

# Coast Country and Environment Background

report since May 2019



**Portfolio report from Cllr Geoff Jung**

In May 2019 following an administration change I became portfolio holder for the **Environment** and in Mid 2020 became portfolio holder for **Coast Country and Environment**.

It is difficult to explain the financial year of 2022/23 in isolation without explaining the lead up to the year and some of the plans for 2023/24.

The 4-year period from May 2019 has been a most challenging time for the District Council, due to budget restraints inherited together with the Government policy to Councils and the enormous challenges required through the Covid Emergency and now the fuel and cost of living crisis .

I would like to thank all the officers, staff, and fellow Councillors for their dedicated hard work throughout these challenging times. Thank you, it has been a massive challenge but rewarding experience!

## **Changes made since May 2019**

The portfolio is administered by a great number of officers and departments, which cover various aspects of Environmental Protection from people's health and wellbeing through to dog poo bins to protecting wild flowers meadows! It was clear from the outset of taking over the portfolio that some of the responsibilities would have to be given to another portfolio holder so that equal focus could be given to each important previously neglected sectors.



**Sport, and Leisure including LED** had been part of my portfolio; however, a new post was created in 2020 to cover Tourism (which was not a portfolio holder responsibility) plus Sport and Leisure into the capable hands of Cllr Nick Hookway taking on this important portfolio. A new Sport and Leisure Strategy has been drawn up and gone through the public consultation stage and adopted. A large part of the strategy is linked to LED(Leisure East Devon) a

Community Trust company that manages East Devon's Sports and Leisure facilities, theatres, and the Ocean complex at Exmouth. The Covid emergency severely impacted its operations, and through an odd quirk in Central Government Covid relief, because it is a "Trust" it did not receive any of the Covid subsidies or benefits unlike other Councils directly managed operators. Therefore, substantial extra support has had to be agreed, whilst the Council has challenged the Government decision. I and my cabinet Colleagues feel that our swimming pools and sports facilities are vital for the wellbeing of our residents, and we are endeavouring to continue to provide the services everyone enjoyed prior to the Covid emergency.

**Culture.** Again, this was included within my portfolio, and under resourced. It includes the Thelma Herbert gallery in Honiton, the Pavilion in Exmouth, and the Manor Pavilion in Sidmouth.

However, it was considered more appropriate to be included in the Tourism, Sport, and Leisure umbrella. A new Culture Strategy has been published consulted and adopted.



**Car Parks**, most neglected and underfunded with no pricing adjustment to cover a VAT increase or inflation for 12 years also needed a fresh approach. The unique position East Devon has of being both a tourist destination and an all-year-round working community, with carparks covering both town centre and beaches required a unique approach.

The new policy with car park permits remaining fantastic value for money from as little as £10 a month, plus our winter charges remaining at the rock bottom £2.00 per day but increasing our summer top locations to a maximum of £8.00 per day(20% increase) with an £2.00 an hour charge. The results from the first 7 months shows that this new policy really works, both for residents, and for our visitors.

Following the car park changes, it was agreed to transfer the responsibility over to the finance portfolio holder as more appropriate, and a new Car park manager recruited to manage our car parks, following the departure of the previous officer, Andrew Ennis.



**Climate Change.** This manmade emergency that is affecting our climate and in turn effects everything we do within the council and at home, requires substantial input, with officers working to develop a strategy that will reduce our carbon footprint. Therefore, a separate portfolio holder for Climate Change was created in the very capable hands of Cllr Marianne Rixson.

Much of the work in protecting the Environment or our coasts and the countryside relates significantly to our changing needs due to Climate Change, and therefore our portfolios are closely related.

My portfolio covers **StreetScene** services

StreetScene is our **largest frontline service area**, accounting for over half the total general fund budget at over £11 million as well as a large capital program mainly relating to infrastructure and coastal defence of around £4.14 million for 21/22, and approximately £1.4 million for 2022/23.

Services that are experienced by all of our residents and our visitors and which support many of our Council priorities, covering services such as street cleansing, ground maintenance, recycling and waste, public realm maintenance, public toilets, parks, green space, beaches, and engineering.

Keeping our environment beautiful and East Devon a place people want to live in, visit, enjoy and invest. The services StreetScene provide is the shop window for our Greener East Devon agenda, and links to green space delivery, our emerging Tourism and Culture strategies and helps to support our objective of delivering a resilient economy.



Across all sub-services of Streetscene, following Covid, there has been an extensive amount of work carried out on recruitment, with a high turnover in Operations, with many new recruits coming in and lots of vacancies to fill. Be it driver and loader issues within Recycling and Waste through Suez, or operatives

within Streetscene-Operations putting pressure on service delivery through the summer season, the employment market and slipping behind in our median payer position impacted on the teams (this has been dealt with by the Reward review). It is testament to the teams and

management that we've managed to keep the show on the road in the face of heightened demand for our services with a depleted team in a state of flux, and still achieve so much!

