

**WEST HILL PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON 19th March 2025 AT 7.30pm**

Present:	Chairman Cllr Francis Pullman (FP), Cllr ShirleyMay Saunders (SMS), Cllr Trevor Ingram (TI), Cllr Ann Cooper (AC)
In attendance:	Anne Oliver Parish Clerk, 33 members of the public,
Apologies	County/District Cllr Jess Bailey

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council

Item (a)	Discussion and decisions (b)
25/118	Welcome and Chairman's announcements The meeting started at 7.30pm. The Chairman, Cllr FP, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
25/119	Apologies. To receive apologies and approve reasons for absence, if considered appropriate. n/a
25/120	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. <i>(Contributions are limited to 3 minutes)</i> The Chairman changed the order of the agenda to include public participation during item 25/123.
25/121	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, TI, SMS and AC each declared no interests in items on the agenda.
25/122	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. Proposed items: Subject to the decision taken in item 25/123, It was agreed to discuss commercial matters in confidential session 25/128.

Other Matters

25/123	<p>Land for sale in the Parish:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To receive the findings of a Due Diligence process. In the absence of a formal public consultation, due tight deadlines, to consider evidence of community support for a bid for the land. To consider land for sale in the Parish and to decide actions, as appropriate. <p>The Chairman gave a short presentation. The Chairman's slides, information and comments included (but not exclusively):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Land for Sale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field of 5.9 acres on Oak Road, Higher Metcombe was for sale. The field has road frontage and direct access from Oak Road Offers in excess of £60,000 were invited. Due the level of interest the agent had set a deadline of midday Friday 21st March for best and final offers. The field had been leased by a local farmer for many years for animal grazing and silage, however, the tenancy had now ended.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The field was relatively square in shape with grass fields to the east and west, the road to the south and an area of wooded garden and field to the north. The land was classed as Grade 3, good to moderate in the Agricultural Land Classification by Natural England <p>2. Location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The site lies on the southern boundary of the parish and was not ideal due to the distance from the centre of the village. The Parish Council had previously objected to planning applications for sites in this area. - The access onto Oak Road is located close to a road junction. <p>3. Why Try to Acquire the Land?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - West Hill has 2000+ residents, including nearly 400 under-15s, but no publicly available open space for recreation. - This need is recognised in the Neighbourhood Plan - The current and emerging East Devon Local Plan supports the provision of sport and leisure facilities. - The land was considered suitable for a variety of uses: recreation/sport activities, community orchard, nature reserve - If successful, the Parish Council would hold a public consultation on the specific use of the land. <p><u>Due Diligence</u></p> <p>4. Does the Parish Council have the Power to acquire land?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Section 124 of the Local Government Act grants Town and Parish Council the Power to acquire land by purchase, gift or lease. <p>5. Does the Parish Council have the funds to acquire the land? The Chairman gave an overview of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parish Council reserves and s106 monies available. - The process and timescales for borrowing. <p>6. Value for money?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Parish Council is responsible for Public Money - Future costs of ownership - Possible application for change of use - Exit strategy? <p>7. Progress to date?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Parish Council had commissioned and received a market valuation of the land. The surveyor noted that the entrance onto the field may need to be re-located. - The Parish Council had commissioned Local Authority and Environmental Searches. The findings of the Local Authority Search had not yet been received. - Investigated options for a loan. if the Council secured a loan there would be some increase to the Precept. - The Parish Council had consulted the Devon Association of Local Councils regarding borrowing and the Public Works Loan Board. It was confirmed that the Council could borrow from other sources including individuals. However, all loans, including those from the Public Works Loan Board would require Government approval. This could be a lengthy process. - The Council had assessed the maximum possible bid without a loan. <p>Standing Orders were suspended to allow public questions and answers.</p> <p>During a lengthy session many members of the public spoke. Comments and questions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over the decades the village has lost all suitable land in the centre of the village to development. - A potential buyer could be a developer - The village needs open space - Acquisition of the land is very important for the village - In the past six months 2 Council meetings have been inquorate. Does the Council have the capacity to take this on? - Do you want to keep the bid confidential (as a commercial matter)? - Could you ask the agent to defer the deadline?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A community survey previously highlighted the need for Open Space to be a priority for the community. In 2018, a Public Realm study recommended two fields on Oak Road to be the most suitable sites for recreation space within the Parish. - Does the Council need a bridging loan? - Could the community make donations? - The site is not well linked to the centre of the village. There may be land better located close to the centre of the village. - The Council has previously strongly objected to a planning application for a site nearby. Is consideration of a land purchase hypocritical? Will it weaken future response to planning applications? - EDDC are under great pressure to achieve their housing target. The current Housing Land Supply, 2.97 years falls significantly below the target of 5 years. - There are many recreation facilities located outside the Built Up Area Boundary or settlement. <p>2 members of the public left the meeting 8.14pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there an uplift clause on the sale? - Is the land already registered as amenity land? - It's very important to take the opportunity when it arises. The land could be built on in years to come. <p>The Chairman called for a show of hands: 5 attendees were against submitting a bid, 4 abstained, 22 were in favour.</p> <p>Standing Orders were resumed. 8.22pm</p> <p>The Chairman reported the Council had received 12 emails from residents regarding the land: 11 were in favour of submitting a bid.</p> <p>The Chairman thanked those present for attending the meeting to share their views.</p> <p>It was unanimously resolved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To submit a bid for the purchase of the land at Higher Metcombe b. To agree the size of the bid in confidential session, agenda item 25/128.
25/124	<p>VE Day-80 Street Party, 10th May 2025: To consider a request for the Parish Council to apply for and take responsibility for the road closure for the event.</p> <p>The West Hill branch of the RBL had requested the Parish Council to be responsible for a road closure (School Lane) to enable a VE-Day 80 community street party to take place on 10th May 2025.</p> <p>It was resolved to be responsible for the road closure and to submit an application for a temporary road closure.</p>
25/125	To receive a report from the Parish Clerk (Urgent Matters) N/A
25/126	<p>Councillor questions, reports and items for future agenda</p> <p>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. <i>Councillors are respectfully reminded that this is not an opportunity for debate or decision making.</i></p> <p>No matters were raised.</p>
25/127	<p>Next meeting: To confirm arrangements for upcoming WHPC meeting on Tuesday 1st April 2025 7.30pm at the Village Hall</p>

All remaining members of the public left the meeting.

Part A closed at 8.26pm

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.

Part B opened at 8.30pm

25/128	<p>To consider land for sale in the Parish and to decide actions, as appropriate (Commercial Matters)</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. To set the value of the bid to be submitted (proposed Cllr FP, seconded Cllr TI)b. The bid would be subject to the findings of Local Authority Searches (awaited).c. To write to the agent to request the deadline for tenders to be extended.d. To agree a Parish Council letter to accompany the bid.
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Part B ended 9.00pm

Meeting closed at 9.05pm

Signed

Date