

Annual Report 2023 - 24

Cllr Todd Olive



East Devon District Councillor for Whimble, Rockbeare, and Marsh Green



**Working hard for Whimble & Rockbeare ward
all year round**

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Walk-in surgeries at The Hive, School Hill, Whimble, EX5 2TS
Monthly: 1st Monday 4-7pm, 3rd Monday 8am-12pm





Dear neighbours,

It's my pleasure to present my first Annual Report as your East Devon District Councillor for Whimble & Rockbeare ward.

The past twelve months have seen a huge amount of change at East Devon – with a new cohort of councillors, a refresh of the executive officer team, and the beginning of a new era for the council following the Local Government Association Peer Review and the adoption of a new Council Plan.

Looking ahead, I'm excited about some of the opportunities coming over the next year. New officer leadership will bring with it a widespread review of how we work at East Devon, and with it I hope an opportunity for everyone to make their voice heard so that our District Council works the best it can for everyone. In the Coast, Country, and Environment portfolio that I have worked in since last September, a new East Devon Tree Strategy and Local Nature Recovery Plan, together with the advent of new public green spaces called 'SANGS' and the proposed expansion of the Clyst Valley Regional Park, will see a greater focus on nature - and our access to it.

Local councils shouldn't always be about new opportunities, though - and as one council team, inevitably we won't have got everything right over the last year. I came into this role promising accountability and transparency in my work on your behalf – so I hope everyone reading this feels that where they've raised issues or queries in the community or with East Devon's services that these have been dealt with wherever possible. If not, I hope you'll feel able to reach out by email, phone, or by coming to one of my regular surgeries.

This Annual Report provides an insight into all of these issues, my work over the last year, and updates on a variety of topics that might be of interest to you, some from within Whimble and Rockbeare parishes and some from wider East Devon – including the progress of the emerging new Local Plan, which following my appointment as Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning at this year's Annual Council meeting I am now responsible for overseeing. I hope you find it useful.

Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement. It is an honour to serve as your District Councillor, and I look forward to continuing our work together in the coming year.

Cllr Todd Olive



News from East Devon

Peer Reviews

In the last year, EDDC has undergone three separate 'Peer Reviews' by independent bodies that support local authorities to deliver quality services.

The first of these, by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, looked at how our three 'critical friend' committees - Scrutiny, Overview, and the Housing Review Board - function to help 'learn lessons' from the past and to develop policy looking to the future. The review made a number of recommendations to improve the robustness of this process, including improvements to how officers support their work and to how each board identifies areas to scrutinise. In particular, going forwards, we hope that the Housing Review Board will play a critical role in helping get EDDC's social housing service back on track - where we know that the quality of housing stock and of maintenance and repair services in recent years have needed improvement.

The Planning Advisory Service, part of the Local Government Association, was tasked to look more specifically at some of our Planning and Economic Development teams' work around Cranbrook and other major developments - as part of a broader review learning lessons from how Cranbrook was delivered by its developer consortium, with a view to a more proactive role for EDDC bringing forwards East Devon's next new town near Farringdon.

Lastly, the Local Government Association were asked to undertake a full 'Corporate Peer Challenge'. This involved a team of expert officers and experienced councillors from other local authorities, as well as LGA staff, undertaking an intensive, entirely independent, and self-directed review of how East Devon functions. The review identified a number of priority areas for action - including among other things the need to complete recruitment of a new Chief Executive and look at the structure of our senior officer team in order to ensure lessons from the Review can be properly taken forwards, as well the importance of better and closer ties between East Devon, its town and parish councils, and communities themselves. The full report, and East Devon's action plans in response, are due in July 2024.

I appreciate that, for many, this might seem like a "whole lot of nothing". I've chosen this as the first item in my Annual Report for this year, though, because I think it illustrates the emphasis that the Liberal Democrat-led administration at East Devon is putting on finding the areas where we need to do better - and making sure we deliver genuine improvement in those areas. I would very much encourage all residents reading this to please proactively get in touch with me where you see issues arising.

New Chief Executive Appointed

Only a few short weeks ago, a meeting of East Devon's Full Council appointed Tracy Hendren as our new Chief Executive. Tracy takes up this position having joined East Devon in Summer 2023 as Director of Housing, Health and Environment, where - supported by Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, Cllr Dan Ledger - she has initiated a widespread programme of reform and improvement within East Devon's Housing service, which has already begun to see improvements in repair response times and the number of empty social homes awaiting works before new tenants can move in. Before joining East Devon, Tracy was the Assistant Director of Housing, Environmental Health, and Trading Standards at The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead. Her career has spanned across central Government, and District and Unitary Authorities within City and London Borough areas.



Over the last year, it's become very clear to me that East Devon faces a host of challenges that are the legacy of previous administrations - most notably in housing, but in other areas of our work too. After 21 years under the previous Chief Executive, I'm delighted that Tracy is bringing a fresh perspective to the Council, and I have every confidence in her to deliver for residents.

Image: EDDC



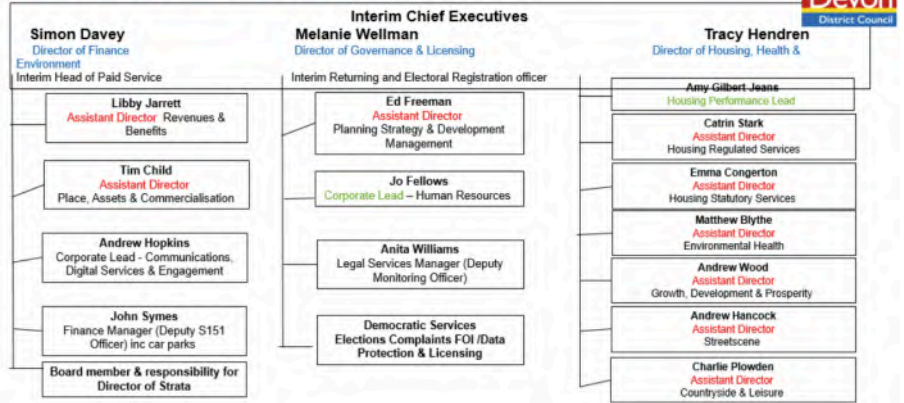
Council Service Updates

Management Restructure

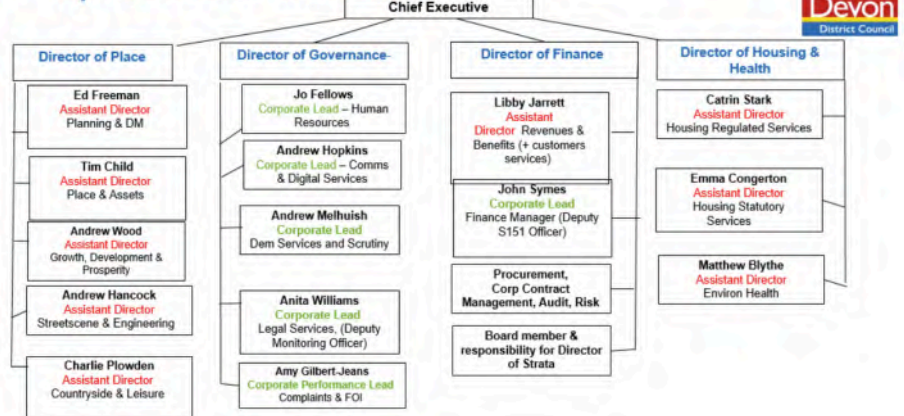
Following the appointment of Tracy Hendren as Chief Executive and further to some of the recommendations made as a result of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, EDDC's Full Council have endorsed a proposed to restructure the Council's Executive Leadership Team, and the various Directorates that sit under each of those lead officers.

