

Cllr Charlotte FitzGerald
EDDC - Budleigh & Raleigh
Report to East Budleigh Parish Council
Monday 18 September 2023

Dear Councillors,

There were no ward Parish or Town Council meetings in August but, following the district elections and formation of a new council in May, the work of East Devon District Council accelerated throughout the summer. Please find below a summary of overall council developments and some specific detail on progress of the Emerging Local Plan in response to requests by the Budleigh & Raleigh councils.

Notes from Cabinet

Cabinet met on 12th July and on 6 September. Key decisions included:

- **Nature Emergency Declaration**

Having already declared a climate emergency, the council recognised that it needed to recognise that there also exists an ecological, or nature emergency and that policy needs to work towards mitigating this as an urgent priority and in parallel with its carbon zero by 2040 activity. In July, Cabinet approved the recruitment of more staff to upskill the council in nature recovery in time for relevant provisions within the Environment Act 2021 coming into effect in November of this year. In September, Cabinet approved a 'Nature Recovery Declaration' for East Devon. This committed the council, in its capacity as the 'Supporting Authority' for the district, to supporting Devon County Council, as the government-appointed 'Responsible Authority', to develop a Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This effectively lays the groundwork for EDDC to prepare a Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local Habitats Map that will develop the district's nature recovery network and improve those habitats and species most under threat. It will necessarily feed into the Emerging Local Plan.

- **Afghan Refugee resettlement.**

In July, Cabinet received a report from its Director Housing, Health & Environment which found that the c.170 Afghan refugees currently resident the Hampton by Hilton hotel near Exeter Airport, who having been there since January are not being given access to cooking facilities, are receiving externally-produced food which is inadequate, in many cases culturally inappropriate, and of poor nutritional quality. Two instances of malnutrition had been picked up among the 40 or so children attending the Cranbrook Educational Centre, and residents with diabetes or other health conditions reported that they did not have their needs catered for. In addition to the food provision issues, safeguarding issues were also raised: local school could not support the students due to lack of extra funds; children as young as four years old were travelling by bus to school unchaperoned, and transport to medical facilities or pharmacies was unavailable. In response, Cabinet and subsequently the Council approved a recommendation to put greater pressure on the Home Office to improve the food service offering, and to improve safeguarding measures. It agreed a grant of £217,500 to meet the needs of the Hampton by Hilton hotel residents, including

directly addressing some of the issues listed above, in partnership with Devon County Council and Refugee Support Devon.

In September, Cabinet approved a recommendation to Council that a sum of £750,000 from a Department for Levelling up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) grant be requested to enable provision of temporary accommodation for Afghan Refugees and others in need of temporary accommodation, thus moving them out of bridging hotels across the country, including Hampton by Hilton in our district. Cabinet moved in September to recommend approval from full Council of a Housing Revenue Account capital budget of £975,000 as match funding for the family accommodation project, if required. The DLUHC funding support has been designed to specifically help those Afghani citizens who assisted us during the conflict in their country. All local authorities have been encouraged to participate in this national effort to ensure we provide accommodation and support to those individuals. In East Devon we currently do not have sufficient appropriate accommodation for large families. Whilst this funding will initially only provide one property for general needs temporary accommodation, the properties originally allocated to assist with Afghan resettlement can revert to general needs housing once the need for refugee resettlement has been satisfied. This fund will therefore enable the council to either bring back into use, or to purchase new, family-sized accommodation to assist local families in need, both in the short and long term.

- **Decarbonisation of EDDC swimming pools** – In light of the impending threat of our three ageing LED leisure centres becoming unfit for purpose, recognising the need to have public swimming pools available, and in a move to address our goal of becoming a net zero council by 2040, Cabinet agreed to invest £300,000 in assessing decarbonisation strategies and funding opportunities for its three swimming pools (Exmouth, Honiton and Sidmouth).
- **Continuous improvement to social housing.** The Council recognises that it has a number of major challenges in delivering its social housing obligations. On the one hand, the number of families on the waiting list has recently grown significantly, and there is a shortage of housing stock to house these families. In Budleigh & Raleigh alone, we have about 150 families on the waiting list (for about 300 homes), which is 50 percent more than in 2019. At the same time, there has been a growing issue with the quality of homes returned to the council at the end of tenancy, leading to very long voids, where homes can take up to six months to be turned around for the next tenant. A new Director of Housing joined the council in August following the retirement of her predecessor and is moving with pace to address these issues. In the meantime, the council has conducted a public consultation into the possibility of introducing carbon-neutral, modular new homes, which, whilst expensive to purchase, have very low maintenance requirements and can be sited in a wide variety of locations, including disused town centre spaces already owned by the council. The first of such homes are anticipated in the coming few months.
- **S106 Funding arrangements.** I am aware some ward councils have had difficulties recently accessing S106 funding owed to them. The Council, recognising there have been an ongoing issues with the administration of S106 funding since at least 2021, has moved to engage new officers to recoup the backlog, as well as simplify and devolve the spending process, such that the council will have lighter-touch oversight of parish councils' spending decisions. Recommendations to enable both the staffing

and process changes are due to go before Cabinet and Full Council next month. Hopefully we will see some rapid improvement in the service to town and parish councils as a result.

