

WEST HILL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

HELD ON 1st September 2026 at 7.00pm

Present: Chairman Cllr Francis Pullman (FP), Cllr ShirleyMay Saunders (SMS), Cllr Ann Cooper (AC),

In attendance: Anne Oliver Parish Clerk, DCC/EDDC Cllr Jess Bailey (from 7.35pm), 4 members of the public

Apologies: Cllr Michael Owen (MO), Cllr Ben Jewell (BJ)

Minute reference 26/

217 Welcome and Chairman's announcements (for information only)

The meeting started at 7.00pm. The Chairman, Cllr FP, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Announcements included:

- September 2026 marked the first anniversary of the opening of the West Hill Road entrance to the Village Hall site. The entrance and path, commissioned by the Parish Council, was well used on a daily basis.

218 Apologies. To receive apologies and approve reasons for absence, if considered appropriate.

Cllrs Owen and Jewell sent their apologies and reasons for absence non-attendance which were accepted by the Council.

219 Public question time (3 minutes): To allow members of the public present to give their question/comments to the Parish Council on issues on this agenda or raise issues for further consideration at the discretion of the Chairman, before the start of the Parish Council meeting. Members of the public may not take part in the Parish Council meeting itself. (Contributions are limited to 3 minutes).

Eileen Perkins, West Hill Footpath Warden:

- a. spoke in support of her application for treeworks 26/1664/TRE
- b. reported a rotten signpost on Footpath 1 (off Bendarroch Road)
- c. asked for an update on resumption of bus services serving the village

Action: Clerk to request an update on bus services to the village during current roadworks.

220 District and County Councillors' reports: To receive reports for information (items raised for decision will appear on the agenda for the next meeting).

This item was taken later on the agenda when the Ward Member joined the meeting at 7.35pm.

County/District Councillor Jess Bailey reported that she had submitted formal comments to DCC raising concerns about the impact of Local Government Reform (LGR) on West Hill. She reported that other Devon communities had also raised concerns.

The Chairman noted that residents had not contacted the Parish Council to raise concerns and suggested some may not be aware of the potential issues.

Action: Clerk to arrange a meeting between Cllr JB and Cllr FP to discuss the possible impact of LGR.

The Clerk asked for an update on the Emerging East Devon Local Plan. Cllr JB expected EDDC's Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 22 September 2026 to recommend to Full Council that the Local Plan be submitted for examination late October 2026.

221 Declarations of Interest:

- a. To receive Declarations of interest for items on the agenda and receipt of requests for new Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) dispensations for items on the agenda. Members are also reminded that

any change to their Declaration of Interests must be notified to the Monitoring Officer at East Devon District Council within 28 days of the change.

- Cllrs FP and AC each declared no interests for items on the agenda.
- Cllr SMS declared an interest (as a neighbour) in agenda item 26/224 planning application 26/1423/PIP and would leave the room for that item.

222 Confidential/exempt items. In consideration of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted): **to agree any items** to be dealt with after the public and press have been excluded. **It was resolved to consider agenda item 26/242 in confidential session.**

223 To receive the **Minutes** of the Parish Council meetings and to approve the signing of the Minutes by the Chairman as a true record.

- a. Ordinary meeting 7th July 2026 (Minute 26/178-26/205)
- b. Extraordinary meeting 4th Aug 2026 (Min 26/206 -26/216).

The minutes of the Parish Council meeting of 7th July 2026 were agreed to be a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

The minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting the Parish Council of 4th August 2026 were agreed to be a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

224 To decide a response to **planning applications received:**

- **26/1423/PIP** Elsdon House Elsdon West Hill
Permission in principle for the demolition of an existing building containing eight flats and the construction of seven dwellings

It was resolved to comment on this application under Delegated Powers as a quorum was not available for this item as Cllr SMS had declared an interest.

- **26/1633/TRE** Lowena Lowena Lane West Hill EX11 1JU
T1, Beech: reduce upper crown by 2-3m, shorten the northernmost overextended limb by approximately 2m; maximum diameter cuts of 50mm wherever practicable. T2, Beech : fell to a 8m monolith.
Support
- **26/1413/FUL** 5 Pinefields Close West Hill Ottery St Mary EX11 1XL
Proposed demolition of existing lean to structure, alterations, construction of two storey rear extension, addition of render, Proposed Conversion of existing garage into residential accommodation; revision of approved application ref. 25/0672/FUL.
Cllrs noted the new application did not include a roof terrace which was a feature of the previous application. The meeting supported the application.
- **26/1664/TRE** 21 Beech Park West Hill Devon EX11 1UJ
T1, Scots Pine : remove two branches, each approximately 3-4 m in length, with pruning cuts in the region of 70-90 mm in diameter. Reason: The intention is to reduce the weight bias and wind exposure of the remaining crown, thereby reducing the risk of further failure that could potentially shorten the trees life expectancy **Support**