Currently, East Devon has three Directors immediately under the Chief Executive - a Director of Finance, responsible for Council Tax, spending, and EDDC assets; a Director of Governance & Licensing, who heads up various legal functions within the Council, including the planning service; and a Director of Housing, Health & Environment, who covers a huge range of other services, including the housing service, StreetScene (which includes recycling & waste), environmental health, growth and economic development, and countryside and leisure. There's a clear imbalance here, which means that often services have not had the dedicated oversight and attention to improvement that they should.

Current team structure



Proposed ELT structure



Source: EDDC

The proposal is therefore to introduce a new 'Director of Place', bringing together a number of services shown in the chart to the right, together with a reorganisation of some other services and senior officer positions to make sure that the Council has enough capacity across the board to properly monitor and improve services. We are hoping that the new Director of Place, and replacement Director of Housing & Health, will be recruited over the course of Summer 2024.

Housing Service Reforms

As mentioned elsewhere, the performance of East Devon's housing service has been a major focus for Councillors across the district over the last year - as well as the subject of significant executive officer attention and reform.

Some of these changes are evident from the above restructuring, where housing will benefit from much greater direct oversight at executive level. A large number of changes are however ongoing behind the scenes to ensure that the service is fully and appropriately staffed in order to deliver for residents.

Significant work has gone into improving the response times and quality of work by East Devon's two housing contractors, Ian Williams and Liberty Gas, who handle most works on East Devon's behalf - including a new, transparent Key Performance Indicator monitoring programme. You can read the latest (at the time of writing) performance report [here](#) - which highlights, for example, that the number of empty properties awaiting works was down by around a quarter at the end of December 2023 compared to three months earlier.



Council Service Updates

Public Toilets Review

One issue that has frequently come up in discussion with residents is the state of public toilets run by East Devon across the district - the result of years of underinvestment by previous administrations.

Many of you will remember the consultation that EDDC ran in late 2021 to give residents a chance to share their views on the future of these facilities. Since then, East Devon's assets team have been working to move this project forward.

Fifteen sites were selected to be retained and upgraded by EDDC.

Of these, works on four are due to start in early June, with the replacement of existing facilities with new modular loos that can be maintained much more easily to the high standard that residents rightly expect. A decision on planning permission for a fifth is due imminently, while the remaining ten sites will be part of 'phase two' over Winter 2024/25.

Of the remaining twelve sites, some of these are expected, subject to legal agreements, to be taken on by various town councils - while the remainder continue to move through the process of being transferred to other authorities or community groups, or sold.



Artist impression of new Exmouth Foxholes toilet block. Source: EDDC Planning

Recycling & Waste

Late last year, I was delighted to visit East Devon's recycling depot at Greendale Business Park to mark the signing of a three-year extension to the current recycling and waste contract. This has come amidst a wider contract of substantial change and disruption in the sector nationwide, the result of substantial changes in national legislation and challenging market conditions. This extension means that the excellent service provided to residents by contractor SUEZ will continue until mid-2026.

Just because we're sticking with the same contractor, however, doesn't mean that East Devon won't be seeking to innovate and improve its service for residents! Earlier this year, East Devon's recycling & waste officers and the Coast, Country & Environment portfolio holder team visited the headquarters of Welsh company NappiCycle, one of the only companies in the world which processes and recycles used nappies and other absorbent hygiene products, on a fact-finding mission. East Devon is subsequently seeking to undertake a trial of kerbside nappy collections for recycling, which is anticipated in the West End of the district in Autumn 2024.



Cllr Paul Fernley, Cllr Geoff Jung, Nick Tandy (SUEZ Principal Commercial Manager), and Cllr Todd Olive with an EDDC 'Romaquip' Image: [EDDC](#)



EDDC Cllrs and Officers at NappiCycle HQ Image: [EDDC](#)

On the note of recycling collections, I know some residents have previously shared concerns regarding litter being blown out of recycling vehicles while collections are underway. I have raised this with officers on a number of occasions over the previous year, who have reassured me that the crews are regularly reminded - including in induction and refresher training - to ensure all hatches on the vehicle are closed when it is moving over a certain distance and speed. Further targeted reminders are raised with specific crews as issues are reported - so if you see this, please let me know.



Council Service Updates

Communities Infrastructure Funding Process Reforms

While perhaps less visible directly to residents, for a number of years EDDC has struggled to deal with the sheer volume of so-called 'Section 106' agreements - which require developers to contribute towards various forms of community infrastructure, such as schools and play parks. These sit alongside a slightly different forms of infrastructure charges, the Community Infrastructure Levy - or CIL. The reason this issue is important is in ensuring that developers are paying their fair share of the costs of delivering infrastructure to support new development; where the system is overloaded and 'trigger points' for payments are missed, or payments aren't properly chased, these funds can be lost. Capacity constraints can also make it difficult for towns and parish councils to apply for funds to undertake community projects.

Challenges in the operation of this service were identified by an internal audit in 2021, with a number of actions agreed and undertaken at the time - which saw around a 50% reduction in the size of the backlog. However, since then, staff changes have meant that not much further progress had been made until the Summer of last year. Following a review, EDDC is now putting in place a larger, dedicated team to operate this vital function - with the recruitment of two additional full-time staff - as well as a revised process for supporting towns and parishes to spend allocated funds that will streamline administration for everyone involved. The expanded team is now largely in place, with vacant and new posts filled or to be filled imminently, and revisions to the process are expected over the course of this Summer.

This may seem a little odd as something to report back to residents, but I think it's a good example of how the reflective and proactive approach of Council leadership ultimately leads to better outcomes for residents - even when looking at areas of work that might seem far-removed from front-line services.

Leisure Service Review

One area of forward-looking work that the LGA Peer Challenge identified as needing robust attention going forward is EDDC's provision of leisure facilities throughout the district - which is done mainly through LED, an arms-length body that operates EDDC's leisure facilities on its behalf. Many of these facilities are in need of significant investment, due both to their age and to the need to decarbonise council assets with large carbon footprints - like swimming pools. There is also the residual need to deliver a major leisure facility to serve Cranbrook and the surrounding area. The broader ambition for East Devon's leisure facilities is set out in its Leisure Strategy, which was developed over the 2022-23 civic year.

