

## Council news round-up September/October 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](http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/index/your_council/committee_minutes_and_agendas.htm)

### **Devon Unitary Review**

Mark Williams (Chief Executive 01395 517408)

### **Submissions of views to the Boundary Committee**

Like many parish and town councils, the District Council submitted a formal response to the Boundary Committee on its draft proposal for a single unitary council across Devon by the close of the public consultation period on 26 September.

The District Council has consistently expressed the view that the current system “ain’t broke and don’t need fixin” and it is, therefore, against the Boundary Committee’s proposal. “It is my Council’s considered view that the draft proposal neither adequately addresses the Boundary Committee’s request for advice from the Secretary of State or indeed the 5 unitary criteria.” stated Sara Randall Johnson, Leader of the Council, in the submission. “The general consensus of all those that I have engaged with during this consultation process is that whatever the review is about, it is not about ‘local’ government.”

As can be seen at the end of this article, more than 30 parish and town councils are also against the Boundary Commission’s proposal with only seven in favour. If your council is not listed and you have made a formal submission to the Boundary Committee, I would appreciate you advising me of your council’s view.

### **Financial Assessment**

Devon County Council’s financial assessment of the proposal to create the second largest council in the country was published a fortnight before the public consultation ended. This suggests that it would take four years before the costs of change, £93 million, are outweighed by the projected savings. Only in 2015 would a Devon unitary council generate regular annual savings which are estimated at £19 million.

“What we do know is that this process will cost the Council Tax payer £93 million.” said Cllr Randall Johnson. “*Future* savings are predicted - but not guaranteed. Experience suggests they won’t be forthcoming. At a time when we should be cutting our costs, spending £93 million is sheer folly.” The estimated annual saving of £19 million from 2015 would be against a gross combined revenue budget of £517 million which equates to slightly more than a 3% saving which is suspiciously similar to the national efficiency target which the County Council would have to face anyway.

To put this sum into further context, it would take 32 years for the projected annual savings to pay off Devon County Council’s annual debt of £614 million.

All that the County Council is promising to deliver in terms of savings for residents is a council tax that matches the county’s current lowest rate. For residents of East Devon in your typical Band D home, that equates to a saving of just £3 a year. Cllr Randall Johnson asked this pertinent question: “Should it be a proud boast of Devon County Council that it is offering a saving of a penny a day to the 62,000 households within East Devon?”

## **Credit Crunch**

The latest downturn in the economy is yet another reason why the government might scrap the idea of reorganising local government in Devon and work to improve the present two tier structure. Communities and Local Government Secretary Hazel Blears fuelled rumours that the review might be scrapped when she refused to rule out cancelling the current round of reorganisations at a recent conference.

“The government have got enough on their plate already, without taking Devon into a chaotic and expensive local government reorganisation that will cause a great deal of hassle for a lot of people, with no visible gain.” said Cllr Randall Johnson. “They might as well admit it now – the game’s up!”

Cornwall is currently preparing to ‘go unitary’ in 2009. It was recently announced that the costs of their new county-wide council have tripled from £19 million to £59 million. This includes the spending of half a million pounds on re-branding and there is the prospect of delays in the holding of elections for the new unitary council. Cllr Randall Johnson concluded “The experience in Cornwall shows us clearly what a disaster it would be if Devon were forced down the same route. Big is not beautiful. Instead, it is unwieldy, clumsy and undemocratic.”

## **A long way to go**

There is still a long way to go before the Secretary of State makes a decision on the Boundary Committee’s final proposal. The final proposal which is due to be announced around Christmas, is not binding and the Secretary of State has the option of postponing a decision or deciding to retain the current two tier system.

East Devon District Council’s campaign for the status quo will continue alongside those of a similar view, notably the district councils of West Devon, South Hams, North Devon and Torridge.

Should some form of unitary local government for Devon be approved, the earliest that it will be implemented is April 2010, at which time the work of the districts and county will start to be merged together.

