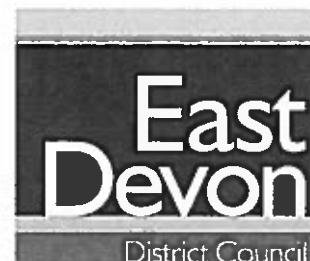


Date: 26 February 2010  
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To: Members of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
(Councillors: Christine Drew, Vivien Duval-Steer, Roger Giles,  
Darryl Nicholas, Marion Olive, Helen Parr, Margaret Rogers  
Philip Skinner, Graham Troman, Mark Williamson)

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## **Meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Wednesday 10 March 2010 – 6.30pm. Council Chamber, Knowle, Sidmouth**

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting.

- A period of 15 minutes has been provided at the beginning of the meeting to allow members of the public to raise questions.
- In addition, the public may speak on items listed on the agenda. After a report has been introduced, the Chairman (Leader of the Council) will ask if any member of the public wishes to speak and/or ask questions.
- All individual contributions will be limited to a period of 3 minutes – where there is an interest group of objectors or supporters, a spokesperson should be appointed to speak on behalf of group.
- The public is advised that the Chairman has the right and discretion to control questions to avoid disruption, repetition and to make best use of the meeting time.

A hearing loop system will be in operation in the Council Chamber.

## **AGENDA**

Page/s

1. **Public question time** – standard agenda item (15 minutes)  
Members of the public are invited to put questions to the Committee through the Chairman.

Councillors also have the opportunity to ask questions of the Chairman and/or Portfolio Holders during this time slot whilst giving priority at this part of the agenda to members of the public.

2. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 January 2010. 4 - 7
3. To receive any apologies for absence.
4. To receive any declarations of interests relating to items on the agenda.
5. To consider any items which, in the opinion of the Chairman, should be dealt with as matters of urgency because of special circumstances.



(Note: such circumstances need to be clearly identified in the minutes; Councillors please notify the Chief Executive in advance of the meeting if you wish to raise a matter under this item. The Chief Executive will then consult with the Chairman).

6. To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including the press) have been excluded. There are no items that the officers recommend should be dealt with in this way.
7. **Presentation by Cllr Iain Chubb – Member Champion for Young People**
8. **Social Zest – new youth website**  
Francesco Ferrari, Systems Analyst will introduce the new website to Members.
9. **Play Facilities for Children and Young People across East Devon** 8 - 24  
Members will consider the Council's Play Strategy, introduced by Councillor Mike Green.
10. **Scene and Heard Youth Panel and update on Youth Press Officer**  
Jamie Buckley will verbally update Members on progress to date.
11. **Place Survey – Residents Influencing Decisions** 25 – 30  
The Communications and Improvements Manager asks Members to consider the potential improvements to the way residents feel that they can influence decisions in the local area as far as the District Council is concerned and selects those improvements most likely to bring about positive change.
12. **Council's Core Aspirations for Rural Communities** 31 – 32  
Members to note a report from Peter Jeffs, Corporate Director, that outlines EDDC's proposed adoption of principles for the District, drawn from the Rural Services Network Manifesto. It is proposed that EDDC will use these in formulating its own future policies and lobbying others.
13. **Update on progress following the Affordable Housing Summit** 33 – 35  
Actions agreed following the Communities Think Tank held 17 February 2010 are attached for Members to note.
14. **Forward Plan 2009/10** 36

### **Members remember!**

- You must declare the nature of any personal or prejudicial interests in an item whenever it becomes apparent that you have an interest in the business being considered.
- Where you have a personal interest because the business relates to or is likely to affect a body of which you are a member or manager as an EDDC nominee or appointee, then you need only disclose that interest when (and if ) you speak on the item. The same rule applies if you have a personal interest in relation to a body exercising functions of a public nature.
- Make sure you say the reason for your interest as this has to be included in the minutes.
- If your interest is prejudicial you must leave the room unless you have obtained a dispensation from the Council's Standards Committee or where Para 12(2) of the Code can be applied. Para 12(2) allows a Member with a prejudicial interest to stay for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business but only at meetings where the public are also allowed to make representations. If you do remain, you must not exercise decision-making functions or seek to improperly influence the decision; you must leave the meeting room once you have made your representation.
- You also need to declare when you are subject to the party whip before the matter is discussed.

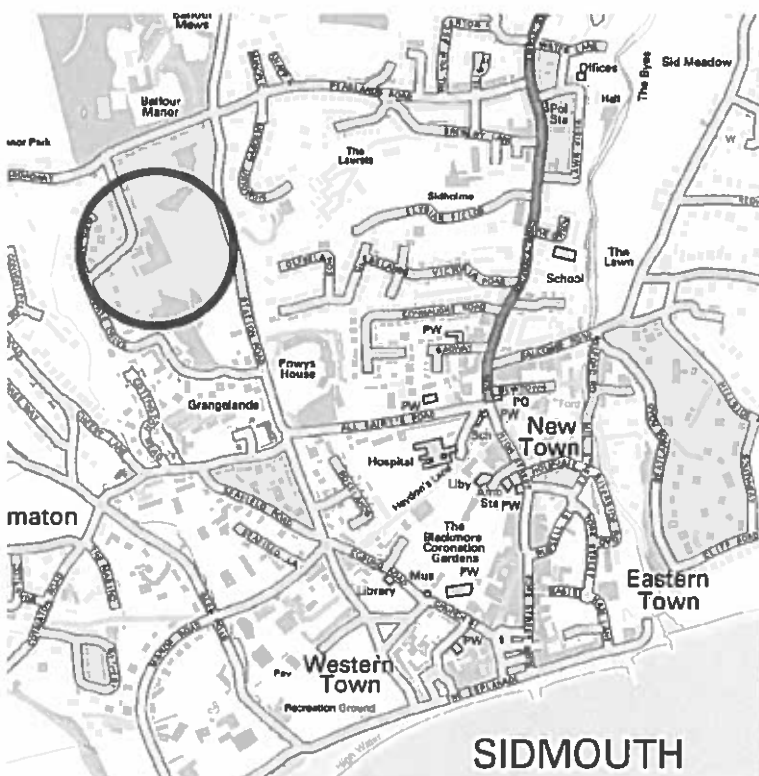


## Suggestions for questioning during an Overview and Scrutiny meeting

Below are some prompts which may help you to form your own questions to ask at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting. Your questioning technique is crucial in creating an atmosphere conducive to open answers. Avoid excessive interrogation and treat those being questioned with courtesy and respect; however don't be afraid to ask supplementary questions if you feel that you haven't been given a clear answer.

- **IS IT REQUIRED?** (do we have this, does it make sense to tackle it, do we really need it).
- **IS IT SYSTEMS THINKING?** (is it evidence based and designed around the customer demands)
- **IS THE INTENTION CLEAR?** (what are we actually trying to achieve)
- **ANY REAL OUTCOMES?** (are we actually, and measurably, achieving things for our customers).
- **WHAT IS THE COST?** (both time and money)
- **DOES IT COMPLY?** (have we checked that it meets our obligations, the law, any formal guidance, and any Council policy or resolutions).
- **OTHERS DO WHAT?** (how do other organisations tackle this, best practice)
- **EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT?** (how do we know we're doing things well, in a timely fashion, and at "best value")
- **WHAT IS THE RISK?** (any areas of risk for the Council)
- **ANYONE LOSE OUT?** (are there sections of the community who might be disadvantaged by this approach, or be less able to take advantage, than others)
- **DOES IT LINK?** (have we linked this to other, similar, pieces of work within or outside the Council)

## Getting to the Meeting – for the benefit of visitors



The entrance to the Council Offices is located on Station Road, Sidmouth. **Parking** is limited during normal working hours but normally easily available for evening meetings.

The following **bus service** stops outside the Council Offices on Station Road:  
**From Exmouth, Budleigh, Otterton and Newton Poppleford – 157**

The following buses all terminate at the Triangle in Sidmouth. From the Triangle, walk up Station Road until you reach the Council Offices (approximately ½ mile).  
**From Exeter – 52A, 52B**  
**From Honiton – 52B**  
**From Seaton – 52A**  
**From Ottery St Mary – 379, 387**

Please check your local timetable for times.

The Committee Suite has a separate entrance to the main building, located at the end of the visitor and Councillor car park. The rooms are at ground level and easily accessible; there is also a toilet for disabled users.

Visitors please note that the doors to the civic suite (meeting rooms) will be opened ¼ hour before the start time of the meeting. Councillors are reminded to bring their key fobs if they wish to access the area prior to that time.

For a copy of this agenda in large print, please contact the Democratic Services Team on 01395 517546



**EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**Minutes of a Meeting of the Communities Overview and**  
**Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth**  
**on Wednesday 20 January 2010**

**Present:** Councillors:  
Helen Parr (Chairman)  
Graham Troman (Vice Chairman)  
Vivien Duval-Steer  
Roger Giles  
Marion Olive  
Philip Skinner  
Mark Williamson

**Officers:** Sue Bewes – Housing Strategy Manager  
John Golding – Head of Housing and Social Inclusion  
Peter Jeffs – Corporate Director  
Rachel Perram – Democratic Services Officer

**Also Present:** Councillors:  
Graham Brown  
Iain Chubb  
Jill Elson  
Frances Newth  
Pauline Stott

**Apologies:** Ray Bloxham  
Derek Button  
Paul Diviani  
Christine Drew  
Chris Gibbings  
Graham Godbeer  
Margaret Rogers

The meeting started at 6.33pm and ended at 8.25pm.

**\*21 Public question time**

There were no questions from members of the public.

**\*22 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 October 2009 were confirmed and signed as a true record.





**\*23 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor/ Officer	Agenda Item	Type of interest	Nature of interest
Councillor Jill Elson	<b>10. Review of Funded Community &amp; Voluntary Sector Groups</b>	Personal	Chairman of the Exmouth & District Community Transport Group (Ring and Ride)

**\*24 Report on the East Devon Affordable Housing Summit 17 September 2009**

The Chairman welcomed the Housing Strategy Manager and the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion to the meeting.