East Devon Emerging Local Plan

Notes from Strategic Planning Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) oversees the development of the Emerging Local Plan as well as individual Neighbourhood Plans within the district. It met regularly throughout the summer to progress the Emerging Local Plan.

In June, and following many informal conversations about the perceived impossibility of squeezing the required number of new homes demanded by central government into a district almost two-third composed of Areas of the Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Portfolio Holder for Coast Country and Environment asked SPC members to consider a case that there were “such fundamental constraints in [the East Devon] local planning authority area that the required [housing needs] numbers [could] not be acceptably accommodated.” Having considered this, the Committee requested from officers an in-depth report into the opportunities and risks associated with challenging the housing needs figures set for us by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The request was driven by an almost unanimous sense within the committee that not only did we face incredible difficulty finding suitable space for these new homes, but the official Housing Needs for the district, as set by central government, are too high, being based on a flawed methodology that over-emphasises price inflation caused by migration into the district rather than need generated within the district.

In August, the officer’s report was presented and considered at Strategic Planning Committee and it was decided, albeit highly reluctantly, that there was very little upside to trying to challenge the imposed Housing Needs figures, because doing so had never been successful in other councils across England. Furthermore, coming up with a Local Plan that did not meet our Housing Needs figure was too risky, as it would almost certainly be refused at inspection stage, leaving us without a workable plan in two years’ time.

Notwithstanding the committee’s decision to give up influencing the district’s set Housing Needs figure through planning channels, it agreed to continue its pursuit of a lower housing needs figure via political channels, including lobbying our MPs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up. Additionally, and in light of our water infrastructure provider’s apparent reluctance to object to planning applications on the basis of capacity constraints on water (and particularly waste-water) systems, the committee is also monitoring announcements by key infrastructure providers, such as South West Water, that suggest they might not be able to support the requirements of new housing developments. I note that the NHS has started to request S106 contributions from developers to ensure that improved health infrastructure is achieved through the planning process itself.

It is a common misconception that the council’s work on developing East Devon’s Local Plan ceased entirely in the spring. In fact, just the investigation of specific sites was paused, following an announcement by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

that it was going to reconsider Housing Needs figures, especially in rural areas. The review has resulted in a reduction in East Devon's official Housing Needs requirement from 940 homes a year to 910 new homes a year. This is not a particularly great reduction, but it means that the district is now theoretically able to meet its five-year housing supply target, assuming all Tier 1, Tier 2 and New Town development sites are accepted and included in the Emerging Local Plan. This is a key consideration as, if we were not able to meet our five-year housing supply target, the plan would be thrown out at inspection stage.

Since January this year, planning officers have been reviewing feedback collected at the public consultation stage over the winter and has been preparing a number of topical reports for consideration by the committee over the coming months. These will include reports on:

1. New Town policy – site allocation and master planning
2. Employment allocations
3. Any new housing and other allocations
4. Clyst Valley Regional Park boundary;
5. Green wedges
6. Coastal Preservation Areas
7. Designated Neighbourhood Area Housing Requirements: this was the topic of the July webinar for Neighbourhood Planning Groups which I attended and may include new allocations put forward by Neighbourhood planning groups. I have pressed the Assistant Director – Housing and Development, to offer this to Neighbourhood planning groups that want it.

The Committee requested an indicative timetable of items for it to review in the coming months as the Local Plan moves towards completion and submission for inspection. We are now working to a deadline of *summer 2025* for submitting the plan to inspection (with adoption anticipated in 2026). Any later than this, and new provisions in the developing new National Planning Policy Framework, due to take effect mid-2025, will render the process defunct and the committee would have to start over (meanwhile with its adopted plan carrying increasingly less relative weight against provisions in the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure we meet our housing needs provision). This is clearly a very undesirable outcome and the council is therefore committed to meeting its 2025 deadline.

Dozens of reports on various aspects of the plan are scheduled to come before the committee in the coming year. An outline of these is available in the 5 September SPC agenda notes. We anticipate having a more easily readable timetable in a GANTT format by the October meeting, which I will share with this council.

