



## **Exmouth Town Council –Newsletter**

**Newsletter 12**

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### **This year's BIG 3**

Exmouth Town Council has not been idle in the last few months and has been facing some major issues affecting the town. So what are the big three:-

- Local Development Framework
- Business Improvement District
- Community Planning

Like buses, difficult issues come along in threes and each one of these is demanding. The first two in particular require an understanding of the changes which are happening in our society. The Council is faced with the challenge of how to respond and how to engage. One option is to take the easy line and to object to everything, taking the populist line. Another is to face the issues affecting us all and become a player able to influence what is happening in a positive way. Some years ago the Town Council recognised that Town Management was important to fight back against out of town shopping. Much has been done to keep Exmouth Town Centre working and busy but there is no room for complacency.

Let's look at the Local Development Framework first now being called the Local Plan, a name which the current Government is returning to.

### **Local Development Framework (LDF) (Local Plan)**

This is the new Local Plan for East Devon. Last year East Devon District Council wrote its core strategy for East Devon which was what it was then called. There was widespread concern about the amount of housing being proposed within this and lack of a whole Planning approach including the need for employment, leisure and social provision. With elections on the horizon this was put on the back burner and re-emerged a few months ago. Towns and Parishes were asked to express their views about what should be contained in the Local Plan. Exmouth Town Council responded with concern about allowing further development on green field sites including St John's Wood and Littleham Valley. The process allowed each Town and Parish a short period of time to present its proposals to the East Devon District Council LDF Panel. A clear message came back from the District that the expectations of Government were that each community must consider how much housing it would anticipate in the 20 year life of the plan and where. The message was that no was not an acceptable answer but that accepting the need for housing was – but where? The Council reviewed its position and agreed that development in the St John's Wood area was not acceptable nor on a piece of land between Higher Marley Road

and Hulham Road. The least worst area of land for development left was in the Littleham Valley at the Pankhurst Road end. Clinton Devon Estates had identified an area of land which would provide for high quality development of 500 units. The Council responded by suggesting a much smaller area supporting 90 units and other sites within Exmouth which would provide for over 1,000 units in the 20 year period. Further examination of Clinton Devon's proposals is now to occur.

The final Local Plan will eventually be adopted after consultation and enquiry as the planning framework within which development will be allowed within the next 20 years. This will provide a presumption that reasonable applications for planning will be allowed. Without a Local Plan, developers will be able to submit planning applications where they wish and the Planning Authority will not have the power of an adopted plan to provide evidence to refuse.

The pressure on Local Authorities is that when planning applications are received then it is possible to negotiate for development gain (a development roof tax) as a one off payment currently called S106 agreement under the Planning Acts. This is being transformed into Community Infrastructure Levy which will allow a central pot of money to be accumulated to help with public infrastructure generally. If a planning application is refused and allowed on appeal then any opportunity to gain s106 funding is lost. So the question for Local Authorities has to be, is the risk of refusal worth taking or is it better to negotiate to improve design and to obtain the best S106 agreement possible.

The Government is now pushing Local Authorities to spend more time with developers in pre-application discussions to get the best possible development and public gain from developments prior to planning applications being submitted.

Why does this pressure for development exist? First of all to meet the deficit of housing units in the private market and keep house prices from accelerating again to make the cost of private houses worse particularly for first time buyers. Also to provide a stock of 'Affordable' housing to provide reasonably priced housing where lower income people can afford to rent or buy. The other pressure is to encourage economic development to provide opportunities for employment so that communities continue to be places which meet the needs of all age groups.

This may sound complicated, and it is, and this is one area which your Councillors are having to consider in great depth to ensure that Exmouth flourishes as a community and does not miss investment opportunities to take it forward into the future.