The Housing Strategy Manager advised Members that this report had been produced following the Housing Summit, held in September 2009 - called as a result of a resolution from the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in June 2009.

Feedback from the event had been extremely positive, with plenty of influential contributors and stakeholders present on the day. Many of the 'blue sky' thinking ideas were being auctioned.

Members of the Committee were invited to develop an action plan from the Feedback Chart in Annex 6 of the agenda.

The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion urged Members to focus on items that were achievable with resources available. Members noted that some comments tabled were unrealistic given current Government legislation and that attention should be given to deliverable outcomes.

Members found the format of the report to be excellent and made it easier to categorise and prioritise initiatives. Concern was raised from several Members over the time that had elapsed since the original resolution of the Committee. Officers reassured Members of the Committee that this had not delayed progress in relation to the development programme. The meeting was reminded that Government funding to aid affordable housing projects was likely to reduce at the end of March 2010. It was clear from a recent regional summit that the Government would expect Councils to develop more housing with less funding in the future.

- RESOLVED:**
1. that the report on the first East Devon Affordable Housing Summit be noted;
  2. that the Communities Portfolio Holder call a 'Think Tank' to start in February 2010 to consider the relevant actions identified at the Affordable Housing Summit;
  3. that progress on the Action Plan and Think Tank be reported to the next meeting of the Committee on 10 March 2010.



25 **Presentation by Cllr Philip Skinner – Rural Member Champion**

Members of the Committee heard an informative talk by the Rural Champion that gave an insight into the broad remit of this role, which included involvement in areas such as planning, communication, the Local Development Framework and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).

The Chairman thanked the Rural Champion, inviting Members to ask questions about the role.

The Champion felt that there had been plenty of action in the future provision of housing and employment land in the District.

In response to a query over whether there was a 'Towns Champion' for East Devon, Members heard that the definition of a rural settlement was of a population fewer than 20,000. Exmouth was the only place that officially classified as a town in this context. Both Exmouth and Seaton were well served by their Champions, who had been assigned to drive forward regeneration in those places.

Members discussed the difficulties encountered by young people who lived in isolated rural areas and who did not have access to vehicles or public transport. They had problems accessing further and higher education.

Members heard about the issue of 'food security' in the district. This term referred to the availability of land in order to produce food for the local area. Land could potentially become more of an issue as the Council continued to strive towards the Government's targets for new housing in East Devon.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the Rural Champion be encouraged to develop the following topics:

1. Access to courses for young people living in isolated communities (could be examined in conjunction with the Business Champion);
2. Broadband – increasing speed and bandwidth throughout East Devon. This work to be carried out in conjunction with Devon County Council;
3. Improved transport access for rural areas;
4. Food Security – encouraging development that takes this into account for local people;
5. An item be prepared for the Parishes' and Towns' newsletter explaining the remit of the Rural Champion.

\*26 **Rural Manifesto**

Members considered a report prepared by the Corporate Director, Peter Jeffs that summarised the main parts of a 'Rural Manifesto', produced by the Rural Services Network (RSN). The Manifesto included a range of rural issues encountered by Councils who had a significant rural population. The report specifically allowed comparison with EDDC's existing Rural Standards Policy. EDDC was consulted by the RSN in advance of the production of the Rural Manifesto. It was noted that many of the Council's concerns had been voiced in the Manifesto.

Members agreed that it was important for the voice of East Devon's rural community to be heard nationally and that the Council respond at Government level to the Rural Manifesto.



**\*26 Rural Manifesto (continued)**

Members wished for the response to encapsulate what the Council believed to be important for East Devon's rural community. If adopted as a Council, the new policy would have a knock-on effect on the Local Development Framework. The Council should set out its position within the next few months.

**RESOLVED:** 1. that the Corporate Director examine the 'Rural Manifesto' and compare this with the EDDC Rural Services Standard and report back.

**27 Review of Funded Community and Voluntary Sector Groups**

Members considered a report prepared by the Corporate Director. This listed the community groups and charities to which EDDC provided funding.

Members heard that the Council's budget was in the process of being agreed, and at this point it would become clear which organisations and to what level, the Council would provide funding over the next year.

Members agreed that it was important for such organisations to have firm Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with EDDC, as was access to accounting information and financial reports.

**RECOMMENDED:** that where appropriate, a three year Service Level Agreement be made with the community and voluntary sector groups to whom EDDC provided funding.

**\*28 Forward Plan for Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2009/10**

Members noted that the next meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny on 10 March 2010 would focus on Children and Young People.

The Committee would also receive an update on progress with the Action Plan for Affordable Housing.

Chairman ..... Date.....



# EDDC Play Areas

Paper by Councillor Mike Green

East Devon District Council currently provides, manages and maintains 71 equipped play areas throughout the district. Of these, 57 are under the Environment Portfolio and 15 are under the Communities portfolio. 3 of the areas are managed in partnership with Town and Parish Councils.

Many facilities are categorised under the National Playing Field Association Six Acre Standard for Local Area of Play (LAP), Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) and Neighbourhood Area of Play (NEAP). Ranges of play equipment provided caters for pre-school age children, 4-12 year olds, and 5 skateparks and 4 multi-use games areas (MUGA's) aimed at older children and teenagers.

The figures below are crudely based on simple numbers of play areas and not on the type or overall actual average provided by EDDC. However I think they provide food for thought

There are other play areas available in the district provided by Village Halls, trusts and Parish/town councils, but the question is ...

## Are we as a Council delivering play equitably around the district?

### Honiton 20 = 1 per 584 head of population

- Glenn Farm
- Old Elm Road
- St Mark's
- Whitebridges
- Davey Playing Field
- Jerrards Close
- Allhallows
- Butts Close
- Allhallows Skate Park
- Upland Chase
- Willow Walk
- Heron Road
- Dove Close
- Woodmans Park
- Pale Gate Close
- Joslin Road
- Phillips Square
- Charles Road
- Langford Avenue
- St Leonards

### Exmouth & Littleham 17 = 1 per 2,100 head of population

- Imperial Recreation Ground
- King George's Field
- Phear Park
- Brixington Lane
- Durham Close
- Truro Drive
- Liverton Copse
- Phear Skate Park
- Redgates
- Lady Byron
- Keats Close
- Ivydale
- Byron Way
- Cherriswood Avenue
- Thomas Close
- Littleham Village Hall
- The Crescent





**Sidmouth, Sidford & Sidbury 8 = 1 per 1,740 head of population**

- Long Park
- Stowford Rise
- Bakers Close
- Manstone Skate Park
- Manstone Lane
- Recreation Ground
- Higher Brook Meadow
- Furzehill

**Axminster 6 = 1 per 1,106 head of population**

- Foxhill
- North Street
- Bonners Drive
- North Street Allotment
- Millwey Rise
- Loretto Road

**Seaton 5 = 1 per 1,498 head of population**

- Elizabeth Road
- Seafeld Gardens
- Meadway
- Skateboard Park
- Seaton Marshes

**Otter St Mary 3 = 1 per 2,926 head of population**

- Winters Lane
- Land of Canaan
- Thorne Farm Way MUGA

**Budleigh Salterton 3 = 1 per 1,758 head of population**

- Greenway Lane
- Lime Kiln
- Skatepark

**Beer 2 = 1 per 681 head of population**

- Seahill Gardens
- Underleys

**Feniton 1 = 1 per 1,909 head of population**

- The Signals

**Newton Poppleford 1 = 1 per 2,123 head of population**

- Millmoor/Turners Close

**Upton Pyne 1 = 1 per 487 head of population**

- Glebe Close

**Clyst Hydon 1 = 1 per 293 head of population**

- Park Close

**Aylesbeare 1 = 1 per 609 head of population**

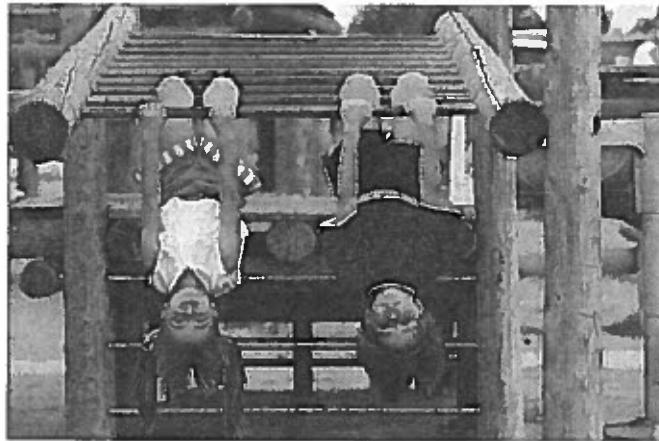
- Scotchmead

**Clyst St Lawrence 1 = 1 per 98 head of population**

- Foretown



# ***A Play Strategy for East Devon***



This Strategy was produced by the 'East Devon Play Network'

Under a Steering Group consisting of 'zero14plus', East Devon District Council's 'communities' and policy team, the Primary Care Trust, Youth Service, Devon Play, Lympstone Parish Council, East Devon District Council's Planning and Streetscene teams





## A. Background – Issues about play

*A consistent theme) is the importance of having communities where there is somewhere safe to go and something to do, (providing) recreational activity for children and young people.. Building the fabric of communities and increasing young people's skills, confidence and self-esteem.  
Every Child Matters, Government Green Paper, September 2003*

The purpose of preparing and implementing a play strategy is to enable East Devon District Council and its partners to establish clear policies on play as the basis for a range of activities that will create and improve access and opportunity for all its children and young people to enjoy a range of quality play and recreation opportunities. In doing so it will also contribute to achieving the Every Child Matters outcomes for children being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being.

This document looks at issues and benefits of play. The policy context of play, play opportunities in East Devon community engagement, action and evaluation.

There is a large body of supporting evidence, research and consultation behind this strategy which for ease of reading, has been summarised in this document.

