

**WEST HILL PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON 3rd December 2024 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, 2 members of the public.
Apologies	DCC/EDDC Cllr Jess Bailey

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council

Item (a)	Discussion and decisions (b)
24/347	<p>Welcome and Chairman's announcements</p> <p>The meeting started at 7.30pm. The Chairman, Cllr FP, welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>The Chairman's announcements included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During November the Council's Emergency Plan booklet was distributed to village households. Shortly afterwards, West Hill experienced Storm Bert which resulted in fallen trees and some homes without power. The Chairman encouraged residents to register with the Council if they may need help in an emergency situation such as a severe storm. The Council's working group will continue to develop an Emergency Plan for the village. • An Energy Advice session led by Devon Communities Together was organised by WHPC for 26th November. Attendance was low but feedback from attendees was very positive. • In recent weeks Lower Broad Oak Road has been blocked by fallen trees and branches on two occasions. The Parish Council has sought advice from East Devon District Council Tree Officers regarding the woodland near the junction with West Hill Road. • During December, the Chairman and Cllr SMS will be meeting representatives from the Ottery St Mary Tar Barrels Organising Committee to discuss parking arrangements in West Hill, particularly on Lower Broad Road. Residents and Cllrs were concerned that inconsiderate parking was causing a safety risk as emergency vehicles could not easily pass through. • Christmas/New Year office hours: The Parish Council office will close at 5pm on Friday 20th December and will re-open at 9.00am Thursday 2nd January 2025.
24/348	<p>Apologies. To receive apologies and approve reasons for absence, if considered appropriate. DCC/EDDC Cllr JB was unable to attend the meeting and sent her apologies.</p>
24/349	<p>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></p> <p>No members of the public wished to speak.</p>
24/350	<p>District and County Councillors' reports: To receive reports for information (items raised for decision will appear on the agenda for the next meeting)</p> <p>The Chairman advised that DCC/EDDC Cllr JB had provided a written report. (see 24/357). Action: The Clerk to publish the report on the Councils website.</p>

24/351	<p>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.</p> <p>Members were 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.</p> <p>Cllrs FP, TI, AC and SMS each declared no interests in items on the agenda.</p>												
24/352	<p>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: None</p>												
24/353	<p>Minutes: To receive the Minutes of the Parish Council meeting of 5th November 2024 (Minute 24/321 -24/346) and to approve the signing of the Minutes by the Chairman as a true record.</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting of 5th November 2024 were unanimously accepted as a true record and were signed by the Chairman.</p>												
24/354	<p>Planning Applications received: To consider a response to:</p> <p>24/2464/TRE 7 Heather Grange West Hill Devon EX11 1XZ T1, Pine tree leaning on adjacent tree: fell.</p> <p>Councillors were unable to make an objective decision as it was felt that they did not have enough information. They noted that this was common to many applications for tree works. They felt strongly that the application form was not fit for purpose.</p> <p>Cllrs resolved to defer to the EDDC Tree Officer's decision.</p> <p>Action: Clerk to request a meeting with EDDC Tree Officers.</p>												
24/355	<p>Planning decisions received for information (*denotes WHPC differed)</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 80%;"></th> <th style="text-align: right; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">EDDC Decision</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>23/0727/MOUT Land North of Eastfield, West Hill Erection of up to 30 dwellings with all matters reserved apart from means of access</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Approved*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>24/1913/TRE Woodlands 2 Birch Grove West Hill Devon EX11 1XP T1, Silver Birch Tree</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Approved</td> </tr> <tr> <td>24/2001/TRE 24 Moorlands West Hill EX11 1UL T1, Oak – various works</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Approved*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>24/2028/TRE The Vicarage Bendarroch Road West Hill Ottery St Mary EX11 1UW T1+T2: Oak: various works. T3: Cherry - fell (dying).</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Approved*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>24/2095/TRE 10 Warren Park West Hill Ottery St Mary EX11 1TN T1 - Cherry, dismantle in sections to near ground level.</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Approved</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>All noted. The Chairman reminded the meeting that a further application for the land north of Eastfield would be submitted to EDDC for approval. This would provide details of the proposed layout, number of homes etc. The Parish Council would have the opportunity to comment on the application.</p>		EDDC Decision	23/0727/MOUT Land North of Eastfield, West Hill Erection of up to 30 dwellings with all matters reserved apart from means of access	Approved*	24/1913/TRE Woodlands 2 Birch Grove West Hill Devon EX11 1XP T1, Silver Birch Tree	Approved	24/2001/TRE 24 Moorlands West Hill EX11 1UL T1, Oak – various works	Approved*	24/2028/TRE The Vicarage Bendarroch Road West Hill Ottery St Mary EX11 1UW T1+T2: Oak: various works. T3: Cherry - fell (dying).	Approved*	24/2095/TRE 10 Warren Park West Hill Ottery St Mary EX11 1TN T1 - Cherry, dismantle in sections to near ground level.	Approved
	EDDC Decision												
23/0727/MOUT Land North of Eastfield, West Hill Erection of up to 30 dwellings with all matters reserved apart from means of access	Approved*												
24/1913/TRE Woodlands 2 Birch Grove West Hill Devon EX11 1XP T1, Silver Birch Tree	Approved												
24/2001/TRE 24 Moorlands West Hill EX11 1UL T1, Oak – various works	Approved*												
24/2028/TRE The Vicarage Bendarroch Road West Hill Ottery St Mary EX11 1UW T1+T2: Oak: various works. T3: Cherry - fell (dying).	Approved*												
24/2095/TRE 10 Warren Park West Hill Ottery St Mary EX11 1TN T1 - Cherry, dismantle in sections to near ground level.	Approved												
34/356	<p>TPO: To note the confirmation of 24/0020/TPO on Land at Lower Broad Oak Road, West Hill.</p> <p>Noted.</p>												
24/357	<p>Planning Matters: To receive a verbal report on the EDDC Strategic Planning Committee meeting held on 22nd November.</p> <p>The Chairman gave a summary of the report submitted by District Cllr JB. On 22nd November, EDDC's Strategic Planning Committee considered proposed Settlement Boundaries (formerly known as Built Up Area Boundaries) to be included in the Emerging Local Plan. EDDC Cllr JB</p>												

