

West Hill Parish Council (WHPC) – 1st November 2022
Agenda Item: 22/337

Half year Review of WHPC Plan for 2022/23

Background

The WHPC strap line is, “Working with the Community to maintain and enhance West Hill’s special character” and is the steer as to what the Council does and how it does it. One of the key words is ‘with’ and the Plan aimed at putting a greater emphasis on this aspect – engaging with and working with residents to meet community needs now and into the future.

There are numerous activities that the WHPC undertakes that could be described as ‘business as usual’ including such as:

- Providing, maintaining and enhancing the Play Park,
- Provision of ‘dog bins’,
- Operating two Vehicle Activated Signs to remind drivers of the relevant speed limits in an effort to encourage greater road safety,
- Being a statutory Consultee on all Planning Applications to the East Devon District Council,
- Providing input to various consultations from other agencies, and raising matters pertinent to the community with relevant agencies,
- Representation on other bodies, eg Exeter Airport Consultative Group, Ottery Health Matters
- Providing Grant funding to local organisations and charities in their work in the community including Ottery Help Scheme in support of social group Boardroom at the Narthex, for the summer fete organised by the PTFA and Royal British Legion for a flagpole.
- Signposting residents to the correct agency or organisation to discuss and help with their issues
- Publication of a regular informative newsletter to every household in West Hill

These functions have continued during the first six months of the Plan.

The Council consists of 7 Councillors, who are volunteers, and a part time Clerk. The Council has to be mindful of the realistic capacity it has to directly ‘do’. Thus the Council needs to work with others to ensure the delivery of benefits for the community. There will be elections for all the seats on the Parish Council in May 2023 and the then newly formed Council will no doubt want to set out their own Plan. It is important that the current Council works to put in place the building blocks to enable the transition required.

Half year review

The below Groups were accepted at the May 2022 Council meeting as the delivery structure for the key issues the WHPC will do during this coming year. The Terms of Reference for each Group were approved along with the table indicating the membership of each Group.

So what has been achieved to date?

1. Strategic Planning Group - the East Devon District Council (EDDC) is currently developing a new plan to set out how it will meet the governmental targets required for increased housing. In a district where some 80% of the land is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that restricts the areas where development could be achieved.

This work is vital to West Hill to ensure we work to influence the East Devon District Council to ensure the Local Plan does not damage the nature of our very special environment, eg. Developments that merge West Hill and Ottery St Mary, housing numbers incompatible with key provisions such as schooling, medical facilities, etc., and protect what green corridors exist, etc.

The Group has ensured Council are appraised of the issues arising from the development of a draft Local Plan and ensuring representations have been made as appropriate. The Group has also sought to keep the community informed through our newsletters, website and noticeboards. An open session for the Community has been arranged to take place during the public consultation on the draft plan. This is to be held on 18th November (3.45-8.00pm at the Village Hall).

The work of the Group has had to be extended as the Ottery St Mary Town Council are seeking to renew the existing Ottery St Mary with West Hill Neighbourhood Plan. This Council will need to decide whether it is now time to develop a dedicated Neighbourhood Plan for West Hill or do jointly with Ottery St Mary. An informal meeting is to held for Councillors on 8th November 2022 to discuss the issues for a decision to be taken at the December meeting. Whatever the decision it will involve considerable work over the next three years.

2. New Pedestrian Access to Village Hall Group - the provision of a pedestrian footway from West Hill Road into the Village Hall and also the Primary School was initially raised some years before WHPC existed, the idea being raised through a survey of the community. This is an example of working with others within the Community, and there is an established Joint WHPC/Village Hall Trustees Working Group. The Group is currently taking forward the Commissioning Phase and have submitted a variation Planning application that is awaiting approval, so that the tendering phase can commence.

