

Council news round-up July August 2008



This news round-up is being sent to all Town and Parish Councils. You may wish to include these highlighted topics in your parish magazines. For more detailed information, you can go straight to the Council web site for agendas, reports and minutes by following this link – http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/index/your_council/committee_minutes_and_agendas.htm

Devon Unitary Review

Mark Williams (Chief Executive 01395 517408)

East Devon District Council has taken a clear view in the current debate about the future of local government in Devon. EDDC's view is that the current system "ain't broke and don't need fixin".

The review of governance in Devon was announced by the Government at the end of last year, after Communities Secretary Hazel Blears rejected a bid for 'home rule' by Exeter City Council.

Since then, the Boundary Committee has received submissions from Devon's eight district councils and from County Hall. In July it announced its draft recommendation.

The main proposal is that all Devon's district councils should be scrapped and the work that they do should be taken over by a larger Devon County Council, in much the way as has happened in the much smaller county of Cornwall.

A secondary idea put forward by the Boundary Committee is that within the Devon Unitary council there should be an island made up of a Greater Exeter, taking away significant parts of East Devon's western hinterland and adding in Exmouth to the south.

Since the Boundary Committee announced its draft recommendation on 7 July, there has been a period of public consultation which ends on 26 September. This momentous change was poorly advertised by the Boundary Committee and so EDDC used savings from last year's budget to fund a number of communication initiatives aimed at ensuring that people understand what's at stake. Responses so far received show that many people were not aware of the proposals and that the very great majority don't like what's on offer.

Feedback from the recent parish and town meeting was appreciation of EDDC's efforts to inform and involve them.

EDDC is now pursuing a legal challenge against the Boundary Committee and the Secretary of State, through a Judicial Review. This has the support of other Devon District Councils including South Hams, West Devon, North Devon and Torridge. Meanwhile, Exeter City has embarked on its own bus-shelter and advertising hoarding campaign, opposing the single Devon unitary.

We now await the outcome of the consultation with interest – to see what the Boundary Committee will come up with as its final recommendation to Hazel Blears. She will study their findings after Christmas and is expected to make a decision in February 2009.

The Boundary Committee's website is:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/boundary-reviews>

Community Funding Opportunity

Jamie Buckley (01395 516551 Ext 2332)

Are you part of a community group in East Devon? Does your group need cash?

You could get up to £5,000 from the Grassroots Grants fund for anything from volunteer and staff costs to outdoor play equipment and computers, things that will make a real difference to the lives of people in your local community.

The grants fund has over £290,000 they have to give out to Devon community groups before March 2009.

If you answer YES to all the following questions then you could soon be getting money to help people even more than you already are:

- * Is your community group led by volunteers?
- * Do you help local people and your local community?
- * Do you have an annual income of less than £20,000?
- * Have you been meeting since December 2006?
- * Do you have a governing document like a constitution?

Applications are considered every 6 weeks so please apply as soon as you can so you don't miss out. You will get a quick decision and will soon be able to put the money to good use.

This money comes from the Government's Office of the Third Sector. A total of £1.4million is available up until March 2011 from the Devon Community Foundation across Devon for small community and voluntary groups that are meeting a local need.

For more information contact the Devon Community Foundation by visiting www.devoncf.com or phoning (01884) 235887.

Public Speaking at Committees

Democratic Services 01395 517546

We remind you that with effect from 1 July 2008, the public has a right to speak at Council and Committee meetings. As standard, at the start of all Council and Committee meetings* a 15 minute period of public question time has been introduced to give members of the public the opportunity to ask questions. In addition, at all meetings of the Executive Board, the Corporate Overview Committee, the Scrutiny Committee, Housing Review Board and the Audit and Governance Committee, members of the public now have a general right to make statements and/or ask questions in respect of all agenda items that are not to be considered in Part B (the confidential part of the meeting

* The exception to this is the Licensing Committee and the Planning Inspection Committee which have their own arrangements. Public speaking at Development Control meetings will be introduced at a later date.)

Airport master plan - consultation

Exeter International Airport is actively seeking responses to the publication of its Airport Draft Master Plan during a 12-week consultation period. The Airport's customers, shareholders, stakeholders, employees and local residents are invited to comment on the development ideas and these will be considered for the final Master Plan sent to the Department for Transport later this year.

The document details the Airport's intention for phased growth to satisfy the regional level of demand for air travel and includes a commitment to have carbon neutral ground operations by 2015. A draft Master Plan summary document is available from the Airport throughout the consultation period and the full document can be seen on the Airport's website: www.exeter-airport.co.uk/masterplan.

