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Extraordinary General Full Council Meeting – Tuesday 3rd May 2022

An extraordinary meeting was called for the council to determine how it wishes to continue to run meetings now that the government has advised we all ‘return to normal’ working patterns. Despite this, the Chair of the Council Cllr Ian Thomas (Independent, Trinity Ward) expressed concern about rising rates of Covid and whether it is the right time to return to all meetings being held at Blackdown house, Honiton. However, a far more over-riding reason to continue with remote meetings in my opinion is the equality issue. Meetings where you must attend Honiton Council offices in person both for day and evening meetings are impossible for those working full time, or who have caring responsibilities, if you rely on public transport or simply live a long way from Honiton etc mean councils tend to attract the sort of councillor who is independently wealthy, long retired and often more wedded to the social side of being a councillor than working hard for the electorate. There is concern that the current law that determines how councils should operate, the Local Government Act 1972, is 50 years old and came into being long before the age of the internet. The LGA has been campaigning for the government to update this act (and indeed the government suspended that Act during the first year of lockdown where Zoom meetings were the only viable option), it seems a very backward step to return to old style meetings where you have to attend in person to vote.

Options were to:

1. Continue to run meetings via Zoom, making recommendations to officers who then carry out the decisions as a delegated responsibility whilst monitoring Covid data. This has resulted in far higher meetings attendance by both Councillors and members of the public.
2. Run so called ‘hybrid’ meetings – where meetings are recorded, some cllrs, officers and members of the public attend in person and some join by Zoom. I would support this option, it should surely be the modern way forward EXCEPT for the fact that cllrs that only attend by Zoom cannot vote, even where they are legitimately on a particular committee. To me, this

negates the point of a 'hybrid' meeting and is not therefore 'hybrid' at all but discriminatory and effectively demands 'in person' attendance. It rules out attendance and voting rights for those who are of working age and might be attending meetings remotely around working commitments, it discriminates against parents and carers who cannot take the time to drive across the district to attend Blackdown House and against those who work shifts etc. There is definitely an equality issue at stake here.

3. A return to the former situation where all meetings must be attended physically. This has huge implications for the climate change emergency (unnecessary car journeys,) the cost of fuel claims at around £23,000 per year, a return to a time when only the wealthy and retired are free to attend the meetings. Fortunately despite pressing actively for a return to full 'in person' meetings at the budget setting meeting back in March. The Conservative group showed no appetite for this at a pre-meeting discussion only to change their minds again at the meeting itself.

The recorded vote was for meetings to continue to be held by Zoom except for those where physical attendance mandatory, eg the meeting to agree the medium term budget and the Annual council meeting. This was not as a result of fears around COVID but simply to allow a greater range of councilors to attend meetings especially those of working age and with caring responsibilities and with a view to the climate change emergency, reducing car journeys and the subsequent petrol claims of around £23,000 per year. These arrangements will last until October 2022 as things stand.

International Noise awareness Day – 27th April 2022

Wednesday 27 April was International Noise Awareness Day. East Devon District Council's (EDDC) Environmental Protection team are committed to investigating noise nuisance in the district, whether it's a barking dog or loud music from a pub.

To help investigate cases, the council are now making use of the Noise App which is simple to use and free to download. It creates an accurate record of noise nuisance and how it affects you and you are able to report the noise nuisance as it happens directly to the council. [The Noise App - Report Noise Nuisance](#)

If you are experiencing a noise nuisance you can report this to environmentalhealth@eastdevon.gov.uk

Complaining about noise

EDDC state: *We can deal with many types of noise complaints from residential or commercial premises. If you are unsure, we would recommend making contact with us in person or by telephone first. We can then discuss the process with you personally and you can then decide whether or not to formalise your complaint. We may suggest using [mediation](#) as a way forward. If you consider your complaint to be of an urgent nature, please contact our "out of hours" service on 01395 516854 after 5pm or weekends. We do not consider anonymous complaints unless there are exceptional circumstances. In the current situation we are prioritising our work and it may be some time before an officer can respond to enquiries. Please bear with us.*