3. The three Standing Groups:

a) **Finance Group** – this group is essential in ensuring good fiscal governance by WHPC. So far this year work has included:

- regularly reviewed spending – target against actual – to alert Council of significant variances
- assisted the Clerk with the preparation of the end of year financial statements in preparation for the external audit
- reviewed the end of year financial reserves and made recommendations to Council for their allocation
- monitored the Council's financial risks
- continued to administer the employee pension scheme and ensured contribution payments are made appropriately
- monitored bank transactions, checked invoices and monthly bank reconciliations
- continuing the search for an Internal Auditor
- Preparing a draft budget and consideration of precept for 2023/24 to recommend to full council.

b) **Policy Group** – this group will identify and draft additional policies required, as well as, ensuring the review and updating of current policies. This Group is important in ensuring good governance. Work so far this year includes:

- updated WHPC Code of Conduct to reflect changes made by East Devon District Council to their Code
- created an Investment Strategy policy document
- created a Training Policy and Training Record
- review of existing WHPC policy documents to ensure they remain up to date and fit for purpose in preparation for the Annual Meeting in May 2023.

c) **HR Group** – this group has been dealing with the issue of the Council's duty of care of its employee, the Clerk. It has also had to be involved in Code of Conduct issues and complaints against its employee.

4. Community Engagement Group – this group has a multi-faceted role that is aimed at improving the interface between the WHPC and the community to ensure a two way dialogue, to ensure residents are kept informed and in enabling the identification of concerns, issues and potential initiatives.

One key area is to set in train actions that would encourage residents to consider putting themselves forward to be elected councillors in 2023. The Group will need to consider how the WHPC can interact with all age groups and the diversity of West Hill.

Actions this year:

- Issue of free hi-viz tabards for the reception class at the primary school and pupils at the pre-school
- Judged the village Scarecrow competition
- Visited a local charity to show support

- Organised open evenings for residents to meet Councillors, and to provide information to those considering becoming Councillors at the next election.
- Provision of newsletters
- Prepare for the Annual Parish Meeting in March 2023

5. West Hill Parish Council Tree Group – renamed WHPC Arboretum Group continuing the themes of working with the Community and West Hill being a ‘Woodland Village’ this Group was established to work with interested residents. Key will be the Group identifying where there are trees (or groups or hedges etc) that should be protected by Tree Preservation Orders, look at ways of encouraging residents to take a greater interest in the trees of the village, as well as, other flora and fauna interests.

6. Road Safety Group – When one Councillor stood down from the Group, Council decided that due to capacity issues the Group would be suspended. Any key issues would be dealt with by full Council.

WHPC have worked with residents and the Devon County Council (DCC) in regard to concerns of parking in Bendarroch Road. DCC have now approved for yellow lines.

Other projects

Closed as work specified completed.

- Playpark Task and Finish Group - New climbing frame with slide etc installed.
- Queen’s Jubilee Group – events and commemorative works completed.

Smaller initiatives

- Remembrance Day Task and Finish Group – supporting the Royal British Legion with regards road closures for 2022 event – to be completed November 2022.
- Provision of benches in suitable locations in the village – as and when locations identified, to be worked up by a Councillor – one jubilee bench provided at the Church to go with a tree to commemorate those who died during the pandemic.
- Supporting the provision of familiarisation training for the two defibrillators installed by the Council, in conjunction with the South West Ambulance Service and the Royal British Legion.
- Funding a second kit for the Community First Responders, also supported by the County Councillor from her Locality Fund.
- Discussions with local groups to identify local need for ‘warm rooms’ and encourage events.

On our minds, but not currently actionable

- Provision of open space/ recreation areas – consideration has been given to land when becoming available – nothing suitable identified yet

Outside Body representation.

WHPC continues to maintain links through Councillor representation on some other bodies:

- Exeter Airport Consultative Group
- Cranbrook and Ottery St Mary Community Safety Group- there have been no meetings to date.
- Police and Crime Commissioner’s Councillor Advocate
- OStM Health Matters – a newly reformed Group that’s held one meeting.
- Leisure in East Devon Group – there have been no meetings.

Decisions:

- **Councillors to note the Half Year review of Annual Plan.**
- **Councillors to consider priorities for the next six months and agree these.**

Della Cannings, Chairman West Hill Parish Council October 2022