Cllr Todd Olive
Whimple & Rockbeare Ward, East Devon District Council
todd.olive@eastdevon.gov.uk

Ward Report to Rockbeare Parish Council
20 October 2026

Cranbrook Leisure Centre

Preparations for the new leisure centre continue to advance at a rapid pace. The planning application for the facility has now been approved by Planning Committee; as one of the two nominated Portfolio Holders for the project, I am regularly updated with detailed technical design and costings work which is progressing with urgency in parallel and I am confident is moving quickly enough to maintain the ambitious programme set out. East Devon District Council continues to target commencement on site as early as spring of next year.

New East Devon Leisure Operator

In a drive to cut costs for local taxpayers, EDDC has been undertaking a review of its leisure service over the past couple of years – and in particular the level of subsidy provided historically to LED to run the service on the council's behalf.

Following an extensive review process, with significant input from experts in the field, the council took the decision to break its existing contract with LED and undertake a full procurement exercise. That exercise has now concluded, with Everyone Active winning the bid to take over the running of East Devon's leisure services early in 2027 – which has the added benefit of securing the contract through disruption expected should government choose to move forward with Local Government Reorganisation. Work to get the transition between operators going is well underway.

New East Devon Recycling & Waste Operator

With the council's contract with Suez to provide recycling and waste collections across the district coming to an end, EDDC's Cabinet and Council took the decision around 18 months ago to proceed with a new model of providing this service – through a local authority-owned 'arms length' company (or LATco). That decision was made in light of a detailed business case which estimated significant savings could be made when compared with the conventional outsourcing approach – particularly so given that the regulatory environment in the sector is going through a period of significant change.

The new operator – EDENserv – has now taken over running the service as of several weeks ago, with the transition having gone smoothly and services continuing to run at the high standards we have enjoyed in the district for many years now.

Community Governance Review (CGR)

The Community Governance Review was formally considered at East Devon District Council's Full Council meeting in September and the recommendations set out in the report were approved. In line with guidance from the EDDC Monitoring Officer and the Code of Conduct, I declared an Other Registrable Interest in the matter due to my membership of Whimple Parish Council. As a result, I stepped aside from participating in the substantive debate and abstained from voting, as did members of other affected towns and parishes, including Cranbrook.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

The government's pause on structural reorganisation across the country remains in place pending review. We currently have no timelines for when this supposed 'rapid review' will be reporting back – several rumoured dates in the past few weeks have come and gone without news. However, it is now established that ordinary District Council elections will proceed as scheduled in May, rather than the previously anticipated inaugural elections to new unitary authorities.

Efforts in parliament by my party to require the publication of legal advice informing the pause met opposition from whipped government MPs and consequently sadly did not proceed. Meanwhile, Devon County Council held off on deciding whether to proceed with judicial review proceedings pending the government's response to its pre-action correspondence, which was due in mid-September and has been continually delayed.

London Road Improvements

Works and technical assessments for pedestrian and cycle improvements along the London Road (B3174) corridor are continuing. I have been liaising with relevant officers to seek any updates on detailed designs and a definitive delivery schedule but currently have no further news on progress or a timetable.

Cranbrook Neighbourhood Health Hub

Discussions concerning the delivery of the Cranbrook Neighbourhood Health Hub unfortunately remain stalled. This is due to NHS Devon's continued reluctance to proceed via the agreed 'Section 2' partnership mechanism previously approved by EDDC. I am continuing to press NHS Devon and regional healthcare commissioners on this issue, as our local GP practices remain under acute operational strain and resolving this infrastructure deficit is vital for surrounding communities including Rockbeare.

Emerging Local Plan

While strategic allocations directly within Rockbeare Parish itself are limited, the draft Local Plan establishes critical overarching policies for our local green wedges and the wider district. The plan is scheduled to come before the Strategic Planning Committee on 1 December 2026 to be considered for formal submission to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination in Public.

Planning Decisions and Notable Applications

At Planning Committee, following representations made by myself with the support of Cranbrook's Cllr Kim Bloxham, members resolved to refuse the light industrial planning application situated within the Green Wedge adjacent to Grange Court Hotel. The committee endorsed our position that the site cannot reasonably be treated as previously developed land and that the proposed mitigations were insufficient to justify the harm to the Green Wedge. An appeal from the applicant remains anticipated, and I will be tracking it closely through the Planning Inspectorate.

Conversely, the committee was not minded to refuse the residential application largely fronting London Road. Working alongside planning officers, I was able to secure a significant reduction of approximately one-third in the number of dwellings proposed, including the complete removal of the westernmost parcel adjacent to Clay Hill so that development is confined to the fields east of the Dragon Inn. Nevertheless, citing the substantial weight attached by national policy to addressing housing affordability, the committee concluded that landscape harm and the loss of Green Wedge land were insufficient grounds to refuse the scheme under current guidance. As a limited mitigating factor, the permission legally protects a substantial parcel of land elsewhere within the Green Wedge as Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGs) for decades to come, giving that area stronger statutory safeguards than traditional planning designations provide.

Statutory Planning Reforms and Delegations

The government has introduced new rules around how decisions on planning applications can be made by local planning authorities. By law, all minor and householder applications (among other categories) must now be determined under delegated officer authority without recourse to the Planning Committee. Furthermore, strict statutory thresholds have been imposed governing when major applications can be referred – this being

permissible only where the application raises 'significant' environmental, economic, or social issues; or other significant planning questions on material considerations for the applications.

The major change here is that this eliminates the ability of district councillors to 'call in' applications for consideration beyond the usual officer determination – either for further review at Chair's Delegation or full Planning Committee meetings, depending on the application and context. Although EDDC pushed back strongly during the national consultation process, all local planning authorities are legally required to operate under this revised framework – there is no choice.

The implications for parish councils are that representations on planning applications – particularly where objections are raised – should be laser-focussed on ensuring issues with substantive material planning considerations are identified, preferably with reference to neighbourhood and district planning policies and the NPPF, and where possible with evidence, documentation, or similar. In essence, consultees can no longer assume that a small representation can lead to a larger platform to make the case down the line.