EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Campervan Task and Finish Forum

Notes of the meeting of the Campervan TAFF held at 10:00am on Friday 27th September 2024, via Zoom.

Present

Richard Easthope	RE	East Devon District Council
Christopher Rook	CR	Devon County Council
Councillor Geoff Jung	GJ	East devon District Council
Councillor Fred Caygill	FC	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Christine Channon	CC	Devon County Council
Councillor Mark Williamson	MW	Exmouth Town Council
Lisa Bowman	LB	Exmouth Town Council
Mollie Carey	MC	Exmouth Town Council

Apologies

Councillor Steve Gazzard	SG	Exmouth Town Council
Councillor Jeff Trail BEM	JT	Devon County Council
Councillor Richard Scott	RS	Devon County Council

1. **Election of Chairmen**

FC was dually elected as chair proposed by MW, seconded by CC.

2. **Welcome and Apologies**

FC welcomed members to the meeting and apologies for absence were noted.

3. **To receive an update on past recommendations to EDDC Cabinet and status of plans for upgrading facilities at Mear Road carpark.**

RE provided an update to members on the past recommendations to EDDC cabinet and status of plans for upgrading facilities at Mear Road CP.
The recommendations previously from this committee were split into two phases - short term aspirations and long term. The TAFF's recommendations were presented to East Devon District Council's Cabinet Committee earlier this year in January, all but one of those recommendations were rejected.

RE stated that the recommendations were as follows.

- Install a drive over grey wastewater point, shower and dishwater disposal point in Maer Road CP
- Install a chemical toilet disposal point, connected directly to the sewerage network
- Install a fresh water tap in Maer Road CP
- Reduce the number of the maximum permitted consecutive overnight stays to three nights; this is in line with other local authorities.

- Improvements to EDDC signage stating the rules and restrictions for overnight stays in both car parks, including ground markings along Queens Drive Echelon to designate suitable bays for overnight stays, leaving a safe distance between vehicles.
- Convert the coach parking area within Exmouth the EDDC Estuary long stay CP to create car parking as opposed to coach and lorry parking.

RE reported that only change that was agreed by cabinet was that EDDC would increase the car parking capacity in Estuary long stay CP to coincide with the plans already agreed in the EDDC parking strategy. The other proposals were all rejected.

The EDDC parking strategy was approved earlier this year, and as part of that, there is a commitment to facilitate overnight stopovers, where appropriate, and to provide the necessary facilities to protect our natural environment. This is the commitment of EDDC and the strategic direction that they want to go in. It will also help with encouraging responsible tourism as well.

JJ suggested contacting SWW to help provide some of these facilities. As SWW is almost discouraging tourism in in Exmouth due to recent sewage incidents, so some financial help on implements and improving the amenities at Mear Road CP might be a way forward. There are plans in place for additional and replacement tanks at Mear Road CP, to help their facilities and a recommendation should be put forward that whilst excavating the site, they put in an adequate waste disposal for camper vans. This could be a waste disposal point or a drive over grey waste disposal point. JJ commented that the contamination of the brook which runs through the car park is also a contributing factor in the sewage pollution on the Exmouth Sea Front.

In respect of JJ's comments, LB asked about the circumstantial evidence that relates to water quality in the brook through Mear Road CP and the link between that and improper grey waste disposal on the part of motorhomes.

RE and JJ to investigate and arrange a site visit with an engineer and enquire into potential funding from SWW to incorporate the TAFF's aspirations for improving the amenities in this specific CP

MW emphasized the need for a report from JJ and RE regarding their discussions with SWW and highlighted the importance of monitoring these discussions to encourage contributions from Southwest Water.

4. **Enforcement regime hours/days and scope to expand INCLUDING agenda item 5 signage.**

RE provided an update on EDDC's enforcement regime hours/days and scope to expand this including the signage as follows:

- There has been a 20% increase in paid overnight stop-overs in Mear Road and Queens Drive and The Echelon CP this summer, up from 1500 to 1800 for the same period of April to August in direct comparison with last year's data.
- The addition of the anti-social behaviour officers that have been funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner and were tasked as a part of their role to look

out for the negative behaviours commonly associated with motor homeowners, including loud music, fires and leaving items on the footpath. They worked outside of the operational hours of the Council into the evenings and at weekends to tackle that behaviour as well.

Members questioned if there is scope to extend the consultation of the PSPO process to include some of the aspects relating to anti-social behaviour?
RE to investigate this possibility and report back at the next meeting.

A three-night maximum stay was imposed in Maer Road CP, which is advertised on new signage that has been installed. It advertises the restrictions for motor homeowners in terms of leaving paraphernalia outside their vehicles, the use of barbecues and playing loud music, as well as other such restrictions.