Post Office Limited Network Change Programme Devon Area Plan Supplementary decision booklet summary.

Following the conclusion of the six-week local public consultation for the Devon Area Plan, which set out the changes the Post Office Ltd proposed to make, Postwatch, the independent watchdog for postal services conducted a further review. The review has now been concluded and Post Office Ltd has published their final decisions in respect of each individual proposal listed below. Following the conclusion of this further review Post Office Ltd's decision is final and there is no appeal procedure to Post Office Ltd.

Post Office Millwey Rise branch, Axminster
Post Office Offwell branch, Offwell
Post Office Queen Street branch, Exeter
Post Office Bridestowe branch, Okehampton
Post Office Lustleigh branch, Newton Abbot
Post Office Shebbear branch, Beaworthy
Post Office Widcombe in the Moor branch, Newton Abbot

Post Office Ltd has decided to proceed with the closure of Millwey Rise, Offwell and Queen Street, with the replacement of Bridestowe, Lustleigh, Shebbear and Widcombe in the Moor with Outreach Services, and to retain a total of 333 branches across the Devon area. The remaining network of 333 branches supports the minimum access criteria prescribed by the Government and ensures that 99.4% of the Devon Area will see either no change or will remain within one mile (by road distance) of an alternative branch.

Posters will be on display in each of the branches that will be closed or replaced by an Outreach Service to inform customers. Further information will be provided to confirm actual dates the closures or changes will take place.

Reasons for closure of Post Office Millwey Rise branch:

- ❑ Customer numbers are relatively low at the branch.
- ❑ Post Office Axminster branch is less than one mile away, providing a wider range of Post Office products and services and is located in the main retailing centre for the area.
- ❑ There is a two-hourly bus service that runs between the two branches.
- ❑ The limited retail services in the area mean that most residents are likely to be travelling to access the wider range of retailing facilities outside the Millwey Rise area already.

Post Office Ltd is currently intending to introduce a new Post Office outlet at this location, on a trial basis, immediately following the closure of this branch. Full details of any such proposed new trial service will be communicated as soon as possible.

Reasons for closure of Post Office Offwell branch:

- ❑ Although public transport in the local area is very limited, customer numbers at the branch are relatively low and car ownership levels in the area are high
- ❑ The limited retail services in the local area indicates that residents are likely to be travelling to access the wider range of retailing facilities outside of the area already
- ❑ Post Office Honiton branch has restricted parking close to the branch and a car park less than 300 yards away
- ❑ The Honiton branch has a level entrance, is open longer hours and offers a wider range of Post Office products and services than Post Office Offwell branch
- ❑ Post Office Ltd has reviewed the capacity of Post Office Honiton branch to absorb the expected increase in customer levels arising from the proposed closure of Post Office Offwell branch and is satisfied that good service levels can still be maintained

It is proposed that 15 branches within the Devon area will have improvement works in order to provide better disabled access or increase the number of counter or counter positions to ensure that they have sufficient capacity for customers migrating from other branches.

In line with the Code of Practice agreed between Post Office Ltd and Post Watch, any closures or other changes will take effect not less than four weeks after the decision is announced.

A copy of the Supplementary Decision Booklet is available on the Post Office Ltd website at: www.postoffice.co.uk/networkchange

This Council and the Council's Member Champion for Post Offices, Ken Potter will continue to campaign to secure existing transactions handled by post offices and to attract new business to secure the future of this important local service.

Place Survey

A questionnaire is being sent out on 25 September to 2,500 randomly selected households by East Devon District Council on behalf of all the public services in the area (councils, health services, the police and fire service). Please encourage your residents to complete it and send it back as soon as they can as it's their chance to have their say.

The findings will be used by all the local public services to help improve life in East Devon. The more views we get the clearer the picture will be. Once we get all the results back we will report them to Town and Parish Councils.

The survey asks for residents' views on a wide variety of issues including what they think needs improving in the local area, if they feel safe in East Devon and if they are happy with their refuse and recycling services.

The same questionnaire is sent out by every local authority area in England every two years. The feedback will help us to see how we compare with other areas, what, if anything, is changing, and whether we are happier or feel safer?

If residents haven't received a questionnaire but would like to get involved in telling the Council what they think they can join the Speak Now panel. 'Speak Now' is a group of East Devon residents who are regularly asked what they think about all sorts of issues.

To join the Speak Now panel, or to see a copy of the questions asked in the national survey please e-mail jbuckley@eastdevon.gov.uk or phone the Communications and Improvement Team on (01395) 517569 and they will be happy to help.