	<p>supported the proposed Settlement Boundary for West Hill, however some members of the committee felt it be extended further. EDDC Officers explained that West Hill is widespread and travel from the outskirts of the village to the centre is considered unsustainable as householders are likely to travel by car. The Settlement Boundary agreed for West Hill:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • included the land north of Eastfield and land south of Windmill Lane (currently subject to planning applications). • did not include the land north of Hayes End • did not include areas included in earlier proposal (2022). <p>On behalf of the Council, the Chairman thanked District Cllr JB for her efforts in preventing a greater enlargement of the settlement boundary.</p> <p>The final draft of the Emerging Local Plan is expected to be published for public consultation in January 2025.</p>
--	--

WHPC Groups + Initiatives

24/358	<p>Finance Working Group: 2025-26 WHPC Plan + Budget:</p> <p>Cllrs considered a paper circulated prior to the meeting and published on the Council's website:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To receive: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. WHPC CIL + s106 statement <p>Cllrs noted the up-to-date statement of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL, £31,872.63) and s106 (£29,770.52) monies available to West Hill. The Clerk and members of the Council recently met with EDDC's s106 Officer to confirm the monies available, eligibility criteria and s106 approval process.</p> <p>The Clerk confirmed the project to create a new pedestrian path was eligible and could be funded from CIL monies.</p> <p>Action: All Cllrs to put forward proposals for use of CIL and S106 monies for discussion at the next meeting.</p> b. Revised Forecast Receipts + Payments for 2024/25. <p>The meeting received a report on the latest 2024-25 forecast for full year receipts and payments. Cllrs noted the revised forecast and raised no issues or questions.</p> 2. To consider the Finance WG recommendation to vire earmarked reserves. <p>The meeting received a report on the Parish Council reserves including 2024 expenditure to date and the expected end of year position if construction of the new pedestrian path is completed before 31st March 2025.</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To vire the current earmarked reserve for replacement of the bus shelter roof (£15,000) to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Development of a Neighbourhood Plan for West Hill, £5,000 o Village Hall pedestrian path project, £10,000 <p>as it has been confirmed that the bus shelter is an EDDC asset.</p> 3. To consider proposed Parish Council projects for 2025/6/7 and their budget requirements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Ongoing projects: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Development of a Neighbourhood Plan for West Hill b. Emergency Plan for West Hill 3.2. New projects:
---------------	---

- a. Playpark Refurbishment
- b. Community Consultation

There was a discussion of the projects planned for 2025-2027. The Chairman acknowledged some projects were ongoing and this limited the resources available for new projects, however he encouraged Cllrs to consider a community consultation during 2025 to establish the views of the village regarding issues/future projects.

