



**Ward Report to Rockbeare Parish Council
19 February 2024**

District Updates

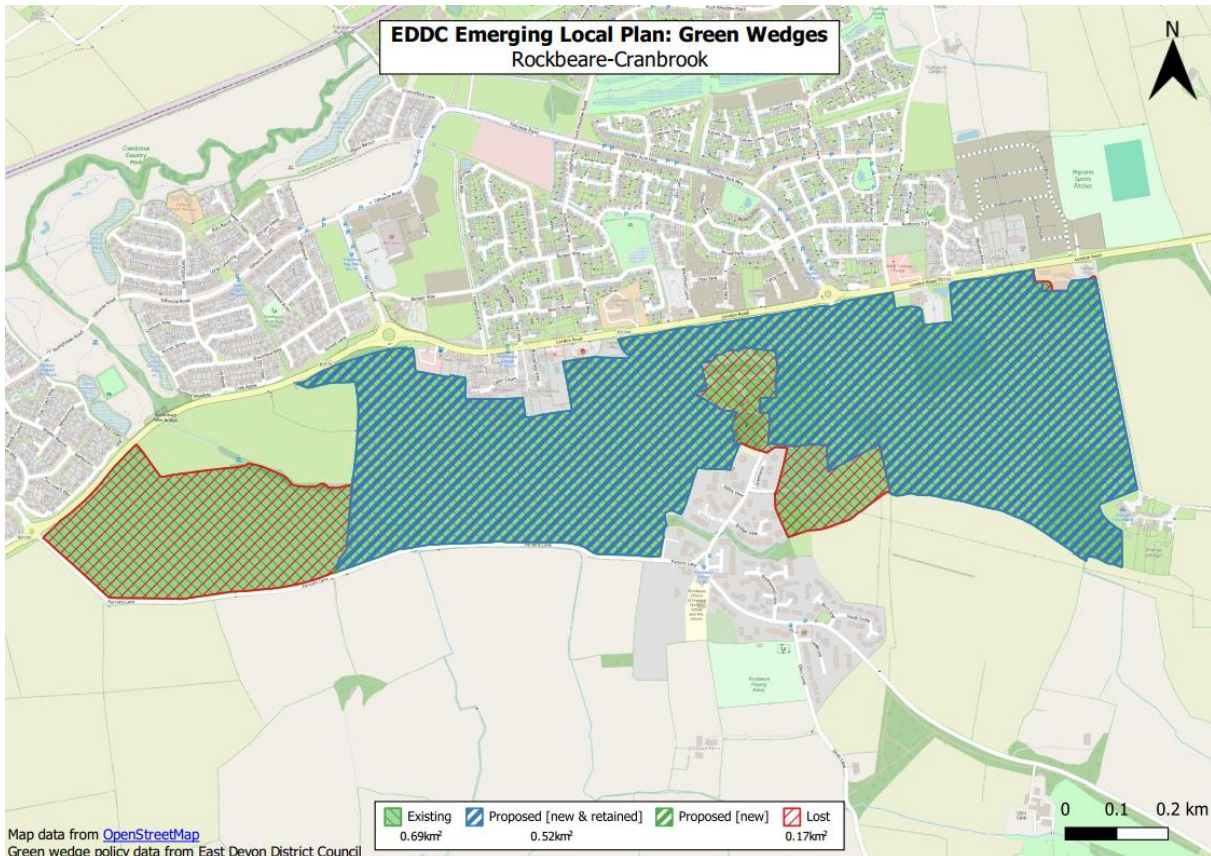
Decisions from Cabinet:

- Cabinet has approved a plan to double Council Tax on second homes from April 2025, in line with new powers under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 – formal assent is expected to be given by Full Council on 21 February
- A delivery mechanism for both gypsy and traveller pitch sites in Cranbrook expansion areas has now been agreed, which should see a total of 15 pitches provided by developers according to an existing Council specification
- Cabinet has adopted a new Safeguarding Policy as part of its work reviewing its processes in light of last year’s ‘Veritas Report’, which will include basic Disclosure Barring Service checks for sitting District Cllrs
- Additional car parking is to be created in Exmouth in response to recent capacity issues caused by Devon County Council’s introduction of new residents’ parking permits – this will see the Estuary Coach Park converted to 86 spaces, with potential further work pending completion of the upcoming Parking Strategy

Other news:

- Some more news on planning, this time on proposals for Green Wedges in the upcoming Local Plan
 - Officers brought a proposal to Strategic Planning Committee for a substantial reduction in designated green wedge areas on the basis of landscape assessments carried out by the policy team
 - This work had been necessitated due to the lack of evidence for the wedges presented at previous plan examinations
 - The proposals would have seen a net loss of approx. 76% of East Devon’s green wedges;

