

## **STATEMENT OF INTENT**

This administration has now been in office for six of the most turbulent months in the history of local government. Our officers have risen to the occasion splendidly and may yet have to do so for some time to come. I would like to thank both them and members of all allegiances who have gone above and beyond this year.

Despite this challenge, the administration has already executed significant moves both to build on its legacy and to re-direct the approach of the council. In order to take back control of our planning processes, we have withdrawn from the GESP and replaced that with a full engagement with other district and county partners in a non-statutory joint infrastructure plan.

In Exmouth, where the history of the seafront development has been troubled, we are encouraging a more public, participatory approach to the extraordinary natural resource of the town's coast. We are also determined to help the people and members from Cranbrook to get their community moving forward to completion, and together with Exmouth and drafting the new Local Plan this will be a central plank of our work.

Throughout these and other priorities we will seek to improve our environmental standards and the transparency of democratic involvement as core priorities.

Economic regeneration to a green and local agenda will be critical with widespread unemployment on the horizon, and towns such as Axminster will also become the focus of efforts to build growth fit for the 2020s. As we move out of this first extraordinary six months, we will be able to work more closely with members outside of our partnership group and all ideas will be heard. I am especially interested in how we might boost our tourism offer and economy here in the Jurassic Coast hinterland, and how we roll out truly attainable homes, both drawing down on resources from the government's promised green growth funds.

All this said, it is important to remember just how much of the council's work for the people of East Devon ticks over via the daily hard graft of its employees. Above all we wish the council to be a good-humoured and empathetic environment for both the staff and elected members, all of whom give so much of their lives to the common good.

As we bridge between the past and the future, we are now issuing this interim Statement of Intent, which will inform the next six months of developing a full Council Plan 2021-23, and we look forward to many discussions in the coming months.

**Paul Arnott**

**Leader**

### **Introduction**

The Covid 19 pandemic has presented a huge challenge to the district of east Devon and since March 2020 the Council has focused on responding to the emergency. We have delivered and helped facilitate a wide range of support to our most vulnerable during this difficult time.

As we look towards a successful vaccination programme in 2021, we will focus our efforts on delivering the Council's new priorities and we will do this through preparing a new and inclusive Council Plan representing a one team approach

Our priorities are informed by a greater respect for the environment through a recognition of a climate change emergency together with a belief that there should be decent homes and decent jobs for all. Fundamentally the Council's services must deliver what matters to our residents and businesses in East Devon. We will be a Council that cares and delivers on its commitments. The Council will be properly accountable, transparent and better representative of our diverse communities. Where necessary we will lobby government for changes in policy and funding so we can implement our priorities.

Our intention is to leave a positive legacy and this Statement of Intent confirms our commitment.

### **Vision**

Our vision is **to achieve a positive difference to residents' lives and our environment in East Devon** and this vision is integral to this Statement and will inform our Council Plan.

We believe that EDDC can achieve this through four key themes:

(1) **A Greener East Devon**, which prioritises climate change and our natural environment ([Appendix 1](#))

(2) **Better Homes and Communities for all** with a priority on the importance of good quality, affordable housing suitable in size and location. Poverty caused by the loss of employment, illness or disability is an increasing issue and will be a high priority for EDDC to tackle through all means available to us. ([Appendix 2](#))

(3) **A Resilient Economy** bringing prosperity to the district notwithstanding the current challenging circumstances ([Appendix 3](#))

(4) **Services that matter to all of us** ([Appendix 4](#))

### **Values**

The way we will deliver a positive difference to residents' lives, and our environment will be influenced by our values. These include seeking continuous improvement of our high performing council, listening to and learning from our residents and caring, and adapting as a council. Our defining values are transparency, equity, fairness, accountability and inclusivity as outlined in [Appendix 5](#).

### **Sound Finances**

Councils in England face acute financial challenges.

Central Government financial support for Councils had been reducing pre Covid-19. That had forced many down the path of purchasing commercial properties in attempts to balance the books and hopefully still provide the same level of service. For those authorities that invested heavily in commercial property by borrowing via Public Works Loans in the hope that the rental yield would cover the loan costs and realise a profit to pay for services have now received a wake-up call over the last 9 months as rental yields have plummeted. In some cases this has resulted in the local authority being banned from any new expenditure with the exception of statutory services.

East Devon District Council has not had a commercial exposure to this extent, but despite the Central Government assistance given as a direct result of Covid-19 we are still faced with challenges to balance the books for the foreseeable future. Planning to address this has started, but the fact remains that we still need to look at ways of increasing our income where possible and at the same time reduce costs so as to be able to retain the same services as currently.

