



Exmouth Town Council –Newsletter

Newsletter 7

December 2009

Rolle College Site

Following the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 9th November there has been a great deal of work carried out by Exmouth Town Council and Community leaders with regard to the Rolle College Site. Access was obtained to the Rolle College on 8th December and a group of us walked around the whole site. The overwhelming feeling was one of sorrow that such a complete educational campus could be potentially lost to private development. The site contains three theatres with room in the largest for an audience of over 200, a large modern lecture theatre, gymnasium, library (now bereft of books) on two floors, three craft rooms including two pottery kilns, classrooms, refectory and offices. Yes – a complete site with the modern Owen building and sound brick built buildings which create a sense of place and learning which would be the envy of many large towns. From a design point of view it would be difficult to create an educational environment which is so fit for purpose and feels so right. It is hard to forgive the University of Plymouth for turning its back on Rolle. In their second edition of 'Enterprise' their magazine, a rosy picture is painted. Page 4 is headed 'Keeping Sustainability Centre Stage'. It says 'We are proud to be ranked the UK's best performing university for environmental credentials. In the annual Green League produced by People & Planet, the nation's largest student group campaigning on the environment, we have outperformed 126 other universities since the league table was launched in 2007'. Also it says 'As the enterprise university, we recognize our wider obligations to society and our aim is to become an exemplar in sustainability, social responsibility and responsible business practice – engaging our wider community and continually monitoring, improving and sharing our achievements'. Fine words indeed, but clearly a blind eye is being turned on Exmouth – where are the obligations to society here?

The bare facts are that all funding has been removed and there is a need to find at least £6m to purchase and refurbish at least half of the site. This is a big challenge, but the prize is to give Exmouth by 2011 facilities for education, training, library and community activities, which are otherwise not in sight for the near future.

Our community approach is to create a clear vision for the site. Behind this is a business plan with the detailed cost already drawn up in its first edition. This will be developed and the initial figures will be worked on to make sure that they are as solid and accurate as they can be. When it

is completed, early next year, this will be the document which allows us to make the hard decisions as to whether it will be possible to find a community led solution or not.

It appears from the Devon County Council 'Devon Talk' magazine circulated to households that a joint education/community solution fits in with County Policy under its Schools for the Future bid to Government, where new schools would have multi-uses. We intend to have further discussion with the County Council on this and to see whether part of that use could include new library facilities for the town.

Other complementary uses for the site could include starter business units, theatre, community hall, facilities for local groups and leisure - all managed by a company set up for the purpose to work alongside Exmouth Community College.

A programme of actions is already underway with good progress being maintained to date. It is likely that representations will be made at Government level from where many of the funding problems arise and the potential solutions reside.

One thing is sure. If the site is offered for redevelopment for housing the waste of this superb resource will be something over which we will all feel a sense of failure and some shame.

Public Funding Budget Crises

Public funding is as many will know hitting the wall right now as a result of the Recession. With budgets being set annually by Public Service organizations there is always a lag before the real effects that have been felt in the private sector feed through to the public sector. The cold winds of reality are now affecting all public organizations as they face potential deficit budgets unless they make drastic changes. Local Authorities, Schools, National Health Trusts, Police, Fire – all are affected. The implications are that services which we have all taken for granted are likely to be affected in some form or another. Possibly reduced floral displays, maintenance being reduced on the things we hold dear such as the illuminations on the sea front, less litter collections, reduced cleaning of public toilets. All those services that Local Authorities are not required to provide by law are under consideration for removal, reduction or change. Voluntary Organisations are also feeling the cold winds blowing with grants from public bodies being scrutinized and also under consideration for reduction or removal all together. Every organization I have contact with is wrestling with potential budget deficits and the reality of what recession actually means.

The public services have probably not been affected so strongly during most of our lifetimes. The reason is that income from all directions is reduced. Interest on investments is reduced as a result of the crisis in the Financial Sector, reduced activity in the local economy is resulting in reduced car park and other income, Government Grant is not being increased in real terms, effectively a cut. The General Election will inevitably result in more drastic action being taken in the first year of a new administration.