Beautiful beaches, award winning parks and safe infrastructure. When it goes wrong it is highly visual to residents and Members often find out about it from their constituents very quickly! Missed dog bins, overflowing seafront bins on busy bank holidays, with incomplete kerbside collections or fly tipping or abandoned vehicles. There is always something that irritates our residents, and the systems Apps and messaging generally resolves the problems speedily and efficiently.

**Operations.** This covers Grounds maintenance, green space development, street cleansing, public toilet cleaning and servicing and maintenance of public realm (but not highways), beaches, watersafety and events.



Following the health emergency, we continued to deliver our high-quality street cleansing and grounds maintenance services despite a 20% vacancy of staff shortage from seasonal agency positions and rising permanent vacancies, alongside a demand level which continues to be higher than pre-pandemic.

2021 saw a 29% increase during the summer, 2022 was just below this. The increase in street cleansing work and street litter bin tonnages is a result of more residents and visitors using our areas since the pandemic.



**Parks and Gardens** Our staff along with a great many volunteers again achieved 3 Green Flag Awards with Connaught gardens Sidmouth (19<sup>th</sup> yearly award), Seafield Seaton (3<sup>rd</sup> year award) and Manor gardens Exmouth (18<sup>th</sup> year award) We have also applied for Pride in Park Awards at Phear park Exmouth, Pavilion gardens Exmouth, The Glen, Blackmore gardens Sidmouth Seafield Seaton, Manor, and Connaught gardens Exmouth for which we are eagerly awaiting results.

Over the last few years in particular we have seen our parks and green spaces play a vital role for people through the covid lockdowns as a place to relax, exercise and meet friends and family in safely, and the retention of Green Flag Awards are a testament to the hard work and dedication of staff and volunteers that make them great spaces for everyone to enjoy.



**Recycling and Waste Partnership.** East Devon is the leading UK district for the least amount of residual (black bin waste) and the 9<sup>th</sup> best performer for recycling. This is a great partnership between EDDC and Suez. With great co-operation by residents we recycle over 61% of our rubbish when only 10 years ago we only recycled 2%!! We also ensure none of our waste goes to landfill as the residual waste goes to Exeter's incinerator and generates electricity.

Our Recycling and Waste household hybrid kerbside sort system collections provides an efficient and regular recycling, waste minimisation and disposal service to over 73,000 households in East Devon. We now regularly make over 500,000 collections a month, more than 6 million collections a year.

The system we use maximises the quality of the recycling we collect to enable it to be re-used as a secondary raw material, we collect as many materials as we can to enable residents to recycle to minimise their waste. This has seen our **recycling rate** increase steadily since 2017, with a slight drop to **60% for 2020/2021 from a level of 60.5% in 2019/2020**, which was still a magnificent achievement during the Covid pandemic. We anticipate an **out-turn rate of 61% for 2021/2022** when DEFRA validate the figures shortly.

We now have over 18,000 properties having biweekly green waste collections. Next year we aim to achieve £215k to help offset service costs, with a target reaching over 19,250 customers.

During and following the Covid emergency there have been ongoing staffing issues, with driver shortage, covid sickness, but this has been managed effectively through rolling communications and our award-winning East Devon mobile phone App. Plus the Councillor emails through end of day reporting. In comparison to other local districts, East Devon Recycling and Waste are in a far better position than some other Devon Authorities.

The continuing pressures since Covid and Brexit has resulted in a tight UK employment market, including pressures on agency suppliers, are an on-going challenge. Driver shortages and restrictions on LGV driver training have been a particular problem. SUEZ driver training programme has gone some way to alleviating the pressure and will continue. Our 'Five Golden Rules' training package for crews has helped keep up service standards despite these pressures of staff shortages.



**Government changes.** The Government are proposing substantial changes to the recycling and waste sector driven by the new Environment Act which officers have been tracking since 2019 through involvement in lengthy consultations, webinars, DEFRA workshops and panels which are on-going.

DEFRA consultation response for **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** has been issued, it is intended that this will see the producer of packaging paying the costs for its treatment, recycling or disposal and will change the way our service is funded and how we have to report our collected tonnages.

We have responded to the consultation responses for **Deposit Return Scheme (DRS)** which is considering requiring a deposit payable scheme on some returned recyclable packaging such as drink bottles to help reduce waste and improve circularity.

There is also a plan to ensure better consistency to require all councils to recycle the same materials which have yet to be issued. These are anticipated to be announced in early in 2023.

The full details of all these substantial changes are still awaited to be issued by DEFRA but in the meantime, we are preparing for a different future as far as we can with the current level of information available and will closely monitor developments, with reports to our Partnership Board and Cabinet once more details are known.

