

**WEST HILL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING, MONDAY
27th March 2025 7.30PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

Present: Cllr Francis Pullman (FP), Chairman, Cllr Trevor Ingram (TI), Cllr Shirley May Saunders (SMS), Cllr Ann Cooper (AC)

In attendance: Parish Clerk Anne Oliver, County/District Cllr Jess Bailey, 44 members of the public,

Apologies: Local Police Team

Minutes of the Meeting

Item (a)	Discussion and decisions (b)
APM25/1	<p>Welcome and Chairman's announcements The meeting started at 7.30pm. Chairman Cllr Francis Pullman (AC) welcomed Councillors and members of the public.</p> <p>The Chairman set out the purpose of the Annual Parish meeting. The meeting was an opportunity for the electors of the Parish to have their say on anything they consider important for the people of the Parish.</p>
APM25/2	<p>To receive the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 18th April 2024. The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 18th April 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record. Proposed: Cllr Francis Pullman, Seconded: Colin Veale. Chairman FP signed the minutes.</p>
APM25/3	<p>To receive the Chairman's report</p> <p>The Chairman's report included:</p> <p>1. Council Membership</p> <p>The Chairman gave an update on the changes in the Parish Council membership since the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Following the resignation of Cllr Allison Carr, Cllr FP was elected as Chairman. On behalf of the Council the Chairman thanked Cllr Carr for the work she did over the years. - Following the resignation of Cllr Andrew Gorton the Council has a membership of 4 councillors out of a planned strength of 7. Cllr vacancies had been widely advertised however the Council had been unable to fill the vacancies. <p>The Chairman expressed concern regarding the resulting strain on the Council and constraint on what could be achieved. The reduced membership increased the risk of being inquorate and being unable to hold a meeting. Two monthly Council meetings were cancelled in the past year due to being inquorate. The Chairman encouraged people to join the Council.</p> <p>2. Community Engagement</p> <p>The Chairman explained that the Council sets out to do what the West Hill community wanted it to do. He encouraged members of the community to contact the Council with feedback or suggestions.</p> <p>The Parish Council newsletter was an important means of reaching each household in the village. The Chairman explained that the newsletters are delivered with the help of a network of volunteer posties and thank them for their ongoing support.</p>

3. Finances

The Council continued to control expenditure carefully to make sure that it could keep to its budget. Having held the village precept constant for the past couple of years the Council to was able to set the precept at the same level £56,875, by setting a budget for the coming year which it believed was challenging but achievable.

4. Activities

The Parish Council's mission was "*Working with the community to maintain and enhance West Hill's special character*". This places the community firmly at the heart of everything the Council does.

Councillors are mindful of their responsibilities to:

- spend public money wisely;
- act within legal powers enshrined in legislation;
- adhere to the Code of Conduct and the seven principles of public life (The Nolan Principles)
- involve the community in decision-making.

- a. **Planning:** The Parish Council was a consultee on planning applications and responding to applications was a large part of the Council's work over the past year. As a result of the increased housing targets set for East Devon, the District Council now has only 2.97 years worth of Housing Land Supply available for housing development which means that something known as the "tilted balance" is now in force. This essentially means that when considering planning applications for new housing there is a balance in favour of approving the application unless there are very strong reasons for rejection.

During the year the Parish Council attended a number of planning committee meetings to make statements regarding potential developments in West Hill or affecting West Hill. A decision on a major proposal for 34 houses on land adjacent to Windmill Lane was deferred after strong representations were made to the planning committee but the plan was then revised to reduce the number to 31 and was then approved.

Development at the Windmill Lane site and the site North of Eastfield (which has outline approval) will amount to an increase of 61 additional houses. PDQ approval was also given for development of 5 dwellings in converted farm buildings at Weggis Farm. Further applications concerning a further 19 houses in West Hill, all of which the Council objected to, were awaiting decisions.

- b. **Emerging East Devon Local Plan:** The Parish Council closely monitored progress of the EDDC's new Local Plan with a particular focus on the impact on West Hill. The Council regularly updated residents via it's regular Council meetings and newsletters.

The Council responded to Local Plan consultations and representatives attended meetings of the EDDC's Strategic Planning Committee to make representations on behalf of West Hill. A number of the potential development sites being considered in West Hill were rejected and those sites that were accepted, such as the Windmill Lane site, now have at least outline planning approval.

- c. **New Neighbourhood Plan for West Hill:** The Parish Council had established a Neighbourhood Plan Working Group to develop our own neighbourhood plan for West Hill. The Chairman thanked members of the Group for volunteering for this challenging project.