Public Sector costs are at present set to be reduced by 25% over 5 years to help the Government balance its books. These bald figures will impact on everyone's lives and no amount of spin by the Government or in Glossy newsletters produced by Councils or Public Authorities will be able to hide these realities.

Local Government Review

East Devon District Council was successful in delaying the Local Government Review Process by joining with East Anglian Local Districts to challenge the Boundary Committee's recommendations. The appeal however overturned the court judgment which upheld some of the Districts case, leaving the way clear for the Boundary Committee to provide advice to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The recommendations which stand for consideration are threefold. A unitary County excluding Plymouth and Torbay, a Unitary Exeter, no change. A consultation period now runs until 19th January when views can be expressed to DevonStructures@communities.gsi.gov.uk or by post to Unitary Structures Scheme, Dept for Communities and Local Government, Xone 3/J1 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU. After that date there is time for the Secretary of State to create the necessary orders to implement one of the review options before the election so it is still possible that the District Councils in this area could be abolished.

Community Organisations Liaison Panel

On a brighter note there has been some success in people working together within Exmouth over the year. The Council has created a panel made up of all the Local Organisations which have been working on various visions for Exmouth. Exmouth Residents Association, Exmouth Community Association, Exmouth Community Forum, Exmouth Civic Society, Transition Towns Exmouth are all involved. This has been working well and has brought committed people together to raise the Exmouth voice in a much more joined up and powerful way. The Panel is working on a Community Plan for Exmouth which will help to inform the statutory processes of planning which the Principal Authorities have to work towards including the Local Development Framework. Whilst there has been some criticism from one quarter that this has been set up to stifle the Community Organisations this is far from the case. Some excellent skills are emerging from within the Community with individuals prepared to give of their time and expertise. The plan will be the subject of public consultation as it develops. Whilst there are statutory plans through the District Council Local Development Framework which will replace the Local Plan and will introduce controversial plans for affordable housing developments and further business sites, the Community Plan will provide the vision as to how we see the character and nature of our community and will be part of the processes which will shape the Exmouth of the future.

Exmouth Christmas Cracker

Thanks to Exmouth Town Management and Exmouth Festival for once again presenting Exmouth with the Christmas Cracker on 4th December. The partnership with Christian Aid South West ensured a weekend of events and will contribute to around £3,000 being raised for Christian Aid this Christmas from Exmouth alone. The Christmas lights and Christmas Cracker creates a great social event in the town, an opportunity for local organizations to present themselves to the wider public and to promote Exmouth Town Centre as a great place for Christmas shopping. Our message to retail businesses in the town is to start thinking about Christmas 2010 and to enter into the spirit the Victorian theme within your shop to reflect the activities put on outside. It would be great to have more people dressing up in Victorian costumes to build the atmosphere even more in future years.

Forth Coming Events

Christmas Day Swim – This takes place at 11.00am on the beach below the clock tower when half of Exmouth traditional turns out to build an appetite pre Christmas Dinner.

Boxing Day Fun Run -This will take place from the Clock Tower to the Geoneedle and back at 11.00am with registration from 10.15pm at the Elizabeth Hall.

New Year's Eve - Exmouth has become one of 'THE' places to celebrate on New Year's Eve with fancy dress and fun to bring in the New Year. This year Exmouth Town Council, supported with sponsorship from The Bath House and The Pavilion, will be bringing in the New Year with fireworks at midnight opposite the The Bath House. A funfair will be in place on the Elizabeth Hall Grounds over the New Year period.

Merry Christmas

The Mayor and Councillors of Exmouth wish you a happy Christmas and a Good New Year when we can all work together in finding solutions to the many challenges which face our community. One thing remains sure and that is the place where we live is amazing and special and we all have a responsibility for the good stewardship of where we live and for continuing to create the great sense of community which is one of Exmouth's many special features.

For more information – contact the Town Clerk on 01395 276167, visit the Town Hall, contact your Local Councillor or visit **www.exmouth.gov.uk**

Any comments or views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Exmouth Town Council. The newsletter is edited by the Town Clerk.