Wedge	Existing Area (km2)	Proposed Area (km2)	Area Gained (km2)	Area Lost (km2)	% Loss
Beer-Seaton	1.26	0.34	0.20	1.12	88.99%
Budleigh-Knowle	0.33	0.10	0.00	0.23	69.65%
Clyst St Mary-Exeter	6.56	0.07	-	6.48	98.82%
Colyton-Colyford	0.61	0.43	0.00	0.18	29.61%
Ebford-Exton-Topsham	0.70	0.62	0.00	0.08	11.80%
Lympstone-Exmouth	1.27	0.20	-	1.06	83.97%
Marines-Exton	0.08	0.08	-	-	0.00%
Marines-Lympstone	0.88	-	-	0.88	100.00%
Poltimore-Broadclyst	1.13	-	-	1.13	100.00%
Rockbeare-Cranbrook	0.69	0.52	-	0.17	24.77%
Seaton-Colyford	1.10	0.58	-	0.52	47.53%
Sidbury-Sidford	0.46	0.37	-	0.09	19.37%
West Hill-Ottery	2.07	0.32	-	1.75	84.47%
Whimble-Cranbrook	1.82	0.97	-	0.85	46.83%
	18.96	4.61	0.20	14.56	
	100.00%	24.30%	1.08%	-76.78%	



Officer proposals for the revised Rockbeare-Cranbrook Green Wedge

- These proposals were brought before members on the basis of a methodology approved at a meeting of Strategic Planning Committee on 3 October, where Members' comments included the importance of assessing non-visual elements of settlement separation – i.e. actual physical separation – rather than just that which could be seen
- I was delighted that, on the basis that the proposals made by officers did not reflect this intention and were contrary to the intention of Members expressed in previous meetings, Committee supported my four alternative recommendations:

1 That Strategic Planning Committee cannot agree that the draft Green Wedges as presented are drawn in accordance with the intent of the Committee or with the spirit of the proposed policy.

2 That the Assistant Director for Planning Strategy and Development Management, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Strategic Planning Committee, urgently review the methodology, proposed policy wording, and proposed boundaries in light of the issues raised by Committee, with particular regard to accounting for non-visual, intrinsic settlement separation and with input from Ward Members, and bring a revised proposal with relevant evidence to a workshop with all Committee Members invited, with conclusions and recommendations brought back to Committee as soon as possible for consideration prior to Regulation 18 consultation.

3 That the Assistant Director for Planning Strategy and Development Management work with the Portfolio Holders for Strategic Planning and Coast, Country, and Environment, as well as relevant Assistant Directors, to scope the potential approach to a new Countryside & Green Infrastructure Strategy and Supplementary Planning Document, and bring a proposal back to Strategic Planning Committee at the appropriate time.

4 That a report be brought to Committee as soon as possible setting out the options for exploring a Green Belt designation in the West End of the district.



- Recommendations 1 and 2 effectively ask officers to go back to the drawing board and involve Members in a process of revising the definition, method of assessment, and actual Green Wedge boundaries
- Recommendation 3 asks officers for a costed proposal to work up a new Countryside & Green Infrastructure Strategy to address many of the points brought up regarding the merits of Green Wedges that are not within their remit – e.g. biodiversity, amenity, flood prevention – and would sit as an additional planning policy document alongside the upcoming Local Plan, though it would likely not be complete until after its adoption on account of the amount of work required; in my view, this should have been the starting point of the new Local Plan!
- Recommendation 4 asks officers to explore whether we could bring in a new statutory Green Belt designation on the edge of Exeter to prevent further ‘urban sprawl’ – this is a ‘step up’ from Green Wedge designations as it is formally recognised by the National Planning Policy Framework and in legislation; while Green Wedges are an accepted component of many Local Plans, they do not benefit from that extra robustness
- We are expecting further developments on this item very soon, as any proposals need to go out to consultation this Spring to meet Local Plan timetables
- While we are awaiting receipt of a full written report from the Local Government Association, I’m pleased to share that East Devon has come out of its Corporate Peer Challenge – where a team of Councillors and officers from other local authorities reviews the work of the Council and makes recommendations for improvement – with a very strong showing, particularly for its work on economic growth and environmental policy; I note in particular that the Peer Challenge team found no evidence to substantiate allegations of bullying contained in a recent report publicised in the press; a staff survey found that Council officers ‘did not recognise’ these

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
- Full Council on 21 February will be considering a number of important items on which I will feedback in next month’s report; most notably:
 - To approve a budget for the production of a new Asset Management Strategy, which will seek to define a coordinated and deliberate approach to acquisitions, disposals, and use of the Council’s land and buildings, tying up with the objectives in the new Council Plan and the Council’s emerging Climate Strategy, as well as other work going on behind the scenes – I am pleased to have been invited to sit on the Working Group that will oversee production of the strategy
 - A Motion on Notice regarding sewage and the performance of South West Water, which I have brought to Council supported by my Portfolio Holder for Coast Country and Environment, Cllr Geoff Jung (Lib Dem, Woodbury & Lympstone) and thirteen other Councillors; the motion asks Council to affirm that it has no confidence in South West Water’s management of sewage infrastructure, and invites South West Water and our MPs to take a number of steps to start the process of rectifying the situation – including and not least inviting SWW to fully and transparently participate in the Council’s planning and strategic planning processes