, East Devon has not been immune from the problems suffered by thousands of families in paying their bills. And it's easy for debts to build up.

That's why EDDC has some timely advice for people who may be in danger of getting into arrears with their Council Tax or Rent payments.

The message is: Don't wait a day longer than you have to before contacting us if you need help. Every month you leave it is another month that will be added to the arrears total, which cannot be changed once it has built up.

Councillor Andrew Moulding, EDDC's Portfolio Holder Resources, said: "If people contact us as soon as they realise they are getting into difficulty, we can start to look at the situation straight away. That way, we may be able to give advice before the debt has built up into a really significant and worrying amount."

## Trained

EDDC's Housing and Council Tax staff are trained to give advice to people on low incomes or on benefit as to any concessions that may be available.

The offer applies to anyone paying council house rent, council tax or business rates.

If you're not sure whether you might be entitled to housing or council tax benefit, please speak to one of our advisors.

There is also a wide range of other discounts we can give on council tax.

If you are worried that you may run into difficulties paying your council tax or rent, don't delay – get in touch with us now.



Council tax	01395 517446
Business rates	01395 517445
Rent payments	01395 517444

Local CABs can give free independent advice. Their numbers are 01395 264645 for Exmouth and 01404 44213 for Honiton, Sidmouth and Axminster.

**EDDC gears up to work with partners to minimise the impact of extreme weather conditions**



# Under the weather!

## Climate throws out new challenges



Like London's buses at the height of the blizzards, East Devon's fleet of refuse and recycling trucks were grounded on 6 February. Crews were out the following week catching up with missed collections.

WHEN blizzards swept across many parts of the UK in early February, East Devon took its fair share of the chaos wreaked by the storms.

Our picture shows a picture-postcard scene on Gittisham Common near Honiton.

The snow looks pretty and the children love it, but it means extra work for some, while for others it means not being able to get to work at all. EDDC's staff and contractors went to work as normal if they could get out of their homes at the height of the blizzards. Many crews working for waste and recycling contractors SITA could not get to the depot, which was itself under a blanket of snow.

The roads, too, were treacherous and many

parts of the district were inaccessible to vehicles. Messages were flashed out through local radio stations warning residents that collections would be disrupted. And updates were also posted on EDDC's website.

Meanwhile, members of the StreetScene team were braving the cold and wet to clear paths giving access to car parks and public toilets.

Once the snow started to thaw, and forecasters predicted heavy rain, there were concerns that the flooding seen in the Otter Valley and other parts of East Devon before Christmas might be repeated.

Advisory messages were sent to town and parish councils and staff stood by to go into action if needed. The flood messaging is all part of EDDC's response to last year's severe flooding.

The Council is working with Devon County Council, the Environment Agency and other organisations to help the area recover from the problems and to be better prepared for future events. See facing page for details.

# Residents flooded with help and advice



FOLLOWING the dramatic storms and flooding in October and December 2008, the East Devon Flood Recovery Group was formed.

This group is a partnership of councils and other agencies with an interest in ensuring that the flood warning, defence, response and recovery arrangements in East Devon are of the best possible quality.

The group hopes to learn lessons from the events of 2008, to improve the infrastructure where possible and to keep the public informed of what is happening.

One way of doing this is through a newsletter that has been delivered to homes in the affected areas – the Otter Valley and its catchment area.

The newsletter is also available in Libraries and other outlets in villages.



## Thank you for filling in our Place Survey

**WE want to say a big thank you to all of you who returned the questionnaire we sent out at the end of last year, and to let you know that we are making good use of what you told us.**

**The East Devon Place Survey asks for people's views on a wide variety of issues, including what you think needs improving in the local area, if you feel safe and if you are happy with your waste and recycling services.**

### Results

**We sent the questionnaire to 2,476 randomly selected households and we got 1,263 completed forms back, which is a great achievement, a higher response rate than in many other areas.**

**We carried out this survey on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government.**

**Every local authority in England sent out the same questionnaire, so once all the results are published you will be able to see how East Devon compares to other parts of Devon or indeed any area of England.**

**We are currently analysing the feedback and the results of this will be presented to Councillors and senior council officers, who will use the information to help them decide how to improve the services we provide.**

**The findings will also be used by all the other local public services (Devon County Council, health services, the Police and Fire and Rescue Service) to help improve life in East Devon.**

**We will be including some of the results in the next edition of *East Devon Talk*.**





# Series of busy events help to promote safety

**By Gerry Moore**  
**Community Safety and**  
**Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinator**

## Noisy March in Honiton!

In November 2008, the East Devon Domestic Violence Forum organised the annual launch of Domestic Violence Awareness Week in the district.