**Bridging solution** Because of the substantial growth in housing throughout the district a major change was required to our scheduled collections this year to deal with property growth until the end of the contract.

There was a contractual agreement known as "Tipping Point 2" at 73,000 households written into our contract which was achieved in Aug 2022. This required a re-negotiation of price and resources to service properties past this threshold.

Throughout the year we scoped this out and proposed a solution through the Board which led to a Cabinet report and agreement to additional revenue funding of £1.2million along with capital to finance additional fleet vehicles. The proposal has been successfully negotiated and implementation is underway.

Phase 1 was the establishment of collections in the 'Growth Zone' at the West End of the district, which was successfully implemented in October 2022. This involved round changes to over 17,000 properties which have been rolled out through extensive round planning changes, and a successful 3 step communication approach.

Phase 2 is planned for the rest of the district in summer 2023 once Phase 1 has had a bedding-in period.

The Bridging Solution has met our contractual obligation under the Tipping Point 2 and has also enabled us to grant the contract extensions with SUEZ taking the current contract to its expiry in 2026. Projections estimate that we will be servicing 76,500 properties by contract end.

Escalating pay rates and fuel costs create a cost pressure on the contract and these are reflected in high indexing levels, which are likely to create a budget pressure over the coming years.

**New Contract feasibility study.** Following the challenges of the tipping point, the team will need to consider the renewal of the service contract or alternative options to be in place by 2026 at the latest.

There will be an options appraisal and members workshops to consider the future shape of the service and delivery model.

This will include: -

- How the Environment Act changes (DRS, EPR, consistency) will affect our collections
- Decarbonisation of the operation
- Depot requirements and investment
- The team size and shape needed for delivering an improved service to over 73k+ properties to reach 70% recycling rate by 2030. (Government Target is 65%)
- An analysis of the vehicle fleet covering the various models,
- To run the service ourselves or continuing with a similar partnership or an Integrated Devon partnership.
- When, adaptation and service change and impacts for contract review.
- Procurement timeline for new Governance, reporting timeline.
- Capital fleet costs of circa £15m for EV fleet alternatives
- £multi million investment in larger depot with charging/refuelling capacity.



**Recycling and waste Fleet Decarbonisation plan** This project alone is substantial to our future funding requirements coupled to the benefit it will provide to East Devon's contribution to our climate change targets. The plan involves a complete electric or renewable energy fleet to replace the 50 plus vehicle fleet and the consideration of charging points or fuel supply (Hydrogen) located at a suitable location.



**Public Toilets** The poor state of our public loos, hardly touched for the last 40 years and many in disrepair, through continued underfunding. Officers and staff carried out extensive work on creating a framework for a review which was approved by Cabinet in May 2021, and again following a public consultation in Dec 2021. The new agreed policy is to fund a complete update and/or relocate our category A toilets.

We recognise, that Public Toilets are vital in a tourist location, and it is important we provide clean and hygienic modern toilets with disabled access and some with disabled adult changing facilities in the appropriate locations. (A government grant was successfully applied for to cover the funding for 4 of these most needy adaptations for adult disabled changing facilities)

Officers are now carrying out the recommendations from the report, with negotiations ongoing with the Category B & C sites being considered for alternative uses. A number of these exciting and innovative uses are at the point of being announced. These exciting future uses which will overcome the many public concerns raised during the consultation with retaining publicly accessible toilets, and also some good community-based re-uses of sites. In the meantime, most of the public toilets have remained open.

## My portfolio also covers **coastal protection and flooding**

### **Climate change effecting our coasts.**



Our estuaries plus our coast line with its uniquely protected World Heritage status the Jurassic Coast, is expected to change significantly due to the predicted sea level of 1metre rise together with our changing climate with more intense storms. Our coastal towns and estuaries are all vulnerable, and they all need substantial protection or adaption.

Our Engineering department who oversees the maintenance of our infrastructure including flood alleviation, coastal protection, bridges, structures and play areas, have had substantial staffing issues in 2022/23 with effectively a team at 50% for the

whole year due to staff turnover, recruitment difficulties and sickness. This has meant many capital bids have not progressed future whilst we have needed to focus on major projects.

However, there has been great progress with the flood scheme at Feniton seeing the completion of the under the railway culvert work which required close cooperation with Network Rail. This will allow for the final phases to be completed to join the sections to finally provide surface water flooding protection to a great number of properties in the village.



The Sidmouth Beach Management Plan has seen substantial progress, despite the increase in construction costs following Covid and Brexit. The agreed Hybrid Option which was introduced following the public dissatisfaction to the 'Preferred Option' to design out the significant raising of the Splash-wall requirement was found to have a £4million budget gap. However, through extensive work with partners engineers and consultants this gap is now at a much better £1.7 million gap and promising prospects of this shortfall being covered as the scheme progresses.

