

District report

As those hot stifling days of summer begin to become a distant memory, we await to see how the current El Nino will impact our forthcoming winter. While there may be some certainty as to what we can expect this winter, the same cannot be said about the massive shake up coming our way with regard to the Local Government Reorganisation. More details have emerged over the summer which make for dismal reading. It would appear that, despite the best efforts of our cllrs and officers, all the hard work and well thought out proposals put forward have been for nothing, with the government going with the plans of the two labour run cities. This has been received with universal rejection from all our rural areas within Devon. We have been severely let down in my opinion. Many parts of the country beset by the same situation, are resorting to legal action, in an attempt to halt, what many believe is a complete waste of time and money, especially as now it appears that no tangible savings and/or improvements will emanate from this major structural change in our democracy.

Things have been made even worse by the PM stating that, following representations made to him by the rural community, "he will have a look at it". This just adds to an already confusing picture. I'm sure in the coming weeks more refined information will filter down from government, which I will pass on as soon as I have anything concrete to report.

In planning news, I have been pressing for clarification on certain points raised in the published government planning review. Key to this for our area is the status of the parkway station in Feniton. The guidance states that a 'well used' railway station close to a proposed development would automatically require the planning department to adopt a presumption to approve. In addition, the report makes mention of a need for the station to be within 800 metres walking distance. Neither statements were particularly clear, so I asked the head of EDDC planning to provide clarity. He has come back and stated that he does not consider the parkway at Feniton to come within the government classification of a well used station due to the current two hourly train stops. This is particularly good news as we can now argue that, if the presence of the station is flagged up as a key element in any major applications it should be able to be dismissed by the planning officers and committee as irrelevant. With regard to the 800 metres walking distance, I queried whether this specifically required the distance to be entirely on pavements and disability access. He was unable to give me clarity on this point at this time as the government report does not specify any of these points. I have asked him to go back and try to get clarification for us.

Since writing the above, the government has announced a pause in the roll out of the LGR. I think it would be obvious to many that this was going to happen, given the way the later parts of the process were being rammed through, with no regard for the democratic process. Will we know more of where we are going next week after full council? I'm not sure. What is looking more certain is that there will be local elections along the usual lines next May. We shall see!

Report ends