A number of these services are statutory e.g. recycling and waste collection. Other services are discretionary, but no less valued by all of us such as public toilets and parks. Looking ahead the challenge is getting the balance right for the costs to residents and businesses and the benefits provided in terms of health and wellbeing whilst maintaining and improving the district as an area that attracts thousands of visitors every year as a tourism destination.

### **A Planned Approach**

Together with sound finances, we need sound plans to help all understand where we are going and what we plan to do. The Council has many plans covering the wide variety of activities that is engaged in. As a priority we will review our Local Plan so that we have local control over what happens in our district. We will also update and review our Climate Change Strategy, our Housing Strategy, the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, our Green Space Plan, our Cultural Plan, and our Public Health Strategy. As time permits we will also assess the need for new strategies – such as a leisure strategy.

### **Timetable**

We have set out in [Appendix 6](#) a timetable for taking forward this Statement of Intent and fully developing our themes and priorities into an inclusive and comprehensive Council Plan. The full impact of the pandemic has yet to be seen and therefore it is right that we take a bit longer to make sure that all can have their say. In particular we have added a period of 2 months to our normal timetable so that all Councillors can be fully involved in the preparation of our new Plan. We will also look to better engage the public and would welcome views and ideas about how best to do this. When adopted the new Council Plan will guide the Council through to May 2023. This is when the next set of elections to the Council are scheduled to take place.

## **Appendix 1 - Greener East Devon**

In 2019 EDDC made a commitment to become carbon neutral by 2040 which we intend to deliver through the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

The Action Plan addresses the following key priorities/themes:

- Enhancing and improving our Natural Environment
- Continuing to deliver excellent recycling and waste rates
- Reducing carbon emissions
- Reducing flooding and the impact of climate change by supporting affected communities
- Greener Transport and infrastructure measures
- Planning Greener Developments
- Communication and Influencing Behaviour

Our objective is to become a carbon neutral council within a low carbon economy and lifestyle, reflected in our travel, homes, businesses, visitor experiences and communities.

COVID 19 has resulted in change to work and lifestyle patterns in the district. We need to explore and understand the impact of new ways of doing things, such as working from home and the impact of online meetings on carbon emissions.

We recognise the importance of working with others on this journey; we will work with partners and contractors, town and parish councils, businesses, visitors and community groups to support them in reducing their carbon footprint.

Greener East Devon for us also means placing the highest emphasis on the natural capital of our stunning environment – coast and countryside - and the value and importance of biodiversity within it. As custodians for future generations, preserving and enhancing our natural environment is key.

We want to provide a healthier, more beautiful natural environment that inspires, educates and involves residents who live in and visit East Devon.

This commitment to Greener East Devon comes at a price. It needs to be appropriately funded and resourced. However, we believe this to be essential for the future of our District.

**We intend to achieve a Greener East Devon by:**

### **Carbon Reduction**

- Delivering a coherent strategy towards net carbon neutral development, including supporting zero carbon development at Cranbrook
- Fulfilling the actions and commitments in our Climate Change strategy aimed at reducing the Council's carbon footprint and that of our partners, contractors, businesses, communities residents and visitors
- Investigating opportunities for renewable energy investment using council assets and promoting local green energy schemes
- Installing electric car charging points on EDDC land, new housing developments and shopping areas.
- Refreshing the Green Travel Plan and the decarbonisation of travel, including the electrification of our own white vehicle fleet

## Recycling and Waste

- Playing a leadership role within the District in implementing green initiatives and harnessing public participation through awareness campaigns.
- Continuously (a) increasing recycling rates and reduction of residual waste tonnages to be amongst the highest recyclers nationally and the lowest council in England for residual waste disposal per household and working with public participation to achieve this; and (b) also, continuing the promotion of the green waste collection service and home composting.
- Encouraging more on-street recycling
- Implementing plastic reduction measures across all council activities, on all council assets and all council funded entities, including LED