### **Business Improvement District (BID)**

This is another area of work which has taken up considerable column inches in the local newspapers recently. The previous Town Manager Tony Collins did a lot to help promote Exmouth. He put on events and acted as an ambassador for the Economy of Exmouth. He came to the conclusion that the way to secure sustainable improvement and growth was to seek a Business Improvement District for Exmouth. He reported to Councillors who agreed with him that this would be a good evolution of Town Management, it would give businesses more responsibility for having their say on how to make the town centre work better as a market place which attracts lots of people wanting to shop there. Lucy Ball, who the Town Council

employed as a consultant to give professional advice and take forward the concept, explained in last week's Journal the facts behind the BID.

Basically that:-

- An area is defined as the District;
- Businesses within that will have the right to vote for against a BID;
- If they vote yes then they will be accepting a 1.5% levy based on rateable value to be ring-fenced used exclusively in the BID area; and the BID Business plan agreed by businesses, becomes a legally binding document to be delivered by the Town Centre Management Company;
- This will raise up to £140,000 per annum;
- A BID company largely made up of business representatives will be legally and financially responsible for ensuring that this fund is spent in accordance with the agreed plan devised to drive up footfall and spend in Exmouth;
- The Town Council is being asked to contribute to the BID Manager's salary as is East Devon District Council and Devon County Council in place of the Town Manager's salary so that all of the money raised is used to do the things the BID plan dictates. Businesses outside the BID area, such as Devon Cliffs, are being asked to make a voluntary contribution and are prepared to do so, because it is in their interests that Exmouth Town Centre is a thriving hub for the town and their customers.

Care was taken to include Exeter Road and Albion Hill within the BID areas as in the past businesses in those streets have often felt excluded. The previous Town Manager helped them to deliver some interesting projects to overcome this sense of exclusion.

To date the Council has agreed to lead this through, carrying the initial set up costs and arranging with EDDC for £45,000 from a S106 payment negotiated for the extension of Tesco's on Salterton Road when it happens, to help meet these initial costs. It is suggested that people who are currently questioning the merit of a BID scheme might wish to look at what has happened in other towns in the South West such as Falmouth, Torbay, Barnstaple, Taunton and Newquay.

### **Community Planning**

Tenders are now being considered for specialist help to start Community Planning within Exmouth. Once appointed the specialist will be looking to recruit a team of volunteers ready and willing to create the first Community Plan for Exmouth. There is a wealth of work already created by Community Groups to be brought together as evidence for such a Plan. This will help to define the reasonable wishes of Exmouth people as to how they see Exmouth meeting the challenges of change in the future. It will help to have a document which becomes the definitive plan for Exmouth and evidence for responding to other authorities giving a clearer locally based view on all things Exmouth than currently exists. The Community Organisations Liaison Panel is keen to see this work started and hopes that there will be people willing to give some time to do this work for their community. It would certainly have helped with the two issues above if such a plan had already in place. The Government is keen to introduce Neighbourhood Plans under the yet to be approved Localism Act and is anticipated that the work needed to be done for these plans can be incorporated into the Community Planning process.

### **Exmouth Festival**

Mark your diaries for the following dates in 2012:-

Exmouth Kite Festival 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> May.

Exmouth Festival Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> May to Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June;

Joey the Lips Concert supported by an Abba Tribute Band on the Imperial Recreation Ground Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Christmas Cracker**

On Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December Exmouth will come alive with an all day Pop Medieval Themed Christmas Cracker with camels, entertainers and firework finale following switch on of the Christmas Tree lights. Come and have some fun in the Strand and Magnolia Centre.

### **Christmas Day Swim**

Don't forget the traditional Exmouth Christmas Day swim at 11.00am – always a spectacle and where it seems like all Exmouth comes together for an hour to celebrate Christmas day

### **New Year's Eve**

Fireworks will once again bring in the New Year on Exmouth Beach to complete the great New Year Celebrations in the town.

For more information – contact the Town Clerk on 01395 276167, visit the Town Hall or contact your Local Councillor visit [www.exmouth.gov.uk](http://www.exmouth.gov.uk) for all contact information.

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