	<p>d. Devolution and Local Government Reform: With the Government's plans to reorganise local government it was not known what the impact will be on Parish Councils. The Parish Council will continue to monitor proposed changes in Devon.</p> <p>e. Open Spaces: The Parish Council responded quickly when land on Oak Road was put up for sale by tender, however the Council was not successful in its bid to purchase land for recreation purposes.</p> <p>f. Work continued on the development of an Emergency Plan for West Hill. A working group of village residents had been very active in developing this plan. The Chairman thanked them for their support.</p> <p>g. Village Hall Footpath: Progress has been made with the first phase of the path construction whilst the Council awaited DCC's Highways approval to undertake the works on the road which involves painting some yellow lines and installing a barrier at the entrance to the footpath.</p> <p>h. Playpark: Equipment in the playpark was regularly inspected and maintained, whilst two of councillors, Anne and Trevor, were developing a long term strategy for the playpark. The Council would progressively replace the equipment that reaches the end of its safe life and builds up towards a new long term park that will give many more years of enjoyment for the youngsters of the village.</p> <p>i. Grant Awards: The Council had been pleased to make grant awards over the past year: the PTFA annual summer fete with a donation to pay for the band; RBL, commemoration for D-Day 80; Village Hall, additional fencing around the preschool area and West Hill Wasps with a donation to buy new equipment. The Chairman encourages other village organisations to apply for some assistance towards their projects.</p> <p>Looking ahead, the Chairman expressed concern that Councillor vacancies would continue to constrain the Council's work on behalf of the village. In the coming year the Council would update its action plan to focus on those projects that will result in the most benefit to the village but with a much reduced strength there are limits to what it could do. If unexpected matters arise the Council does not have the resilience to deal with them without dropping the other work.</p> <p>The Chairman concluded his report by thanking his fellow councillors for the work they have done over the past year and for sticking with the council despite the fact that we are desperately short of members. He also thanked "our underpaid and overworked Parish Clerk Anne for her guidance, advice and impeccable governance of the council's activities. I'm not sure the village fully appreciates how fortunate we are to have such a person in this important role."</p>
<p>APM25/4</p>	<p>Reports from County Councillor and District Councillor Jess Bailey</p> <p>District/County Councillor/Jess Bailey thanked the Parish Council and commented that she and the Council worked together very effectively on behalf of the village. She thanked Councillors and Clerk for their hard work over the past year.</p> <p>Her report included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Regulation 19 public consultation on the Emerging Local Plan closed on 31st March. She noted that there was a risk that several large sites included within the plan may not proceed in the coming years. If this happened there may be pressures on towns and villages to deliver more new homes. She advised the Council to continue to monitor the situation. - EDDC's approval of the planning application for the Windmill Lane was subject to many planning conditions, including works to be delivered by South West Water. - Planning and preparations for Devolution and Local Government Reform in Devon could be a major distraction for the County and East Devon District Council over the coming year.

APM25/5	<p>Reports from Local Organisations, groups and grant recipients and questions from Electors</p> <p>Representatives of Council Working Groups, local organisations, groups and grant recipients gave short reports to the meeting, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Village Hall: The Village Hall continued to be busy throughout the day with many bookings from the primary school, pre-school, village organisations and village residents. The Village Hall Committee consisted of 4 elected trustees and 5 representatives from user groups. The Trustees would welcome residents looking to become a Trustee. b. Neighbourhood Plan Working Group: Margaret Hall, Chair of the Working Group, explained the purpose of a Neighbourhood Plan and how it could influence how West Hill may develop over the coming years. The policies within the Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the planning hierarchy that must be taken into account when planning decisions are made. A key part of the work of the Working Group was to engage with the community as their views and aspirations would shape the policies and design codes within the Neighbourhood Plan. Those present were encouraged to complete a survey to be published in June. c. Ottery Help Scheme (OHS): The Chair of Trustees reported on another busy year. Their new office in Ottery St Mary had been established and had proved very successful. A large number of people in West Hill were registered with OHS as volunteers or those needing support. OHS were always looking for additional volunteers, particularly those drivers willing to provide transport for medical appointments. OHS continued to provide a range of activities including a memory café, exercise sessions, friendship groups. She noted that loneliness was a major factor across the local area. d. Arboretum Group: Ten years ago, in recognition of the woodland character of the village, members of the group had begun a survey of village trees. The task took many years to complete. Members of the group were available to provide advice on tree maintenance. The Group plan to hold further guided walks in 2025/26. Residents interested in joining the group were asked to contact Alan Cook. e. Digital Switchover: Cllr Saunders gave a short presentation on the national switch from analogue to digital phone lines. The overall project was due to be completed by 31st January 2027 and the rollout may reach West Hill in late 2025 (to be confirmed). The Parish Council had requested BT to arrange for a drop-in session for West Hill to provide advice on a one-to-one basis (probably last summer). Those residents with services, such as alarms, provided by their phone lines may be affected.
APM 25/6	<p>Close of Meeting</p> <p>The Chairman thanked the speakers for their informative reports and invited questions. There were no further questions from the public.</p> <p>The Chairman closed the meeting and invited people to stay for refreshments.</p>
	<p>Refreshments served</p>

Meeting closed at 8.40pm

Anne Oliver, Parish Clerk

3rd April 2025

Minutes Signed:

Date

DRAFT