## Country, Coastal and Natural Environment

- Promoting the implementation of the green space plan by putting green infrastructure considerations before development to achieve environmentally sustainable development
- Review the Government's proposals to the suggested changes to the AONBS and the implications of a proposed Dorset/East Devon National Park; and in conjunction with Natural England to consider extending AONB boundaries
- Implementation of Environment Act duties for Local Planning Authorities – to include biodiversity net gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Implementing other Environment Act duties across the council to include - changes to recycling systems to see waste as a resource, driving the circular economy, establishing nature recovery networks and the ability to address air quality
- Protecting and enhancing our local ecology through the development and implementation of an ecology and biodiversity strategy, which would include re-wilding policies, enhancement policies, tree protection, retention and planting policies, wild meadows, hedgerow policies and bee corridors
- Promoting the planting of new trees and protecting the existing treescape across the district, promoting best practice on tree management Climate change actions to include tree planting scheme and creation of community woodlands and creation of additional inter tidal habitat on the Seaton Wetlands as a carbon sequestration project
- Providing greater resources for our green spaces as well as creation of new community green spaces and nature reserves following COVID19 and the value and importance of these spaces for our residents' health and wellbeing
- Ensuring robust provisions in the new local plan to our climate change and ecological commitments
- Working with our residents, local groups, and parish and town councils to promote green initiatives at the most local level
- Developing and implementing beach management plans and flood defence schemes to facilitate long term management of the schemes, working with communities, partners and other agencies
- Reviewing our public toilet requirements including their location to ensure they are fit for purpose
- Encouraging community and voluntary groups to support their local areas and to assist them in the developing an action plan to achieve community resilience
- Reviewing the playing pitch strategy and ensuring the protection of playing fields
- Encouraging an approach to educate and enforce high standards of food, air, land and water safety, through environmental health regulation

## **Appendix 2 - Better Homes and Communities for All**

We want to ensure better build quality of new homes, more affordable and social housing and a good standard of maintenance to ensure homes are fit for purpose across all sectors. To us, delivering better homes is about so much more than bricks and mortar; it is about using our resources and influence to keep people healthy and safe. It is about the quality of the setting of the homes, whether that is town, village or countryside and the amenities, the open space and infrastructure that serve the houses and contribute to the wellbeing of residents.

We believe that as the planning authority we have a crucial role to play in delivering better quality homes, ensuring the right homes in the right places and enforcing high build standards. Through our enabling activities we intend to drive the delivery of much needed social and affordable housing. We will be pressing harder than ever for the ending of the Right to Buy which deprives the council of crucial housing stock.

As a council we also wish to reduce poverty and deprivation and intend to use our resources to achieve this.

### **We intend to deliver on our commitment on Better Homes and Communities for All by:**

Increasing the supply of quality social and affordable housing. We will also provide housing options for those in housing need through our own housing revenue account and working with our partner housing associations (Registered Providers). We also intend to:

- Deliver on the commitments in our Housing Strategy and Housing Service Plan
- Implement our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to assist those in greatest housing need
- Work with communities to develop community-led housing schemes
- Work towards the adoption of a new local plan at the earliest opportunity
- We will review the purpose of our Housing Company to ensure that it is focused on our ambitions, specifically the delivery of a council build and acquisition programme
- Deliver plans to decarbonise housing consistent with our climate change ambitions
- Ensure that Council homes are well managed, in good repair, fit for purpose and safe for our tenants
- Obtain high performance and value for money from our Integrated Asset Management contract for repairs and maintenance, and continue to invest in tenants homes guided by stock condition data
- Engage with and involve tenants in decision affecting their homes
- Advise on and enforce standards in the private sector to attain suitable management and safety standards, including affordable warmth, houses in multiple occupation, mobile homes and private water supplies
- Promote Home Safeguard services and develop our supported housing offer
- Lobby central government on ceasing the “right to buy” and allowing greater flexibility in spending Right to Buy receipts
- Ensure that developers meet their obligations with regards to social and affordable housing and ensuring that the new local plan contains robust policy and provisions to ensure this.
- Create and implement a poverty strategy to reduce hardship and inequality in the district
- Implement the actions in the Public Health Strategy designed to improve public health, wellbeing, and the quality of life of our residents
- Promote community well-being programmes through a culture and activities offer, led by THG, Seaton Wetlands, Wild East Devon, and expand our community development activities

- Review the way we support community and voluntary groups, and provide community funding to ensure that it is provided in the most effective way
- Commit to keep in place EDDC's Covid 19 community support hub to protect the most vulnerable for as long as necessary
- Empowering communities to help themselves through a programme of devolution of assets and responsibilities and through fast access to s106 monies
- Reviewing our relationship with LED and the provision of leisure facilities and activities to meet the needs of residents across all communities
- Promoting health & wellbeing, including healthy lifestyles, physical activity, and good mental health
- Delivering a wide range of events and activities on our land consistent with our Culture Plan and developing an Events Strategy
- Developing of a new cultural quarter in Exmouth as part of the seafront regeneration programme that brings the creative arts into the vision for a new tourism offer for the town
- Ensuring that our services and facilities are Covid secure
- Promoting the links between arts and culture and climate change through the Creative Cabin and other initiatives