### 1 Government and Play

*'The right to play is a child's first claim on the community. Play is natural training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.'* David Lloyd George

*The term 'Play' refers to the freetime activities of children and young people of all ages when they are choosing what to do, usually with their friends and without direction from adults.  
(Planning for Play 2005)*

Play is essential to children's happiness, health and development. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, gives all children the right 'to rest and leisure; engage in age-appropriate play and recreational activities'. There is increasing evidence, however, that children's play opportunities are under threat. Many children and young people, particularly in our cities do not have the degree of freedom or access to the spaces and environments – physical and social – that they need to play. The consequences – real and potential – both for their immediate quality of life and for their long-term health and development are serious.

The government has recognised the need to make better provision for children's play as a theme that cuts across a range of policy areas, from planning, open spaces and transport to health, education and childcare. Most significantly, the enjoyment of 'recreation', including play, is one of the key outcomes for children that authorities are required to consider in drawing up co-ordinated children and young people's plans under the Children Act 2004

*Such is the contribution that play can make to children's lives in so many areas that the Department for Education and Skills, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department of Health and the Home Office can (each) contribute to play through their policies. My department...is beginning to draw up a government agenda for play.'* Estelle Morris, Minister for the Arts (Department of Culture, Media and Sport) House of Commons, January 2005.





## 2 What is children's play?

- 2.1 Although we all recognise it when we see it, play is difficult to define. National Occupational Standards of the playwork, childcare and early years professions define play as 'freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child. It can be fun or serious....by playing, children learn and develop as individuals and as members of the community' 'The 2004 play review uses the straightforward description of play as 'What children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons.'<sup>ii</sup>
- 2.2 Play provides children and young people with an important opportunity to develop their values, beliefs and traditions and understand how they impact on their environment. Play is the way children explore the world around them and develop and practise skills.
- 2.3 Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them.

## 3 Play and health

Play is essential for children's healthy physical and emotional development. The Chief Medical Officer advises that 'children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes moderate-intensity physical activity each day.' There is growing research evidence that increased opportunity for free play is the most effective way to ensure this for children, and that a range of increasing health problems are associated with the decline in such opportunities.<sup>iii</sup> The government white paper Choosing Health, 2004, noted that 'many children appear to have less time being physically active.'

## 4 The benefits of play for children's development

- Play provides valuable life skills and is vital to their development.
- Play is integral to learning, but can not be taught through formal education.
- Play keeps children and young people healthy and active and able to learn.
- Play promotes independence, resilience, fosters self confidence, self esteem, self awareness.
- Play stimulates five key areas of development in child, social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional.

## 5 The benefits of play for parents/carers and families are:

- Improved family relationships
- Social contact with other families
- Healthier and more resilient children
- Happier and more confident children



## 6 The benefits of play for the community are:





- Involvement of children in creative and positive activities
- Anti-social behaviour is reduced and children are less at risk of crime
- Facilities are a focal point for the community
- Families are supported
- Young people are helped to prepare for a learning and working life

## 7 What are the barriers to play?

*The overwhelming cry from both parents and young people is around lack of activities and facilities the thing they say would most improve family life is the provision of places to go and things to do...where they can spend their leisure time with their friends.'*  
**Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children and Families, January 2005**

Parents and the wider community strongly believe that children today have fewer opportunities to play than they did as children, and are spending too much time watching television or using computers. This is a serious concern for many adults. A 2001 MORI poll in Devon cited 'activities for teenagers' as people's top priority for local improvements, ahead of crime reduction, road repairs and better transport. More and better facilities for younger children were next.<sup>iv</sup>

Children and young people commonly identify many barriers to play, recreation and their enjoyment of public space.<sup>v</sup> These include: fears for their safety, especially from bullying; traffic; dirty, boring or run-down play areas and parks; lack of choice; and lack of access. East Devon's youth survey showed 'transport' as a serious barrier to accessing their preferred leisure pursuits. This is unsurprising in an area with a widespread 'rural' aspect.

## 8 Play and the environment

*'Children are losing their connection with the natural environment and their well-being and environmental quality are inextricably linked. The worse a local environment looks, the less able children are to play freely..'*  
**A Child's place – why environment matters to children, Green Alliance/Demos, 2004**

A research report by Demos and the Green Alliance<sup>vi</sup> has found that there is a big gap between children from rural and urban backgrounds in their level of access to natural environments and that this is detrimental to city children. Among the report's key recommendations was that children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be provided with more and better opportunities to good quality open space and its design. The environmental charity Groundwork reports that community-based play activities can ensure optimum use of such space.

## 9 Inequalities and social exclusion

*'inclusive play provision is open and accessible to all and takes positive action in removing disabling barriers so that disabled children and non-disabled children can participate.'*  
**Alison John, for Kidsactive and the Better Play Awards**

For children with disabilities, negative attitudes and inaccessible physical environments compound the general problems experienced by most children, creating enormous social and physical barriers to the enjoyments of their right to play independently. In Devon, as across the UK as a whole there is evidence that disabled children do not enjoy equality of access to play and leisure activities. A recent survey of 1,000 UK parents of disabled children demonstrated





how their children were excluded from ordinary leisure opportunities. Parks and playgrounds were the least user friendly, with few facilities for disabled people.<sup>vii</sup>

Research has shown that certain minority ethnic groups are disproportionately excluded from play provision across the UK. For example, Asian Children – and girls in particular – can be widely discouraged from attending mainstream play services owing to a range of cultural and ethnic pressures, including overt and implicit racism.<sup>viii</sup>

## 10 Anti-social behaviour

Groups of children or young people 'hanging out' in the public domain are often characterised as posing a threat or a nuisance, even when they are simply enjoying being together. Many children and young people complain that they do not have access to space that is theirs, or which they are welcome to share with adults, and that they are consequently scapegoats.

*Research commissioned by CAFE space shows that 'place making' – improving the design, maintenance and supervision of parks and other public spaces – is a more effective solution to anti-social behaviour than simply increasing security measures.<sup>ix</sup>*

## 11 Play facilities

*'Young people want to play and spend time outside and it is important that we provide suitable spaces for them. Alongside learning more about themselves and each other; play facilities will help keep children fit and healthy, help tackle the growing issues of obesity and provide parents with places where they are happy to let their children spend their free time.'*

**Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport**

When considering play we adopt the principles of the "3 frees i.e.

- Freely accessible to all
- Free of charge
- Free choice of activity

## 12 When and where children play

Half of all days in the year are weekends or school holidays, when, given the opportunity, children will play outdoors for many hours. If given the opportunity they also play before, and after and on the way to school

Research shows that children, especially those with special educational needs, benefit from the space and the opportunity to play during the school day.<sup>x</sup>

Research has also shown that children like their play space to be visible and readily accessible, to be at the heart of the communities and the environments with which they are familiar and where they feel socially secure. However, they also like the option of accessing or creating special and 'secret' spaces: dens and hideaways. Successful play places will take account of children's need to see and be seen without compromising the need for a rich and varied environment.<sup>xi</sup>

## 13 Good play provision?

Neither the identification of children's needs for play, the definition itself, nor the description of its objectives, actually tell us what constitutes good play provision. What they do tell us is that play is about much more than swings and roundabouts in the park. Fixed equipment playground have their place but the strategy should take a much broader view of where and how often children



need access to the space and opportunity to compete, cooperate, practice skills run, climb, skip, hide, play with ropes,



jump, practice cartwheels, throw and kick balls, make friends, fall out, build fires, grow things, tell stories, climb trees, take risks, get wet, explore nature, build dens, get dirty, dress up, keep animals, dig holes, swing on tyres, shout, fight, invent games, make things, paint pictures, talk with their friends, or just sit.

## **B. The policy context for play**

The Play Policy must recognise the themes in “Every Child Matters” and the Children Act 2004 as well as Article 31 of the United Nations Rights of the Child (a right to play and recreational activities, as well as equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities).

*We recognise that play can impact positively on a range of issues and we will continue to...ensure that it is recognised as having an important contribution to the Change of Children Programme, the Physical Activity Plan and the Cleaner, Safer, Greener agenda. We will be considering how to take forward a more strategic, cross-departmental policy for play.'*

### **The Play Review**

*Getting Serious About Play – a review of children's play (2004) made the key recommendation that 'the local authority or a local partnership should be responsible for drawing up proposals...prepared in partnership with other local agencies, children and young and local communities.'* A fuller summary of the recommendations of the Play Review is set out on page...

### **Every Child Matters and Change for Children**

The government's Every Child Matters framework and Change for Children programme ([www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)) identify the enjoyment of recreation, including play, as a key outcome for children and young people to be considered in the preparation and implementation of Children and Young People's Plans under the Children Act (2004).

### **The National Childcare Strategy**

The Extended Schools Initiative –part of the National Childcare Strategy to offer 'wrap-around care' for all children up to age 14 – was to look at opening school grounds and premises for out-of-school activities, including children's play. These are expected, as a priority, to provide leisure facilities for all children in a locality, including disabled children, and not only for those who go to a specific school.<sup>xii</sup>

Early Years development and childcare partnerships have been encouraged by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to promote play as an integral part of childcare plans. Government guidance to the partnerships sets out a range of measures to ensure the quality of play opportunities within childcare provision, stating that 'partnerships have a crucial role in the promotion and development of good quality play opportunities.'

Supervised provision that is open to children under eight must be registered with Ofsted under the national Standards for out-of-school care. Under the standards, open access playgrounds or play schemes have alternative criteria to those that apply to childcare: Out of School Care: Guidance to the National Standards.



## **Devon Play Policy Context**

Devon has a county-wide play policy which has shaped and informed this document.



### **C. East Devon as a place for children and young people**

These are the key messages that come out from the review of data.

5540 children 4 years and under

6693 children 5 – 9 years

6989 children 10 - 14 years (the most significant group)

16.5% of East Devon's population are male under 15's, 14.3% are female.

Exmouth Withycombe Raleigh Ward has the greatest number and highest percentage of under 15's. Sidmouth Rural the lowest.