To confirm consultee response submitted under Delegated Powers:

- **26/1522/FUL** Rustlings Lower Broad Oak Road West Hill EX11 1UF (SUPPORT) **Confirmed**
- **26/1562/TRE** Manana Higher Broad Oak Road West Hill Devon EX11 1XD (SUPPORT) **Confirmed**

225 Planning decisions received for information (*denotes WHPC differed) **All noted.**

- a. **26/1119/TRE** 5 Heather Grange West Hill Devon EX11 1XZ Status: Decided
- b. **25/1832/FUL** 6 Potters Close West Hill Devon EX11 1YE Status: Approved*
- c. **26/1433/TRE** Chorley Mill West Hill Road West Hill EX11 1UZ Status: Approved
- d. **26/1375/TRE** 17 Hayes End West Hill EX11 1GG Status: Approved
- e. **26/1249/VAR** Kings Gatchell Higher Metcombe EX11 1SL Status: Withdrawn
- f. **26/1180/TRE** The Gap Lower Broad Oak Road West Hill EX11 1UD Status: Decided

226 Planning Matters: To receive a report on the new National Planning Policy Framework published on 17th August 2026.

The meeting received a report (previously circulated) on the requirements of the new National Planning Policy Framework which came into immediate effect. Cllr FP noted:

- The old "tilted balance" test has been replaced by a clearer, rules-based system with a "permanent presumption in favour of sustainable development",
- A key test is whether a proposal is inside or outside the built-up area. Outside a built-up area, only certain kinds of development are allowed.

Working Groups

227 Finance Working Group:

- a. To receive a 1st Quarter 2026-2027 Financial Report.
The meeting considered a report previously circulated.
It was resolved to approve the report and publish it on the Council's website.
- b. To receive a revised WHPC Asset Register.
The Clerk reported that the Asset Register had been updated to reflect the transfer of WHPC's 2025 Highways works (West Hill Road) to Devon County Council.
It was resolved to agree the amendments and publish it on the Council's website.
- c. To note a challenge to the WHPC 2025-2026 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).
Noted. The Chairman noted that the Parish Council awaited the External Auditor's decision on the eligibility of the challenge. The timescales for this were unknown.
- d. To receive the External Auditor's findings for the year ended 31 March 2026 (if available).
Not yet received.
- e. To consider the appointment of an Internal Auditor (IA) for 2026-27.
Cllrs considered a paper circulated prior to the meeting which included best practice guidelines for the appointment of an Internal Auditor (IA). It was noted that the current IA had carried out previous audits however there was no requirement to appoint a new auditor. Councillors were asked to consider whether to seek a new IA or re-appoint Penny Clapham, the current IA. Cllr FP commented that re-appointing the current IA would provide continuity as the new Council takes effect in 2027.

It was unanimously resolved:

- the Council was satisfied that Penny Clapham was competent and independent of the Parish Council.
- to re-appoint Penny Clapham to carry out the Internal Audit for 2026-27
- to make available all documentation or explanation requested by the Internal Auditor.
- to approve costs of up to £150.00.
- to sign a Letter of Engagement

Action: Clerk to issue Letter of Engagement.

228 Neighbourhood Plan Working Group:

- a. To receive a progress report and approve costs
- b. To note arrangements for a public consultation "Local Green Spaces and Valued Views".
- c. To note responses from landowners (if received).

Standing Orders were suspended.

Margaret Hall (MH), chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (NPWG), gave a short report. Her comments included:

- A public consultation would be carried out during October-November 2026 to gather feedback on West Hill Local Green Spaces and Valued Views to be included in the Neighbourhood Plan. Those identified in the Neighbourhood Plan would have some protection from development. The consultation would be launched on EDDC's Commonplace platform (at no cost to the Council).
- The group ask for the WHPC newsletter to be issued during the consultation to provide links to the live consultation.

- The new National Planning Policy Framework impacts Neighbourhood Plans. One change provides greater protection from other development for those areas with a Neighbourhood Plan which includes some allocated development.
- Development of the new Neighbourhood Plan requires the group to notify and consult landowners who have an interest in the village. The working group had made contact with an agent acting for the owners of the Morrisons site and hoped to have a helpful dialogue. Agendas and minutes of any meetings would be published on the parish website. The group had contacted EDDC to ask for an EDDC Officer to attend any meetings that take place.

