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Welcome to our March 2025 Newsletter

As we look ahead to 2025 we see a number of challenges facing us as a village and as a Parish Council. In this edition of our Newsletter we talk about some of the matters we need to deal with such as the pressure to build more houses in the village, the problems of increasing traffic and speeding, how a proposed change in the local authority organisation may affect us and other such challenges. We also want to keep you informed about some of the things we are trying to do to improve and protect the village such as our long term plans for the Playpark, the footpath to the Village Hall, the very important Neighbourhood Plan and the Emergency Plan we are developing for West Hill.



Our work as a Parish Council is a combination of things that we have to do such as planning matters and things that we want to do to improve the village for the long term such as the Neighbourhood Plan and our other projects. If there are other things you think we should be doing please let us know because as a small group of volunteers we would like to think that the time we are devoting to the Council is actually usefully spent.

Our upcoming Annual Parish meeting is a great opportunity for our community to get together to talk about plans and ideas for the village. Can we tempt you to come along? It's an informal event and refreshments are available! We hope you'll join us as a community we are stronger when we work together.

I hope you find this edition of our newsletter interesting and informative.

Cllr Francis Pullman, WHPC Chairman

STOP PRESS

The Chairman has called an

Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council

WED 19th March 2025

7.30pm at the Village Hall

The meeting will consider land for sale in the Parish. The agent has set a date of 21st March for final offers in excess of £60,000.

Subject to the findings of a Due Diligence process, the Council will consider the acquisition of the land for use by the West Hill community.

The Parish Council wants your feedback on the possible purchase of the land. Please come along to the meeting or email your comments to our Clerk before the meeting (details below).

In due course, if the Parish Council acquires the land we will consult the community on how it should be used.



Image courtesy of Google Maps

Planning News

Planning is a matter which generates a lot of interest and concern amongst residents. Those people who attend the monthly Parish Council meetings or read the minutes on the website will be aware that there are several active planning applications to build more houses in West Hill. At the time of writing this article there are 6 active applications for a total of 82 additional houses in West Hill. This is a very significant number for a small village with supporting infrastructure that is already overstretched.

The biggest proposed developments in West Hill right now are for 30 houses north of Eastfield which has been approved in outline (subject to a s106 agreement) and 31 houses South of Windmill Lane. WHPC and many residents have objected to these applications but EDDC decided that these should go ahead despite all the concerns expressed in the objections.

The Government has set out to build 1.5million new homes over 5 years. East Devon District Council have been faced with a huge increase in the number of homes they are now expected to provide for 200 homes per year over and above those that were previously planned. This is a difficult target given the environmental and infrastructure constraints of the district.

Taking into account the applications which have already been approved East Devon has housing supply of 2.97years in the pipeline. As this a significant shortfall against a target of 5 years it becomes increasingly difficult for EDDC to refuse applications.

Against this background we are working to produce our own West Hill Neighbourhood Plan. This will give us a little more influence over planning decisions being made about West Hill. It will not give us control as East Devon District Council is the ultimate decision maker but with an approved Neighbourhood Plan we will have a stronger argument against proposals that are contrary to our approved Neighbourhood Plan. We have a strong, talented team of residents working on the plan and we give them sincere thanks for the work they are doing for us. In the meantime the Parish Council will continue to consider all planning applications and respond objectively to them to serve the best interests of West Hill.

Cllr Pullman



The public consultation on the final draft of the East Devon Local Plan 2022-2042 plan is now open.

East Devon District Council
website www.eastdevon.gov.uk



2025-2026 Council Budget & Precept

At the WHPC meeting on 14th January 2025, Councillors formally voted to leave the Parish Precept unchanged for the fifth year running at £56,875. This represents a Council Tax band D equivalent of £48.40 (subject to confirmation of the tax base). There will be a small shortfall against the agreed 2025-26 budget, £58,767, which Councillors agreed to fund from reserves, and some project costs will be funded from Section 106 grants or Community Infrastructure Levy as appropriate. Councillors were mindful of the cost of living and other inflationary pressures on residents.