The **Audit & Governance Committee** met for the first time in August. Members received a briefing on the work of the committee and reviewed its structure and processes. The Committee is seeking to appoint an Independent Person from outside the committee, preferably with audit experience. I have requested some written detail on the role; if anyone from the ward is interested, please let me know.

Budget and Capital Allocations Panel has its next quarterly meeting in September, so I will provide an update in October.

Member champions

I am due to meet with the Public Health Officer in early October to discuss my role as Mental Health Champion for the council.

Finally, some Budleigh and Raleigh ward matters:

Greenway Play Park

The district-run play park at Greenway Lane in Budleigh Salterton has been refurbished. It is a fantastic facility and already attracts a great deal more families than previously. It has a zip-wire, ground level trampoline and activities for all ages.

Junior League Football

Recognising that we do not currently have a space suitable for junior league football in the ward, Cllr Henry Riddell and I are in conversation with EDDC Property and Assets and the Budleigh Salterton Association Football Club to see whether a patch of disused EDDC Open Space land adjoining the club and the Greenway playground can be converted into junior league pitches.

Lime Kiln car park and play park

Lime Kiln play park is now temporarily closed. Play park equipment is being removed and a new EDDC play park will be constructed there in the spring. The car park will also be resurfaced next spring following completion of all LORP activity and removal of its equipment. Budleigh Town Councillors have received details of the resurfacing plans. I would like to thank residents for everyone's patience with the reduced number of parking spaces during the holiday period; I understand that the timing of LORP works in the area have been constrained by ecological factors (bird nesting seasons) and the pre-requisite storm outflow reinforcement work under the car park, which was delayed by unseasonal rain in July.

South Farm car park

South Farm car park is now open. It is owned by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust. EDDC have added payment stations and a dog poo bin. Only these are administered by EDDC, which I understand claims 20% of parking fees to cover administration costs.

Bin charges review

I understand that currently some town and parish councils are paying EDDC up to £6 per bin empty, whereas others pay less, or – in the case of many seaside towns whose bins are provided for visitors as well as residents – sometimes nothing. A district-wide bin benchmarking survey is underway and will be received by EDDC council members in October, following which we anticipate bin emptying charges to be re-assessed across the district in order to attempt to re-level the charges.

Sincerely,
Cllr Charlotte FitzGerald

Cllr Charlotte FitzGerald
EDDC - Budleigh & Raleigh
Report to East Budleigh Parish Council
Monday 18 September 2023

Dear Councillors,

There were no ward Parish or Town Council meetings in August but, following the district elections and formation of a new council in May, the work of East Devon District Council accelerated throughout the summer. Please find below a summary of overall council developments and some specific detail on progress of the Emerging Local Plan in response to requests by the Budleigh & Raleigh councils.

Notes from Cabinet

Cabinet met on 12th July and on 6 September. Key decisions included:

- **Nature Emergency Declaration**

Having already declared a climate emergency, the council recognised that it needed to recognise that there also exists an ecological, or nature emergency and that policy needs to work towards mitigating this as an urgent priority and in parallel with its carbon zero by 2040 activity. In July, Cabinet approved the recruitment of more staff to upskill the council in nature recovery in time for relevant provisions within the Environment Act 2021 coming into effect in November of this year. In September, Cabinet approved a 'Nature Recovery Declaration' for East Devon. This committed the council, in its capacity as the 'Supporting Authority' for the district, to supporting Devon County Council, as the government-appointed 'Responsible Authority', to develop a Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This effectively lays the groundwork for EDDC to prepare a Local Nature Recovery Plan and Local Habitats Map that will develop the district's nature recovery network and improve those habitats and species most under threat. It will necessarily feed into the Emerging Local Plan.

- **Afghan Refugee resettlement.**

In July, Cabinet received a report from its Director Housing, Health & Environment which found that the c.170 Afghan refugees currently resident the Hampton by Hilton hotel near Exeter Airport, who having been there since January are not being given access to cooking facilities, are receiving externally-produced food which is inadequate, in many cases culturally inappropriate, and of poor nutritional quality. Two instances of malnutrition had been picked up among the 40 or so children attending the Cranbrook Educational Centre, and residents with diabetes or other health conditions reported that they did not have their needs catered for. In addition to the food provision issues, safeguarding issues were also raised: local school could not support the students due to lack of extra funds; children as young as four years old were travelling by bus to school unchaperoned, and transport to medical facilities or pharmacies was unavailable. In response, Cabinet and subsequently the Council approved a recommendation to put greater pressure on the Home Office to improve the food service offering, and to improve safeguarding measures. It agreed a grant of £217,500 to meet the needs of the Hampton by Hilton hotel residents, including

directly addressing some of the issues listed above, in partnership with Devon County Council and Refugee Support Devon.

