



Ward Report to Whimble Parish Council 14 January 2024

District Updates

Decisions from Cabinet:

- EDDC are continuing to fund and staff Warm Hubs across the district to help tackle the ongoing cost of living crisis and help reduce isolation and loneliness
- Following review by Overview, feedback from town and parish councils and the wider public, and advice from officers, Cabinet has approved an extension to special funding for so-called 'Category B and C' public toilets that have been earmarked for transfer to towns and parishes or commercial sale for an extra 12 months to allow for further work with councils to seek a long-term solution enabling these sites to remain open
- Reapproval of existing modifications to the Council's Housing Benefit scheme to continue to disregard veterans' war pensions when carrying out means testing for housing benefits
- Emergency repairs to Exmouth Sea Wall with a budget of £1.1m have been approved to start urgently once the requisite pre-construction design and survey information has been put together
- A new Car Parking Strategy has been commissioned to improve transparency in the way that the Council makes decisions regarding car parking assets and tariffs
- Cabinet has approved the Capital Programme for 2024/25; headlines include extensive refurbishment and replacement works at play parks throughout the district, significant investment in vehicle refurbishment and maintenance to keep up our very high standards in reliability of recycling and waste collections; and improvements to theatre and other cultural facilities in Exmouth, Honiton, and Sidmouth
- To procure a programme of decarbonisation support for business and community organisations, which will offer training, carbon surveys, and carbon action plans to help reduce waste, lower emissions, and save money – and will be followed by grant programmes to help implement these measures
- To continue with an expansive Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which provides up to 100% support to lower-income households, taking a significant number out of paying Council Tax altogether – with the reduction scheme as a whole supporting some 3000 of East Devon's households
- To proceed with the final fourth stage of the Feniton Flood Alleviation Scheme, with a value of up to £3m, which will significantly reduce flood risk and impacts in Feniton and downstream towards Ottery and beyond, and will complete a multi-year project to address these longstanding challenges

Other news:

- There has been a substantial amount of movement on various matters related to planning:
 - Strategic Planning Committee, supported by Cabinet, have approved a programme of measures to improve the process of applying for and spending s106/CIL receipts, including expanding capacity in the team and streamlining the application itself – both to simplify and accelerate things for towns and parishes
 - The Council has moved to commission advice from the national Planning Advisory Service on resisting speculative development on the district linked to the government's five year housing supply rules
 - Strategic Planning Committee has commissioned officers to undertake a review of how so-called 'windfall allowances' – homes that come forward for development not on allocated sites in the Local Plan, e.g. new dwellings in back gardens or on brownfield sites – in the Council's five year housing land supply come forward, on the back of headline figures that suggest these have



been systematically underestimated; an initial report on this has been brought to Committee, which felt that it failed to satisfactorily address the questions that had been put to officers, and as such relevant committee members will be involved in a detailed discussion with officers to review and a subsequent report will be brought

- Following Michael Gove's changes to the NPPF on 19 & 20 December 2023, Strategic Planning Committee received a report into the same advising members that little had changed by way of the housing need calculation, and that the government was replacing the five year housing land supply test with a four year test for authorities progressing well with their local plan; the report recommended noting the changes and proceeding to make decisions based on prior policy pending further advice from government
- In view of efforts by Conservative MPs to portray the changes to the system as significant and fundamental, particularly in allowing Councils to reduce housing numbers on the basis that the so-called 'standard method' was now advisory, members of SPC, led by Liberal Democrat members, instead resolved to adopt the new four year test, meaning that the Council retains greater control over development within the District, and to issue a public statement and correspondence to MPs to emphasise the insubstantiveness of the change and to continue to raise concerns regarding the standard method

Updates & Upcoming:

- Council is currently reviewing draft Service Plans and budgets for the coming financial year, setting out key priorities for operations – with further details on this to share once confirmed
- Council is also shortly to be completing work on its new Council Plan running to 2027, maintaining the focus on housing, the environment, and the economy brought out in the previous plan, with a new fourth priority, delivering quality services
- Further to a motion brought to Full Council in Summer of 2023, Council has undergone a review by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny into the effectiveness of its Overview and Scrutiny functions, the results of which are due at the end of the moment, and will be undergoing a Peer Challenge Review carried out by the Local Government Association

Ward & Parish Updates

- I am working proactively with officers to understand timelines and the process for a potential Governance Review looking at the town boundary of Cranbrook in relation to new expansion areas. My current understanding is that these would not take effect until the next election in 2027 if the Review moves forwards. In the interim, I and Cranbrook Cllrs have asked for a meeting with the relevant officers to discuss how we address governance around the expansion areas in the meantime, which may mean that Whimble Parish Council is invited to participate in the Strategic Delivery Board, but this is to be determined
- As Cllrs are aware, following my correspondence with the Public Rights of Way team at Devon County Council, contractors are being instructed to install around 20 metres of fencing along the footpath to improve safety along the route. Devon Highways have also been instructed to attend to inspect the surface, and if budgetary constraints allow will make any appropriate repairs; otherwise, a capital bid will be made by the PRow team for upgrades to the surface during the next financial year from April
- I continue to work on the Whimble Neighbourhood Plan, as Cllrs are aware, and am in close communication with the Neighbourhood Planning Officer at EDDC to try to get ahead of any issues arising here; I would draw WPC's attention to changes to the NPPF in December to provisions regarding the weight of Neighbourhood Plans in development management decision-making, and particularly that where NPs incorporate allocations to meet identified housing needs, these plans are now



considered up-to-date (and thus have significantly greater weight) for five years, rather than two years under the previous NPPF

Follow-Up on Matters from November/December Whimble Parish Council Meetings

- Pursuant to Council's request, I sought advice from EDDC's Engineering Projects Manager on requests from a resident for clearance and excavations in the stream running through the Square. In summary:
 - Clearing the vegetation would have little to no impact; while it might reduce the potential for clogging of the narrow culvert at the bottom of the Square, it's also likely to increase the velocity of water travelling towards said culvert, which we already know is inadequate for the stream, which at best will counteract any benefits from reduced blockage and at worst might make flooding at the Town Lane bridge worse
 - Digging out the banks of the stream would likely have a similar effect
 - I would also advise that because the stream has EA Main River status by the time it reaches the Square, **any works** beyond just cutting back the plants on the banks - i.e. any digging out - would require a bespoke permit from the EA as they wouldn't fall under any standard rules or exemptions
- I have made enquiries w.r.t. s106/CIL contributions and the Slewton Play Park refresh and am awaiting response