

## LITTLEHAM AND LANDCROSS PARISH COUNCIL REPORT

### Special Parish Council Meeting 17 July

Councillor James Morrish, Leader of Torridge District Council, attended the special Parish Council to talk about the proposed arrangements for local government in Devon. He prefaced this talk by thanking the Parish Council for their support during TDC's journey to improvement since May 1997. TDC is currently going through a performance assessment and Cllr Morrish expects that this will demonstrate improved performance in several areas.

Cllr Morrish then referred to the Boundary Commission draft proposal for Devon which is for a Unitary Authority which includes Exeter. (Torbay and Plymouth will remain as two separate Unitary Authorities) i.e. three Unitary Authorities in Devon. The Boundary saw some merit in the formation of two Unitary Authorities apart from Torbay and Plymouth. In this case Exeter and Exmouth would be together and the remainder of Devon would form another unit i.e. four Unitary Authorities. The Boundary Commission's preferred option is for three Unitary Authorities for Devon and the Parish Council should respond to this option. The Boundary Commission would accept no further representations on any other options.

There were a number of questions from the audience and in answer to these questions Cllr. Morrish made the following points:

- Parish Councils would remain in their present form but could take on more responsibility if they wished to.
- 28 Community Boards would be established. These would be centred on the market towns.
- If the Parish Council felt that planning should be handled locally then the Parish Council would need to make representation to the Boundary Commission.

Cllr. Morrish was thanked for taking the time in his busy schedule to meet Littleham and Landcross.

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### Parish Council Meeting 7 August

Discussion of the formation of Unitary Authorities took place at the Parish Council meeting on 7 August. Some members of the council wished to remain with the status quo while others accepted the merits of a Unitary Authority centred around Exeter. More details of the discussion can be found on the community website in the Parish Council minutes.

A copy of the Parish Council letter to the Boundary Commission follows:

*Dear Sir*

*The Parish Council wish to comment on the Structural Review of Devon: Draft Proposal as follows: -*

- 1. The draft proposal for a separate Exeter (or extended Exeter) Unitary Council to be established is strongly opposed. The Parish Council is unanimous that Exeter is our "county town" and an inseparable integral part of the existing administrative county.*

2. *Of the two proposed unitary options, the Parish Council supports a Unitary Council for the whole of the administrative county of Devon, but Parish Councillors have concerns that local democracy could be seriously weakened, unless effective Local Community Boards are to be established within the new Unitary Council.*
3. *Parish Councillors believe that there is need for more local representation, if a Devon Unitary Council is to be created. They urge the Boundary Commission to ensure that "Planning" continues to be administered from a local district centre. In Torridge District, that would be Bideford.*
4. *Members unanimously express grave concern over the undue haste being applied. Further consultation with district, town and parish councils on the detail within the new Unitary Council for Devon proposals is essential.*
5. *When Members voted on which Community Board area would be most suitable for Littleham and Landcross, based on the scant information available, the vote was: - Bideford 5, Torrington 2 and 2 members abstained, due to insufficient information.*
6. *There is concern that the unitary proposals might not generate savings for about five years, because of severance and set-up costs. Steps should be taken to ensure that there is early evidence of benefit and savings arising from any new structure introduced.*
7. *Parish Councillors also suggest that your committee should learn from experiences in rural counties where Unitary Local Government has already been introduced, or will come into effect ahead of Devon. Hereford, Cornwall, Shropshire and Norfolk were mentioned.*

The full text of the Boundary Committee's report for Devon can be accessed at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/data/assets/pdf/0011/56657/report-on-devon-review-web.pdf>

The Home Office Minister, Hazel Blears, has the final decision on this reorganisation of local government.

This has been a busy summer for the Parish Council!

Mari.