Early in 2023 the final draft from the consultants for the OBC (Outline Business Case) will be discussed at a Sidmouth Beach Management meeting for the group to make a recommendation. Following the approval of OBC the detailed designs, public consultations, and planning permission will follow, with construction expected in 2025



At **Seaton** and the **Axe estuary** we have received the funding to protect the failing cliffs and work is progressing, plus work to Seaton Wetlands at our award-winning nature conservation reserve to improve and expand it is progressing.

We are also the lead Authority in working with a wide range of partners to overcome the dangerous pollution levels within the Axe River catchment that is at present restricting any future development in the area.



At **Exmouth** we recently saw the completion to the Environment Agency funded Estuary defence scheme protecting over 500 dwellings and the town centre. We are now working on the Exmouth Beach Management scheme to reduce the sand movement on Exmouth beach and working with

partners to consider the implications of the expected changes to Dawlish Warren following the decision not to provide engineering solutions to this protected important habitat location.



On the **lower Otter Estuary**, we are working with Clinton Devon and the Environment Agency to return the estuary to its natural state, prior to the artificial dykes that were built by prisoners during the Napoleonic wars that are now failing.

This multimillion-pound European investment will improve the shoreline habitat, plus move the cricket ground to higher ground and raising South Farm Road, overcoming climate change predictions, reducing flood risks, and providing important intertidal habitat which is disappearing elsewhere.



**Beach Safety** and the day- to- day management of our beaches continues to be busy over the summer months. In 2022 we again successfully retained two Blue Flags awards at Exmouth (4<sup>th</sup> yearly award), and Sidmouth (3<sup>rd</sup> yearly award) alongside achieving a new award of Blue Flag at Seaton, with seaside awards at Exmouth (5<sup>th</sup> year award), Budleigh (4<sup>th</sup> year award), Sidmouth (4<sup>th</sup> year award), Beer (new award this year), and Seaton (5<sup>th</sup> year award). This highlights the progress we have made in improving our environmental, educational, safety, and accessibility criteria of all of the beaches by not only retaining awards but expanding them with new awards at Seaton and Beer in recognition of the improvements we have made. These awards are an important internationally recognised “charter mark” of the quality that our beaches offer, something we are rightly proud of and helps support our new Tourism Strategy work.

In 2021 there was an increase in domestic tourism of 59.2% nationally with Devon being the no1 destination. The top desirable feature for a destination the beach. While this boom was partly down to Covid and limitations on foreign travel,



research by Visit Britain suggests that other factors such as Brexit and the climate emergency are also in play, and the growth is forecast to continue until at least 2025.

In September 2021 the RNLI carried out a beach safety assessment which concluded that their current provision at Exmouth was no longer adequate to ensure the safety of beach users, and therefore the level of lifeguard cover should be increased. Therefore, EDDC commissioned and invested in an improved lifeguard service at Exmouth beach, which covers a much longer season from Easter until 26th Sept, with an additional lifeguard stand in the peak season This step showcases our commitment to water safety, while enhancing our tourism offering which in turn boosts the local economy and businesses.



**Pollution.** Although we as a district council are not directly responsible for pollution issues, (SWW and the EA are) we are responsible for the possible effects through our Environmental Health officers. As all our beaches are “Blue flag” designated beaches, meaning that they are safe for swimming, being pollution free, any concerns with pollution could have a serious detrimental impact on our Tourism, and also our own residents enjoying our beaches.

This year for a few days at Exmouth Beach we had to advise users not to enter the sea for what was an unfounded concern, plus a few times due to an EA pollution forecasts following a storm event . We are working with SWW, the EA and Surfers Against Sewage to provide up to the minute information, not only during the summer, but throughout the year.

We are also working with SWW to remove the necessity of storm releases from anywhere along our coasts that can affect the water quality of our beaches, plus ensuring all the catchments and estuaries are also free from pollution as well. This will require substantial investment by SWW and will take some years to implement fully.



**Surface Water Flooding.** The changing climate is affecting surface water run off resulting in overburdening our sewage systems, inundating properties, and roads more and more. The challenge is for local people, farmers, landowners, South West Water the Environment



Agency, and councils to work together. East Devon is working with partners to set up Community Resilience voluntary groups to act as local emergency responders during an event and to co-ordinate schemes that reduce the impact of flooding on a community.

My portfolio also covers the **Countryside** and the effects of climate change and increasing development requirements



As a District Council we have been required to provide 950 plus new dwellings a year by Central Government, which is a massive challenge, but the Council recognise that although a large amount of these houses will be built in what is termed the West End of the district, there needs to be substantial investment in protecting the biodiversity and enhancing the countryside with improved public access at the same time.