A Parish Council Precept is a tax that Parish Councils charge their local electors to meet their budget requirements. Parish Councils do not receive any direct funding from central government and rely on their Precept plus any other income they generate. The Parish Council Precept is part of the Council Tax and is collected from local electors via their Council Tax payments.

How does West Hill compare to other Parish/Town Councils?

The Precept is virtually the only source of income for WHPC and comes from East Devon District Council via the Council Tax collected from residents. The average Band D Parish Precept in East Devon for 2024-25 was £56.62 (Source: EDDC)

The digital phone switchover

What you need to know

What is the digital phone switchover?

The UK's telephone network is changing. Between now and 2027 most telephone providers will be moving their customers from old analogue landlines over to new upgraded landline services using digital technology.

This means services that rely on the old landline system such as home phones and healthcare devices will be switched over.

How will it affect me/what do I need to do?

The good news is – your landline isn't going anywhere and for most consumers and businesses, this change will be straightforward. In fact, many customers are already making the switch when they upgrade to full fibre broadband.

Your telecoms provider (Virgin Media O2 or BT) should contact you before the switchover to check in and discuss what you need to do to make sure your service isn't affected. However, we're encouraging everyone to know what to expect.

If you have an internet connection, the change may be as simple as plugging your phone into your broadband router rather than the socket on the wall.



Do you or someone you know depend on their landline for use of a telecare device connected to the phone line such as a fall monitor, lifeline or personal alarm?

If yes, then please notify your communications provider (the people you pay for your landline) and check with your monitor/alarm provider whether your device is digitally enabled so that they can advise on how the switch might affect the service of the devices.

If you have other devices connected to your phone line, such as alarm systems, your burglar alarm service provider might need to upgrade your device to make sure it is compatible. If you are unsure about how a device in your home or business might be affected, it is recommended you contact the equipment supplier or device manufacturer to find out whether it will still work on a digital phone line.

In an emergency

Digital landlines cannot carry a power connection, so in the event of a power cut they will not work. If you have a mobile phone this can still be used, but if you've no other means of calling the emergency services your telecoms provider will offer a solution to allow calls to be made to emergency services.

You should tell your telecoms provider now if you have no other way of making emergency calls.

DIGITAL VOICE - BT's New Home Phone Service

Further information for BT customers: BT advise that for most of us this will simply be a matter of unplugging our phone lines from the current sockets and plugging them into the back of our WiFi Routers.



- We shall get 4 weeks notice of when the switch is to be made.
- If we lose our electricity supply then we also lose our phone line. A battery pack is available that links into your router is available at a cost of approximately £80 and lasts 2-3 hours. BT recommend that all of us should have battery packs for our mobiles and keep them charged.
- BT maintain that over 99% of phone handsets are compatible with the new system but if yours is not, you may need to purchase a new handset.
- They say that the benefits of Digital Voice is that it prevents the majority of scam calls, provides clearer call quality and allows users to divert calls to mobiles if required. You will keep your phone numbers but will lose the facility to make local phone calls without using the local exchange prefix which in West Hill is 01404

Anyone who is vulnerable should make themselves known to **BT on 0330 1234 150** who will assist them.

Cllr Saunders

A New Neighbourhood Plan for West Hill

Work has started on preparing a new Neighbourhood Plan for West Hill.

You may know that the current Neighbourhood Plan, which was adopted in 2018, is the Ottery St Mary and West Hill Neighbourhood Plan. This was started before West Hill separated from Ottery St Mary parish in 2017. There is a chapter specifically for West Hill, but the majority of the Neighbourhood Plan deals with planning issues for the whole of the original Ottery St Mary parish.



Neighbourhood Plans should be reviewed every 5 years or so. In 2022 West Hill Parish Council (WHPC) discussed with Ottery St Mary Town Council whether to continue with a joint plan or whether it would be better for each parish to prepare its own plan. WHPC felt that the interests and priorities of the two councils have diverged and that the two settlements have separate and distinct identities and demographics. There are some policies in the NP which are working well and others which could be strengthened and made more specific for West Hill, and some new policies are needed.

