



East Devon Alliance to fight for council seats

CANDIDATES representing a new political party will challenge for the seats of some of East Devon's most high-profile Conservative councillors at the local elections in May – a move that could bring about the biggest political shift in the area for decades.

Pulman's View can reveal that the East Devon Alliance – now an officially registered political party – will field candidates to contest at least 40 of the 58 district council seats, including that of deputy leader Andrew Moulding.

The organisation, originally formed as a pressure group in 2013, will now take its battle to the ballot box, with candidates set to fight for more than two-thirds of the seats in May.

The authority is currently dominated by Conserva-

EXCLUSIVE
by Jack Dixon
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tive councillors, with only nine Liberal Democrats and seven independents posing a challenge to the council's majority party members.

But the Alliance is now aiming to bring about a major restructure of the council's political composition, with many prominent Conservatives facing a fight to keep their seats.

The party has already confirmed that the seats of three high-profile councillors will be targeted, with candidates Paul Hayward, Marianne Rixson and Dr Cathy Gardner to challenge deputy leader Andrew Moulding (Axminster), deputy chairman Christine

Drew (Sidmouth and Sidford) and health and wellbeing champion Peter Sullivan (Sidmouth) respectively.

Over the next few weeks, the party is expected to name candidates to take on a number of other leading Conservatives at the elections.

'No point just moaning from the sidelines'

Chairman Paul Arnott, from Colyton, will continue in his role at the head of the new party, with Feniton campaigner Dr John Withrington taking up the position of vice-chairman.

Ottery St Mary's Ian McKintosh, a founder member of the EDA, has been named the party's president, with experienced independent councillor Ben Ingham to fill the role of party leader.

Speaking exclusively to *Pulman's View*, Mr Arnott said: "The East Devon Alliance has been an influential campaigning group working in the context of what many believe to be a maladministered district for the last couple of years.

"But there is no point just moaning about it from the sidelines. So we decided that the only way to reform our council is through the ballot box.

"Therefore, we are constituting ourselves at the Electoral Commission so that we can support independent candidates at the next district elections, who may if they wish stand as 'Independent East Devon Alliance' candidates."

The party has outlined six key principles that its candidates will seek to follow if elected in May. They are to:

- Deliver value for money;
- Support 'sensitive' development;
- Improve standards of conduct, accountability and transparency;
- Nurture the local economy;
- Stand up for local services;
- Protect the natural environment.

If elected, independent East Devon Alliance councillors will pursue a series of specific issues, including plans to freeze the demolition of the council's current

offices in Sidmouth and assess alternatives to its costly relocation project.

According to the party's "action" document, released exclusively to *Pulman's View* last week, candidates will make completion of the district Local Plan their main priority, with further proposals to tighten the definition of key planning terms in order to give residents a greater say in the development of their communities.

EDA candidates will also push for the repeal of controversial public speaking restrictions and the abolition of the cabinet system, in order to "reflect better the political mix" and "ensure that every councillor has a say in crucial aspects of the council's work."

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Mr Arnott added: "We come from a great variety of backgrounds, but we have all come to the same conclusion – that national party politics just isn't working in East Devon. And with more devolution in England round the corner, real local voices need to be heard more than ever.

"In May 2015, the people of East Devon will be offered independent candidates across the district on a previously unknown scale."

The new party was officially launched at Axminster Heritage Centre yesterday (Monday).

See page 5



CAMPAIGN TRAIL: East Devon Alliance members (left to right) Marianne Rixson, Ben Ingham (leader), Cathy Gardner, Paul Hayward, Ian McKintosh (president), Paul Arnott (chairman) and Sheila Smith (treasurer) are leading the new political party into the local elections in May

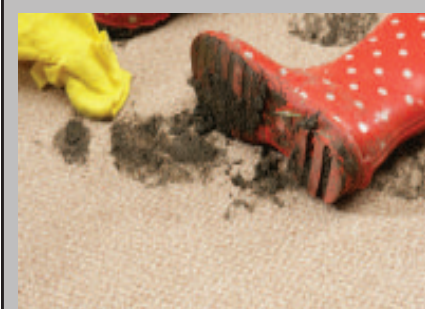
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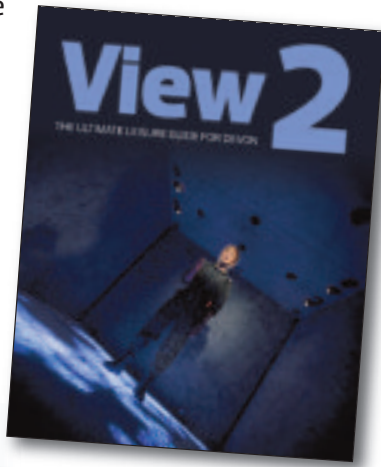
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The ultimate leisure guide for East Devon

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Diary Dates - Our weekly round-up of events in the area



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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS



SIDMOUTH: Stuart Hughes, Devon County Council's cabinet member for highway management, said proposed cuts to bus services were designed to minimise impact.