Within 10 kilometres of the Pebblebed Heaths, the Exe Estuary and Dawlish Warren all new dwellings are required to provide funding known as Habitat Mitigation. This includes a substantial area of Teignbridge and Exeter. These funds are controlled by the **South and East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee**, with a representative from each council overseeing the measures to protect these vitally important habitats. Up to 2019 the portfolio holder for Strategic Development was the representative as the funding came from development, but it became apparent that the expenditure decisions was more suitable for more specialist knowledge on wildlife and habitat and therefore the responsibility was shifted to my portfolio.

As well as protecting and improving the Pebblebed Heaths and the Exe Estuary a significant aspect of the mitigation is to provide SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) for people to walk and enjoy away from these protected locations to encourage alternatives for people to visit. Recently an area near Broadclyst Station was purchased by East Devon which will provide footpaths cycleways, ponds and watercourses for residents and wildlife to enjoy.

This new open public access space compliments SANGs areas already provided by Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council.



**Clyst Valley Regional Park Masterplan.** In the present local Plan for East Devon (2012 to 31) under **Strategy 10 Green Infrastructure in East Devon's West End**, the Clyst Valley Regional Park was included on the proposals map and minor details provided. A 25-year masterplan was adopted by the Strategic Planning Committee in April 2021 and now needs to be included as planning policy in the emerging Local Plan to 2040.

The Clyst Valley Regional Park (CVRP) is an area of green and blue space with a policy boundary covers circa 6,000 acres and is the focus of activity for the provision of public open space and trails.

The Clyst Canopy project operates at a catchment scale of 1,550 km<sup>2</sup> to improve water quality in the river Clyst and tributaries and will help to reduce flood risk through natural flood management. We have an ambitious target for 80 km of traffic-free trails linking seamlessly to buses and trains.

The plan is to deliver high quality, nature-rich public open spaces, and traffic-free trails to serve one of the fastest growing areas in the country. Around £1.5 million of funding (public and private) has been secured to implement the proposals to date.

Already we have delivered two 'springboard' projects to give the fledgling park wings and brought its first area of publicly accessible natural greenspace. (SANGS area) 25 acres at Broadclyst Station.

The ambitious 25-year masterplan was a finalist at this year's Royal Town Planning Institute's national awards for planning excellence (and won the regional award outright).

The CVRP will help to ensure that the local population can enjoy excellent access to the natural environment with associated health and wellbeing benefits.

In creating the UK's newest Regional Park, EDDC is implementing the recommendations of the "Future Parks Accelerator". A report commissioned by the National Trust on behalf of the project partners recommended creating 10 large-scale regional parks in the urban fringe at a national level.

Using the 'Greenkeeper' tool and Green Book compliant methods, these urban parks would generate £600 million per annum in health benefits, contribute 8% of the national tree planting target, and provide £2 of health and amenity benefits for every £1 invested over 30 years.

The CVRP provides a newsletter that is received by 1,653 residents, with a great many of whom have attended guided walks, bike rides, and conservation volunteering activities. This provided developing skills and increasing confidence for 500 public volunteers and gave 300 school children the chance to experience drama, historic re-enactment, and tree planting.

There have been 5000 native broadleaved trees planted by 400 volunteers and 200 children from local schools, 3 orchards created, 325 ancient trees recorded by volunteers, including a 700-year-old oak and 35 acres of historic parkland restored.

The Clyst Canopy project has provided information from surveys carried out on 10 farms, that would enable landowners to increase tree canopy cover to over 30%. (East Devon Average 12%) and we have identified local businesses willing to invest.

The first part the multi-use Clyst Valley Trail have been constructed and completed a public consultation on the full 13 km route has also been completed.



**Countryside Team.** The “bounce back” following Covid has seen a hugely successful year for the Countryside team’s **Environmental Education programme:** Successfully

engaging 68 groups, consisting of 2075 people, and generating £13,170 income.

**Volunteering** with the Countryside Team has built up to 275 volunteers actively engaged in 2022/23, who between them accumulated 2967 hours of valuable time towards our wildlife conservation efforts, the equivalent of £28,186 of cash value.

Our small team of Rangers manage our award-winning Seaton Wetlands, 13 local nature reserves and co-ordinate Urban Green initiatives through Wild East Devon. The first urban area was Wild Exmouth where with funding from the National Lottery the work involved various community projects and works bringing nature into the urban area. This concept is now being rolled out in other urban areas throughout East Devon.

Following the success of the Wild Exmouth project, the team are now working on the Delivery of **Wild Honiton** project, improving green spaces to benefit wildlife, access, and recreational enhancements. This includes discussions with neighbouring landowners to improve access and circular walks with the urban environment.

They also manage and maintain the East Devon section of the SW Coast Path and provide support and funding for the East Devon and Blackdown Hills AONB Partnerships as nationally important landscapes.

