

## District Report for AGM 2014: Exeter & East Devon

- 1. Flooding.** In the past, farmers have been entitled, indeed encouraged, to maintain their rivers and watercourses. The silt recovered was used as fertiliser on the land, and the gravel for roadways. I raised this matter 4 years ago with the Environment Agency (“EA”), in respect of flooding of the lower end of the River Clyst, and received a negative reply.
- 2.** CPRE Devon is seriously concerned about the loss of good farmland, as UK imports 40% of our food, and thus we have a security of supply problem. There is no national policy for Land Use. At the time of writing in February 2014, there is catastrophic flooding on the Somerset Levels, repeated elsewhere. In East Devon, we have considered the River Clyst. It is clear that the main cause for this disaster is the lack of dredging, responsibility for which has lain with the EA since 1996 when they took over from the National Rivers Authority. Thus the flood water, mostly arising from heavy rain, has nowhere to escape.
- 3.** The statutory definition of Flood Defence (S.113 WRA 1991) means “the drainage of land and provision of flood warning systems”. The EA have failed to do drainage. The excuse has been that climate change has caused sea level to rise. However MHWS Devonport has remained the same since 1968, so “flood anyhow” is a false premise. We thus hope that sanity will now prevail, inter alia that Riparian Owners will be encouraged to maintain their rivers, from which action they are in fact not prohibited.
- 4. Solar PV.** This stochastically intermittent renewable source, with Load Factor of 10%, really is not a suitable means of producing mains electricity. Yet it is pursued by developers as easy money, due to the long term state aid subsidy. Again we are concerned about the loss of good agricultural land, and in East Devon we have lost 360 acres to solar PV to date.
- 5.** However we do now have confirmation from DEFRA (Rural Payments Agency) that such land is not eligible for Single Farm Payment. We have also heard from the DCLG that such land is liable for Business Rates. These matters should cause a slowdown in large Solar PV, but also we may see abandonment of some sites.
- 6. Feniton.** This village, which includes what was known as Sidmouth Junction, has seen a rash of Housing proposals recently. In January, there began a 3-week Public Inquiry involving 3 separate developer appellants. It made the national newspapers. Moreover the indignation of the residents has been apparent, at the proposal to build a further 235 dwellings.
- 7.** The East Devon Local Plan is out of date, so the NPPF applies with a “presumption in favour of sustainable development”. Whilst it has been interesting to see the 3 developers each knocking the other two’s plans, there is a very serious principle here. It is whether or not the local plan provides a 5-year housing supply. EDDC have capitulated on this point, but we have not. If you use the factually correct 2011

census figures, as opposed to the 2008 estimates, it is clear that the population is growing at 0.52% pa, as opposed to the estimated 1.0%pa. The Feniton decision is expected in May 2014.

8. **Local Plan EDDC.** The Examination in Public of the new Local Plan is due to begin on 11 February 2014. Land use is key. We shall raise the matter of Housing 5-year supply, and emphasise the loss of agricultural land for this and other matters. We have prepared a Policy on the matter of Flooding, to encourage all parties to maintain the ditches and rivers and watercourses, so that they operate at full capacity. We are also proposing a policy for renewables, to support only those that produce despatchable power.
9. **Railways.** On 4 February 2014, the GWR main line at Dawlish was severed by the sea. The alternative route of the Teign Valley line went in 1958. On 8 February 2014, the GWR main line was severed by the floods at Bridgwater (to Bristol) and at Athelney (to Westbury), together with the LSWR main line at Crewkerne by landslip. Serious consideration should now be given to reinstatement of the LSWR lane (23 miles) Okehampton to Tavistock to Plymouth, and it does seem that these are greater rail priorities than HS2.

TJWH 10 February 2014