For these reasons, WHPC decided that they wished to “go it alone” and proceed with a new Neighbourhood Plan for West Hill on its own. It was agreed between the two councils that there will be joint discussions over matters of mutual interest, e.g. the green wedge, and that there may be a need for mirror policies in the two new NPs.

The first step was to apply to EDDC for a new Neighbourhood Area for West Hill parish on its own. The new West Hill Neighbourhood Area designation was approved by EDDC on 6 December 2023.

WHPC has now set up a small working group to carry the project forwards. This has residents and parish council representatives.

What are the benefits of a Neighbourhood Plan?

Neighbourhood planning enables communities to play a much stronger role in shaping the areas in which they live and work. A neighbourhood plan forms part of the development plan and sits alongside the Local Plan prepared by EDDC. Decisions on planning applications will be made using both the local plan and the neighbourhood plan, and any other material considerations.

A Neighbourhood Plan:

- Is community-led and guides the future development, regeneration and conservation of our parish
- Reflects the views, aspirations, wants and needs of local people
- Comes from community engagement and an evidence base
- Is about the use and development of land, new facilities, and can allocate sites for specific kinds of development
- Can deal with a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues (e.g. housing, design policies, employment, community facilities, recreation facilities, open spaces and our unique woodland landscape)
- Has a vision, aims, planning policies and proposals for improvement
- Is a powerful tool for giving us a say in shaping the development of our neighbourhood
- Can plan for greater levels of development (such as new housing) but not less than the East Devon District Council’s Local Plan
- Is an essential part of local statutory development plans
- When approved, the local community will benefit from 25% of the revenues from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) arising from development in the parish
- Has real legal force and local authorities and planning inspectors have to make decisions based on what it says



What happens next?

Over the next few months, the working group will be consulting as widely as possible with you, the community.

Come to the Parish Meeting on Thursday 27th March 7.30pm at the Village Hall and find out more.

Look out for a community survey – this will be widely publicised, details in the next newsletter.

We will also consult with community organisations, village clubs and societies, younger people, local landowners.

WHPC's website will soon have special section devoted to Neighbourhood Plan News

We need your Views!

Did you know West Hill has a new bus service?

Feedback from a resident

I certainly didn't know, despite information and timetables posted on various notice boards throughout the village and that's because we travel by car normally. However, the bus has appeared in our road (Oak Tree Gardens) every Monday recently and waited for a minute or two before departing. Intrigued, I spoke to the driver and he explained the details and that funding has been obtained for at least 12 months if the service is supported.



My husband and I decided to try the 9.30am service out of curiosity, for shopping in Ottery. I have to say the experience was impressive and the journey less than 15 minutes, where we were able to visit Sainsbury's, the Library and Pharmacy, before returning to catch the 10.52 am bus home to our door.

An added attraction was using our Devon Bus Pass, (otherwise the fare is £1.10p each way) and the driver is happy to be waved down in West Hill Rd by request. Will this be enough to encourage other residents? Only time will tell, because currently only 4 people have tried the service, whereas the driver tells me the Thursday service from Taleford carries 15 passengers regularly.

Monday only (Except Public Holidays)

WEST HILL Oak Tree Gardens	0930	-	1110	1210
THORNE FARM WAY Ferguson Close	0940	-	1120	1220
HOSPITAL	0941	-	1121	1221
SAINSBURY'S	0943	-	1123	1223
SQUARE, Stop A	0945	-	1125	1225
LONGDOGS LANE School	0951	-	1131	1231
RIDGEWAY	0959	-	1139	1239
BUTTS ROAD Washbrook View	1003	-	1143	1243
BROAD STREET, Stop B	1010	1050	1150	1250
SAINSBURY'S	-	1052	1152	1252
HOSPITAL	-	1055	1155	1255
THORNE FARM WAY Ferguson Close	-	1056	1156	1256
WEST HILL Oak Tree Gardens	-	1106	1206	RQ