The headline for 2012/3 at Seaton Wetlands has seen the successful opening of Seaton Tramway Wetlands Halt. This will help to further develop the local visitor economy for Seaton with the offer of an additional attraction to the tram experience.

Plans are being worked on for extra visitor infrastructure to the Wetlands to enhance visitor experience and monetise the increased footfall with the creation of a café offer through a concessionary arrangement at the Black Hole Marsh hub and the installation of contactless payment points and resurface and re-aligned car parking area



### **The Environment Act 2021**

Following the government introduction of the **Environment Act 2021** the duty of an LPA to the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain and preparing Local Nature Recovery Strategy's for the emerging new local plan.

A District Ecologist was a new post in 2012/3 which will link to help develop the Biodiversity Chapter in the new local plan for better environmental outcomes which will provide stronger policy protection for biodiversity and a better quality of development, for people and biodiversity. Also, to collaborate with Devon Local Nature Partnership to develop a new Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Working with the Countryside team the District Ecologist will develop proposals for both further habitat acquisition in the district that can facilitate commitments to nature recovery and carbon reduction/adaptation and utilising the emerging Local Habitat map to implement nature recovery networks.



**Tree Strategy.** It has been identified that East Devon Tree Canopy cover is only 12% of the total ground area covered. London tree cover is 20% in comparison and therefore it is planned to introduce a new Tree Policy. This is in conjunction with Devon County Council, other Councils, and the Woodland Trust, to provide a Devon wide tree policy within the Climate change initiatives.

The Tree team has been short staffed over the last 12 months, but the new Tree Strategy is being developed through working with Devon County Council with a county wide Tree strategy, which will be a blueprint to set out the framework for engaging with climate change, tree wardens and community engagement, tackling pests and diseases, and requirements for trees within development sites.

The tree team will actively engage and develop tree warden scheme across East Devon to help with the protection of existing trees and planting of new trees, update tree webpage ensuring all information is relevant and deliver a core statutory duties and start a Tree Protection Order (TPO) review ensuring all TPO'S are legally enforceable and up to date.



**Woodland Trust** A new 158-acre area of woodland has just been announced at Coombe Farm between Woodbury and Exmouth to be known as Yonder Oak Wood, and I was greatly honoured to plant the first new Oak tree in honour of the late Queen in November 2022

## Other projects within my Portfolio.



**Green Heat.** Cranbrook and the new developments west of Exeter are currently being heated by a centralised heating system generated by gas, but a neglected vital planning condition, requiring it to be replaced by “green energy” had previously been ignored. Through a most challenging process we have received multi-million-pound funding to facilitate the heat through an insulated new pipeline from a new waste to energy incinerator being built at the Hill Barton Business Park. This will replace the

gas power, not only for all existing dwellings but for the future expansion of Cranbrook, the Science Park and we will have spare capacity for future development too!

This project is vital to help us achieve Zero carbon by our target of 2040 and therefore this project is in conjunction with our Climate Change Portfolio Holder Cllr Marianne Rixson.

## Environmental Health

The Environmental Health Service arm of the District Council is generally an unknown yet substantial part of the District Council's responsibilities. Its aim is to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of both individuals and communities plus the protection of the environment.

The Service focuses on improving the quality of life and to influence decisions, and to control a range of behaviours and environmental factors that can affect the health and wellbeing of people in East Devon.

- a) good for our personal health and wellbeing.
- b) good for our environment and
- c) lifestyle choices that contribute to improving health and reducing poverty in our communities.



Alongside the day-to-day statutory programme of inspections, complaint investigations and professional consultations, the team will take every possible opportunity to promote and signpost good practice in our communities to contribute to all three of our corporate priorities. This may be simple conversations with business operators about energy tariffs, plastic free packaging options, and local and sustainable food sourcing and energy efficiency all the way up to strategic partnership working with other departments, authorities, and businesses.

We will also work to identify and tackle fuel poverty in private dwellings and to promote personal wellbeing in one-to-one conversations with householders (where appropriate), with our colleagues in Financial Resilience and external partner Exeter Community Energy and addressing mental health, active travel choices and other relevant lifestyle conversations as and when they arise taking full advantage of our unprecedented level of informal one-to-one access to business owners and householders in East Devon.

**The variety of work is reflected by the cross over with other portfolios, Sustainable Homes and Communities, Climate Action and Council and Corporate Coordination.**

**Environmental Protection** We are routinely consulted on the impact of proposed developments set out in planning applications, and we work to prevent public nuisance and to protect public safety by working closely.

**Licensing team** on a variety of licensing matters, including animal licensing, street trading and alcohol licensing. We now have a dedicated Animal Licensing and Welfare Officer whose responsibilities will also include tackling unlicensed animal boarders and breeders across the district.