Job vacancies and roles at EDDC

Along with many employers, EDDC have a number of vacant posts and are finding some of these quite difficult to fill for a variety of reasons. Concerns have been raised that the pay rates offered did not compare well with what could be earned in the private sector or other local authorities and this has formed part of an ongoing review of roles and pay rates, scales etc in order to address this area. Of course, there is more to attracting the right candidates to post than simply offering more money per post. I am sure many people have had jobs they were not happy in for some reason or another and simply earning more money in that role, without other changes to the role or conditions, would rarely be a sustainable way of keeping employees happy. For example, if you have a horrible journey to work, or a personality clash with a colleague you have to work closely with, or simply feel there is never enough time to complete the role you are tasked with, or you find it difficult to work in an open plan and noisy environment; more money is not going to change those underlying feelings of dissatisfaction. There are also complex calculations where one job role is compared with another in order to achieve parity of pay across a range of roles.

When it comes to pay scales legally employers must pay the statutory national minimum wage for workers under the age of 23 (£9.18 at age 21) , and the statutory national living wage for those over the age of 23 (currently set at £9.50 per hour). The 'real' living wage occurs where employers voluntarily pay more than the statutory rates and is currently set at £9.90 per hour or £11.05 in London. This is paid where an employer recognizes that in order to try to keep up with the cost of living they need to pay their employees at the higher rate. There are in addition 'market forces payments' where an employer recognizes that they are going to have to pay over and above a particular spinal pay award in order to recruit or keep a member of staff with particular skills or expertise.

When the percentage of voluntary leavers is in the 10% region for example, not uncommon in the public sector, where EDDC has approximately 500 employees, that's 50 employees per year leaving whose role needs replacing through advertising, short-listing, interviewing, probationary periods and this in itself is hugely time consuming and financially expensive so it is well worth the time spent looking at how this number can be reduced. At a meeting where this pay review was discussed, the leader of the Conservative group declared that the exercise was a wish-list and an expensive waste of time, showing their poor grasp of the above issues and how expensive it is to recruit unsuitable staff or lose good staff needlessly.

In discussions about how to attract more candidates to roles at EDDC the points raised have been:

- 'Grow your own' – for example bringing in apprentices and hopefully seeing them progress up the ranks within the organization.
- To publicise more widely the range of posts and careers available at EDDC, especially focusing on young people, returners, second and third careers for those looking for a new interest or challenge in their work.
- Branding – raising the profile of the organization, undertaking regular staff surveys to see how employees rate their employer, pursuing Investors in People awards to show that staff are encouraged to undertake continuing professional development and that staff are managed well and have good working conditions.
- Worksmart policies that focus on the needs of the organization but balanced with family friendly policies and staff well-being. Looking at ways to get the best out of employees to improve productivity. Healthy living.

- Market forces payments – these are the additional top up rates that an employer recognizes should be paid over the above the pay spine as previously explained. These should be kept to a minimum and can result in claims of inequality if another employee in a different role also argues that their job is worth more than the pay scale indicates they should be paid.

Examples of the range of roles available cover:

- Environment health
- Arboriculture – trees, countryside and the environment
- Housing – council housing, private rental sector, homelessness,
- Planning
- Building control
- Surveyors
- Legal services
- Democratic services
- ICT posts
- Countryside
- Human Resources
- Maintenance
- Climate change emergency specialists
- Health and welfare including mental health

Jobs are advertised on the EDDC website. Just a reminder that Devon County council covers a different range of roles for example – roads and highways, health, social care, education etc.

May Annual Council meeting – 19th May 2022

By the time you read this, the Annual council meeting will have been held where the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chairman, Vice-Chairman and various committee roles are agreed. The Democratic Alliance retained control of the council for the year ahead. Paul Arnott (EDA) was voted in again as Leader, Ian Thomas (Independent) as Chair, I am again voted in as Vice-Chair.