East Devon has slightly less % of pupils with special educational needs (451) in total than Devon, England or the South West.

Only 0.07% of East Devon's households are from BME communities. The largest group within this is Chinese. However travelling communities and migrant workers are poorly revealed through census data.

3 Wards in Exmouth rank in the lowest quartile in England for educational skills and training in young people.

2 Wards (one in Exmouth, one Sidford) are in the lowest England quartile for "Income Deprivation affecting children".

Devon generally has a slightly lower percentage of 'free school meals' than other parts of the South West or England.

#### **East Devon as a place to play**

A great deal is said about the very high age profile of East Devon. However, over emphasis of these older age groups would ignore the needs of children and young people.

In order to best consider the needs of children and young people we also need to remember the following combination of issues which are special to East Devon:

- A very rural District. Some parts rank in the top quartile nationally for rural isolation with all that is entailed in forms of limited transport limits and range of facilities.
- One in five households have no access to a private car. To an extent certain areas having good access to bus, rail, and community transport offset this, but such facilities are by no means universal, and may limit the transport option for children and young people. Thus





we can see that free or low cost access to areas, activities and equipment for play needs to be dispersed throughout our District, in places where children and young people live.



## **Leisure facilities and schemes in East Devon**

East Devon District Council no longer directly provides sports and entertainment venues. The major facilities are now run by Leisure East Devon (LED) (a charitable body) and more minor facilities are leased to other relevant enterprises. East Devon District Council still provides and maintains play parks and skate parks.

Key messages from our research show:

- Four public swimming pools (in addition to privately run ones)
- Around 150 halls used by the community
- 7 public indoor sports facilities (the majority shared with schools)
- 163 sports pitches (almost 60 of which are specifically for junior sport)\*
- 86 equipped play areas and Skate parks \*\*
- 17 parishes have neither sufficient sport nor play facilities with open community access (almost 25% of parishes)\*\*\*

These facilities have been mapped in several major studies.

Summer play events have been run in the past by the Council and others, and LED is proposing to work with the Children's Trust in future on these.

Devon Youth Service not only provides Youth Clubs and centres but outreach services and a mobile provision.

Excellent examples of free play with an environmental theme relate to the work carried out by the Council's Countryside Team Education Ranger. They run Junior Ranger, Great Trees, and Nature Reserve schemes.

Similarly the East Devon District Council Arts Development team have worked with many formal and informal childrens groups and individuals (eg Big Draw, sand sculpture, Banners project) Support for exploration of digital arts for young people has been through Digital Express.

[\* Playing pitch Strategy 2002/03

\*\* Recreational areas strategy 2003]

\*\*\* Outdoor sport and play provision within Devon (DPFA) 2005, and 'Devonplay' data.

## **Planning and Strategy**

East Devon is currently involved in several major regeneration areas (indeed is also creating a new community), and as such new opportunities will arise in these areas.

This East Devon Play Strategy is in line with the Devon Play Policy which in turn is informed by a wide range of other policies (including priorities from Local Area Agreements and the Children and Young Peoples Plan).

East Devon Play Strategy is in line with the East Devon Cultural Strategy (2004/08) which forms a part of East Devon Community Plan (most recent version 2006), and which relates to East Devon District Council's Corporate Strategy.



East Devon has draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on "Provision of open space, recreation and play space on residential development sites" (this supports Local Plan Policy RE3). This follows the National Playing Fields Association Guidance on accessibility, capacity, type and also makes arrangements East for maintenance costs. The Planning Guidance was based on East Devon Recreational Areas Strategy 2003.

East Devon has a Playing Pitch Strategy (adopted in 2004) following identification of where any short falls in sports pitches lie.

This Play Strategy builds on a previous version of 1996 and recognises significant change in the organisations' funding policy, and ambitions of the people of East Devon.

Play is not specifically mentioned in the Sustainable Communities Plan but it is recognised as being related to achieving sustainable Communities Plan priorities around communities with problems, positive mental health, anti-social behaviour, culture and use of the countryside.



### **East Devon's multi-agency structures that support play opportunities**

- East Devon Play network, Devon Play Support, Funding Officer, CTLF, LSP etc
- Children's Trust Local Forum
- Local Strategic Partnership (via Community Plan priorities)

## **D Driving the Play Strategy and Play projects process**

From an initial, wide, meeting with the East Devon Play network a steering group was established from 'zero14plus', East Devon District Council's 'communities' and policy team, PCT, Youth Service, Devon Play and Lypstone Parish Council, East Devon District Council Planning and Streetscene teams.

## **E Consultations and Community Engagement on play within East Devon**

The gaps and barriers as identified by the consultations carried out in 2004 by Devon Play Network gave rise to a number of play policy objectives, from which District Councils and partner organisations can further develop their own strategies.

East Devon District Council's general users satisfaction survey in 2003 indicated that 6% of respondents felt that young children's facilities were most important (6.7% in 2006). 10% said that they were the thing most needing improving in 2003 (11.8% in 2006).

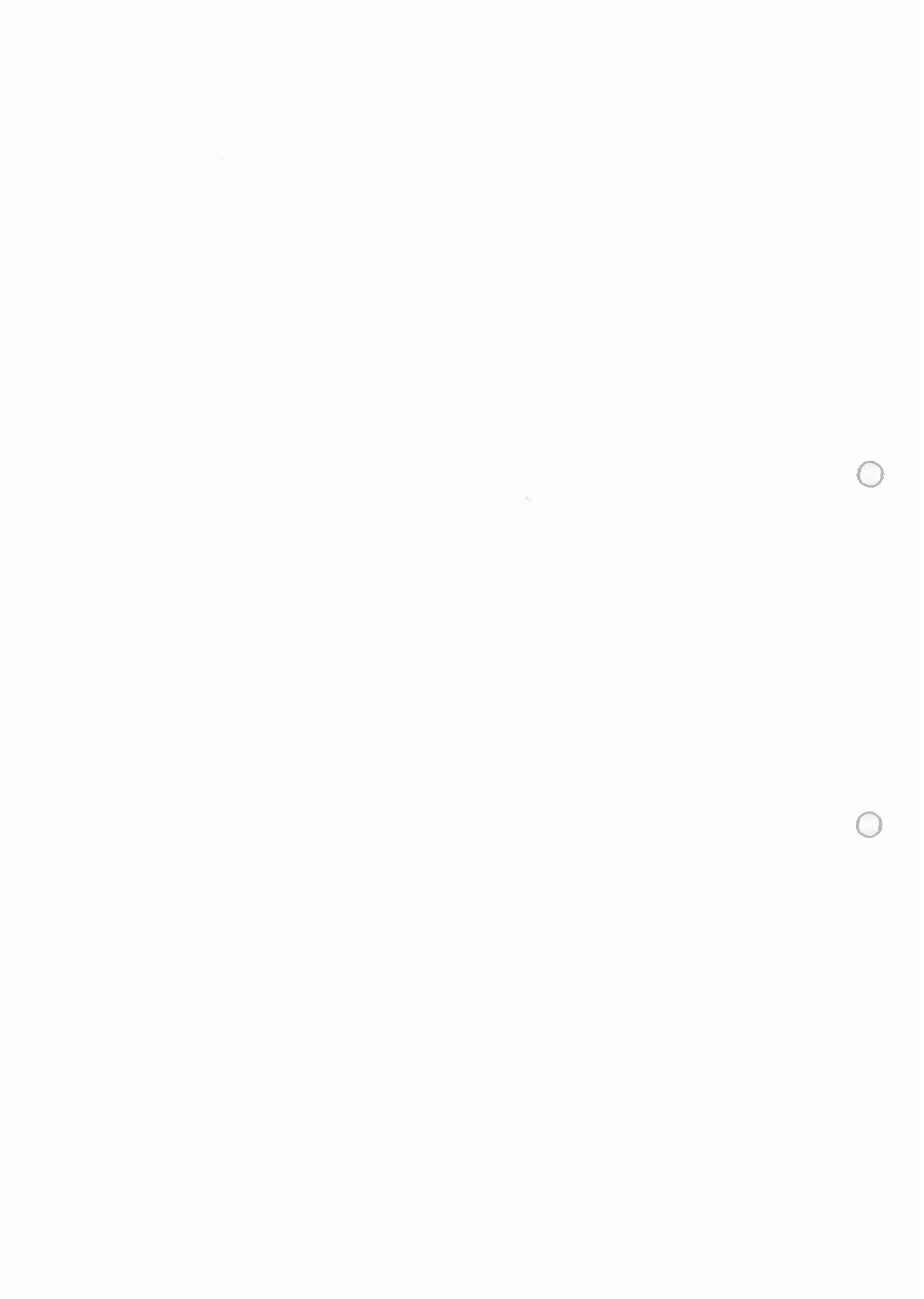
However in the same survey in 2003, 9% felt that teenager's facilities were most important (rising to 18.8% in 2006). 32% thought these were the thing most needing improving in 2003, rising to 41.5% in 2006.

Thus not only did teenager's facilities seem a greater priority but also becoming more pressing.

The East Devon Youth Survey (2005) identified key activities and barriers for young people (secondary school ages) asking a very large proportion of young people from Sidmouth, Ottery St. Mary, Axminster and their surrounding areas (almost 2000 students).

Consultation specifically to create this Play Strategy have included:

1. East Devon Play network consultation and evening discussion (70 invitees)



2. Parish and Town Council postal consultation (69 consultation letters – postal)
3. Consultation through County Show.
4. Consultation through Honiton Show and Honiton Play event (parent and child, face to face)
5. Consultation through Seaton skate event (BIAS) [300 attendees] (video interviews)
6. Council tenants consultation (4,500 consulted – postal)
7. Consultation with Children's Trust Local Forum Members (presentation)
8. Consultation with Council 'Culture Think-Tank' (presentation)
9. 'Drop in' consultation event about play projects to be funded through Lottery Funding (building a wall of ideas).
10. Consultation of LSP (presentation)

As a result we have information from parents, grandparents, young people, and children (some as young as 3!). The results from 4,5, and 6 were the most significant consultations which have been aimed specifically at this strategy. All views were gathered around a consistent set of questions for these events but using different, age appropriate, means of collection.