These ambitions, however, come with significant costs - particularly for new facilities - which will require careful consideration and planning from the authority to determine how to take forwards. In a challenging financial environment for local authorities, EDDC needs to be careful to plan prudently to ensure it is able to meet its strategic priorities in the most balanced, cost-effective way. As a result, EDDC's Cabinet has commissioned a review supported by Strategic Leisure, a group of expert external consultants, which will be taking a second look at options for future provision of leisure facilities in the district - as well as how these can be delivered.

Dog Bins

As an Assistant Portfolio Holder over the last year, I've learned an awful lot about East Devon's dog bins - far more than I ever thought there was to know! This one has, just like public toilets, come up a lot with residents. Each bin is part of a round that is assigned to a dedicated StreetScene officer - normally, when there's a problem, this is because of crew sickness; as things stand, most rounds are largely known only to the assigned officer - so when the officer is off sick, collections can be missed. StreetScene are looking to deploy a new digital system for mapping and tracking rounds, but this is still in the works. In the meantime, if you spot a bin that needs emptying, please report it via the East Devon website.

Secondly, I am aware of requests made directly and via the Parish Council for new dog bins - for example, at Whimble Cricket Club. Unfortunately, at the moment, every round is at maximum capacity - meaning no more bins can be installed. EDDC is looking at capacity for more collections as part of a broader review of how StreetScene delivers its services. In the meantime, please take your dog waste home for disposal.



Council Service Updates

Nature Recovery & Public Green Spaces

Last September, EDDC's Cabinet adopted a Nature Recovery Declaration for East Devon, recognising the importance of halting and reversing historic and ongoing declines in biodiversity and loss of habitats nationwide. The declaration forms part of a broader developing area of policy introduced by the Environment Act 2021, which requires local authorities to work together to 'map' nature - e.g. priority habitats - in their area, and come up with a spatial plan for its protection and enhancement.

Following this declaration, East Devon will be undertaking a district-wide exercise to identify our most vulnerable and important habitats and species - our 'nature network' - and to then develop a Local Nature Recovery Plan, which sets out practical steps for conservation of these, as well as for expanding the existing 'nature network' towards broader, 'landscape-scale' nature recovery. This may well sound a lot like just another set of paperwork - but with the legal duties contained within the Environment Act, together with new requirement for biodiversity gain in the planning system this represents the first time that local authorities have had a legal duty to proactively work towards the conservation and improvement of nature.

In parallel with this work, EDDC has also resolved to develop a district-wide Tree Strategy - following the completion of similar work at a county level. The strategy will set out the council's approach to protecting existing trees through the planning system, with special emphasis on mature and ancient trees, as well as recognising concentrations or special groups of trees that require special protection.

Lastly, some residents may be aware of the council's obligation to deliver 'SANGS' - Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space - under environmental regulations to compensate for the impacts of housing development on sensitive local designations, principally the Pebblebed Heaths and Exe Estuary. Following resolution of some complications as regards funding and land ownership, EDDC's Cabinet has approved the process for the first of these sites - at Station Road, Broadclyst - to come forwards. This will see the creation of a high-quality, public access natural environment for dog walking and recreational use during the coming financial year.

Exmouth Town & Seafont

Two major projects are ongoing in East Devon's largest town - a long-term 'placemaking' project seeking to regenerate and rejuvenate Exmouth's town centre and seafont, and a shorter-term project to address issues with Exmouth's sea wall that became apparent late last year.

The Exmouth Placemaking Plan will set out a broad strategic vision for future developments in Exmouth, including ambitions for use of public spaces, flagship projects, and infrastructure creation - all with the intention of cultivating a high-quality physical and economic environment for businesses, visitors, and residents, and to streamline the process of obtaining grant funding for major projects in the town in future. A draft plan, with a vision for a new leisure centre, revitalised and green public spaces, an arts and culture hub, and various other elements was put out for consultation in March 2024 with feedback to be considered over the coming months. You can view WSP's presentation of the draft plan [here](#).

Secondly, residents will be aware of significant investment being made by EDDC to replace failed and at-risk sections of Exmouth's sea wall close to the Sideshore development. Following large structural cracks appearing during Storm Babet last Autumn, EDDC mobilised contractors to implement a temporary repair on an emergency basis in advance of Storm Ciaran. Following an extensive and detailed engineering process, EDDC's Full Council approved a £1.5m budget for initial works on the 90m failed section of wall, with further works required later this year to replace at-risk sections.



Temporary defences were installed in 2023 to prevent further deterioration of Exmouth Sea Wall. Image: EDDC