There is a restriction on motor homeowners using their monthly or annual East Devon permit for overnight parking and motorhomes within EDDC car parks. This was instigated primarily because there was a high volume of van-lifers that purchased an annual permit for £120 with the intention of staying in the car park indefinitely.

FC raised a question about the perceived discrimination in parking rules for camper vans and motorhomes that are used as a private vehicles rather than for camping. Despite using it for personal transport, some residents feel penalized by parking restrictions that prevent them from parking in certain areas, including the DCC side of the seafront and EDDC CP during specific times. FC also raised the point that he is unable to purchase a parking permit for his vehicle and he feels this situation is discriminatory because he is being restricted simply due to the type of vehicle he owns, even if it functions as a private vehicle. FC's question seeks a comment on how this can be addressed and whether it's fair to enforce such restrictions, particularly when using their camper van as an everyday vehicle and asked for solutions to this.

RE reiterated that the rules around motorhome and camper van parking were originally intended to accommodate people who use these vehicles as their primary mode of transportation for daily activities. However, the system was being exploited by people living in their vehicles indefinitely in the car parks, creating problems for council officers and making the area less welcoming for tourists due to confrontations and territorial behaviour.

As a result, stricter regulations had to be introduced to prevent this exploitation, which unfortunately impacts people such as residents who use their camper vans as private vehicles for regular purposes. RE acknowledges that this is an unfortunate consequence and a grey area, and while he understands FC's frustrations, the issue arises from misuse by a minority.

In short, the parking restrictions were meant to stop people from living in the car parks, but as a result, people who use camper vans as everyday vehicles are also affected.

5. **DCC and EDDC parking charges.**

FC invited CR (DCC Officer) to provide an update on parking policies related to camper vans and general parking in Devon, specifically in the context of parking charges and their relationship with district council decisions.

- **Camper Van Parking**: CR acknowledged the removal of camper van parking on the main seafront but mentioned there are still parking options at the western end of the seafront where camper vans can park in a pay-and-display area.
- **Parking Charges Policy**: The policy for Devon County Council is to prioritise short-term (under one hour) parking on the street to encourage turnover of parking spaces. For longer stays, the preference is for vehicles to use car parks.
- **Tariff Review**: Devon County is preparing to review parking tariffs across the county and will adjust their rates based on the decisions made by District Councils. If EDDC decide to increase parking fees, Devon County Council will likely follow suit through their democratic process.

In summary, the focus of DCC's response is on maintaining consistency in parking charges with district councils, encouraging short-term parking on streets, and preparing for a county-wide tariff review.

RE discussed the potential for increasing parking charges in 2025 at EDDC, explaining that while the final decision will be made by Council members, it has already been spoken about with the Director of Finance and a recommendation will follow. However, he cautioned that parking fees are already high compared to neighbouring towns, so any increase should be carefully considered.

There is a possibility of reviewing camper van parking charges but EDDC believes that any increase in these charges should be linked to improvements in facilities, such as better monitoring and services. The aspiration is to ensure that higher fees should directly benefit what is being offered to users.

Members agreed with the concept that camper van parking charges should be reinvested into improving facilities. They highlighted that whilst the car park needs to be maintained, there should be a clear connection between the revenue generated from camper van stays and the quality of facilities provided. Members didn't specify exactly how much should be reinvested but supported the idea that the District Council's earnings from camper van parking should be used to enhance the services offered to those users.

6. **Next steps**

LB and members questioned what scope is there for the EDDC to conduct an independent consultation relating specifically to camper vans? LB raised a concern that informal discussions won't provide quantifiable evidence needed to support the initiative if residents challenge it. It was agreed that a proper consultation is necessary to gather measurable support for the proposed facilities, which would help RE and JJ in their efforts.

Members agreed that RE and JJ should look into progressing a consultation on camper van facilities in Exmouth and this should be based on the following:

1. **Structured Consultation**: a formal consultation to gather quantifiable evidence and feedback on camper van facilities.
2. **Engagement with Stakeholders**: consultation will target relevant stakeholders, including residents, visitors, and camper van owners, to ensure that the feedback is representative of those directly impacted.
3. **Use of Surveys**: consider using in-person surveys or questionnaires, similar to past initiatives, rather than general online or postal methods, to capture more meaningful responses.
4. **Focus on Improvements**: questions will need be framed to focus on how to improve the camper van facilities rather than inviting negative feedback about the current situation.
5. **Funding Considerations**: discussion about the possibility of the Town and District Councils contributing funds to support the consultation process.
6. **Timeline for Implementation**: RE should aim to gather input over the winter so that any improvements can be implemented by the next summer season.
7. **Collaboration**: RE will consult with communications team to plan and execute the consultation effectively.

Overall, the aspiration is to develop a constructive approach to enhancing camper van facilities based on community and primary user's input. RE to feed back to TAFF members finding at the next meeting.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the date of the next meeting will be in November to enable RE and JJ to report back on findings.

The meeting finished at 11:20