## The key results of the Consultations were:

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| A | Youth Survey   | - <u>Swimming</u> , cycling, shopping, tennis and trampolining, ice skating were popular wishes. transport was the biggest barrier.  |
| B | Play Network views   | - A wide ranging list including play grants, holiday play schemes, extended school use, and use of coastline were suggested as gaps.   |
| C | Parish & Town Councils   | - Rural play equipment and facilities for older children (especially games surfaces and skateparks) were the main gaps.  |
| D | County Show<br>(young people)  | - this identified the wish for a range of clubs, adventure activities and play spaces. Ice rinks and theme parks were notably mentioned!   |
| E | Honiton Show<br><br>Honiton Play Days,<br>Seaton (BIAS) event<br>(young people), &<br><br>Tenants consultation | These were the biggest consultations devised especially for the Play Strategy. Key issues were (scoring over 15% of responses): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ safety &amp; maintenance</li><li>▪ more play opportunities required and accessible and free parks are the most significant place where play takes place</li><li>▪ organised structure for play (events etc) would be welcome</li><li>▪ choice of options needed</li><li>▪ 12-16 year olds need play places (followed by 8-12's with young groups less so)</li><li>▪ both genders but especially girls had insufficient provision</li><li>▪ poor provision for children with particular needs</li></ul> |
| F | CTLF Members &<br>Communities Think Tank   | - gaps in freely accessible exercise facilities, creative play, and engagement of extended school facilities - major landowners were identified as may be having a role.   |

## From consultation and data gathering these are the key criteria for our Play Strategy:

1. We need to focus on encouraging and allowing more play.
2. We need to ensure that play 'gives something' to those involved.
3. The play provision needs to be inclusive of all types of children and young people (including both genders, all cultures, all abilities and including people from rural locations).
4. Play provision must be safe, secure and easy to maintain.
5. Play in parks must be retained and encouraged.
6. There must be a variety of choice.
7. Must be easily accessible (time, place and for rural children).
8. Must cater for 12 – 16 year olds.
9. A framework of organised activities is welcome.
10. Legitimised spaces for different activities/age groups will help to control domination by certain groups and individuals (which is an issue).





## **F Our Vision of the future and the policy principles which we have derived**

- In recognising the essential nature, benefits and value of play our vision for the future is to see play provision as a key strand of sustainable communities (existing and new, urban and rural).
- Furthermore it must be recognised that, largely, play should be freely accessible, free of charge and freely chosen.
- The need to create locations which are 'legitimised' for play, and for many different groups of children and young people, and that permit (preferably encourage) integration.
- We must not limit our concept of play to children of primary school age and younger. Play is important throughout life but especially up to the age of 16.
- As play is not just about equipment we must also seek out other means to engender play and playfulness.
- Whilst play needs to be undertaken in reasonably controlled environments there is a need to enable challenging and exploratory play (physical, mental and emotional challenge are key elements).
- Because of the huge variety of play needs no single organisation is able to provide these. Partnership working needs to continue into the future developing from the East Devon Play Network.

## **G Action Plan we will now follow**

The Council, LSP and CTLF have now adopted this strategy and action plan.

Our actions to develop the vision and policy principles are to:-

1. Create a communication strategy to raise the profile of play within East Devon and recognise that play should be largely undirected, need not be physical, nor outdoor, and is not primarily about the provision of equipment (initial work by December 2007).
2. Work through East Devon District Council's Funding Officer to help to identify initiatives and grants through which play opportunities in rural villages may be enhanced (initial work by December 2007).
3. Value children and young people's ideas and opinions on their play needs through a programme of ongoing consultation and involving them in decision making (debate at Consultation Group in 2007).
4. As policies and procedures are reviewed to ensure that the needs of children and young people are formally considered (ongoing).
5. Ensure that through design, location, type and maintenance, of local Councils' own facilities that play environments allow children and young people to access the provision and to ensure the balance between children's play need and their need to experience risk is not compromised (review standard by April 2008).
6. Stress the importance of partnership working, including private, voluntary and statutory to work together to get the best for the children and young people of East Devon. Through the Children's Trust Local Forum (initial work by September 2007).
7. Seek delivery of appropriate additional play space and equipment through local planning policies (as identified in the Recreational Area Strategy) (ongoing).
8. That the AONB teams (based at EDDC) seek to identify, support and promote play activity using the natural environment (initial review by December 2007).



9. That the regeneration and new community developments in East Devon recognise the need for a range of play options. Initially within 2007).
10. That indoor creative play is recognised as requirement for development by the partners to East Devon's cultural strategy (to the LSP by December 2007).
11. That EDDC seeks to develop new, and increased uptake of, play and recreational opportunities through its formal contracting arrangements with Leisure East Devon (to review by LED SLA Monitoring Group by April 2008).
12. That EDDC uses the standards in the Supplementary Planning Guidance in its considerations of the future of existing play areas (ongoing).
13. To seek more "flexible use" hard surfaced and grassed sites rather than just play equipment as planning gain (to review within LDF process according to programme).
14. Recognise the needs of people with disabilities and others at risk of exclusion for integrated play within future provision (initial discussion with CTLF in 2007).
15. Seek opportunities to enable access to play and craft materials within East Devon (eg scrap store) (initial consideration within 2007).
16. Recognise the needs of older children for 'play' type activities in our provision across agencies (discuss at LSP within 2007).
17. Highways & Planning departments consider the use of traffic calming and Home Zones within existing and new housing developments within Devon to ensure the safety of children's play (to consider within LFD process in CTLF in 2007).
18. Help to legitimise certain areas of play provision for different age groups and activities through their design (initial discussion in CTLF in 2007).
19. Develop the East Devon Play network (with links to the local forum of the Childrens Trust) as a forum to develop and monitor progress on these action points (within 2007).
20. Continue Young People's consultation both on regeneration areas and also through 'Neighbourhood Assessments, and Youth 'Think Tanks' (ongoing).
21. To promote play opportunities through 'East Devon Unlimited' the Young People's website (July '07).

### **Lottery Money**

A further consultation event (afternoon and evening) was held about the Play Strategy and about the Lottery Play Funding. This generated a number of ideas for use of the Lottery money towards the 'key criteria' for our play strategy. These were all evaluated against our criteria, and the schemes that provided best outcomes were:-

1. Multi-use, all-weather community play surfaces, designed with consultation for use by older children.
2. A mobile provision for rural communities to run schemes with the community and then train and hand the schemes over to volunteers in that community.
3. A 'playtrail' suitable for older children, including those with disabilities, developed around an existing route.

The opportunity was given for every community to 'bid' for one, two or all of such schemes. The responses that came back were in turn prioritised against need (recognised gaps in play area reviews), and practicality.



We will monitor the following indicators annually through the Children's Trust Local Forum:

- Numbers of villages and towns with play facilities
- Numbers of play sites specifically aimed at older children
- Monitor levels of use and community value of play facilities via Town and Parish Councils
- Identify value of planning gain negotiated
- Monitor progress against action plan



## Notes and references

- <sup>i</sup> B Hughes and F King, 1985 as adopted by the National occupational Standards for Playwork
- <sup>ii</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Getting Serious About Play, a review of children's play*, 2004
- <sup>iii</sup> Chief Medical Officer, *At Least Five A Week*, Department of Health, April 2004
- <sup>iv</sup> MORI/Audit Commission, *What needs most improving in your area?* 2001
- <sup>v</sup> SOLC, 2004
- <sup>vi</sup> Green Alliance/Demos, *A Child's Place – why environment matters to children*, 2004
- <sup>vii</sup> P shelly, *Everybody here? Play and Leisure for disabled children and young people*, Contact-a-Family, 2002
- <sup>viii</sup> H Kapasi, *Asian Children Play*, Playtrain, 2001
- <sup>ix</sup> CABE Space, *Preventing anti-social behaviour in public spaces*, policy note 2004
- <sup>x</sup> Play Inclusive (P.inc) Action Research Project; *Inspiring Inclusive Play*, 2004
- <sup>xi</sup> R Whewy and A Millward, *Child's Play: Facilitating play on housing estates*, The Joseph Rowntree Association and Chartered Institute of Housing, 1997
- <sup>xii</sup> *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, Government Strategy for Special Educational Needs, section 2.11





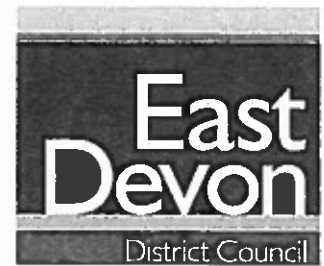


# Agenda Item 11

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10 March 2010

Influencing Decisions Place Survey O&SC 10.03.10



## Place Survey – Residents Influencing Decisions

### Summary

The results of the 2008 Place Survey were considered by the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 September 2009 and members requested that further investigation be undertaken with the respondents to the survey to find out why they felt they could not influence decisions. This was the worst result for the Council for the 18 National Indicators measured by the Place Survey and the only one for which we featured amongst the worst 25% performing district councils in England. Officers conducted a survey of the respondents to this question in the 2008 Place Survey and ran two discussion groups during November and December 2009 to tease out the issues behind the low score. The findings of the further engagement were explored by senior officers who have identified potential improvements for the Committee to consider.

### Recommendation:

That the Committee considers the potential improvements to the way residents feel that they can influence decisions in the local area as far as the District Council is concerned and selects those improvements most likely to bring about positive change.

#### With regard to Planning:

- More information to local people on how Planning works explaining how people can get involved and to what level, including:
  - A structured interview between the media and the Head of Planning and Development Control Manager.
  - Publicise the LDF further, showing its importance as this is the stage where people really can have some influence.
  - Publicise all future Planning Policy consultations much more widely and make them more inclusive as this is where the public and Town and Parish Councils can make a difference.
  - Publicise the Planning Committee and Planning Process leaflets widely and sent to all Town and Parish Councils.
  - Make the online 'Planning Guide to Objectors' easier to find on the website and promote it.
- Have a dedicated conclusion section on Planning reports written in Plain English detailing Planning Officers comments on objections.