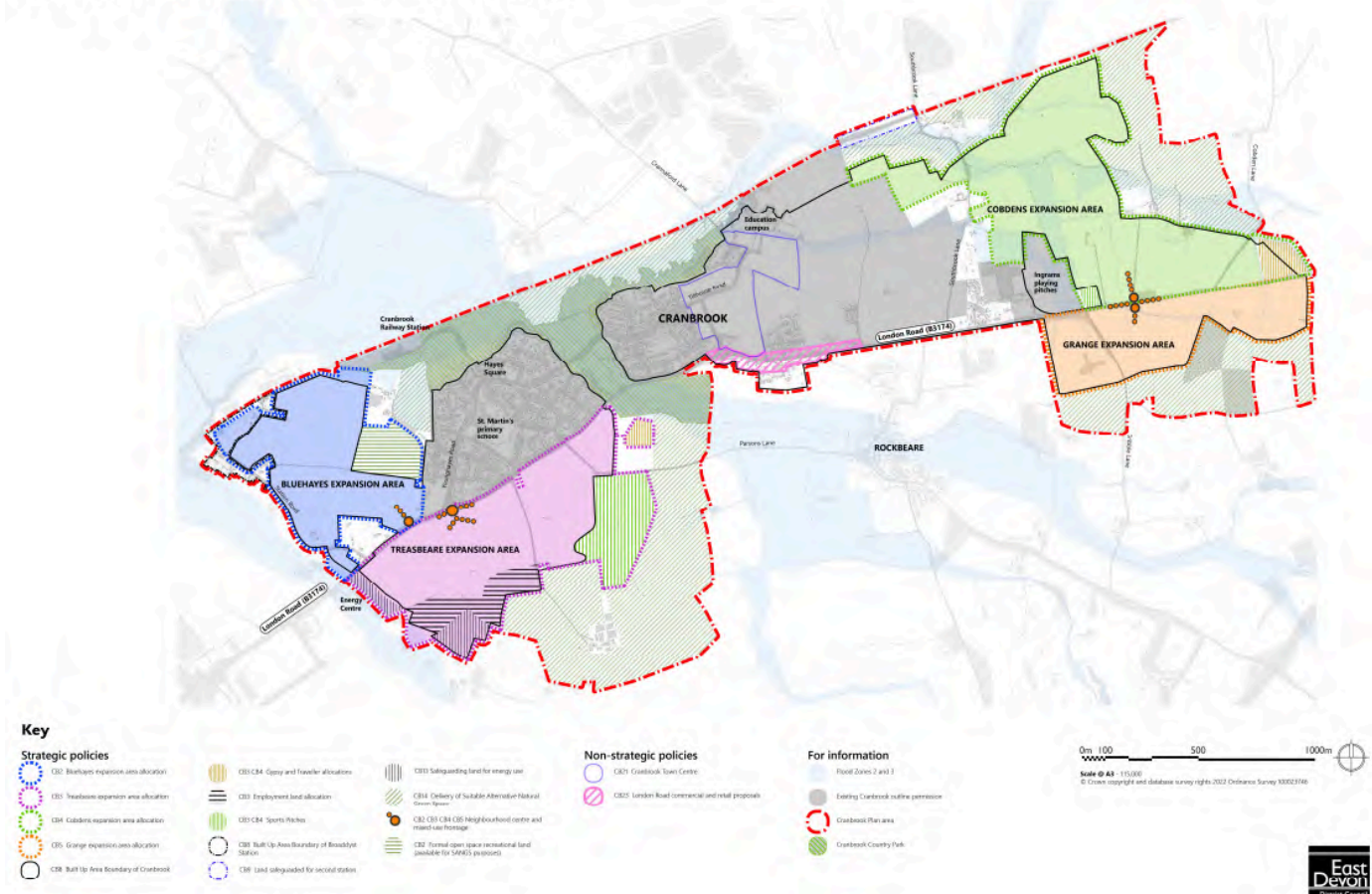


Council Service Updates

Cranbrook Community Governance Review

Residents will likely remember discussion a couple of years ago regarding a review of the administrative boundary of Cranbrook Town in light of proposed extensions in the new Cranbrook Plan. This work was paused several years ago to allow the Cranbrook Plan to be examined and adopted prior to this work being completed.

Cranbrook Plan - Policies Map



Cranbrook Plan Policies Map showing expansion areas. Image: [EDDC](#)

Following the adoption of the Cranbrook Plan in October 2022 and a decision by EDDC's Cabinet in early 2024, the process of the Community Governance Review will now be restarted to consider options for the future boundary of Cranbrook and management of the expansion areas.

Residents will be aware that each of these expansion areas include elements that would mark a significant step up in responsibility for surrounding parishes - not only Whimble and Rockbeare. If expansion areas were to remain in their current parishes, responsibility for managing and maintaining public green spaces, gypsy and traveller sites, and similar would sit with these parishes - as well as the cost.

I know this is a contentious issue for residents throughout Whimble & Rockbeare ward, and that many will not be pleased to see the issue being re-opened. I'm hoping, however, that with a new executive leadership team in place, the consultation will be an opportunity for genuinely constructive discussions regarding how the various expansion areas are to be governed. I'd like to reassure residents that this is by no means a foregone conclusion; it remains very much the case that expansion areas *could* remain within current parishes, be included within an expanded Cranbrook Town boundary (which would not take effect until 2027 at the earliest), or somewhere in-between. I hope residents will feel able to actively contribute to the discussion, either directly or by sharing their thoughts with me.



Council Service Updates

Changes to EDDC Council Tax Scheme

East Devon has introduced a number of changes to its Council Tax scheme for the 2024-25 financial year.

The first of these is a new Care Leavers Council Tax Discount, which offers a 100% reduction in Council Tax payable by young people leaving social care up to the age of 25. While this affects relatively few residents, it offers critical support to young people emerging from what is often a challenging period. EDDC has also renewed for a further year its Council Tax Reduction scheme, which provides up to 100% relief on Council Tax bills for lower-income households. The CTR scheme supports around 3000 East Devon households with varying degrees of Council Tax reduction.

On the other end of the spectrum, following substantial delays to the requisite legislation, EDDC has implemented a doubling of Council Tax bills for second homes in the district - a response to the challenge posed by second home ownership to local housing supply and community integrity.

Adoption of Armed Forces Covenant

Following a review of East Devon's existing commitments to supporting current and former armed forces personnel, in February 2024 EDDC's Cabinet agreed an updated Armed Forces Covenant for the authority, setting out an expanded commitment to supporting services personnel in obtaining employment, healthcare, and housing, as well as ensuring that these groups are properly accounted for and consulted in wider council activities and policymaking. EDDC is also to become a member of the voluntary Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, an external body that audits employers for best practice in supporting current and former Armed Forces personnel.

New Council Investment Framework

Last October, EDDC's Full Council adopted a new 'Place and Prosperity Investment Framework', which sets out the authority's priorities for using public works loan funding for acquisitions and investment projects within the district designed to safeguard and create jobs, improve the public realm, and achieve other objectives in line with EDDC Priorities. The Framework sets out a number of rigorous tests for any proposed investment decisions, ensuring that any project undertaken has a clear avenue of financial return to EDDC to ensure that projects are self-sustaining and do not become a drain on wider council finances, while still recognising the importance that should be placed on achieving 'public goods' such as town centre regeneration.

Decarbonisation support for businesses

As part of East Devon's plans for nationwide UK Shared Prosperity Funds made available by central government, EDDC's Cabinet approved in January 2024 plans for free packages of decarbonisation support to be made available to local businesses and community groups throughout the district. This will include free training, carbon surveys, and carbon reduction action plans to help organisations understand and reduce their carbon footprints, also enabling them to reduce waste and save money in the process.

This support follows previous Innovation and Resilience Funding issued by EDDC, which provided funding for projects designed to facilitate or directly implement carbon savings. More information about both schemes can be found on East Devon's [website](#).

Car Parking Strategy

In response to concerns on the part of some residents and businesses regarding the historical approach to managing East Devon's car parks, EDDC's Cabinet agreed to develop and adopt a new Car Parking Strategy that will govern the way the authority makes decisions around car parking in the future.

While not implementing any changes in future, the strategy sets out a number of principles around community consultation, accessibility, and decarbonisation - among others - which will be used to transparently guide decision-making. The draft strategy later adopted by Cabinet can be found [here](#).



Upcoming New Local Plan, Housing Numbers, and Green Wedges

Where we are, what's still to come - and when

I've had a number of questions recently regarding the progress of the emerging East Devon Local Plan (eLP), so I thought it would be helpful to set out the position on this and a number of other related topics.

Residents will recall a consultation by East Devon on a draft plan over Winter 2022, ending in January 2023. That consultation was on the contents of most of what is known as a 'Regulation 18 draft' - the conclusion of the first substantive stage of drafting of the plan itself. The documents consulted on at that stage are available [here](#), while a report summarising the responses received is available [here](#).

Since that consultation, officers have been working to understand the responses received, produce further evidence, and undertake additional detailed assessment work to inform redrafting of each chapter of the plan in turn. Those reports have started coming to Strategic Planning Committee in turn according to a predefined timetable - though that timetable has now been altered substantially and a redrafted version is yet to be published at the time of writing.

To address a number of topics that were missing from the original 'Regulation 18' consultation, at the time of writing of this report East Devon is running a supplementary 'Regulation 18' consultation looking at - among other things and most relevantly for Whimble & Rockbeare ward - 'Green Wedge' policy (discussed below), Coastal Protection Areas, town centre designations, and the boundaries of the Clyst Valley Regional Park. That consultation is available [here](#).