## **FOR a Unitary Devon**

<i>Bramford Speke Budleigh Salterton Dunkeswell Luppitt</i>	<i>Rockbeare Sheldon Parish Meeting Upton Pyne</i>
---	--

## **AGAINST a Unitary Devon**

<i>Axminster Aylesbeare Bishops Clyst Branscombe Broadclyst Broadhembury Clyst Honiton Clyst St George Colaton Raleigh Combyne Rousden Cotleigh East Budleigh with Bicton Exmouth Farway Gittisham Hawkchurch Honiton</i>	<i>Huxham Parish Meeting Lympstone Membury Monkton Musbury Newton Poppleford &amp; Harpford Northleigh Offwell Otterton Payhembury Seaton Sidmouth Uplyme Upottery Widworthy Woodbury</i>
---	---

## **No formal submission to the Boundary Commission - Ottery St Mary**

## **Help with council house rent, council tax and business rates**

Council rent – 01395 517444

Council Tax or Housing Benefit 01395 517446

Business rates 01395 517445

East Devon District Council is offering to talk about any payment problems people may be having due to the downturn in the economy. The offer applies to anyone paying council house rent, council tax or business rates. Please phone the council (numbers above) to discuss concerns before getting behind with payments. It could be that there are entitlements that you are not aware of – for example have you heard that from 27 October, all child maintenance payments are no longer taken into account when allocating housing and council tax benefits. If you are not sure whether you might be entitled to housing or council tax benefit, please speak to one of our advisors. There may be discounts that you are unaware of.

Business rates – if the rateable value of your premises is below £15,000, you could get some business rate relief, subject to certain criteria. Even if you are not entitled to a reduction but you are having difficulties paying your rates, please help us to help you by getting in touch with us now.

## **Licensing legislation and Council powers**

EDDC Licensing Team – 01395 517810

There has been recent public criticism that the Council hasn't done enough to support local opposition to some licensing applications. As a result, it is opportune to outline the Council's position and licensing legislation.

Since the Licensing Act came into force some four years ago, responsibility for granting licences passed from the Magistrates' Courts to city, unitary and district councils. The Act names a number of 'responsible authorities' who are consulted on licensing issues and who can raise objections to applications or seek reviews of licences when premises are badly run. These are Police, Fire and Rescue Services, Trading Standards Departments, Area Child Protection Committees, Environmental Health Departments, Planning Departments and Health and Safety Executives. In addition, 'interested parties' – members of the public who live or have businesses in the 'vicinity' – also have a statutory right to voice their objections and seek reviews.

Responsible authorities and interested parties are able to make objections under the following licensing objectives:

- the prevention of crime and disorder
- public safety
- the prevention of public nuisance
- the protection of children from harm

East Devon District Council, as Licensing Authority in East Devon, has a duty under the Act to carry out its licensing functions with a view to promoting the above four licensing objectives. If no **relevant** representations are made, the legislation requires the authority to grant the application in the form that it was made with no changes. Where there is formal objection from responsible authorities to a fresh application or a changed application, an EDDC Sub Committee of the Licensing Authority will hear the application and consider the objections.

In the majority of cases, however, informal mediation by the Police or the Council's licensing officers is successful and achieves the desired result without the need for a hearing. The Police, like other Responsible Authorities, are restricted in what they can object to. For example, with new licences, they cannot object on the grounds that they believe disorder will take place as a result of the new premises opening. They first need evidence and often this is not available until after the licence is granted and the premises are actually operating. In addition, under the Act, residents and local businesses in the 'vicinity' of the premises (Interested parties) can make relevant representations about an application. This is to give the local community a say in licensing decisions.

## **EDDC freak weather relief fund**

Following the recent freak storms in Ottery St Mary and other parts of East Devon, EDDC has announced a number of initiatives to help residents hit by flooding.

- A fund has been launched to help those in need of financial assistance
- Other existing sources of funding and advice are being investigated

EDDC has opened a Flood Relief Fund. At this stage, cheques and postal orders may be sent to EDDC's offices at Knowle, Sidmouth, EX10 8HL. Cheques and postal orders must be made out to the "Ottery St Mary Flood Relief Fund".

The proposed objectives of the Fund are 'To provide financial help to residents of Ottery St Mary and surrounding areas of East Devon whose properties have been flooded by the 29/30 October floods and who have suffered hardship as a result'.

**Government Crisis Loans** may also be of help. They can give up to £1,500 interest free loans for people in severe need, for example: no food to feed the family or the roof of the home has caved in. These can be applied for through your local Jobcentre. For more information:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Diol1/DoltOnline/DG\\_4017683](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Diol1/DoltOnline/DG_4017683)

EDDC has reassured householders who are living on benefit and whose carpets or appliances have been wrecked by the recent floods that do not need to worry about the cost of removal by waste collection crews. If this is not covered by the householders' insurance policy, the Council will waive any charge for collection. The Council has also provided skips to assist the clearance.