#### With regard to Elected Members:

- A5 sized Members contact cards with a photo and their contact details could be produced and placed in village/ town notice-boards and local shops. This would help address public concern that they don't know who their Councillor is or how to contact them.
- Elected Members could explore additional ways of providing feedback on decisions as well as by informing Town and Parish Councils.
- Elected Members could attend more community or Council organised events to meet local people e.g. Countryside's Wet and Wild Weekend. These events already attract the public and so are opportunities for Councillors to meet and engage with members of the public. This approach would also involve no special budgets as the events are already organised and paid for.
- Elected Members could take up the opportunity of writing an online blog.
- Publicise the work of the Standards Committee, and what it is trying to achieve, more widely.
- Collect and promote good practice examples from Elected Members of where they have been able to action issues raised by their constituents and where they have actively sought and acted on feedback.



**a) Reasons for Recommendation**

The Place Survey is a very important Government survey, carried out by every local authority in England. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) expect that the results will be used by all local public service providers, including EDDC, to understand and improve the area they serve. They expect action to be taken on any issues arising in the results of the survey, including any poor results. It is very important that these follow up actions are implemented for the benefit of residents and the Council's reputation, and also for CAA and the developing Engagement and Empowerment Agenda.

**b) Alternative Options**

None.

**c) Risk Considerations**

It is expected that the Council will consider and act upon the Place Survey results and that doing so will avoid the Council being criticised in a future inspection and prevent any compromising of the Council's reputation and budgets.

**d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations**

The recommendation calls for consideration of improvements to the way residents feel that they can influence decisions in the local area as far as the District Council is concerned. The improvements that the Committee selects are likely to have an impact on current practice and possibly on policy but are not expected to have significant budgetary implications.

**e) Date for Review of Decision**

The Place Survey is due to be carried out every two years with the next one scheduled for the autumn of 2010 when it is expected residents will be asked the same questions, including whether they feel that they can influence decisions in the local area. The results of that survey will be reported to members in the spring of 2011.

**1 Main Body of the Report**

**1. Place Survey**

East Devon District Council sent out the Place Survey to a selection of residents in the autumn of 2008 on behalf of national government. The Place Survey involves the use of a questionnaire to capture residents' views, experiences and perceptions, so that public bodies can use the results to decide upon their priorities and solutions for their area.

**2. Influencing decisions in the local area**

One of the questions in the Place Survey was: 'Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions in the local area?'

Only 24.8% of East Devon residents agreed with this statement. This was a comparatively poor result and placed us in the bottom quartile nationally.

% of people that feel they can influence decisions in their local area= 24.8%

Devon Districts	South West Councils	English Councils	Position amongst District Councils	Quartile position amongst Districts	Position amongst SPARSE councils
27.9	27.4	28.9	168 <sup>th</sup>	Bottom Quartile	81 <sup>st</sup>

**3. What can EDDC do to improve this?**

This result, amongst others, was reported to Communities Overview and Scrutiny on 16 September 2009. At this meeting Elected Members requested that further investigation be undertaken with the respondents to the survey to find out why they felt they could not influence



decisions. This investigation has now been completed and a more detailed summary of the method and results is attached.

#### **4. Methodology**

We went back to the respondents from the survey and asked them to tell us why they felt unable to influence decisions, either by attending one of two discussion groups, or by completing the short questionnaire we sent out to them.

#### **5. The findings of further engagement**

The same issues arose in both of the discussion groups and the paper based questionnaires. The three main findings are set out below.

##### **5.1 By far the main reason that residents did not feel they could influence decisions in their local area was due to planning decisions being made with disregard to what the residents and Town and Parish Councils want or recommend.**

27 of the 43 residents (63%) that commented on the paper based form talked about being able to have no influence on Planning, as did very nearly all the people attending the focus groups. In the focus groups it was by far the most commonly mentioned issue taking up at least half the time spent in discussions in each focus group, and most people had several examples of where they and their Town/ Parish Councils had not been able to influence Planning decisions in their local area. This is by far the most important factor affecting how able residents feel to influence decisions. Residents also wanted information and feedback on planning decisions and more regular enforcement of planning restrictions.

##### **5.2 Residents felt that most Councillors do not listen to or act upon the views of their electorate. They also felt Councillors did not give enough information or feedback to their residents.**

In the focus groups nearly all participants mentioned Councillors, two stated that they had very good Councillors and this made them feel a lot more able to influence decisions. The others felt that Councillors didn't appear to listen to or act upon the views of their electorate and didn't feel they give their electorate feedback or information.

10 of the 43 residents (23%) that commented on the paper based forms stated that Councillors made them unable to influence decisions. They felt that Councillors acted in their own self-interests or the interests of their Party, and not the interests of their own electorate. They felt Councillors needed to get back in touch with and act upon the views of their residents and Town and Parish Councils.

##### **5.3 Residents also felt that when they gave views on other issues their views were not acted upon. (Other than Planning.)**

In the focus groups residents felt that when they gave their views or complained/ requested various services and suggested plans for the future of their areas, what they said was often ignored. There was also a feeling that even if there were valid reasons as to why what they said could not be acted upon, this was never fed back to the people that commented or complained. Several of the participants felt that there was no point in trying to influence decisions as the decisions had already been made.

13 of the 43 residents (30%) that commented on the paper based forms felt that in general what they say is ignored by the Council, and in some cases not even responded to. They felt that the Council has a disregard for what people want and even if residents are consulted their views are not acted upon.

#### **6. Potential Improvements**

Meetings were held with Directors/Senior Officers to discuss how we could improve on the top two findings as set out in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2.

##### **6.1 By far the main reason that residents did not feel they could influence decisions in their local area was due to planning decisions being made with disregard to what the residents and Town and Parish Councils want or recommend.**

The issues concerned with this finding were explored with Senior Officers and the main points of discussion, current practice and potential improvements are detailed below.



### **The main points raised were:**

- Planning is a balancing act, many issues need to be taken into account including a wide variety of often conflicting local views.
- Planning is quasi-judicial and EDDC has to take into account national and regional Planning Law and Guidance.
- The Planning process allows everyone to have their say but the decision making process is more constrained. Decisions are bound up with policies dictated by the Local Plan/ Local Development Framework (LDF) which is where the true engagement process lies, along with Village Design Documents and Parish Plans.
- Planning decisions are not taken dependent upon the volume of objections, there have to be specific material planning objections for the comments to be taken into account. It is not simply a matter of counting the number of objections or supporters.
- There is a need to appreciate local distinctiveness when Planning decisions are made but it is dependent upon whether this is possible under national Planning legislation/guidance.

### **What is already happening:**

- All planning applications, decisions and reports are scanned in and put on the Planning Online website for public viewing.
- Planning are in the process of simplifying the website of Planning Online, including better web links.
- The online Planning system allows people to register interest in their street, village, town and they will receive alerts on any applications received from these areas. If they comment on an application they will receive alerts on the progress of the application and the final decision.
- A leaflet on how Planning Committees work has been drafted and another one is planned on how the Planning process works.
- We already have one of the best Planning Websites in the UK, which key objectors were invited in to help us design.
- Members have had training in the constraints they face when making planning decisions.
- We have already been out to Town and Parish Councils to educate them on how the Planning process works and how to use the online Planning system.
- Statistics show that we have actually disagreed with Town and Parish Councils on very few planning applications.
- When there is public speaking the public speakers are given printed information about how to object and what will be done with their comments.
- If someone objects to a planning application and that application goes forward for decision to the Development Management Committee, that person will be advised of the date and time and how they can take part in that process.

### **Potential improvements:**

- More information to local people on how Planning works explaining how people can get involved and to what level, including:
  - A structured interview between the media and the Head of Planning and Development Control Manager.
  - Publicise the LDF further, showing it's importance as this is the stage where people really can have some influence.
  - Publicise all future Planning Policy consultations much more widely and make them more inclusive as this is where the public and Town and Parish Councils can make a difference.
  - Publicise the Planning Committee and Planning Process leaflets widely and sent to all Town and Parish Councils.
  - Make the online 'Planning Guide to Objectors' easier to find on the website and promote it.
- Have a dedicated conclusion section on Planning reports written in Plain English detailing Planning Officers comments on objections.





## **6.2 Residents felt that most Councillors do not listen to or act upon the views of their electorate. They also felt Councillors did not give enough information or feedback to their residents.**

The issues concerned with this finding were explored with Senior Officers and the main points of discussion, current practice and potential improvements are detailed below.

### **The main points raised were:**

- There is a public perception that Councillors do not listen to or act upon the views of their electorate.
- 'Meet Your Councillors' surgeries have been trialled nationally and generally do not work unless in response to a key local (particularly controversial) issue or are part of a wider event.
- Some Councillors engage well with their communities and attend local council meetings – but not all Councillors do this.
- Councillors have to balance the wants and needs of their community with all sorts of other issues e.g. legislation.

### **What is already happening:**

- A formal induction/welcome process is organised for newly elected councillors.
- Informal advice and opportunities for engaging with their community are created by Democratic Services and Service Heads.
- Community Involvement/how to increase community engagement was discussed at the Member Development Working Party on 1 March.
- Democratic Services and elected Members pick up on issues raised at events and try to progress them, e.g. Local Democracy Week at Sidmouth College.
- Some Elected Members take part in Grumble Walks with Streetscene. These involve walking round an area/neighbourhood, talking to residents and identifying how to address issues raised.
- Elected Members feedback to Town and Parish Councils on decisions.
- Each Elected Member has the opportunity through the Council's ICT systems to write an online blog. This would help the public to understand the work and roles of Councillors and provide a communication channel. So far no Councillor has committed to a blog through the Council's systems.
- There are some very good practice examples of what East Devon Councillors are already doing.
- The Standards Committee produces a quarterly up-date article for the Knowledge to help the public understand its purpose and the issues that it deals with.
- The new Licensing Act arrangements enable residents living near licensing applications to track them on the Council's website. They can then make representations to the Committee. Feedback from those who attend the Committee to make representations suggest this has been very well received by residents.