COLYTON: Paul Arnott chairs the East Devon Alliance, now registered as a new political party, which will field candidates in the local elections.



COLYFORD: The Reverend Hilary Dawson led a special service at St Michael's Chapel of Ease to celebrate the 125th anniversary of its founding.



COLYTON: Rookie runner Brandon Jaycock (10) is training for Seaton's 4km Junior Grizzly to raise money for CLIC Sargent in support of a 3-year-old friend with cancer.

Quotes of the week...

“There is no point just moaning about it from the sidelines... we decided that the only way to reform our council is through the ballot box.”

Colyton resident Paul Arnott, Chairman of the newly-formed political party the East Devon Alliance

“Out of the ashes can come good things.”
Libby Price, co-director of the Filo Project, which is supporting volunteer hosts to care for Honiton's older population, as council cutbacks force the closure of St Michael's Day Centre

“The devil drink got to them.”
PC Steve Speariett, after four now-apologetic youths were sent warning letters following their rampage through Seaton

Full report on page 55

SPORT Rugby – Under 8s



HONITON Tigers scored mixed results when a 12-strong squad made their first-ever foray to a wintry Wellington. They nonetheless produced some of “the best rugby they’ve ever played,” according to coach Jon Hannay.



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TOP STORIES FROM ALL THE OTHER EAST DEVON TOWNS

AXMINSTER

Axminster Chamber to stay... for now

AXMINSTER Chamber of Commerce has been given a stay of execution and looks set to survive. This was brokered during a stormy EGM last week to which Axminster Mayor Jeremy Walden was denied entry because he is not a chamber member.

Mr Walden turned up at the meeting venue, Apple Tree Galleries, but claims vice-chairman Chris Tipping said he could not attend.

The meeting notice circulated by the chamber did say: "This is not an open meeting so, only members are welcome."

Councillor Walden wasn't personally offended, but said refusing him entry was an insult to the town council.

The meeting had been called to allow chairman Lisa Lyman and her committee to formally stand down, and close the chamber because nobody else had come forward to take over.

Former chairman Shane Morgan attended and nominated himself for the chairmanship, but outgoing chairman Lisa Lyman said he was too late.

He pointed out the latest chamber minutes stated: "If no-one has stepped forward prior to the EGM to take on the chair, then the chamber of commerce would be closed down."

Mr Morgan had already made his nomination by e-mail at 10.02am that day, so claimed he was not too late.

But Mrs Lyman claimed that memos sent after the November meeting had moved the deadline to December 11th last year, and superseded the minutes. This meant the chamber would close and funds held in account allocated as per the memos. Mr Morgan refused to accept this and claimed that protocol had been breached.

In the end it was decided to call another meeting and inform all chamber members that Mr Morgan had been nominated for the chairmanship.

From the editor's chair Shake-up at the polls?



THIS week we exclusively reveal that the East Devon Alliance, the pressure group formed in 2013, jumping on any hint of maladministration at Knowle, has formed into an official political party and will be fighting at least two-thirds - probably more - of the district council seats at the next election.

By doing so we will be accused of political bias but believe me those who sit on EDDC and want to retain their seats should sit up and take note.

As we report on the front page of each of our editions this week (a rare occurrence), rather than just standing back and moaning from the touchline, they've decided to field their own team and fight their cause at the ballot box.

It could result in the biggest shake-up in local politics since local government was reorganised in 1974.

When I had the temerity to write in this column a few weeks ago that in 50 years of reporting on councils I could not recall a time when there was more dissatisfaction with our elected representatives, I was castigated by one of the more arrogant members of the ruling party as

"an out-of touch has-been who should have put away my notebook years ago".

Don't you just love it when you've got them on the run!

The EDA will be treated with equal disdain - and that will encourage them even more.

♦ **SOME** good news at last for Axminster!

We report this week that the long-awaited demolition of Webster's Garage - the 30 year-old town centre eyesore - looks like it is about to happen after all.

Owners and developers, Hallmark Estates (Devon) Ltd, has secured private funding to enable the old garage to be demolished in preparation for a temporary town centre car park.

This is brilliant news for the rest of Axminster town centre trading community.

Perhaps now would be the right time for the powers that be to put pressure on the owners of the George Hotel which is rapidly becoming a Webster's Mark II.

Philip Evans

SEATON

Mayor's business summit proposal

ALL Seaton business owners are being invited to a summit by the mayor, Councillor Gaynor Sedgwick.

The aim is first and foremost to let businesses tell the town council about the challenges they face.

Secondly, the town council will inform about initiatives to increase footfall and opportunities available through the town's marketing and events co-ordinator.