In response to a question from Cllr FP, MH gave an overview of the process and timetable for approving the Neighbourhood Plan. The working group hoped to launch the Regulation 14 consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan in early 2027 before an updated version is submitted to an external examiner.

Cllr FP thanked the working group for their ongoing work.

Standing Orders were resumed.

Ward Member Jess Bailey joined the meeting (7.35pm). See agenda item 26/220.

229 Playpark Working Group:

- a. To receive the findings of the 2026 RoSPA playpark inspection report and to decide actions and costs.

Cllr AC reported the findings of the annual RoSPA playpark inspection. Each item was rated as Low/Very Low risk. Minor maintenance issues identified in the report had been actioned during August.

It was resolved to:

- accept the report and agreed that no further actions were required.
- approve payment of inspection costs £100+vat.

In addition, it was resolved to:

- commission the Lengthsman to carry out further minor repairs to the Triple Swing and approve a budget up to £50+vat.

- b. To receive a report: Playpark Accident.

The meeting received a report regarding an accident in the playpark and actions taken by the Council. Comments included:

- On being informed of the accident WHPC immediately blocked off access to the bridge.
- A visual investigation of the bridge showed that there was no evident defect that could have contributed to the accident. The bridge was kept out of service pending further investigation.
- The council took advice and asked the EDDC Playpark Inspector, the manufacturer and RoSPA. The annual ROSPA inspection was brought forward to July 26th and their report was received by the Council two weeks later. The climbing frame was graded as low risk with no work needed on the bridge.
- Throughout the investigation the parents were kept informed of the action being taken by WHPC.
- A letter from the ROSPA Head of Play Safety confirmed that the bridge and the multipay equipment is compliant with standards and presents a tolerably low risk to users.
- A further letter was sent to the parents of the child quoting the ROSPA report findings. They were happy with the conclusions and thanked the council for a thorough investigation.

The full report is published on the Council's website.

Councillors were asked if any further actions were required. **It was unanimously agreed** that no further actions were required and WHPC should close the investigation.

- c. To decide arrangements for a public consultation.

The Chairman asked for details of the proposed consultation to be presented to the October 2026 meeting of the Council.

230 Other Working Groups: To receive reports (actions/costs arising to be agreed at a future meeting). **N/A**

1 member of the public left the meeting, 7.58pm

Other Matters

231 Grant Application: To consider an application submitted by Ottery St Mary Cricket Club for a contribution towards the cost of installing new boundary fencing.

The meeting considered a request for a contribution towards the installation of new boundary fencing at the club. The new fencing was expected to cost circa £80,000. Of the 247 current members, 50 lived in West Hill and of them 38 were under 18 years of age.

Following a lengthy discussion members supported the principle of a grant award but disagreed on the size of the award. Cllr FP noted that it was not clear if the club were able to raise sufficient funds to reach their target

Cllrs voted on Cllr SMS's proposal to offer a grant of £1000.00: 2 in favour (Cllrs SMS/AC), 1 against (FP). Cllr FP commented that he considered an grant of £1,000 to be dis-proportionate to the number benefitting but added that he would have supported a smaller grant award.

It was resolved to offer a grant award of £1,000.00 subject to:

- a. Confirmation that the club has secured sufficient funds for installation of new fencing.
- b. Confirmation that an order for the fencing had been placed.
- c. The grant award to be made in the current financial year, ie before 31st March 2027. The offer of a grant award expires on 31st March 2027.

232 To approve, if considered appropriate, new/amended **WHPC Policies and Protocols:**

- a. **Community Engagement:** To decide the WHPC Protocol for Monthly Drop-in Sessions and to decide arrangements/ costs for monthly drop-in sessions to be held for a six-month trial period. (ref Min 26/198).