**Environmental pollution** prevention and control duties and powers. These include the control



of smoke, odours, fly-tipping and littering offences, fly nuisance and noise nuisance, air quality, environmental permitting and the promotion and enforcement of public health and pest control legislation. We completed 100% of the environmental permitting inspections in 2022 due to ensure that these businesses continue to minimise environmental pollution and reduce the impact on the health and wellbeing of East Devon residents. The introduction of the Noise App in 2022 has

helped to reduce the time taken to investigate noise nuisance and ensure a suitable resolution for all involved.

**Contaminated Land** we have a detailed strategy for dealing with land that has been contaminated by its historic uses.



**Pest control** and treatment service. We now offer a reduced fee for pest control treatments for low-income residents to ensure we are able to protect the public health. We have piloted a scheme to offer non-food commercial businesses, a tailored pest control contract at a competitive price. In 2022, we have responded to 600+ requests for pest control treatments.



**Anti-social Behaviour** in its various forms, including dog nuisance. There are a range of regulatory tools available to assist officers including Community Protection Warnings and Notices. A successful information campaign took place in 2022 encouraging residents and visitors to be responsible dog owners and the recruitment of a Dog Enforcement Officer will help to strengthen that message moving forwards. They deal with dog control issues and stray dogs and work hard to educate communities by promoting responsible dog ownership.

Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) that set out controls over unacceptable behaviours in terms of irresponsible dog ownership and other matters including street drinking and aggressive begging have been reviewed for 2023 with some minor changes.



**Hoarding and accumulations of rubbish** in homes and gardens where officers work in multi-disciplinary teams to tackle these complex social issues.

**Public health funerals.** There is a statutory duty to arrange where no one else is willing or able to take the steps necessary to deal with the remains of an individual who has died within the district. We were successful in recovering over 80% of the funeral costs from the deceased's estate in 2021/22.



**Commercial Premises** includes the registration, inspection, and enforcement of legislative standards for 1870 food businesses, allergen management in the 'none pre-packed' sector and the investigation of complaints about the safety of food. High-risk premises; non-compliant premises; approved premises; and fraudulent food and criminal activities are prioritised. Complete 100 food and environmental samples annually based on local and national priorities and emerging risks. In 2022/23 we have been focussed on meeting the Food Standards Agency's post Covid recovery plan.

We investigate workplace accidents and complaints about workplace health and safety and enforce as necessary or advise on and promote good practice. We ensure relevant workplaces remain smoke free and provide routine swimming pool sampling to LED Community Leisure.

We register skin-piercing activities to ensure infection control and licensed riding establishments, zoos, and dangerous wild animals to ensure animal welfare standards and public safety criteria are met.

We have an established Safety Advisory Group (SAG) to provide advice and guidance to event planners and organisers of large events in staging their events, and help them understand their individual responsibilities and those of other agencies involved

**Planning and Licensing** teams with whom we work with on a variety of issues relating to commercial food businesses to ensure they meet the standards required by legislation and **Councils Byelaws**. We assist Public Health England in the investigation of infectious diseases and prevent their spread within the community.



**COVID-19** has had an enormous impact on workplaces, and we continue to support workplaces and businesses to implement the good infection prevention practices that employers and staff can do in everyday life that really do make a difference to everyone's health and wellbeing at work.

**Community Safety and Safeguarding** We are an active partner in the East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership and the CSP Priorities are the basis for a range of initiative and interventions we deliver locally.



**Modern Slavery, Youth Crime Violence Prevention, Trauma, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence** we are represented at Devon Boards around prevent these important issues

**Domestic Homicide Reviews and Child safeguarding** we attend as key partners in meetings and share information and action back into our own council departments.

**Development of training and a Safeguarding Forum** We arrange and Chair Multi agency meetings with our partners to deliver against identified local issues. We develop and maintain a local community network where we share relevant information around best practice or available training and funding opportunities that help to deliver against aspects of poverty and form the basis of our four local Community Safety Groups. We also lead on the coordination and support of the Council's safeguarding duties by working closely with operational teams. Development of training and a Safeguarding Forum to enable a more balanced and corporately focussed safeguarding response.

**Emergency Planning and Business Continuity** Our current emergency plan has been reviewed this year and actively used to deliver against concurrent incidents, including COVID 19, loss of power and severe weather situations.

**Devon Emergency Planning Partnership and the Devon Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Resilience Forum** to develop our plans to deliver against these emergency and other future incidents. We plan, maintain, review, and exercise the Council's emergency plans and have a key communication and coordination role during the response and recovery phases of plan activation.





**Business Continuity and disaster recovery plans.** We also work across the organisation and externally to coordinate our Business Continuity and disaster recovery plans.

**Public Health & Wellbeing** We have a key role in contributing to public health and wellbeing of our local communities in ways not available to other agencies such as NHS bodies. Our work is evidence based, to ensure that East Devon is a place where people want to live, work, visit and enjoy life, focusing on where there is the greatest need. To achieve this, we work with our communities and with many local partners to reduce health inequalities across East Devon.