Residents, EDDC Councillors, and other stakeholders are able and welcome to make comments on each redrafted chapter of the plan as it is presented to and considered by Strategic Planning Committee. I will endeavour to notify everyone of any notable chapters that are coming up via social media.

Once all redrafted chapters and policy decisions have been completed, the redrafted plan will be put out to public consultation again over Winter 2024 - this is called the 'Regulation 19' stage. Following this consultation, officers and Strategic Planning Committee will review all the submissions received and make any further changes to the plan that are deemed necessary, before the plan is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for 'Examination in Public' on behalf of the Secretary of State. At this stage, a Planning Inspector will hold several days of public hearings at which interested parties and the public can comment, as well as assess the plan against a wide variety of statutory requirements set out in legislation and government guidance. East Devon is anticipating submitting the eLP for examination in May 2025, just before a government-imposed deadline in June 2025 for Local Plans to be submitted under the current system.

The examination process normally takes at least a year, with a number of modifications usually being required to make a proposed Local Plan 'sound'. Once that process is completed, the plan can then be adopted by EDDC - which we are currently aiming will occur in late 2026.



Upcoming New Local Plan, Housing Numbers, and Green Wedges

Housing Numbers and the New Town

Residents may remember in late 2023 a series of triumphant government announcements that they had now made the so-called 'standard method' for calculating local housing numbers "optional" - and indeed some residents raised this with me at the time.

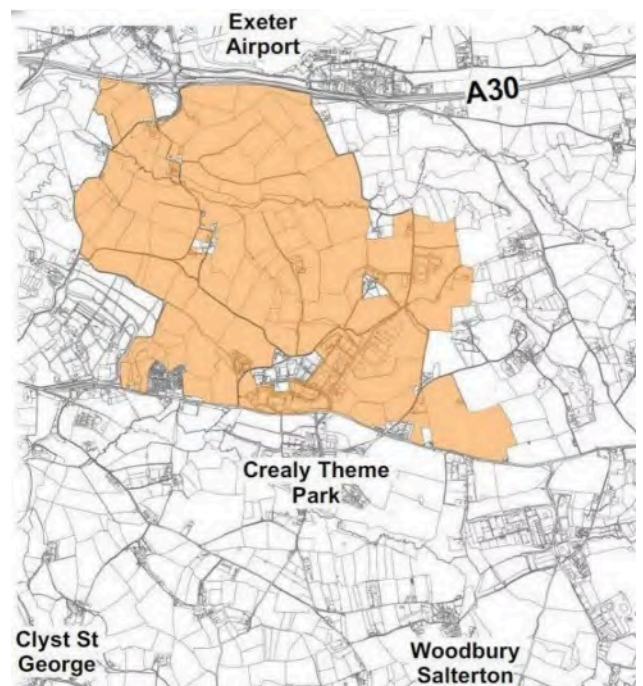
As I wrote in one of my Whimble News articles shortly afterwards, this was simply not true. It has always been possible for planning authorities to argue that the standard method should not apply, and instead to designate a different number for housing need - the government's changes in December 2023 did not make any meaningful alterations to that whatsoever. Instead, they only added additional emphasis on the fact that planning authorities could argue for an exception in certain very limited circumstances.

Only two planning authorities have done so since the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework. Both had unique local circumstances to do with the *characteristics of their population* that meant the dataset upon which the standard method is based was fundamentally inappropriate. No planning authority has ever successfully argued that environmental constraints should justify a lower housing number - indeed, even Tandridge District Council, where 94% of the local authority is designated Green Belt, which functionally benefits from substantially more protection than any environmental designations in East Devon, has previously had to plan for housing need as dictated by the standard method.

In practice, this means EDDC will need to make some difficult - and unpopular - decisions to allocate sites for residential development in the new Local Plan. While I can and will do my best on residents' behalf to make sure that these are the 'least bad' choices possible, there is simply no way that we can get around this requirement. If EDDC doesn't make these decisions, national planning policy empowers developers to push through applications regardless, because the council would not be able to demonstrate a sufficient supply of homes - and in the worst case, government might actively step in and make site allocation decisions *for* the council, which would undoubtedly lead to much worse outcomes for residents and the environment.

A large proportion of the district's housing requirement is expected to be met through a 'new new town'. Following officer recommendations, this is to be sited between the A30 and A3052 to the East of Exeter, in proximity to the village of Farringdon.

I know many residents will be concerned about this becoming a repeat of some of the failures of Cranbrook, so I'd like to take this opportunity to reassure everyone that your Councillors and EDDC officers will be working extremely hard to make sure that this is not the case. The delivery of Cranbrook was led, pursuant to the decision of previous Conservative administrations at East Devon, by a consortium of private sector developers - who had little to no interest in making sure that the town was properly delivered, to a high standard and with the infrastructure it needed. EDDC has already commissioned substantial work to understand how we can proactively lead on the delivery of the new town.

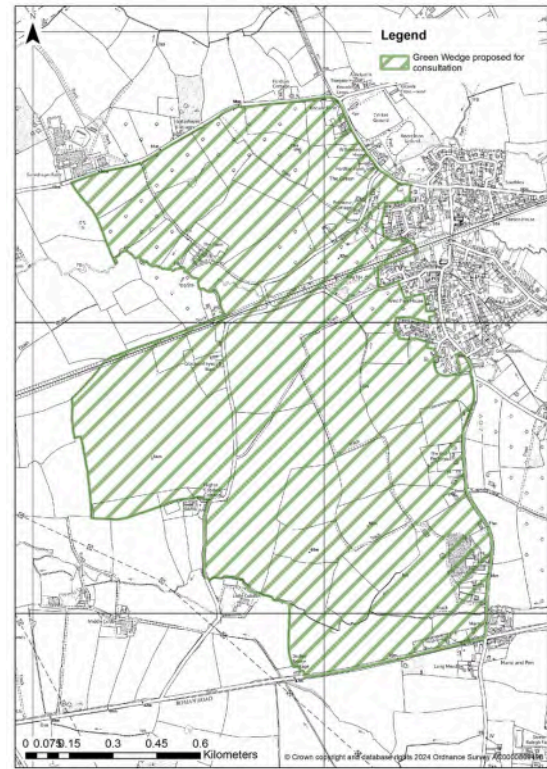


Proposed site for the new town. Image: [EDDC](#)