### **Potential improvements:**

- A5 sized Members contact cards with a photo and their contact details could be produced and placed in village/ town notice-boards and local shops. This would help address public concern that they don't know who their Councillor is or how to contact them.
- Elected Members could explore additional ways of providing feedback on decisions as well as by informing Town and Parish Councils.
- Elected Members could attend more community or Council organised events to meet local people e.g. Countryside's Wet and Wild Weekend. These events already attract the public and so are opportunities for Councillors to meet and engage with members of the public. This approach would also involve no special budgets as the events are already organised and paid for.
- Elected Members could take up the opportunity of writing an online blog.
- Publicise the work of the Standards Committee, and what it is trying to achieve, more widely.



- Collect and promote good practice examples from Elected Members of where they have been able to action issues raised by their constituents and where they have actively sought and acted on feedback.

### **7. Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Committee considers the potential improvements to the way residents feel that they can influence decisions in the local area as far as the District Council is concerned and selects those improvements most likely to bring about positive change.

### **Legal Implications**

The duty to promote democracy will shortly be a statutory duty on local authorities to promote understanding of local governance systems and opportunities for members of the public to be involved. This will include promoting understanding of the local authority's own functions and how local people may get involved and influence its decision-making arrangements, as well as those of its partnerships.

The duty extends to promoting public understanding of the role of councillors and how to become one.

It will also include a duty to promote understanding of the functions and democratic arrangements of connected public bodies ('connected authorities') where local people can get involved, as well as explaining about specific civic roles, such as lay justices, and the opportunities to take them up.

This duty is contained in Section 1 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, in response to the Councillors Commission Report 'Representing the Future'. The specific activities undertaken to meet these duties will largely be at the discretion of local authorities but will include publishing information about local democracy. Councils will need to make reasonable adjustments to ensure information is made available in accessible formats in accordance with equalities legislation. Statutory guidance will link the duties relating to the promotion of democracy strongly with equalities duties, and best practice guidance will suggest a range of methods and media such as websites, leaflets and posters, and targeted work with schools. Mentoring schemes, shadowing, work with community groups, and open days targeting under-represented groups are likely to be encouraged.

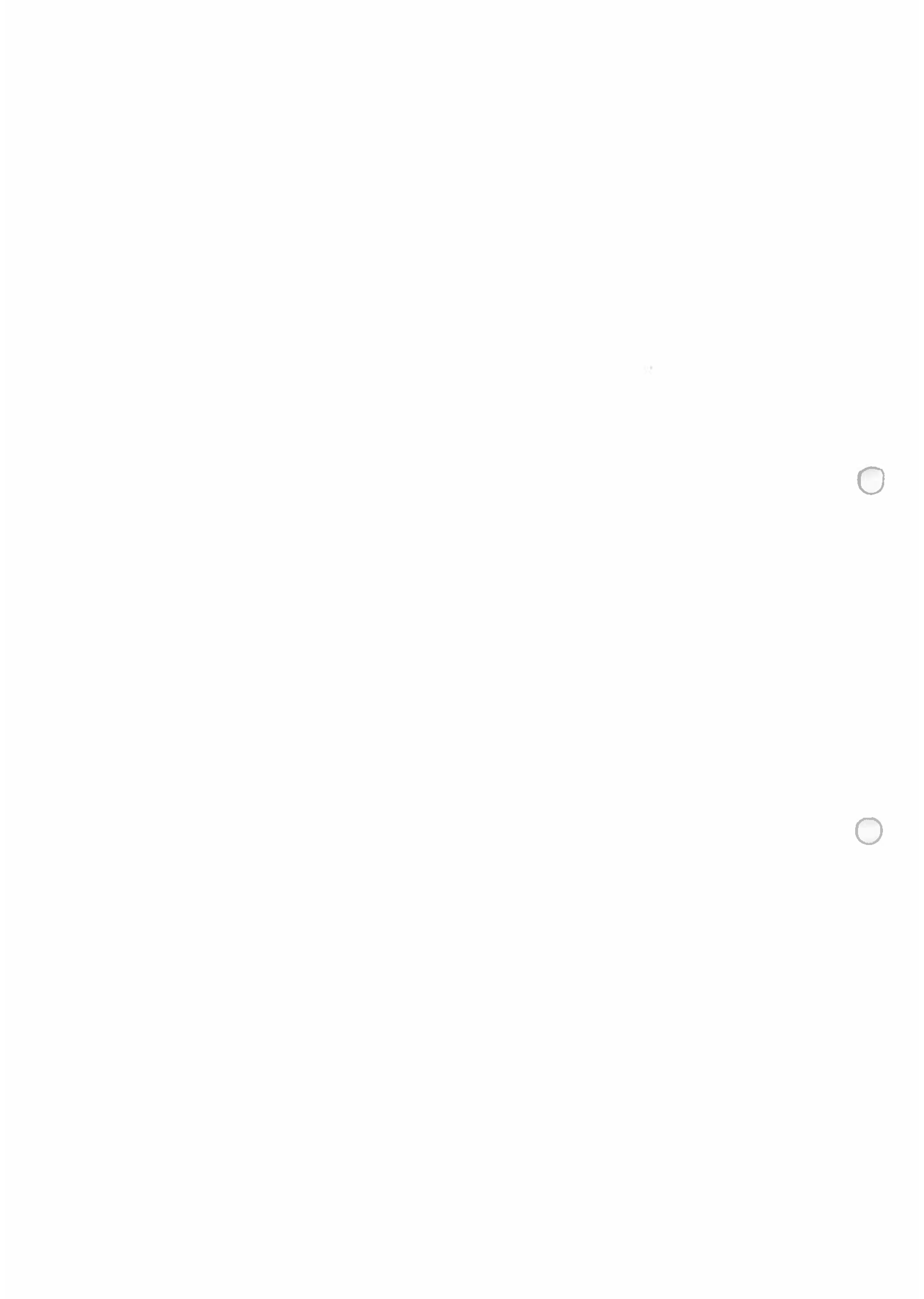
### **Financial Implications**

In agreeing the recommendations the committee must ensure that the costs associated with them, can be met from existing budgets

### **Consultation on Reports to the Executive**

### **Background Papers**

One appendix follows this report which sets out details of the further engagement undertaken and the findings.



## **The Council's core aspirations for rural communities**

EDDC may adopt the following principles for the District which are largely drawn from the Rural Services Network Manifesto. EDDC will use these in formulating its own future policies and lobbying others.

### **General**

- A set of national minimum universal service and infrastructure obligations for all people whether living in rural or urban settlements. This will include social and health care facilities as well as community hubs such as village halls and/or churches.
- Recognition that real rural deprivation can be masked by the methods used to assess multiple deprived areas.
- Recognition that rural life is not just dispersed urban living. Rural living is distinct.
- A need for rural proofing of policies (local and national).  
Valuing difference and sense of place of rural locations.
- A need for government to meet the 'rural premium costs' associated with servicing rural areas.
- Sustainable construction.

### **Economy**

- National schemes to support key rural shops and pubs and the range of services (including mailing and banking) that they offer.
- Enabling local authorities to take positive action to procure locally.
- Valuing the particular type of contribution made by rural enterprises to the economy, as distinct from the urban contribution.
- Develop, value and support land based skills and environmental business.
- Recognition of food security issues and the need to protect food-growing opportunities.

### **Digital communities**

- Rural communities not to be bypassed (speed, timetable, bandwidth reliability) by the roll-out of future proofed digital infrastructure.
- Internet hubs in communal buildings and in schools.
- Mobile phone reception.

### **Transport**

- Concessionary fares for rail where this provides better access to urban centres.
- Central funding of community transport
- Demand responsive public transport
- Removal of fixed rates of remuneration for community transport issues.
- Everyone within 10 minutes walk of a bus stop serving a regular service.
- Retention, development, and maintenance of a footpath network.

### **Schools**

- No school closures except on education or safety grounds.  
Alternative models of managing schools as an alternative to closure (e.g. confederation)
- Schools to be available for community use outside school hours.
- Access to Children's services



### **Affordable housing**

- Parish Councils to have clear responsibilities to support and promote provision of affordable housing to meet established need.
- Financial support to a rural housing enabler.
- HCA need to be flexible in their formulae for affordable housing in rural areas where abnormal development costs are faced.  
Utility providers to be more accountable for delays to rural housing.  
Government pressure on lending institutions to fund affordable rural housing options.  
The need for affordable rental housing not to be bypassed.

### **Health & Social Care**

- No rural hospital closures except on safety grounds. A wide range of services to be retained.
- National funding of air ambulances.  
Innovation in health and care provision, designed specifically for rural locations.  
Multi-use medical/pharmacy centres in rural locations.  
Effective GP out of hours call system for rural visits for those with no private transport option.  
Outreach care into rural areas also.  
Health appointments to be bookable at times suitable for access by rural residents.

### **Rural fuel poverty**

- Innovative and appropriate insulation for rural homes through national grant schemes.
- Sustainable energy options appropriate to rural settings.

### **Flooding**

- Separate funding for rural flood defence and an end to "one size fits all" cost benefit analysis.

### **Emergency Services**

- Equality for emergency response times.