We work hard to find ways of increasing access to and understanding of reliable health information across East Devon, so that individuals can make healthy choices about their lifestyles and for people they care for. We research and create messages that are relevant for our population, and work with our communications team and others to share and distribute relevant messages in a range of print and digital formats.

We work with other services to ensure that all the council's activities actively support and promote the health and wellbeing of our communities. We take opportunities to show how activities good for an individual's health are very often good for the planet (e.g., diet and active travel).

**Private Sector Housing** (including Private Water supply regulation) We focus on improving standards and compliance in private housing; private water supplies and we provide grants for adaptations and home improvements. We give advice and information to owner occupiers; landlords and tenants in the private rented to improve the housing standards in the district. We do take enforcement action in line with relevant legislation and policies where it is necessary, proportionate, and supported by evidence. In this team we deliver our services both reactively and proactively.

**Hoarding and accumulations of rubbish** in homes and gardens were officers work in multi-agency and disciplinary teams to tackle these complex social issues.

**Private Water Supplies** We have over 1000 private water supplies in the district one of the highest in a local authority in England. We risk assess; sample and enforce water quality in private water supplies for which fees are charged. In 2022 we completed 278 samples and 41 Risk assessment; served 20 statutory Notices and removed 4 sites from our high-risk list to improve water quality.



We arranged for a holiday let business to have a low interest loan with the Councils loan company *Lendology* to update and improve their private water supply treatment plant. Our officers are specialists and accredited.

### **Housing Standards**

- We complete an annual data Housing Standards
- We inspect and enforce housing standards in owner occupied or private rented accommodation and housing. We have about 500 complaints and interventions every year.

### **Licensing houses of multi occupation and mobile; caravan and camping site**

We license 41 houses in multiple occupation and mobile; caravan and camping sites to ensure the safety of residents and occupier for which a fee is charged.

## **Empty Homes**

We work with homeowners to bring empty homes into use by giving, advice and information. We served statutory Notice on problematic empty homes particularly if there is rodent activity. There are about 90 long term empty properties in East Devon that have been empty for over 5 years.

## **Tackling Fuel Poverty**

The Private sector housing team collaborate with the Financial Resilience and Benefits team, external partners Exeter ECOE and the social enterprise lender Lendology CIC to provide residents with practical information on funding to improve energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty. We will undertake an investigation into any disrepair, hoarding or self-neglect.

We actively support Energy Company Obligation schemes by making 'declarations' for eligible residents to access retrofit funding We made 347 ECO declarations between April 2021 and July 2022 allowing these residents get energy efficiency measure. ECO 4 was launched in January 2023.

We partnered with Devon County Council; other Devon Local Housing Authorities and Exeter Community energy to bid for Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) funding. The Sustainable Warmth project delivers energy efficiency and retrofit projects to owner occupied homes with and EPC rating of EFG. We have been successful to bid for HUG2 funding to extend the Sustainable Warmth project for another 2 years.

## **Rural Drainage**

We investigate and enforce environmental pollution associated with rural drainage and statutory nuisance.

## **Filthy and Verminous homes**

We work with residents living in 'filthy and verminous' homes by working in partnership with mental health teams, social services, and GPs. We can offer grants to undertake works; serve Statutory Notices and undertake 'works in default' to clear accumulations and treat for rodent activity.

## **Immigration Visits and Homes for Ukraine accommodation checks**

We undertake home accommodation safety visits for immigrants for which there is a fee. We started the home accommodation checks in April 2021 when the Homes for Ukraine scheme opened due to the war in Ukraine. We have undertaken 250 home visits. East Devon is one of the most popular districts in the Country to welcome Ukrainian guest due to the generosity of East Devon residents.

## **Better Care Fund**

We provide adaptations to homes under the provision of the Better Care Fund including the Disabled Facilities Grant and non-means tested stairlift so that residents can stay in their own homes. Our current budget is £1.4 m, and we are on target to spend this in the financial year 2022/23. We provide the following:

- Disabled facilities grant (DFG) to provide access to facilities so disabled residents can remain in their homes. The grant maximum is £30 000.
- Accessible Homes Grant is a discretion means tested grant to top up any DFG.
- Non means tested stair lift.
- Healthy Homes Grant is discretionary up to £5000 is available for home improvements.

- Lendology provides loans to owner occupiers to make home improvements.
- Historic grants repayments. We get back some money from grants when properties are sold so that we can use this money to make more grants.

We had a SWAP Audit in 2022 this identified improvements which we had identified as a team. We have reported to O&S on these ongoing improvements.

**NB. The variety of work is reflected by the cross over with other portfolios, Sustainable Homes and Communities, Climate Action and Council and Corporate Coordination.**