### **Appendix 3 – A Resilient Economy**

COVID 19 has had a significant and detrimental impact on the economy of East Devon. Before the pandemic the District was in almost full employment. Now, one third of our employees have been furloughed with unemployment set to increase to between 9.5% to 14.5% by the end of 2020. During the first half of 2020, over 1000 jobs were lost due to companies going into administration or relocating, including the collapse of Flybe. Many jobs that have been lost have been high value and skilled engineering roles but just as many are in the lower paid sectors of our local economy.

It is our overriding priority to strive for a resilient economy in order to promote prosperity and reduce hardship within the District. Not only will we seek to increase the levels of employment, but we will also seek to improve the quality of employment and raise wages levels across East Devon

We recognise the importance of working as a part of Team Devon in order to drive recovery for the East Devon economy. We will continue to promote the development of the Enterprise Zone as key to the prosperity of our district.

#### **We will work towards a resilient district-wide economy by:**

- Working with our partners to support business response and recovery to Covid
- Delivering the Enterprise Zone programme, using ring fenced income to invest in deliverable, innovative and socially-responsible projects that overcome socio-economic barriers, and create economic catalysts and opportunities.
- Positive and targeted regeneration of our High Streets and Town centres via an array of centrally, and locally, funded initiatives, both in a response to Covid but also to address long-standing economic pressures and consequences to changing consumer behaviour.
- Promotion of the rural economy including sustainable and “Green” tourism, responsible agriculture and training opportunities for younger residents. Focus on improvements in rural connectivity and broadband access to ensure that our rural communities are not left behind as work patterns and behaviours rapidly evolve.
- Completing the already-agreed regeneration projects within our district [Exmouth and Axminster] and delivering a vibrant, sustainable and future-proof Cranbrook town centre; one which meets the needs of today’s residents and those settling here in the next 10-20 years and takes into account the changes referred to above.
- Creating opportunities for high-skilled and better paid jobs and opportunities across the district whilst also improving opportunities for those in lower-paid employment. Creating and providing the means to deliver innovative and exceptional training and skills access.
- Working with partners throughout Devon, the South West and at Westminster to improve our economy and to widely promote East Devon as the natural home of business in the SW to ensure that the District receives the maximum benefit from national regional and sub-regional programs; working closely with our MP’s in cooperation, not opposition.
- Working with our Growth Hub to support local small and start-up businesses through free access to tailored advice and guidance, and progressing that support as businesses grow and develop. Considering a Mentor Scheme where successful recipients of this support return something to their communities.
- Ensuring that ALL our assets (including car parks) are used in the most effective way and that their development potential is evaluated in order to support employment, create opportunity and economic growth and prosperity for all.
- Building on the existing natural assets in the district to sustain, develop and improve our appeal to domestic and international tourists. Incorporate our aspirations for a “green”

economy and transport innovation into a deliverable Tourism strategy that brings in income without affecting the beauty of our district and the appeal of the AONB's that cover most of East Devon.

- Working with DWP, regional and local partners to develop and co-ordinate an effective redundancy response network to respond to the serious economic challenges that Covid will bring to our district and our residents.
- Supporting our businesses to be resilient to major changes, including those from Brexit, by working with partners to understand (and adapt to) these challenges over which we have no direct control, but whose impact will fall upon our economy and population nevertheless.
- Supporting the roll out of super-fast broadband to residents across the district in close cooperation with Devon County Council, national infrastructure providers and central government to deliver connectivity to all, and thus provide access to all the benefits that such connectivity provides in the urban parts of our area.
- Providing in-house commercial services (such as pest control, safeguarding) that provide value for money to residents, whilst creating new and valuable revenue streams for the Council, making good use of the expertise and skills that we already have access to within our teams.
- Providing support and advice to business through environmental health services.
- Explore the use of the Doughnut Economic Model to guide policy and decision making and ensure that ethical, socially-responsible and financially-sound decisions are made in an open, transparent and democratic manner.
- Supporting the government's Green Industrial Revolution through encouraging investment in green technologies and jobs

#### **Appendix 4 - Services that Matter to all of us**

We are proud of the services that our council delivers whether by itself or in partnership with others. Our services range from the delivery of grants and benefits on behalf of the government, through to environmental health, street cleansing, toilet provision, award winning parks, beaches and open spaces, recycling and waste collection. Behind the scenes we also deliver so much more; complex and bespoke engineering projects typically linked with climate change and based around flood protection; leisure services to meet the needs of East Devon residents through our partners in LED and cultural services both independent of and in conjunction with LED. We are the custodians of ten nature reserves and responsible for the South West Coastal Path and the East Devon Way.