In September, Cabinet approved a recommendation to Council that a sum of £750,000 from a Department for Levelling up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) grant be requested to enable provision of temporary accommodation for Afghan Refugees and others in need of temporary accommodation, thus moving them out of bridging hotels across the country, including Hampton by Hilton in our district. Cabinet moved in September to recommend approval from full Council of a Housing Revenue Account capital budget of £975,000 as match funding for the family accommodation project, if required. The DLUHC funding support has been designed to specifically help those Afghani citizens who assisted us during the conflict in their country. All local authorities have been encouraged to participate in this national effort to ensure we provide accommodation and support to those individuals. In East Devon we currently do not have sufficient appropriate accommodation for large families. Whilst this funding will initially only provide one property for general needs temporary accommodation, the properties originally allocated to assist with Afghan resettlement can revert to general needs housing once the need for refugee resettlement has been satisfied. This fund will therefore enable the council to either bring back into use, or to purchase new, family-sized accommodation to assist local families in need, both in the short and long term.

- **Decarbonisation of EDDC swimming pools** – In light of the impending threat of our three ageing LED leisure centres becoming unfit for purpose, recognising the need to have public swimming pools available, and in a move to address our goal of becoming a net zero council by 2040, Cabinet agreed to invest £300,000 in assessing decarbonisation strategies and funding opportunities for its three swimming pools (Exmouth, Honiton and Sidmouth).
- **Continuous improvement to social housing.** The Council recognises that it has a number of major challenges in delivering its social housing obligations. On the one hand, the number of families on the waiting list has recently grown significantly, and there is a shortage of housing stock to house these families. In Budleigh & Raleigh alone, we have about 150 families on the waiting list (for about 300 homes), which is 50 percent more than in 2019. At the same time, there has been a growing issue with the quality of homes returned to the council at the end of tenancy, leading to very long voids, where homes can take up to six months to be turned around for the next tenant. A new Director of Housing joined the council in August following the retirement of her predecessor and is moving with pace to address these issues. In the meantime, the council has conducted a public consultation into the possibility of introducing carbon-neutral, modular new homes, which, whilst expensive to purchase, have very low maintenance requirements and can be sited in a wide variety of locations, including disused town centre spaces already owned by the council. The first of such homes are anticipated in the coming few months.
- **S106 Funding arrangements.** I am aware some ward councils have had difficulties recently accessing S106 funding owed to them. The Council, recognising there have been an ongoing issues with the administration of S106 funding since at least 2021, has moved to engage new officers to recoup the backlog, as well as simplify and devolve the spending process, such that the council will have lighter-touch oversight of parish councils' spending decisions. Recommendations to enable both the staffing

and process changes are due to go before Cabinet and Full Council next month. Hopefully we will see some rapid improvement in the service to town and parish councils as a result.

East Devon Emerging Local Plan

Notes from Strategic Planning Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) oversees the development of the Emerging Local Plan as well as individual Neighbourhood Plans within the district. It met regularly throughout the summer to progress the Emerging Local Plan.

In June, and following many informal conversations about the perceived impossibility of squeezing the required number of new homes demanded by central government into a district almost two-third composed of Areas of the Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Portfolio Holder for Coast Country and Environment asked SPC members to consider a case that there were “such fundamental constraints in [the East Devon] local planning authority area that the required [housing needs] numbers [could] not be acceptably accommodated.” Having considered this, the Committee requested from officers an in-depth report into the opportunities and risks associated with challenging the housing needs figures set for us by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The request was driven by an almost unanimous sense within the committee that not only did we face incredible difficulty finding suitable space for these new homes, but the official Housing Needs for the district, as set by central government, are too high, being based on a flawed methodology that over-emphasises price inflation caused by migration into the district rather than need generated within the district.

In August, the officer’s report was presented and considered at Strategic Planning Committee and it was decided, albeit highly reluctantly, that there was very little upside to trying to challenge the imposed Housing Needs figures, because doing so had never been successful in other councils across England. Furthermore, coming up with a Local Plan that did not meet our Housing Needs figure was too risky, as it would almost certainly be refused at inspection stage, leaving us without a workable plan in two years’ time.

Notwithstanding the committee’s decision to give up influencing the district’s set Housing Needs figure through planning channels, it agreed to continue its pursuit of a lower housing needs figure via political channels, including lobbying our MPs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up. Additionally, and in light of our water infrastructure provider’s apparent reluctance to object to planning applications on the basis of capacity constraints on water (and particularly waste-water) systems, the committee is also monitoring announcements by key infrastructure providers, such as South West Water, that suggest they might not be able to support the requirements of new housing developments. I note that the NHS has started to request S106 contributions from developers to ensure that improved health infrastructure is achieved through the planning process itself.