Peter Jeffs  
Corporate Director  
February 2010





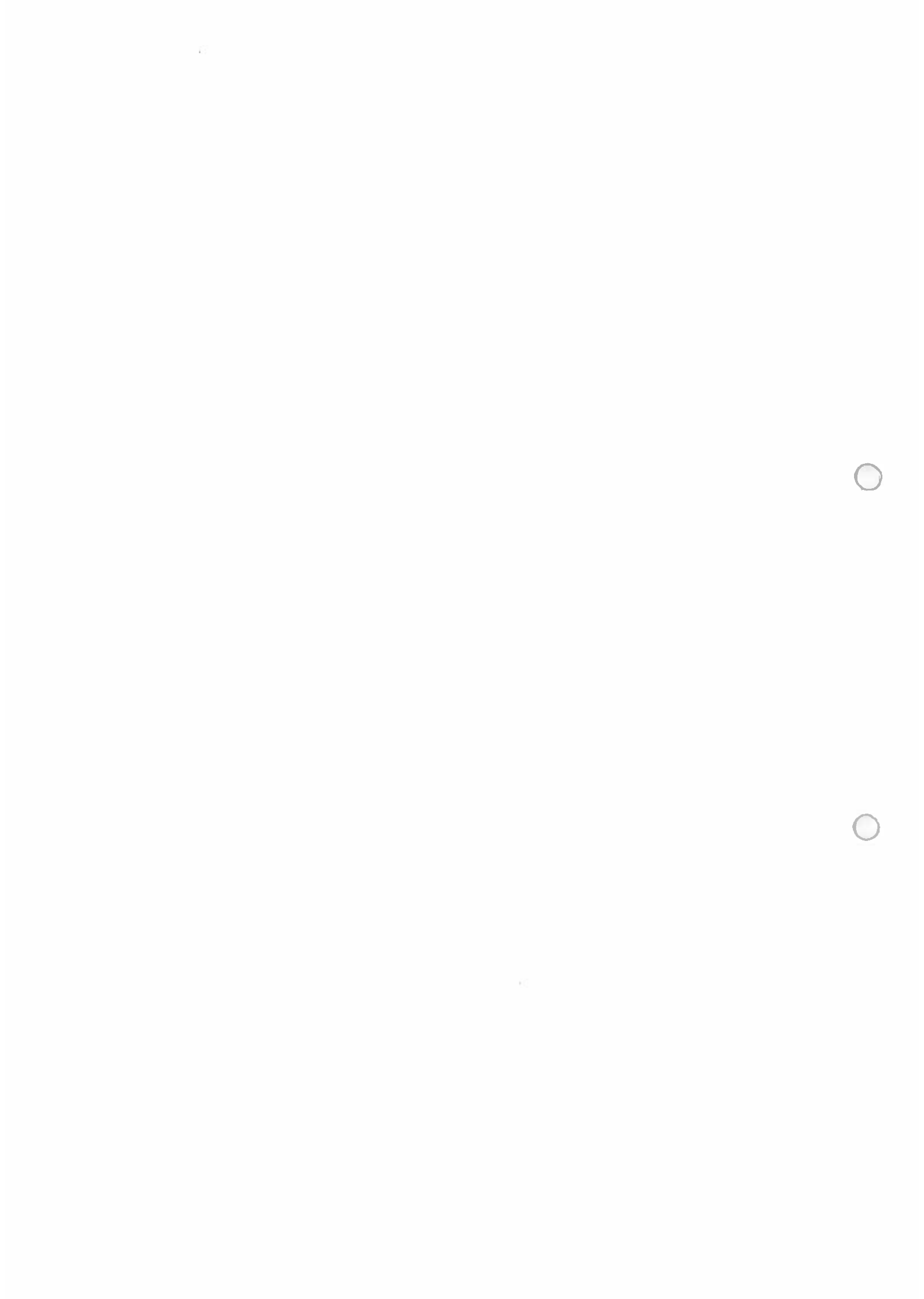
**Affordable housing ideas referred from Communities Overview Scrutiny Committee 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010 –**

**Actions agreed following Communities Think Tank held 17 February 2010**

	Item raised	Actions/thoughts	Action to take
<b>1</b>	<b>General Planning</b>		
1.1	Link a series of rural sites together – initial risks/costs carried by Council. Then offer to RSLs	Shouldn't be just rural sites. Need a pot of money for initial work on potential sites. RSLs at WHSP supported idea of linking sites together.	A development 'pot of money' would make sense and needs to be considered corporately. *
1.2	Why do needs assessments? We know there's a need. Assessments take time.	Arrangement with CCD only funds about 4/5 assessments per year. Strategy team investigating whether information held on Housing Registers etc would be sufficient to show need. What data will be available from Devon Home Choice?	Check whether Planning policy would tolerate a lower standard of "general evidence". *
1.3	Ensure community buys into the process – need strong community leaders	Need to work with town and parish councils – possibly hold 'summit' for them, or attend their meetings to spread knowledge, hear concerns etc	Part of LDF process is picking this up – work with clusters of villages.
1.4	New rural position statement – stop gap between low land values and result of SHLAA. Sites need to be viable.	Situation forms part of LDF.	Achieved. Further work required for LDF.
<b>2</b>	<b>Rural Issues</b>		
2.1	Internal investment in experience/staff to speed up process	Mostly we are working through 'third parties'.	A matter for Rationalisation Board.
2.2	Interim rural departure policy – sustainable?	Rural position statement already in place.	Achieved (interim policy pending LDF).
2.3	Older people – schemes often for families – need to consider retirement issues and better incentives to downsize	May mean sites don't meet density requirements if building bungalows etc. Need to talk to local community. TALCP undertaking work on downsizing incentive scheme. Also need to consider outcome of decommissioning exercise and what use houses/land that are decommissioned can be put to	Not accepted, contrary to Housing Market Assessment. Recognise need for downsizing work (in hand via TALCP), 'Extra Care' Homes are required.
2.4	Bottlenecks – why do schemes take so long? Rural schemes can take up to 5 years to deliver	New interim policy may speed things up	Excellent Rural; Housing Enabler guidance on streamlining is now available. Suggest a workshop for Members. *
<b>3</b>	<b>Housing &amp; Communities</b>		



	<b>Item raised</b>	<b>Actions/thoughts</b>	<b>Action to take</b>
3.1	Exploring non traditional methods of construction	Is Council prepared to subsidise this? Strategy Team to do more research on what has taken place elsewhere etc	Agree the principles but this is longer term as the current economic climate is not conducive to lending on such property.
3.2	Acquiring ready built properties	Tried and need to continue – but lack of money	Some work completed. Costs likely to be prohibitive compared to rent.
3.3	CPO – sites with planning permission not yet implemented		CPO's are a last resort, and high cost. No immediate need.
3.4	Flexibility of policies – more time for negotiating individual sites	Planning are flexible	Already in hand.
3.5	Community Infrastructure Levy waived for RSLs	Won't apply immediately to RSLs – consider at a later date	CIL not yet in place. Longer term matter
3.6	Seed funding – LA to put money into partners to do preliminary investigation work	Similar to 1.1 as pot of money required	See response to 1.1
3.7	Private sector – better integration – empty homes into use	CPOs? See 3.4 above	See 4.1 below
3.8	Government to properly fund the cost of affordable housing	Need to lobby government	Lobbying government already on returning their annual levy to use for affordable housing.
<b>4</b>	<b>Private Sector Housing &amp; Empty Homes</b>		
4.1	Empty homes – effectively bring back. Concern that not enough is being done. Council works with EHA – need more resources in ED – large potential pool	To be taken up by Environmental Health. Could be picked up by their policies	CPO's (see 3.3) – Change of use of key village facilities needs to be considered in LDF, Empty Homes - already directly being contacted (if long term empty). Management controls are available in extreme cases but there is a significant cost.  *
4.2	CPOs		
4.3	Speed with which process is dealt with – need to be more aggressive		
4.4	How can private sector help meet need – empty pubs etc – need to be more flexible/proactive		
<b>5</b>	<b>Planning Policy</b>		
5.1	Housing need in all areas across district		This is recognised and being addressed.
5.2	Scrap planning policy	No. This is a legal requirement	Not legally possible. LDF is opportunity for change.
<b>6</b>	<b>Key points – blue sky</b>		



	thinking session		
	Item raised	Actions/thoughts	Action to take
6.1	Why does affordable housing need to be built to a higher standard than open market housing?	To access grant funding. If council build directly without using grant funding doesn't need to be to that standard	This is only a condition of funding. Brownfield redevelopment an especial financial problem.
6.2	Need to address 'nimby'/'banana' attitudes – strong messages need to go out to communities	See 1.4	Continue contact with Parishes.
6.3	Need to address under-occupation in council housing. Can we have clause in secure tenancy agreement? Improve the incentives offered?	See 2.5 above Strategy Team to investigate further whether secure tenancy agreement can be used in this way. No response received to call on Housemark.	See 2.3 re downsizing – already being addressed. (Does not increase housing stock or rental income however).
6.4	Increase the tax on 2nd and 3rd homes – probably enough housing in Devon but much not properly used	Strategy Team to research tax on 2nd and 3rd homes	Already maximised. (90% is legal maximum)
6.5	Council keen to work with anyone putting in bids for funding from HCA	Need to get the message out to all communities	Message to be promoted.
6.6	Difference between base rate and mortgage rates inequitable – need to raise with government		Being raised by local MP.
6.7	ED low wage economy – some people in full time work on benefits	Statement links to other work	Issue recognised and being addressed generally.
6.8	Need a can do approach – many developments declined initially and only come through on appeal	Need to lose the policy driven mind set – adopt a 'how can we deliver affordable housing here?' attitude	Virtual Affordable Housing team established to tackle this.

\*Actions now to be taken



## Communities Overview and Scrutiny Forward Plan 2009/10

Month	Topic	Lead
16 June 2010	<b>Children and Young People</b> Continued debate	
8 September 2010	Presentation from Member Champion for Culture Update from Member Champion for Equality	
20 October 2010		
12 January 2011		
16 February 2011		

### Suggestions for Future topics:

- Children and Young People (Corporate Strategy)
- Progress on Home Safeguard budgets
- Parish Plans
- Outcome from Leaders' Service Transformation Group
- Engaging with the Community
- Childhood and Adolescent Obesity
- Presentation from Community Groups funded by EDDC
- Presentations from Member Champions – what work is being done for communities and how can the Council assist further?:
  - Cultural Champion
  - Post Offices Champion
  - Community Safety Champion
  - Sustainability Champion