Thirdly, Councillor Sedgwick is keen to establish a 'working together approach'.

Mayor Sedgwick presented the idea to the town council on Monday, January 26th, saying: "I'm heartened by the investment of businesses in the town, both in terms of new businesses

opening and the refurbishment of established businesses.

"I am aware, however, that trading is slow and difficult both locally and nationally.

"I propose that we invite a cross-section of business owners in the town to an informal meeting or series of meetings.

"The purpose would be to hear and understand the challenges businesses face and to ensure that, as a council, we understand the difficulties."

Councillor Dawn Squire supported the idea but was keen to include all business owners as opposed to a cross-section of them.

Other town councillors also supported the idea of inviting all business owners. A date, place and format will be announced in due course.

OTTERY ST MARY

Neighbourhood Plan gets the go ahead

TOWN councillors are urging local people to come forward to help shape the future development of the parish, after district bosses gave the green light for work to begin on a Neighbourhood Plan for Ottery St Mary and the surrounding area.

Planning chiefs at East Devon District Council have now approved the initial application, enabling members of the community to press ahead with the ambitious project.

Now the process is in motion, work can finally begin on the plan, which will set out development guidelines for the entire parish.

The innovative scheme, introduced in 2011 under the Localism Act, is designed to give communities more say in the development of their area.

And following a lengthy process, including extensive consultation with residents, the finished plan would become a statutory document.

When the plan is completed, it will be examined by expert officers before being put to a local referendum so that residents of Ottery and the surrounding villages can have their say.

To contact the council call the town clerk's office on 01404 812252 or email enquiries@otterystmary-tc.gov.uk

HONITON

Councillors call for police investigation into Beehive finances

A GROUP of Honiton town councillors has called for a police investigation into the council's finances, following allegations of mismanagement over the Beehive project.

The matter will be discussed at the full council meeting next Monday (February 9th), after six members signed a request for the item to be included.

They will call for the police - "a truly independent body" - to look into the council's finances and scrutinise the costs of the Beehive project.

Their motion reads: "Given matters impacting on risk to the precepting authority Honiton Town Council and relating to the Beehive Community Centre, this council resolves to approach a truly independent body, namely Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, to investigate concerns relating to public finances and contractual matters."

The "wholly unfounded" allegations were strongly refuted by the Mayor of Honiton, Peter Halse, who said he was "astounded" by the claims.

One of the signatories, Councillor Taylor, claims that £100,000 borrowed from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) is to be used for an "improper purpose".

The council agreed to borrow the money in order to provide a "safety net" to cover the unexpected costs of the Beehive project, but Councillor Taylor says it will be used to "replace poached reserves" instead.

He alleges that the council's reserves have been depleted because £75,000 worth of bills - described in a November report as "additional unanticipated variations" for the construction of the Beehive - were paid before being disputed.

He also says he believes that some of the money will be placed in a high interest account to help repay the council's original loan for the Beehive build.

In a statement issued last week, he said: "...to apply for money knowing that it is not needed for a purpose allowed under PWLB rules is illegal because it is a way of replacing reserves that are required to be kept by all councils but in the case of Honiton Town [Council] have been 'poached'."

But the claims were later dismissed as "totally false" by Councillor Halse, who called for the allegations to be withdrawn and an apology offered.

The row followed a meeting held behind closed doors last Monday evening, during which councillors resolved to agree a 10-year lease for the Beehive company to run the community centre, enabling it to apply for charity status.

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The birth of a new political party

THE birth of East Devon Alliance as a political party was announced during a launch party in Thomas Whitty House, Axminster, yesterday (Monday).

It was a fairly low-key event with about 20 candidates and EDA supporters in attendance.

EDA chairman Paul Arnott opened the meeting in buoyant mood and quickly issued a rallying cry, saying: "We won't be stopped, East Devon appartchiks."

He added that the straw which broke the EDA back was East Devon District

by Anders Larsson
anders@tindlenews.co.uk

Council's (EDDC) decision last year to restrict the opportunity for members of the public to speak at meetings.

On a more light-hearted note, Mr Arnott, a Charlton Athletic fan, referred to the rosette he sported, saying: "I haven't had a rosette since Charlton played Crystal Palace in the early 70s, I feel like I've won Best in Class at Crufts."

He handed over the microphone to EDA leader Ben Ingham, who read the manifesto verbatim, before saying: "EDDC is floundering desperately without a local plan."

He promised swift action if EDA

gained enough votes, and described the fledgling party's campaign as "like a breath of fresh air in a stagnant [political] room".

He added that it was all about "getting rid of the establishment" and re-

placing it with "a group of people that actually cares about East Devon".

The formal part of the launch concluded with a brisk walk to the Minster Green where candidates and supporters gathered for a photo.

■ Leader Ben Ingham delivers his speech at the EDA launch in Axminster



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