## **Local Development Framework Issues and Options Report 'Planning for the Future' – your views are important**

The Issues and Options report sets out how the District could develop over the next 20 years. Key issues facing East Devon over the next two decades include ensuring economic prosperity whilst providing housing for local people and preserving and enhancing East Devon's envied environment, not forgetting the additional challenge of climate change. These principles will be used to shape East Devon's Core Strategy document which will be the reference for planners over the next 20 years as they tackle pressures on land and resources, driven by national forecasts of population trends and economic growth in the South West.

The Government has proposed changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy and these in brief are:

- Enlargement of Cranbrook to 7,500 dwellings
- A proposed second new community of around 4,000 homes – site to be identified
- Extra homes in many East Devon towns or villages
- Future-proofing plans to accommodate further growth
- Support infrastructure that includes schools and medical provision
- Additional employment sites
- Building is sustainable and affordable.

EDDC has objected to the proposal to enlarge Cranbrook beyond 6,500 dwellings and to the proposal for a second new community near East Devon's border with Exeter.

You will be invited to comment on the Issues and Options report – details of the consultation will be publicised shortly and exhibitions are to be held across the district where you can feed in your views. The document will also be on line and you will be able to submit comments through the Council's web site.

The Core Strategy is a Development Plan Document that will consist of key strategic policies and large scale strategic land allocations. It will also inform and set out guiding principles for other plans that will form part of the East Devon Local Development Framework. Once adopted this will replace East Devon's current Local Plan and will guide development in the District until 2026.

## **Funding Opportunity**

Jamie Buckley ( 01395 516551 Ext 2332)

**Grants for War Memorials** – funding available for urgent and necessary repairs to the fabric of the memorial, work to improve the legibility of eroded inscriptions, reinstatement of lost elements, particularly decorate features, works related to hard landscaping, fees for a conservation accredited architect. Applications are assessed every 6 months on 30 April and 31 October each year. For more information go to [www.warmemorials.org.uk](http://www.warmemorials.org.uk)

**Community Shops** – The Village Retail Services Association in partnership with Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and Co-operative and Community Finance have funding of up to £40,000 available. This is to fund the start up of community owned shops in rural areas in England. Applicants can also get advice from the Association. The deadline for submissions is 30 July 2009. For more information go to [http://www.virsa.org/index.cfm/villageshop/News.Custom/page\\_id/36](http://www.virsa.org/index.cfm/villageshop/News.Custom/page_id/36)

**Town Twinning** – The Town Twinning initiative has funding of between 2,000 and 20,000 Euros available to support town twinning citizens' meetings. These meetings will be between towns already twinned and will further develop strong links between their citizens. The deadline for applications is 1 December 2008.

For more information go to

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/action1/towntwinning/funding\\_en.htm](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/action1/towntwinning/funding_en.htm)

## **Making sport and play accessible and inclusive for all**

Gail Hickson, Community Council of Devon, School Hut, County Hall, Exeter EX2 4QB  
Tel 01392 383443 [gail@devonrcc.org.uk](mailto:gail@devonrcc.org.uk)

Workshops have been designed to support volunteers from sport/play Associations and Parish Councils with the skills and understanding to improve access to sport and play facilities. The workshops will help local volunteers make the space you manage more accessible and inclusive to all members of the community. The aim is to help you to:

- Understand and address barriers to your local sport and play facilities
- Explore access audits and other tools
- Identify hard to reach groups and support their use of recreational spaces
- Provide an overview of the Disability Discrimination Act and the implications for management committees
- Funding advice for your future sport and play projects
- An introduction to the Grass Roots Grant funding stream

For details of these half day courses running please contact Gail Hickson. The sessions cost £10 as they are subsidised by funding from Awards for All. (The most local to this area is Kentisbeare Village Hall 2-5pm on 4 December)

## **East Devon's Warm Zone**

[www.devonwarmzones.org.uk](http://www.devonwarmzones.org.uk)

Devon Energy Efficiency Advice Centre Freephone 0800 512012 [www.devon-energy-advice.co.uk](http://www.devon-energy-advice.co.uk)

The Devon Warm Zones project has been launched to help households across the region cut their fuel bills, reduce carbon emissions and improve their health through the use of energy efficiency measures. The project aims to raise awareness of the grants and discounts on energy efficiency products and services available to households across East Devon, as well as giving advice to help people to reduce their energy bills. The project will also play an important part in helping towards Devon's work in tackling climate change. The project has been launched in Exmouth but will be rolled out across Devon.