It was resolved:

- to adopt the WHPC Protocol for Monthly Drop-in Sessions
- the 'surgeries/drop-in sessions' to be held on the third Tuesday of the month 10.00-12.00 at the RBL clubhouse on School Lane: 20th October, 17th November, 15th December, 19th January, 16th February, 16th March
- approve room hire costs of £30.00 per session

- b. **Policies + Protocols:**

The Chairman gave an explanation for the new/amended policies:

- WHPC Community Engagement Policy: a new policy summarising the Council's activities
- WHPC Communication Policy: Amended to confirm that the Council does not currently use Social Media.
- WHPC Data Protection Complaints Policy: a new requirement under GDPR law, however the policy didn't change current Parish Council practice.
- WHPC Complaints Policy: amended to signpost the new Data Protection Complaints Policy

It was resolved to approve the following policies:

- WHPC Community Engagement Policy (new)
- WHPC Communication Policy (amended)
- WHPC Data Protection Complaints Policy (new requirement)
- WHPC Complaints Policy (amended)

- 233** To note the Government decision on **Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution** for Devon.
Noted: See agenda item 26/220.
West Hill becomes part of the Exeter Unitary Council whilst Ottery St Mary forms part of the Devon Unitary Council. The Unitary Councils come into effect on 1st April 2028.
- 234 Christmas Event 2026:** To consider arrangements for a temporary road closure for the new Christmas Event to be held on Saturday 5th December.
Members considered a risk assessment circulated prior to the meeting.
It was resolved to submit an application for a temporary road closure for School Lane, 5th December (timings to be confirmed).
- 235** To approve the September 2026 edition of the **WHPC newsletter**.
It was agreed to defer publication and for the newsletter to be approved at the October meeting.
- 236** To consider **correspondence** received (if any) and decide actions (as appropriate): Waste bin located at bus shelter
The meeting noted that East Devon District Council was the relevant authority as they provide the waste bin and collection service. The Parish Council had previously raised concerns on behalf of a resident.
- 237 Clerk Matters:**
- a. To receive a report from the Parish Clerk and to agree actions/costs as appropriate, including:
 - WHPC Permissive path
As per Council the West Hill Road entrance and pedestrian path to the Village Hall was closed for 24 hours to maintain its status as a Permissive Path. Pedestrians were alerted to the closure via notices published a week in advance. WHPC had not received any correspondence on this matter.
 - National Tree Week 21-29 November Noted.
 - b. To note decisions made under delegated powers (if applicable)
The meeting noted
 - Lengthsman was commissioned to carry out minor repairs in the playpark. (see item 26/229)
 - c. Urgent matters (if applicable). **None**
- 238 WHPC Action Tracker:** To receive updates on actions and matters arising from the last meeting and to agree actions/costs as considered appropriate.
The meeting received an update on actions from previous meetings:
 - The rotten stile on FP1 had been reported but not actioned by DCC.
 - Councillors were invited to attend a Devon Digital Café session
- 3 members of the public left the meeting, 8.36pm
- 239 Financial matters:**
- a. To consider and approve, if appropriate, the Schedule of Payments and internal bank transfers.
The meeting considered the Schedule of Payments, internal transfers and invoices circulated prior to the meeting. No questions were raised.
It was resolved to approve the payments/transfers and sign the invoices.
 - b. To consider and approve, if appropriate, any additional payments presented to the meeting.
It was resolved to approve one additional payment presented to the meeting: -

Pro-Lawn Garden Services: VAS Transfers	£102.00
Pro-Lawn Garden Services: Repairs, Hedge, Timber Treatment	£684.00
EDDC Waste Collection(Dog Bins) 2026-2027	£1591.20
West Hill Village Hall Room hire	£12.75
 - c. To receive, if available, monthly Bank Reconciliations and finance trackers.
The Bank reconciliation (July) and Finance Trackers were noted. No issues were raised

240 Councillor questions, reports and items for future agenda: Each Councillor is requested to use this opportunity to report minor matters of information not included elsewhere on the agenda and to raise items for future agendas. Councillors are respectfully reminded that this is not an opportunity for debate or decision making.

No matters raised.

241 Next meeting: To confirm arrangements for the upcoming WHPC meeting on **Tuesday 6th October 2026** 7.00pm at the Village Hall

All members of the public had left the meeting.

Part A ended 8.40pm

Part B started 8.40pm

Part B - Confidential/exempt items. In consideration of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted): to agree any items to be dealt with after the public and press have been excluded.

242 Personnel Matters - HR+ Policy Working Group: To receive a report on the national pay award for the Local Government sector and the Clerk's salary.

The meeting considered a paper circulated prior to the meeting. The national pay award, effective from 1st April 2026 had been agreed and an increase of 3.3% applied to salary scales LC1 – LC4.

It was resolved to accept the HR Working Group recommendation to (a) apply the 3.3% increase plus additional increment (b) to note the Clerk's 2026-27 salary and backdated pay.

Part B ended 8.48pm

Meeting ended 8.48pm

Signed

Date

Signed: *Anne Oliver*, Clerk to the Council, 4th September 2026