This time, as part of the East Devon launch, some 30 people took part in a noisy march through central Honiton on a busy market day.

The march culminated in the official launch which took place at the Mackerness Hall with the main speaker being Cllr Vernon Whitlock, last year's Mayor of Honiton.

A minute's silence was observed for victims of domestic violence and abuse, after which a series of poems written by survivors was read out. Further events took place across Devon in respect of the Awareness Week.

## Your Local Action Group

Each main town in East Devon has a geographically based Local Action Group (LAG). LAGs were set up some years ago to help tackle crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

They are also responsible for the rural areas surrounding each town.

There are four LAGs in East Devon: Exmouth, Honiton, Sidmouth / Ottery St Mary and the Axe Valley, which centres on Seaton & Axminster.

Where towns share a LAG, as with Sidmouth and Ottery St Mary, or Seaton and Axminster, meetings will alternate between the two places.

LAG meetings take place approximately every six weeks in the main town and are attended by a variety of agency representatives from that area. Objectives and action plans are drawn up to help focus attention on matters that concern local residents.

If members of the public would like their local action group to discuss problems in their neighbourhood relating to anti social



Photograph courtesy of Archant Newspaper Group

## Noisy marchers give Honiton a wake up call on domestic violence.

behaviour or crime & disorder, please contact Gerry Moore (gmoore@eastdevon.gov.uk) or telephone 01395 273802.

## Another opportunity to experience the popular SCAMBUSTER event!

Following the great success of the Trickster / Scambuster event in Honiton last September, Soloman Theatre Group will by popular request, be back in East Devon to perform another musical which as before, will focus on the nuisance and distress caused to householders by bogus callers and various scams.

This time, the residents of Sidmouth and Ottery St Mary will have a chance to attend a performance of this lively production and find ways to avoid becoming subject to unexpected callers or scams.

The production provides great entertainment while at the same time putting across advice on how not to be conned. The event will be taking place at the Manor Pavilion at Sidmouth between

9.45 am and 12 noon on Friday 13th March 2009 and later the same day, at the Institute in Yonder Street, Ottery St Mary between 2.15 pm and 4.30 pm.

Several agencies will have stands giving advice and information about general community safety matters.

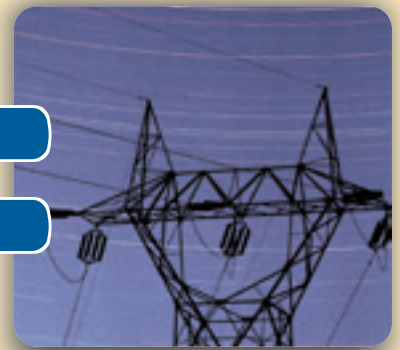
## How the Partnership can Help – a FREE guide for Householders

The East & Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership has published an information leaflet which gives an overview of the structure, priorities and work of the Partnership for local residents in both districts.

Useful telephone numbers are also listed at the back of the leaflet.

All householders should have received, or will be receiving a free copy of this leaflet in their local free newspaper.

If you have not received your copy, you can download one by visiting the East Devon District Council website, A to Z of Services and go to the Community Safety Section under C.



EDDC's new waste and recycling service in the Axe Valley, introduced in August last year, is going great guns. So much so, that the Councillor responsible for the project has said a huge "Thank You" to residents for their efforts.

The service to around 13,000 properties in Seaton, Colyton, Beer, Axminster, Uplyme and surrounding areas includes the collection of new materials, especially food waste, which ends up at the Holsworthy Bio Gas Plant in North Devon – an anaerobic digestion plant.