A must watch Video – The man in soiled Linen

Miriam Barber was a pupil at Newton Poppleford Primary School in the same class as my son. She did a post-graduate nursing course in London some years ago, quickly rising to the rank of Sister in busy London hospitals. She worked in London in hospitals through the entire COVID epidemic from the start until last year when she moved back home to Colaton Raleigh. Miriam has made the most moving film on her experiences, based on a poem she wrote, and I urge you to take the time to watch this short film and share amongst your friends. It is currently available on Facebook and Youtube. Search for 'The man in soiled linen'. I have sent the link to MP Simon Jupp for his comments on the gross mismanagement and under-funding of the NHS. Or try using this link:

[To The Man in Soiled Linen on Vimeo](#)

The Big Plastic Count – 16-22 May 2022

This past week has been the Big Plastic Count, organised by Greenpeace. I hope many of you signed up for this. The idea is to find out really how much plastic householders are using and recycling each week, and a much bigger investigation into what happens to the plastic we recycle. We are a major

polluter of other countries by dumping our plastic onto them. I had to agree for once with Boris Johnson when he said it is not good enough just to recycle plastic, we should be using less in the first place. See the link below for 6 reasons that Boris Johnson was right taken from the Greenpeace website last November 2021.

Breaking news – the Prime Minister is telling the truth! Can it be?!

Boris Johnson was all over the news last week after telling a room full of kids that recycling isn't working. Some have said that he's "losing the plot"... But believe it or not, we agree with the PM on this one.

Recycling alone is never going to be able to solve our plastic problem – and the UK is a "World Leader" in exacerbating the crisis, generating more household plastic waste per person than any other country except the USA. Plastic is everywhere you look, from our supermarket shelves to our parks and our beaches. We will not be able to recycle our way out of this mess.

Read our six reasons why...

1. Our plastic is being shipped, dumped and burned.

Well over half of the plastic waste that Boris's government counts as 'recycled' is actually sent overseas for other countries to deal with. Last year we were exporting 1.8 million kilos of the stuff a DAY, and the countries receiving it can't cope. Take Turkey, our top export location until this summer. Our Government increased exports of plastic here by a factor of 18 between 2016 and 2020, from just 12,000 tonnes in 2016 to a whopping 210,000 tonnes in 2020. Earlier this year, a Greenpeace investigation found evidence of British plastic waste being dumped in fields, near rivers, on train tracks and by the roadside. In many cases, the plastic, which included packaging from seven of the top 10 UK supermarkets, was on fire or had been burned. This can have serious impacts on health.

People living near dump sites in Malaysia and other countries where we send our plastic waste say that plastic pollution and burning plastic are causing respiratory issues such as coughing and difficulty breathing, headaches and itchy, irritated eyes, and are concerned that exposure to these toxic fumes may also be causing problems with menstruation or higher rates of cancer. The consequences of the UK's 'recycled' exports are disproportionately felt by poorer communities and communities of colour. The UK's current approach to plastic waste exports is part of a legacy of environmental racism. It is modern colonialism carried out through wealthy, predominantly white countries dumping toxic pollutants on people who lack the power and resources to resist.

2. Plastic can only be recycled a couple of times

Unlike glass and metal, most plastic can only be recycled once or twice before it becomes unusable. Recycling plastic decreases the length of the polymers that they are made up of. Polymer length determines the strength, flexibility and weight of plastic. The shorter they are, the lower their quality. This common misconception that plastic can be indefinitely recycled has been exploited to justify the continuous overproduction of plastic that no one really wants or needs. Recycling should still be a piece of the puzzle, but it will never be the core solution. Greenpeace is calling for a 50% reduction in single use plastic – that remaining 50% needs to be plastic that we can easily recycle in the UK.

3. We don't have the capacity

Official government stats tell us that the UK's recycling rate in 2019 was 46.2%... but we think this number is in fact far smaller. In the UK we currently are recycling just 230,000 tonnes a year domestically, yet we produce over 5 million tonnes. Something's not adding up! No one knows

exactly what happens to all of our household plastic because there's no data on this (yet). However, given our low capacity for recycling here in the UK and the fact that we know much of our exports end up dumped or burned... it's clear that we aren't recycling anywhere near 46%. And even if we were – it still wouldn't be good enough

4. There's too much

Nearly 370 million tonnes of plastic is created globally annually, 8 million of which end up in our oceans (the equivalent of one truck load every minute of every day of the year). On top of that, despite all our best efforts – switching to reusable water bottles, (almost) always remembering to bring reusable bags out to the shop, and of course... recycling – plastic production is actually set to quadruple by 2050. Whilst it's undoubtedly important that we properly deal with plastic once it's no longer useful (i.e. NOT dumping or burning or shipping to other countries to deal with), the bigger problem is that the amount of plastic currently being produced is completely unmanageable.