It is a common misconception that the council’s work on developing East Devon’s Local Plan ceased entirely in the spring. In fact, just the investigation of specific sites was paused, following an announcement by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

that it was going to reconsider Housing Needs figures, especially in rural areas. The review has resulted in a reduction in East Devon's official Housing Needs requirement from 940 homes a year to 910 new homes a year. This is not a particularly great reduction, but it means that the district is now theoretically able to meet its five-year housing supply target, assuming all Tier 1, Tier 2 and New Town development sites are accepted and included in the Emerging Local Plan. This is a key consideration as, if we were not able to meet our five-year housing supply target, the plan would be thrown out at inspection stage.

Since January this year, planning officers have been reviewing feedback collected at the public consultation stage over the winter and has been preparing a number of topical reports for consideration by the committee over the coming months. These will include reports on:

1. New Town policy – site allocation and master planning
2. Employment allocations
3. Any new housing and other allocations
4. Clyst Valley Regional Park boundary;
5. Green wedges
6. Coastal Preservation Areas
7. Designated Neighbourhood Area Housing Requirements: this was the topic of the July webinar for Neighbourhood Planning Groups which I attended and may include new allocations put forward by Neighbourhood planning groups. I have pressed the Assistant Director – Housing and Development, to offer this to Neighbourhood planning groups that want it.

The Committee requested an indicative timetable of items for it to review in the coming months as the Local Plan moves towards completion and submission for inspection. We are now working to a deadline of *summer 2025* for submitting the plan to inspection (with adoption anticipated in 2026). Any later than this, and new provisions in the developing new National Planning Policy Framework, due to take effect mid-2025, will render the process defunct and the committee would have to start over (meanwhile with its adopted plan carrying increasingly less relative weight against provisions in the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure we meet our housing needs provision). This is clearly a very undesirable outcome and the council is therefore committed to meeting its 2025 deadline.

Dozens of reports on various aspects of the plan are scheduled to come before the committee in the coming year. An outline of these is available in the 5 September SPC agenda notes. We anticipate having a more easily readable timetable in a GANTT format by the October meeting, which I will share with this council.

The **Audit & Governance Committee** met for the first time in August. Members received a briefing on the work of the committee and reviewed its structure and processes. The Committee is seeking to appoint an Independent Person from outside the committee, preferably with audit experience. I have requested some written detail on the role; if anyone from the ward is interested, please let me know.

Budget and Capital Allocations Panel has its next quarterly meeting in September, so I will provide an update in October.

Member champions

I am due to meet with the Public Health Officer in early October to discuss my role as Mental Health Champion for the council.

Finally, some Budleigh and Raleigh ward matters:

Greenway Play Park

The district-run play park at Greenway Lane in Budleigh Salterton has been refurbished. It is a fantastic facility and already attracts a great deal more families than previously. It has a zip-wire, ground level trampoline and activities for all ages.

Junior League Football

Recognising that we do not currently have a space suitable for junior league football in the ward, Cllr Henry Riddell and I are in conversation with EDDC Property and Assets and the Budleigh Salterton Association Football Club to see whether a patch of disused EDDC Open Space land adjoining the club and the Greenway playground can be converted into junior league pitches.

Lime Kiln car park and play park

Lime Kiln play park is now temporarily closed. Play park equipment is being removed and a new EDDC play park will be constructed there in the spring. The car park will also be resurfaced next spring following completion of all LORP activity and removal of its equipment. Budleigh Town Councillors have received details of the resurfacing plans. I would like to thank residents for everyone's patience with the reduced number of parking spaces during the holiday period; I understand that the timing of LORP works in the area have been constrained by ecological factors (bird nesting seasons) and the pre-requisite storm outflow reinforcement work under the car park, which was delayed by unseasonal rain in July.

South Farm car park

South Farm car park is now open. It is owned by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust. EDDC have added payment stations and a dog poo bin. Only these are administered by EDDC, which I understand claims 20% of parking fees to cover administration costs.

Bin charges review

I understand that currently some town and parish councils are paying EDDC up to £6 per bin empty, whereas others pay less, or – in the case of many seaside towns whose bins are provided for visitors as well as residents – sometimes nothing. A district-wide bin benchmarking survey is underway and will be received by EDDC council members in October, following which we anticipate bin emptying charges to be re-assessed across the district in order to attempt to re-level the charges.

Sincerely,
Cllr Charlotte FitzGerald