

Full Council
Wednesday 4th September 2024

Barry Warren – local resident.

Mr Chairman

A Performance and Risk report has been circulating before various Committees and PDG's of the Council. At a recent meeting of the Audit Committee a member commented on the low risk score under reference CR9a 3 Rivers – Reputational Damage - but regrettably his comments and the response from the Section 151 Officer are not minuted other than by a meaningless passing reference.

Reply from the Chairman – as has been confirmed on numerous occasions the minutes are a summary of the discussion(s). Whereas, the taped recording includes a full account of the whole meeting.

The Section 151 Officer concluded his response to the member with these words: *“I also do think, this is my own personal opinion, the council does need to move on and refocus its effort on delivering the services we should be proud of and that our residents want, rather than dwelling on something that has happened **and has now been finished.**”*

3 Rivers is being closed down, but how can it be said to be finished when the Council has admitted to a loss of millions of pounds and had millions more moved from reserves, or brought back from previous years, to try and reduce the visible loss figure.

There are still ongoing impairments; unsold properties at Bampton; land in Cullompton bought at an over-inflated price; St. George's Court in Tiverton still requiring considerable additional expenditure to make it ready for HRA use; the selling of land bought to deliver 70 affordable houses in Tiverton, the Park Road Nursery site and more.

Some of these issues will be affecting the Council Tax Payers of Mid Devon for some years yet. It may be convenient to wish it was finished - but it is not.

Also, will this Council's partnership commitment with Zed Pods be a new 3 Rivers?

Reply from the Chairman – it may be worth reflecting that in the past 6 months Zpods have won a number of major construction awards (and were short-listed for 6 others), e.g. Construction News Awards 2024 winner for the category “Client of the Year” (national) and Constructing Excellence SW awards, winner in two categories for St Andrew's House “Climate Action” and “Building Project of the Year up to £5m” (SW regional). In addition the company has also achieved Construction News Specialist Awards winner for St Andrew's House for the category “Project of the Year by a Specialist Contractor (up to £2m)” (national) and been awarded the Kings Award for Enterprise, announced by the Construction Industry Council.

Many questions are being asked about costs and construction. Detailed responses – not answers – have been put forward to public questions. One recent response, given by the relevant portfolio holder, was so very long and detailed that the words could only have come direct from Zed Pods. It is a pity that some of that information is different from what is being put forward in the planning applications that Zed Pods are making on behalf of MDDC.

Questions are also being asked about project delivery times being extended and costs increased.

Reply from the Chairman – the Council is aware of a number of questions that have been asked over a number of months, which all appear to emanate from a very restricted source. All of the questions that have been submitted have been answered fully and promptly to my knowledge.

Is 'due diligence and value for money' really being exercised on behalf of the Council Tax Payers?

Reply from the Chairman – I'm sure our officers and auditors, both internal and external, are undertaking appropriate due diligence to ensure that value for money is achieved.

Will the Scrutiny and Audit Committees take a good and forensic look at the public money spent on these projects?

Reply from the Chairman - The Chairman and representatives of these two Committees were present at this meeting and will of course structure their forward plans as they see fit.