
**Yarty Ward Councillor (EDDC) report to All Saints
parish meeting – 3rd March 2020 – 7.30pm**

Dear Parishioners of All Saints Parish

I am delighted to be here tonight although, as most of you know, this is also my day job and I would be here anyhow!

My monthly reports are published online and the latest one – for February 2020 – is currently being prepared to take into account all the comings and goings at the DC over the last month.

However, I thought that it might be helpful to recap on some of the key issues that have arisen in the last year that affect All Saints parish and these are outlined below;

Waste and Recycling:

EDDC continues to be a star performer nationally in terms of its recycling performance and I was fortunate enough in June last year to visit the district recycling centre which gave me a fascinating insight into how it is all dealt with. That said, I know that in recent weeks, there has been a noticeable dip in performance in relation to collections in the parish and this, I am reliably informed, is almost entirely due to staffing shortages amongst the recycling crews. I am assured, as are all members of Council, that the Senior Management Team – and our partners at Suez – are working to rectify the problem but would ask parishioners affected to get in touch so I can keep a record of where and when collections were missed.

Climate Change:

I know that this topic is on the agenda later this evening for a wider, group discussion, led by our Tree Warden, and I am sure that those here tonight are aware that EDDC passed a Climate Change Emergency Declaration last year and are looking at ways to reduce the Council's overall carbon footprint and take urgent measures to combat and mitigate against climate change. Councillors across the political spectrum are working together to deal with this issue and there may be some difficult and unpopular decisions ahead, but the time for words is over. Councils (and communities) across the UK now need to turn the rhetoric into affirmative action.

Planning:

Perhaps the single most contentious issue is the fact that EDDC is the Local Planning Authority in these parts. Every planning decision leaves winners, and losers, and the members of both the Strategic Planning Committee (which considers and makes planning policy), and the Development Management Committee (which considers applications based on those policies) meet regularly to consider plans from Exmouth to Hawkchurch, Dunkeswell to Seaton. I am fortunate to sit on both of these committees and can assure those here tonight that a robust and lengthy process is followed to ensure that every aspect of an application is scrutinised and discussed before a decision, for or against, is democratically voted upon.

There have been several applications in the last year, in this parish, that have divided opinion and I am sure there will be more in the future. Members of the public have a legal right to attend and speak, to question and voice concerns. But it is too late to do so after the horse has bolted.

Blackdown Hills AONB:

One of the regular discussion points at the DC is the importance of the AONB. I attend meetings on your behalf with fellow Councillors from across the AONB and I take on board the views of the All Saints community (95% who consider the designation either Very important or Quite important) when considering applications and policies that affect the AONB. Council is considering the findings of the Governments Glover Review into the UK's National Parks and whether there is potential or demand for a new Jurassic National Park which would potentially bring together the East Devon, Blackdown Hills and West Dorset AONB's into one larger, all-inclusive National Park area. Again, opinions are sharply divided but I am more than happy that the subject IS being debated and considered after many years of obfuscation and refusal to even consider it.

Axminster Masterplan:

On a related note, the matter of the proposed Masterplan (and the relief road to accompany it) is always high on the agenda at Honiton HQ and I recognise that All saints PC, and a large number of the residents in the parish, have grave concerns about the scheme, and the proposed access points to the by-pass. Personally, as your ward member, I have been infuriated by the refusal of officers to allow me to attend meetings on this subject, given that I represent some 2000 residents to the north of the site, who rely on the bridge at Weycroft to travel into their nearest town centre. Anything that happens in Axminster affects you all directly and I will continue to fight at all levels of the District Council to ensure that your voices and concerns are properly heard and properly recognised.

Governance:

On a slightly more tedious note, and an issue that no-one has ever raised as a matter of concern at parish level, is that of Governance but I will take a few moments to outline the situation if I may as it affects each and every resident. The District Council currently operates on a “Cabinet” model - similar to HMG in No.10 - and this has been the case for nearly 2 decades. Some Councillors however have expressed concerns that this model puts all of the power of Council – a body made up of 60 individuals – into the hands of just 10 or even less and disenfranchises 90,000 residents in East Devon whose elected ward member has no real say... Council becomes a talking shop and a rubber stamp. However, after a lot of opposition, there is some progress and Council is now meeting regularly to consider alternate models, such as the committee system which allow Councillors skills to be recognised in particular areas – such as finance, planning, environment, mental health etc – and those skills better utilised for the greater good. I will keep you posted on this riveting project as we move into 2020.

The year ahead.....

At the current time, Council is administered under a process known as “No Overall Control” or NOC. This means that no single Party holds enough seats to enable a majority to exist and pass legislation accordingly. This was a marked change after 40+ years of single party control which ended in May 2019 and Councillors are still finding their feet in this new, and often uncertain & fraught, scenario. Happily, the budget for 2020/21 was passed recently so all the staff will get paid, and services will continue to be delivered.

The Council no longer receives a single penny from Westminster (compare with a few years ago when 75% of all EDDC revenue came from this source) and so Council must look at different ways of generating income, some which are riskier or more innovative than others. It is not an ideal situation but we are where we are. The Council wishes to maintain service levels as they are and also deliver new facilities and amenities where it can – but the times-they-are-a-changing and we must roll with those changes.

Finally, potholes:

Cllr. Hall has no doubt covered this point in his report but I thought it appropriate to just mention that the District Council is not in any way shape or form responsible for the highway network but we are very mindful of the damage and inconvenience that RSD or Road Safety Defects cause. Please continue to report holes as you find them via the DCC website or via email to either Cllr. Hall or myself. Our newly elected MP, Neil Parish, said that fixing potholes is one of his main priorities and therefore, on your behalf, I will hold his feet to the fire and knock down his door to hold him to that pledge, as I am sure Cllr. Hall will do. Together, we will strive to fix them all as soon as possible.

Cllr. Paul Hayward

Yarty Ward, 3/3/2020