Since the scheme started, the Council's contractors, SITA, have been collecting on average 23 tonnes of food waste per week. This waste is taken to the Woodbury Depot, where it is contained

# More power to the Axe Valley!

and stored at a licensed facility until it is transported on to Holsworthy Bio Gas Plant weekly.

Holsworthy has the capacity to process 146,000 tonnes of cattle, pig and poultry manure, including organic food waste.

The slurry is collected from 30 local farmers within a 5-6 mile radius of the

plant. The slurry and food waste are mixed together in a mixing tank and are then heat treated, at temperatures reaching up to 70 degrees Celsius.

This process is repeated several times. The methane gases produced are captured and, using the latest technology, are converted into electricity, which is fed back into the National Grid, servicing homes in Devon with electricity.

The compost that is produced at the end of the waste management process is returned to local farmers in the Devon area to use on arable or grazing lands, so completing the recycling loop.

Since East Devon introduced the new service in the Phase 1 area the recycling percentage rate has jumped from 23% up to approximately 51%. This is a major turning point, meeting EU targets on the recycling of materials.

Councillor David Cox, EDDC's Portfolio Holder StreetScene, said: "This new service is currently only available in one part of the district but over the next few years will be available to all households.

"It looks promising in reaching various government targets and reducing waste going to landfill. I'd like to thank residents in East Devon and in particular the Axe Valley for all their efforts to recycle."

The Council is now preparing for the roll-out of this scheme to the Sidmouth and Ottery St Mary area of the district later this year (2009).



## Champion oak falls



**ONE** of Exmouth's oldest trees, a Lucombe Oak believed to be around 240 years old, is no more. The 100 tonne tree, the centrepiece of Phear Park, which celebrates its own centenary this summer, toppled over in the night when there were only light winds blowing.

The oak had been failing for some time and is thought to have died from the tree equivalent of old age. The trunk snapped off with most of the roots left in the ground. EDDC's gardeners now have the task of deciding what to do with the massive trunk. The oak has a taller brother in Phear Park which is of a similar age, but is still healthy.

# Family found temporary home after garage fire

EAST Devon District Council teams gave assistance after fire ripped through an Exmouth town centre motor dealership, causing a mass evacuation.

The following day the Council's Leader, Sara Randall Johnson, went to see for herself the damage caused by the garage blaze.

At the height of the inferno, with fears that toxic fumes and exploding cylinders could pose a risk to health, dozens of workers had to leave their business premises and a number of families were evacuated from their homes.

Among them was a family living in a flat in Victoria Road, Exmouth, who needed help from EDDC's Housing Service to find alternative accommodation for the night.

The Council's Building Control Team was also on hand to advise the fire service and the owners of the business on the structural safety of the building.

The following morning, Councillor Randall Johnson spoke to local people including young mother Lisa Rosevear, who fled her home with her toddler in her arms as soon as she saw the flames and black smoke a short distance from her back window.



Picture by Alex Walton, courtesy of the Exmouth Journal.



Left: Sara Randall Johnson at Lisa Rosevear's home, overlooking the scene of the fire.  
Above: Fire rips through R&R Motors in Exmouth.

## Help available for village hall improvements

**DOES** your Village Hall or Community Centre need improving? Would you like ideas on how to help it make enough money to keep it open? Do you need help to find your way around current legislation for community buildings?

East Devon District Council works with the Community Council of Devon (CCD) to provide a 'Multi-Use Community Buildings Grant' for capital projects only. There are two types:

- Grants of up to £30,000 from the CCD. There must be match funding available of at least twice the amount of grant from other sources and/ or local fundraising. Only available until 2010.
- Funding of up to £6,000. Grants for up to two thirds of the project are available because funding applications for up to £6,000 can be funded through the CCD and also by EDDC.

To find out more about the funding scheme or apply for this funding visit: [www.devonrcc.org.uk/page/village\\_hall\\_funding.php](http://www.devonrcc.org.uk/page/village_hall_funding.php)

For village hall/ community centre queries, visit: [www.devonrcc.org.uk](http://www.devonrcc.org.uk)

To find out more about the Devon Association of Community Buildings, visit: [www.devonvillagehalls.co.uk/Pages/DACB](http://www.devonvillagehalls.co.uk/Pages/DACB) Or for all three phone 01392 383 345.