

**Annual Chairman's Report
Managing the Environment Policy Development Group
April 2014 – March 2015**

As Chairman of the above Group I wish to submit my report to Council for the year 2014-15.

During the past 12 months the Group have been engaged on a number of important matters, which in due course will have a significant impact on the services that MDDC supplies to the electorate.

Waste and Recycling Service

Continuing on from 2013/2014 the Groups main topic of policy development involved the Waste and Recycling Service, in that during 2014 major steps were taken to improve the whole service.

In order to achieve the high standards required, and the savings envisaged, certain major areas had to be evaluated and decisions taken by the Group to recommend to Cabinet and Full Council that such policies were needed to meet expected improvement of services.

To that end, steps were taken to improve the refuse and recycling fleet as the current vehicles in operation were taking an even larger cut of budget to maintain and service due to the age of the fleet, therefore during the early part of 2014 tenders (based on MDDC operational requirements) were sent out to some 6 suppliers for the supply of 10 new recycling vehicles.

The successful tender was received in July 2014 at a cost of £84K for 12 tonne vehicles (5 of) and £79K for 11 tonne vehicles (5 of); this was cheaper than covered in the 2014/15 capital Budget Programme. Following in depth discussion/debate the group recommended to the September Cabinet that the tender be accepted, it was accepted and fully endorsed by Full Council later that month. Vehicles were delivered from January through to March 2015 and since that time have been in operational use. To date, results are matching the full requirements that MDDC needed and will in the near future show the savings that the Group were tasked to find. On a final note the crews have found the fleet to be a vast improvement.

In the same vein the Group were also tasked with improving the collection on refuse and recycling over the whole district and from reports received from Officers, analysis and taking into account views expressed by Members and the general public it was recommended to and approved by both Cabinet and Council that by October 2015 a new scheme would be fully operational. This would include the collection of all types of plastic (excluding film), and coverage of the scheme would increase from 80% to 100%. Included in the new scheme was the collection of cardboard and a possible charge for garden waste collection, that decision would be made prior to October when the scheme goes live.

A trial of the new scheme was undertaken in February 2015 (part urban/part rural) and whilst awaiting a full report back to the PDG as to the reaction of the participants

it does appear that the community involved has adapted to the change. At this point I need to express the thanks of the PDG to the excellent work, expertise and input shown by all Officers involved in the exercise and it is noticeable that their understanding of the scheme has been paramount to its success.

At the same time that the new scheme was evolving it was recognised that Silverton Mill would not be able to cope. Fortunately MDDC's lease on these premises was due for renewal and whilst discussions/reports were undertaken an operational decision was made that new premises were urgently needed. To that end premises under a 5 year lease were found in Tiverton and have been occupied since mid-2014 by the recycling team. One word of caution must be made, MDDC only have a 5 year lease, and therefore future steps must including the finding of suitable long term premises.

As a PDG this last 12 months has been challenging, in that major decisions and recommendations have been made so that MDDC is geared to meet future challenges in waste and recycling strategy.

One final note on this particular subject, as Chairman of the PDG I am also tasked as a member of the Waste Project Group that over the last months has been shadowing the effects of the scheme. Such discussions/debates have been reported (through myself) to the PDG.

Despite the amount of time that waste/recycling has taken with-in the PDG other areas during the year have included:

Play Areas

A survey of current play areas within MDDC's remit was undertaken during this past year, with the aim of ascertaining the use of the same by the public, and whether or not certain play areas (103 in the District) supersede each other by having similar equipment on site. From those surveys and responses from Town/Parish Councils discussions are currently taking place with those parties who showed an interest in taking up some of the costs associated with running the same. One of our main reasons for the survey was that many of the play areas have been operational for many years and the S106 agreements with developers have ended, meaning that MDDC are now financially involved with the upkeep and the maintenance. This now leads to the next matter under discussion by the PDG, namely:

Public Conveniences

Recommendation was made to the Cabinet that Officers continue discussions with Town and Parish Councils for assistance towards the upkeep and maintenance of such in the district. This is an ongoing matter, but to date it is pleasing to note that Town and some Parish Councils have agreed to assist in the upkeep and maintenance, now whilst certain buildings have been closed in 2014 it is hoped that measures agreed to date will assist in the long term of maintaining of such facilities.

Other matters discussed/debated by the PDG during 2014/15 included supermarket packaging, multi storey car park (a new working group was set up in 2014 to

ascertain future policy), air quality (Crediton/Cullompton), flood risk (future flood plans with DCC/Environment Agency), wild flower meadows (during 2014 season trials were undertaken proved beneficial to those areas concerned and in 2015 other areas will be taken into a wider scheme).

Besides the above, budget and performance and risk management also played an important part of the PDG. All in all 2014/15 was another varied and busy year for the PDG, therefore, in closing my sincere thanks go to all the Members who have given their valuable support and keen insight into the matters covered and discussed. Some debates have been keenly undertaken, but always for the benefit of the Council and the wider community we serve.

It would be totally remiss of me not to mention the assistance and support that I had from the former Head of Service, namely Mr P Williams, whose manner towards me, and I trust of the other PDG Members, was to give us that information and insight that was required on matters pertaining to his department.

My sincere thanks also go to all those Officers who in the many years I have been the Chairman of this PDG have never failed with their experience and knowledge. I will always maintain that we, as Members, are very fortunate to have such a team looking after this PDG and whilst not to acknowledge one Officer from another, I must acknowledge the wonderful help given to me by Ms Julia Stuckey, many thanks for your trouble in keeping me on the right path!!

Here ends my report.

M A Lucas
Chairman
March 2015