Pearl Savage

Did you know

WHPC can award grants for organisations that are not-for-profit or have charitable status as long as it benefits some or all residents of West Hill? Already this year WHPC has awarded 3 grants with a combined value of £2,327.82

- West Hill Primary School's PTFA was awarded £450 towards the cost of its annual school fete which was well attended by parents and local residents.
- West Hill RBL also benefited from an award to the value of £400 to help with commemorating the 80th anniversary of D-Day. This included a BBQ and entertainment in grounds of the RBL.
- West Hill Wasps Junior Football Club received a grant of £977.82 to purchase some match balls and respect barriers and signs.

WHPC is always on the look out for more local groups it may be able to help with a grant so if you are a member of such a group please don't hesitate to get in touch for more details. Unfortunately, private individuals or commercial organisations are not eligible.

All the details can be found on the West Hill Parish Council website (just search for "grants"). Please get in touch.

Traffic and Speeding



Why do these signs appear and disappear in West Hill?

These Vehicle Activated signs (VAS) are owned by WHPC and we move them around regularly to gather information about traffic speeds in different parts of our village.

I am sure it will come as no surprise to learn that quite a proportion of cars travelling through the village exceed the stated speed limits of 30mph and 20mph. The data we collect cannot be used to prosecute anyone because it is not calibrated by the Police or the Highways authority. We do however make representations to these bodies pointing out the potential danger and requesting action to prevent a nasty accident. The response, very frustratingly, is that because there has not been an accident then it is seen as a low priority and therefore there is no action. Clearly there is no belief in those quarters that prevention is better than cure!

People in the village however are concerned and we receive a number of letters complaining about speeding vehicles.

WHPC will continue to put pressure on the Police and the Highways Department to take our concerns seriously before someone does get hurt. We do have a Speedwatch group in West Hill who, like other volunteer community organisations (including WHPC), have great difficulty in getting volunteers to come forward to help.

Speedwatch would welcome new volunteers to devote a little of their time to help with a very important and possibly life saving job which is clearly of great benefit to the village. Please let us not wait until there is a serious incident to make the authorities take notice. Please do think about joining Speedwatch and making a contribution to the important work they do.

Cllr Pullman

West Hill Community SpeedWatch needs your help

Can you spare 1 hour?

Vision Zero South West is a campaign, spearheaded by Devon & Cornwall Police to halve road deaths across the two counties by 2030. Local SpeedWatch activities are a key part of this initiative.

West Hill has an active group of trained volunteers operating at several sites around the village

Are you willing to join the team and lend a hand? As little as an hour a month at times of your choice will be a big help. Full training is given. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact the Clerk (details below).

Parish Council News

Village Hall Footpath

This project to build a link between West Hill Road and the Village Hall and School has had one of the longest gestation periods for any project I can think of with the possible exception of a third runway for Heathrow Airport! Work has however now started and we will hopefully have the path up and running in the near future.

Designing a plan and seeking planning permission was the easy bit. Turning it into reality has proved to be a frustrating series of bureaucratic barriers that have to be overcome. We have however actually made a start towards the physical construction with some foundations for the path laid. We have also thinned the hedge at the point where we will actually break through to discourage birds from nesting in that area as a precaution to avoid potential further delay.

As part of the conditions for approval of the plan we have to paint some markings on the road to warn drivers that there is a school exit nearby, paint some double yellow lines to restrict parking near the exit from the footpath and also move a flashing amber warning light. Before this can be done the Highways Department requires a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) which is a legal agreement allowing the County Council and the Police to enforce the restrictions indicated by the new road markings. This in turn requires the Highways Department to consult with road users including freight transport bodies, public transport operators, local traders, residents and community organisations. In parallel with this we have to arrange with the electricity company to provide power for the relocated flashing light. Maybe you are beginning to see reasons for some of the frustrating delays. All of this has to be done by four volunteer councillors who are not experts in this field and a very harassed and overworked Parish Clerk! *Cllr Pullman*