Upcoming New Local Plan, Housing Numbers, and Green Wedges

Green Wedges & Green Belt

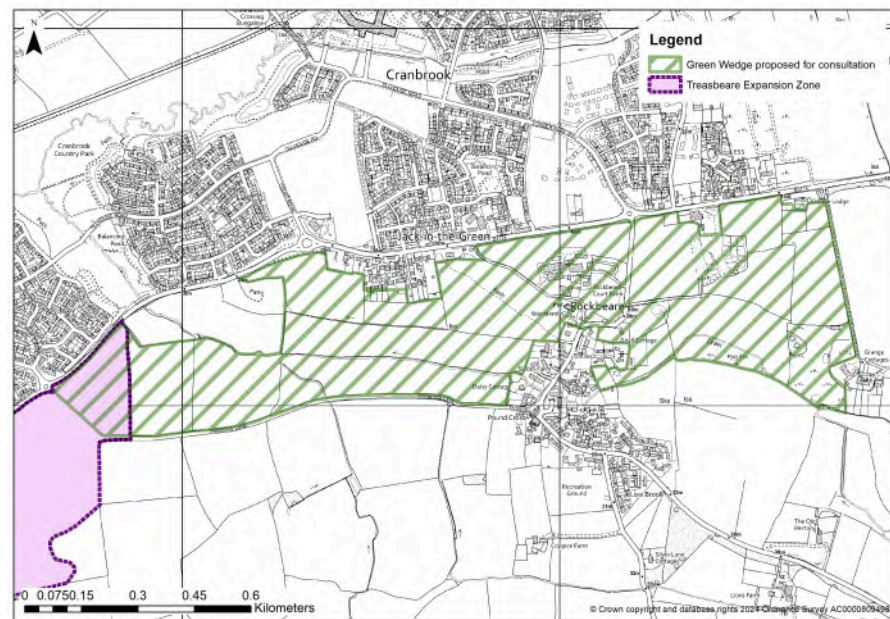


Proposed Whimble Green Wedge. Image: [EDDC](#)

Most residents are probably already aware that the existing East Devon Local Plan contains a policy that protects certain areas of countryside from development that would lead to two nearby settlements 'joining together' - both Whimble and Rockbears benefit from a so-called 'Green Wedge' between each settlement and the new town of Cranbrook.

Residents had probably also seen a proposal from officers that these areas should be substantially cut down, as a result of a reworked set of criteria that would lead to a much more robust policy - i.e. one that worked better to prevent development between nearby settlements - that sought to protect areas that only provided *visual* separation between settlements, rather than protecting land physically lying between settlements in a broader scale. After research that I undertook into the proposals, it was found that if accepted these would have led to a loss of 76% of East Devon's Green Wedge policy areas - though Whimble and Rockbears wouldn't have lost quite as much as this.

It's important to remember that Green Wedge policy is *only* about preventing settlement coalescence - *not* about wider countryside protection and preservation of nature. Nevertheless, I led members of Strategic Planning Committee in refusing to endorse these proposals, instead ultimately asking officers to consult on maintaining the existing Green Wedge boundaries largely unchanged - which is what is reflected in the supplementary 'Regulation 18' consultation ongoing in May/June 2024. Maps of the proposed Green Wedges are included to the left.



Proposed Rockbears Green Wedge. Image: [EDDC](#)

Again on my recommendation, at the same meeting fellow Councillors also agreed to ask officers to proactively produce a new Green Infrastructure Strategy, setting out planning policy for the protection of much wider areas of countryside between settlements and ensuring access to nature. Officers have also been asked to look into the potential for designating a formal Green Belt on the East edge of Exeter, though this is an extremely ambitious ask and would likely be an undertaking for the next Local Plan, rather than the current emerging Local Plan.

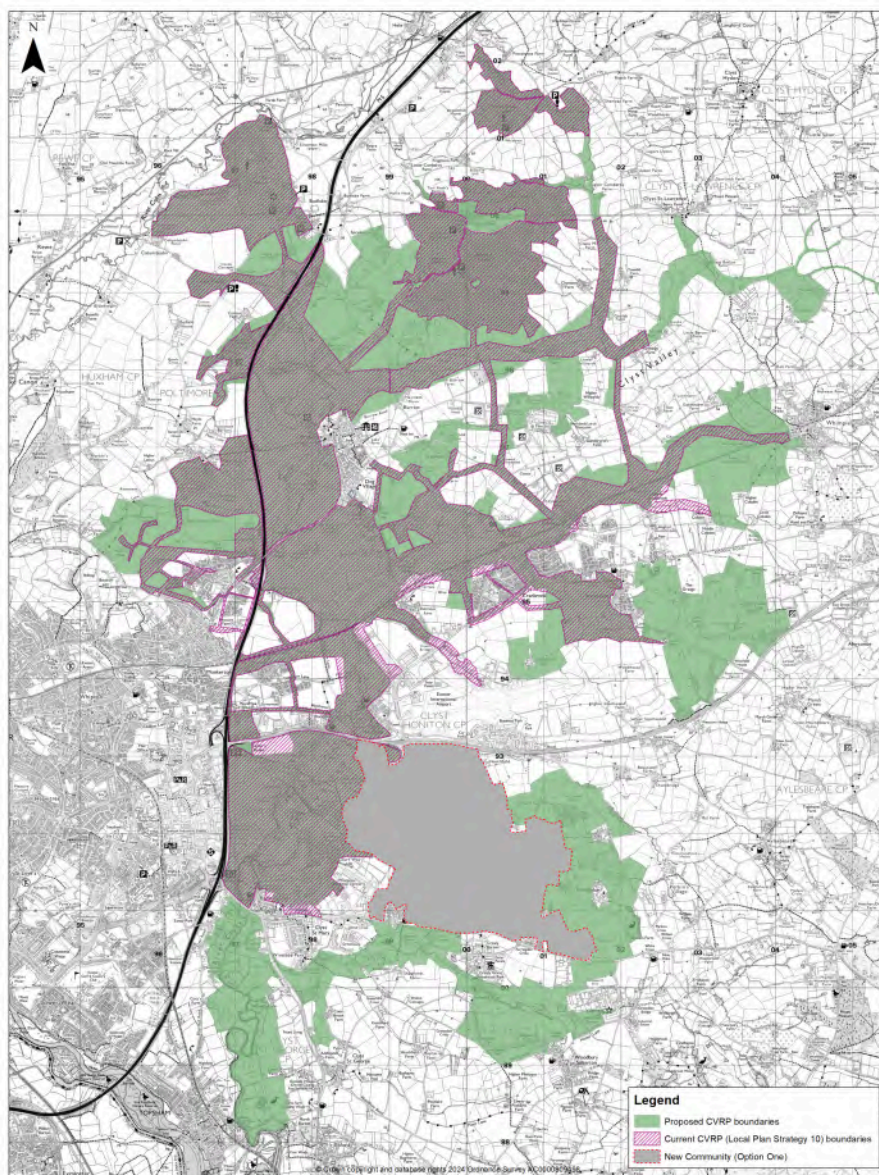


Upcoming New Local Plan, Housing Numbers, and Green Wedges

Clyst Valley Regional Park

The Clyst Valley Regional Park is a large area in the West End of East Devon that benefits from additional protection against inappropriate development under the existing 2016 Local Plan, which seeks to create high-quality landscapes and settings for people and wildlife as well as provide natural green spaces adjacent to and through proposed development areas.

The supplementary 'Regulation 18' consultation is consulting on a revised boundary for the CVRP, with a small number of areas proposed to be taken out and large areas proposed for addition - including throughout Whimpe & Rockbeare ward.