5. It's not cost effective

Most types of plastic are recyclable. However whether or not they actually are recycled tends to rely on economic and technical factors. For example, soft plastics (like salad/bread packaging) are extremely hard to recycle and there is a limited market for them. No market demand = no money to be made from recycling them = not gonna happen. Therefore, what we end up with is plastic that is theoretically recyclable not being recycled because it's not commercially viable. The Government needs to stop delaying our long awaited Deposit Return Scheme. By adding value to worthless 'throwaway' plastic, DRS could help recover over an estimated 8 billion drinks containers wasted in the UK every year. What's even better is that since these schemes keep plastic in much better condition, DRS can be used to collect reusable packaging!

6. Fossil fuel companies are using it as justification to extract more oil and gas

Plastic is made predominantly from oil and gas – and it's no secret how bad that is for the environment. Fossil fuel companies that are infamous for destroying our planet (think ExxonMobil, Shell, etc) are now heavily investing in the petrochemical chemicals that can be derived from oil, such as those used to make plastic. Industry as a plan B to justify their dirty, extractive destructive ways. In fact, petrochemicals will account for more than a third of the growth in world oil demand by 2030, and nearly half of the growth by 2050. This is why we need to shift the focus to the other R's – reduce and reuse. We can't continue over producing non-essential plastic under the false pretense that we can recycle our way out of the colossal plastic crisis.

So no... we don't think recycling is working either. Now, this may sound bleak but don't stop doing your bit. Recycling is still part of the solution. What's important to note is that no one wants all this non-essential plastic, it is forced upon us. We need to transition to a system of reduction and reuse, which would allow us to stop exporting our plastic and manage what we produce in the UK. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, this more circular economy could also be worth up to US\$10 billion!

We know that at least 85% of people in the UK want the government and retailers to cut the amount of plastic packaging. They have the power to sort this out now... so what is Boris waiting for? The long awaited Environment Bill, The Environment Bill, is meant to be the UK's new post-Brexit framework for protecting and enhancing the environment. It will introduce new rules, regulations and targets on issues from biodiversity to air quality to plastic pollution. will give the government

new powers to set legally binding targets, including on waste. The PM needs to turn his rhetoric into action and take this chance to set a target to reduce single-use plastic by 50% by 2025. The bill also gives the government powers to limit the export of plastic waste, which they should use to stop the export of plastic waste completely.

[Six reasons why Boris Johnson is right about recycling | Greenpeace UK](#)

Local Matters

Bus stops at the West end of the village – close to the junction of Burrow Lane.

A resident has queried why these have been removed with no consultation or notice. Stagecoach were asked to look at these by the parish council and Stagecoach were very concerned about how unsafe it is for residents to walk along the narrow A3052 without pavements in order to reach both the east and west bound stops. They did look at relocating them but found no immediate alternative so they simply removed them on safety grounds. Residents will now need to walk east to Burrow and take the bus from the next stop on the main road; there is a shelter on the north side of the A3052.

Joney's Cross Footpath closure and re-opening.

It was agreed at an EDDC planning committee meeting that a footpath at Joney's cross from the car park to the A3052 that Clinton Devon Estates proposed to block off, should remain open to allow users to cross the A3052 more safely. However, Clinton Devon Estates went ahead and closed it by blocking it off completely anyway. Luckily a colleague on the Colaton Raleigh Parish Council noticed this and pursued it through EDDC and me and the EDDC enforcement officer has now confirmed that the path is re-opened.

Waterleat redevelopment – further plans have now been submitted and now is the time to comment on the reserved matters.

With grateful thanks as always to residents for helping to raise local issues so they can be addressed.

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