We are also proud of our external accreditation – our Green and Blue Flags, our platinum award from Investors in People - and we strive for continual improvement beyond what has already been achieved. This means operating at the highest level as an organisation - to deliver excellent services first time and every time. We strive to evolve continually for the benefit of residents now and in the future. External evaluation matters to us and we will continue to value that especially where it, as often is the case, provides positive endorsement of our services processes and staff.

We will deliver this by;

- Continuously improving the customer experience of our telephone system based on customer and stakeholder feedback
- Identifying and implementing improvements and upgrades to our website to enhance our digital offer and delivering more digital services so that customers can easily access reliable information and resolution of service requests
- Providing responsive, effective and consistent communications through traditional media and social media
- Listening to feedback via our residents' Viewpoint surveys and developing an action plan to improve our services.
- Exploring innovative digital ways of consulting our residents in order to establish snapshot views in order to improve our services
- Developing an interactive performance database to enable continual and real time assessment of key performance indicators

## **Appendix 5**

### **Democracy Transparency and Communication**

Democracy and Transparency should underpin the work of any local authority. The Nolan Principals sit at the core of our undertakings and must apply to all members and not just those that wish to follow them. We seek to promote tolerant, respectful and democratic debate, encouraging the participation of all within the Council, and beyond. The public must always be assured that what we do as a Council, we do with their best interests at heart. Continuous evaluation of our constitution, governance arrangements, policies and practices will help us to ensure we evolve as a council with these fundamental principals at our core.

Our priority is the future, both within the council and outside of it, but to do this effectively we also understand that self-reflection and scrutiny of the past will be crucial, if we are to learn, grow and improve as an organisation. Whilst we must promote our successes, we must be prepared to admit our failings, both in our decision making and our service delivery.

Public engagement through consultation will be undertaken whenever appropriate to ensure public opinion is properly and accurately represented. Meetings will be promoted through a variety of communications platforms to ensure everyone has the opportunity to attend, 'have-their-say' or ask questions. Officers and Councillors alike must be courteous, welcoming and responsive so that members of the public are assured that they are our priority.

A culture of collaboration is desirable in which all experience is valued. All opinions are welcome regardless of any individuals gender, age, background, personal circumstances, or political affiliation. Cross-party, cross-department and cross-authority working has been vital through the current Covid crisis. This is something we would like to see continue into the medium and long term.

Where possible we will make changes to promote future inclusivity and diversity within the council as we recognise that it is our different perspectives that strengthen us.

Dialogues with those outside of the council as well as the training and development of members within it, will help to ensure confident, well informed debate and decision making.

While our meetings are being held remotely we will continue to live stream them, but we will remain alert to changes in Government legislation. As regulations change, we will adapt and learning from other authorities, exploring all options available so that meetings and debates are made accessible to as many people as possible.

Our aim is to improve access to information through all of our communications, the media and via our website, wherever legal and appropriate to do so, to ensure we are open and transparent.

We will continue to promote, market and raise awareness about our statutory, discretionary and paid services, as well as communicate EDDC news quickly by utilising the East Devon mobile app, website, social media, online and print based media partners and community and business networks so that our residents remain as informed as possible.

We will continue to review, improve, and find new ways to communicate in order to reach new audiences.

EDDC are fortunate to have exceptional staff working in the communications and service delivery teams. Since the start of the pandemic they have been under considerable pressure and have

focused their attention on reassuring those who are scared and anxious by providing crucial information to them, quickly, easily and without further stress. This will continue to be our focus as we move through and out of the pandemic.

**Appendix 6 -Council Plan Timetable**

<b>Step</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>Finish</b>
Statement of Intent	November 2020	December 2020
First Draft Council Plan	January 2021	
Cabinet/SMT+ Consideration	February 2021	February 2021
Member Workshops and Public Engagement	March 2021	May 2021
Overview/Scrutiny Committee	June 2021	
Cabinet adoption	June 2021	
Council adoption	July 2021	
Final Version of Plan Published	July 2021	

Graphics and design takes place post adoption