Clyst Valley Regional Park

Proposed Clyst Valley Regional Park Boundary. Image: [EDDC](#)



Sewage & South West Water

What's the problem?

Most residents will know very well some of the headlines of this nationwide issue: water companies have failed to invest in sewage infrastructure for decades, meaning that heavy (or even, sometimes, light!) rain now frequently leads to the activation of what are technically known as 'Combined Storm Overflows' - which then spill raw, untreated sewage into rivers and the sea.

The press has reported extensively on the serious failings of our local water company, South West Water, in Exmouth in particular - but given the importance of the issue for many I've spoken to, I wanted to highlight the extent of the problem in East Devon, and say a little about what EDDC is doing in response.



Firstly, some statistics.

Far from being a coastal problem, in 2022, all five of South West Water's worst-performing overflow outlets by hours of spill, and four of the five worst-performing outlets by number of individual spills, were located on inland waterways.

Last year, South West Water storm overflows poured sewage into our rivers and sea for over fifty thousand hours. Nearly ten thousand of these hours were in Tale Vale ward, which covers a large rural area just East of Whimble & Rockbeare.

Only four wards in East Devon did not see a storm overflow activating within their boundary in 2023.

Sewage overflows in East Devon spilled on over five thousand individual occasions last year. That's less than once every two hours.

And worst of all - East Devon isn't even the worst-affected area. We saw the 12th longest total duration of sewage spills last year - South Hams and West Devon, two other Devon authorities, came in at 10th and 11th, while a further two, Torridge and Teignbridge, came in just behind us, at 13th and 14th. Cornwall came in at 2nd, with nearly three times the duration of spills - at just under 143,000 hours.

All of these areas are served by one company: South West Water. To be clear, this is the same South West Water that failed to construct a promised Wastewater Treatment Works at Cranbrook, as evidence at the time suggested they needed to; failed to improve existing treatment works like Exmouth's Maer Lane station to deal with capacity constraints; and failed to improve treatment works elsewhere in the district - like at Otterton and Sidmouth - to improve river water quality.



Sewage & South West Water

It's clear to me, and I hope to you all, that South West Water's performance in recent years comprises an abhorrent series of failures with disgusting consequences. That's why I brought a motion to EDDC's Full Council in February 2024, which was endorsed by 48 councillors present with two Conservative councillors abstaining. My motion resolved:

- That EDDC has no confidence in South West Water
- To request that SWW properly involve EDDC in ongoing discussions with other authorities regarding infrastructure improvements, convene a regular liaison group involving senior SWW and EDDC staff as well as Cabinet members, proactively engage with EDDC's emerging Local Plan development and Development Management processes, and proactively work with EDDC Beach Safety & Environmental Health functions, going beyond statutory requirements to protect the public
- To lobby MPs to beef up weak pollution reduction rules introduced by the government last year, which give water companies until 2038 to clean up their act; to designate water authorities as statutory consultees on major planning applications; to resist bill increases to fund infrastructure works until SWW have achieved demonstrable reductions in spills in line with their own 2025 targets, and to restore funding to the water quality regulator, the Environment Agency, to pre-austerity levels
- To instruct Strategic Planning Committee to review upcoming independent evidence on infrastructure capacities with a view to determining whether any spatially- or time-limited measures are needed to delay new development until the sewage network can properly cope, and in view of SWW's failure to act on issues identified in the previous 2010 Water Cycle Study to introduce a standing item to review process

Most of East Devon's power to tackle this issue is in its status as a planning authority - and as the new Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, I will be making sure - in conjunction with Council Leader, Cllr Paul Arnott, and in collaboration with other District Councils across Devon - that we leave no stone unturned in holding South West Water to account for its failures.

Unfortunately, as a planning authority, we are not able to just 'ban' development on the grounds of sewage network capacity - nor can we use it as an argument to reduce our housing numbers.

We are, however, able to impose conditions on development that effectively apply a 'moratorium' on new houses being occupied until sufficient infrastructure has been delivered to handle sewage flows from these developments - so-called 'Grampian Conditions'. Work is underway to explore how we might apply these - including in tandem with other Devon planning authorities - including determining the evidence we would need to do so.





My work in Whimble & Rockbeare

Aside from all the news from EDDC and of activity elsewhere in East Devon, I wanted to provide residents an insight into what I've been up to within the ward over the past year. For obvious reasons, I can't detail the vast majority of the local casework that residents have come to me for assistance with, and for practicality I wouldn't wish to highlight everything - but I hope the below 'timeline' gives you a flavour of what my work on your behalf has looked like. If you have any questions or suggestions, as always, please do reach out to me.



May 2023

Following my election as your new District Councillor on May 4th, I got straight to work - with two meetings with residents within a week of the results having been declared. Following this, I went through an extensive training programme put on by EDDC - covering a huge variety of topics from the Code of Conduct and the role of a Councillor to technical training in licensing and planning - to make sure I could represent residents to the best of my ability.

June 2023

In June, I launched my regular Councillor Surgeries - twice a month in my office at The Hive, in the centre of Whimble. I also consulted extensively with residents in Marsh Green regarding an appeal that was filed over the Ford Oaks Solar Farm

- ultimately supporting residents in producing an application to the Planning Inspectorate to formally participate in the public inquiry as a 'Rule 6' party - as well as consulting on the first major planning decision in the ward, for a solar farm North East of Whimble.

July 2023

July saw the launch of my own Councillor website at toddolive.mycouncillor.org.uk, where you can find my monthly ward reports as well as updates on any major news. I provided a summary of responses to the first 'Regulation 18' consultation on EDDC's Emerging Local Plan to both Whimble and Rockbeare parish councils. I sought advice on behalf of Whimble Parish from EDDC's Tree Officer and Landscape Architect regarding options for tree planting in the Parish Field, and from Devon & Cornwall Police regarding the setting up of a Community Speed Watch in the centre of the village. In Rockbeare



Parish, I produced a 7,000-word 'Statement of Case' for the Marsh Green Valley Protection Group, setting out the community's position in the Ford Oaks Solar Farm appeal, and objected on behalf of residents and the Parish Council to the first planning application in the Cranbrook expansion zone South of London Road. I also raised the appalling state of roads South of Rockbeare with Devon Highways.



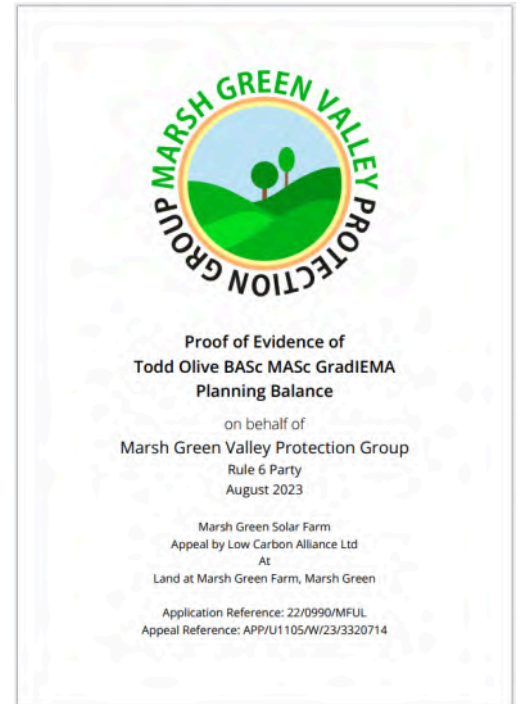
Also in July 2023 came one of my favourite moments of my time at East Devon so far - showing up to my first Audit & Governance Committee meeting in the same shirt as my friend and colleague Cllr Yehudi Levine (Dunkeswell & Otterhead).