Emergency Plan

With the last Newsletter we issued a leaflet introducing the Emergency Plan we are working on. The plan is being developed to provide a process for helping the people in West Hill who depend on carers to help them or who would need assistance in the event of the village being cut off and losing power and communications for two or three days. This may sound apocalyptic but in the series of named storms we experienced around the turn of the year thousands of households around the country were without power for several days and one village in Devon was cut off by fallen trees for a couple of days before they were cleared to the extent that people could get in and out of the village. We want to have a plan to deal with such an eventuality so that we can provide help to those people who really need help until the emergency services, who will be very stretched themselves in such an emergency, are able to take over.

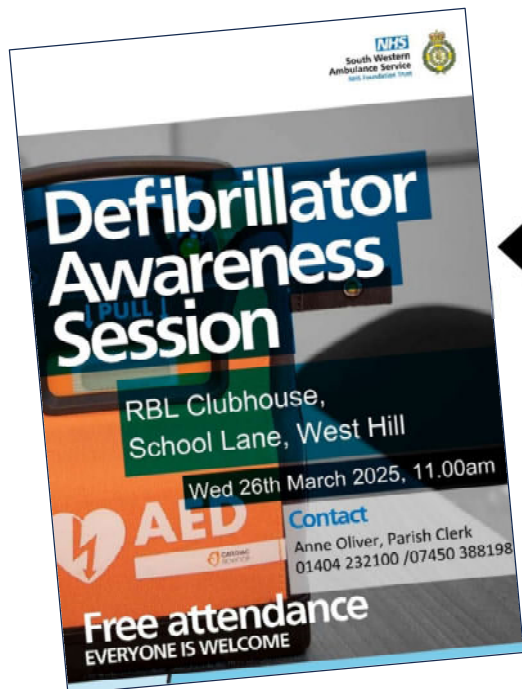
The plan will require a number of Community Response volunteers to take responsibility for an area of the village similar to a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. In the event of an emergency those volunteers will check on the known vulnerable people to see if they need help. They will also keep other residents updated with information about the recovery plan.

We also plan to establish the Village Hall as a 'Village Hub' to act as a central point for information and as an emergency refuge for vulnerable people where they can keep warm and have some hot food until the emergency services and utility companies can return things to normal.

All of this can only work if there are some people who are prepared to assist as Community Responders. I am sure that should such an emergency happen a lot of people will want to do something. What we need is to identify those people before the emergency happens so we can train them and co-ordinate efforts as a team rather than have lots of well intentioned people all doing their own thing which is a guaranteed way of expending lots of effort for little return.

If you can help please let us know. It really will be a valuable contribution to the good of the village.

Community Events for your 2025 Diary: *Please look out for further details.*



WHPC Community Public Access Defibrillators (CPADs)

Do you know where they are located?

- RBL Clubhouse, School Lane
- 10 Eastfield

Do you know what to do? The 'Defib' device and/or a 999 emergency call handler will talk you through what to do in an emergency. If you want to boost your confidence please come along to a familiarisation session led South West Ambulance Service at the RBL clubhouse on **26th March at 11.00am.**

The Parish Council would like to thank our Defib Guardians for their ongoing support.

PS There's also a CPAD at the Village Hall provided by the Trustees.



West Hill War Memorial
Short Service of Commemoration
11.00am Thursday 8th May



Sat 10th May 1.30pm
West Hill RBL
VE-Day 80
Community Street Party
You're invited - All Welcome!
Please look out for more details



PTFA Summer Fayre
Sat 28th June
on the School Field
All welcome
It's a community event!
Support our village school

Contact Us:

West Hill Parish Council welcomes your comments. Please contact our Parish Clerk, preferably by email.

Do you want to join our **mailing list**? We use this to send you updates such as meeting agendas. Details of our Privacy Policy are available on our website.

Thank you for your support!