My work in Whimble & Rockbeare

August 2023

August was dominated by preparations for the Ford Oaks Solar Farm appeal, for which I helped to produce a huge volume of written evidence to be submitted by Marsh Green Valley Protection Group - including my own evidence on the planning merits of the scheme, which ran to over 8,000 words, as well as evidence regarding highways and heritage impacts. In total, I produced some 15,000 words of evidence documents, with associated maps, charts, photographs, and planning precedents to support residents' case.



September 2023

September brought with it an extremely busy period!

Early in the month, I obtained advice from EDDC's Neighbourhood Planning Officer regarding the potential for reviewing and updating Rockbeare's adopted Neighbourhood Plan, contributed to a workshop reviewing the high-level 'vision' for the emerging new Local Plan, and raised residents' concerns regarding the state of Whimble's Slewtan Crescent Play Park and a rat infestation adjacent to the railway line in the centre of the village with appropriate EDDC officers. I was also appointed as Assistant Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country, and Environment, working with Cllr Jeff Jung (Woodbury & Lymptone), and attended my first meetings regarding recycling and waste services and beach management in Exmouth.

I also attended the entire public inquiry into Ford Oaks Solar Farm in support of Marsh Green Valley Protection Group, including taking the stand to give my own evidence in front of the Planning Inspector, which was cross-examined by expert legal counsel employed by the developer. This was probably one of the most challenging things I've ever done - and it was a genuine privilege to represent and stand up for residents in this way.

October 2023

At October's Strategic Planning Committee, I called for EDDC's Leader and then-Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning to write to East Devon's three MP's to highlight the serious issues with the government's 'standard method' for calculating local housing numbers. I represented Whimble Parish Council's concerns regarding a contentious planning application at Planning Committee, and pursued concerns regarding highway safety and parking expressed by the Headteacher of Rockbeare Primary School with Devon Highways and Rockbeare's Devon County Councillors. I also attended a meeting of the East Devon Community Resilience Forum, which received a number of presentations from community groups and Devon Communities Together regarding emergency preparedness, particularly for flooding - which I fed back to both Parish Councils.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement of additional funding for South West rail infrastructure projects, I worked with EDDC officers to obtain an update from Devon County Council - who are leading on the scheme - on the proposal for re-dualling the railway line through Whimble. I also drafted correspondence seeking to lobby ministers on residents' and the council's behalf, but unfortunately this later ran into some legal obstacles!



My work in Whimble & Rockbeare

November 2023

On account of very poor weather, lots of EDDC business that was supposed to take place this month was postponed. I provided feedback to Rockbeare Parish Council and to residents on the outcome of the Ford Oaks Solar Farm planning appeal, visited Exeter's 'Energy from Waste' plant together with Councillors and officers from other Devon local authorities to get an insight into how East Devon's non-recyclable waste is handled, and flagged safety issues regarding the footpath between Dince Hill Close and the Square in Whimble with Devon County Council's Public Rights of Way team.



At the Exeter Energy from Waste facility with fellow EDDC Councillors Paula Fernley (Broadclyst) and Geoff Jung (Woodbury & Lymptstone)

December 2023

In December, I participated in a marathon all-day virtual meeting evaluating East Devon's capital spending programme for the coming financial year - including supporting a proposal for six figures of investment into a new play park at Slewtton Crescent in Whimble, which following maintenance requests earlier in the year was found to be largely past its useful lifetime. I also worked with EDDC officers

to understand potential timelines for the Cranbrook Community Governance Review and report back to Parish Councils.



New safety railings along Dince Hill Close footpath

January 2024

I started this year with two significant wins at Dince Hill Close footpath, obtaining an instruction from Devon County Council to its contractors to install 20m of new safety railing at the top of the footpath to prevent further incidents, as well as a commitment to apply for funding to resurface the entire footpath.

I also completed three applications for significant funding for technical support in the production of supporting evidence for the Whimble Neighbourhood Plan from the Department for Levelling Up, Homes, and Communities at the request of Whimble Parish Council, as well as obtaining expert advice from EDDC's Engineering Projects Manager regarding managing the stream in the centre of Whimble.

February 2024

In February, my focus was largely on various matters at Strategic Planning Committee - for which I completed a substantial amount of technical research and analysis opposing officers' recommendation to significantly shrink East Devon's Green Wedge protections - and Full Council, where I brought my motion on sewage and South West Water following an extremely disappointing meeting of EDDC's Scrutiny Committee attended by the water company, at which they largely failed to address Councillors' questions and concerns or to account for their failure to invest in the sewage network.

March 2024

In March, I met with Police & Crime Commissioner candidate Steve Lodge at my office to discuss rural crime, as well as addressing some particularly serious failings of EDDC's housing service within the ward on behalf of residents. I also worked with EDDC officers and Devon Communities Together to organise the Whimble Housing Needs Survey - a crucial piece of evidence needed to support the upcoming Whimble Neighbourhood Plan.



Todd with PCC candidate Steve Lodge



My work in Whimble & Rockbeare

April & May 2024

Spring 2024 brought with it local elections for Devon & Cornwall's Police & Crime Commissioner, as well as an EDDC by-election in Exmouth Brixington - which on account of regulations regarding public authority activity in the weeks immediately prior to elections meant that lots of work at East Devon was going on 'behind the scenes' rather than actively involving me as your District Councillor.

Nevertheless, in this period I resolved an issue with a 'knocked over dog bin' at Talaton Cross in Whimble - pictured the shiny new bin installed in less than a week by EDDC's StreetScene team! - as well as giving a comprehensive tour of the village to a landscape architect from AECOM, who following my successful applications for technical support for the Whimble Neighbourhood Plan will be supporting the Parish Council in the production of a Village Design Guide.



New dog waste bin at Talaton Cross

This is a much-abbreviated insight into my work on your behalf over the last twelve months. If you'd like to learn more, or if you have questions, comments, or suggestions regarding anything in this Annual Report, or would like to discuss any other matters with me, please do get in touch with any of the methods outlined below - I'll be delighted to assist.

Working hard for Whimble & Rockbeare ward all year round

Need to get in touch?



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@CllrToddOlive



toddolive.mycouncillor.org.uk



Walk-in surgeries at The Hive, School Hill, Whimble, EX5 2TS
Monthly: 1st Monday 4-7pm, 3rd Monday 8am-12pm