Cllrs were concerned about the Cllr resources required to deliver the projects given the number of ongoing Councillor vacancies. In particular, they considered:

- the development of the Neighbourhood Plan would be a lengthy, complex project.
- The completion of the Village Hall Pedestrian Path project would free up resources, however the completion was subject to the Highways process and timetable for a Traffic Regulation Order.

Cllr TI asked if the Community Consultation had been agreed. The Chairman advised the proposal would be discussed in detail at a future meeting.

Councillors then discussed the funding required for projects and considered the possible source of funding for each of the projects.

Councillors were asked if they were satisfied that the project plan could be funded from WHPC Reserves, CIL, S106 or external grant funding.

It was resolved:

- the budget and Precept Demand for 2025-26 would not include funding for projects.

4. To consider a 2nd draft budget for 2025-26 and to agree actions/amendments.

The Chairman presented the 2nd draft budget and summarised the work done by the Finance Working Group during November. The Working Group had scrutinised each item on the budget and reduced costs wherever it was considered appropriate and viable. As a result, the draft budget for 2025-26 had been reduced from £61,135 to £58,767. Amendments included:

- Staff costs had been updated to reflect the changes to Employers NI and the recently published 2024/2025 national pay award. There was no change to the Clerk's contracted hours as it was expected that the Clerk would support the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Operating expenses were reduced as per decisions taken to cancel some subscriptions.
- Provision for grant awards was unchanged at £3,000.
- Renewal of the West Hill community defibrillators scheme would be funded from CIL monies (March 2026).
- No provision for additional audit fees.

The Finance WG felt that this was a prudent, workable budget for 2025/26.

Councillors were asked if they were satisfied that the proposed 2025-26 budget met the needs of the Council and to identify any further work before the budget is signed off at the January 2025 meeting. No issues were raised.

5. To consider the Parish Council Precept Demand for 2025-26.

In preparation for deciding the 2025-26 Precept Demand at the January 2025 meeting, Councillors shared their initial views on the size of the Precept Demand (increase, no change, decrease). It was noted that the Council's Precept Demand was unchanged since 2021/22 whilst it's "business as Usual" costs had steadily increased due to inflation, increased staff costs, and decisions taken by the Council. They noted the draft budget for 2025/26, £58,767, was

	<p>higher than the 2024/25 Precept Demand £56,875. The Chairman considered the Council had sufficient reserves to call upon to fund any overspend against Precept.</p> <p>Cllrs discussed various scenarios and were mindful of the impact on West Hill households. The Council's Precept is collected by a charge on properties in the village. This is itemised on Council Tax bills and collected by EDDC. Cllrs were invited to compare the charge on a West Hill Band D property against other Band D properties across East Devon. It was noted that the comparison is difficult as the Precept reflects the services and facilities provided by the relative Councils. The charge on a Band D property in West Hill was below the average and typical of many Councils. Unlike many other Councils, West Hill's Band D charge had not increased significantly in recent years.</p> <p>6. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2023-24: To receive the findings of the External Auditor (if available) regarding the challenge to the Council's Annual Return (AGAR) for 2023-24.</p> <p>It was reported the Parish Council had received the External Auditor's Final Report and Certificate for 2023-24. No matters of concern were raised.</p> <p>Action: to publish the External Auditor's Final Report on the Councils website and noticeboard.</p> <p>As previously reported, a challenge had been submitted to the Auditor which listed 7 objections to the Council's Annual Return (AGAR) for 2023-24. The Auditor's findings were that 6 of the objections were ineligible. The 7th objection was eligible as it related to the AGAR but was not accepted for investigation.</p> <p>Cllrs noted the invoice for the External Audit for 2023-24 included the annual fee £315+VAT and £1,065 additional fees for processing the Objector's challenge. Cllrs acknowledged that an elector has the right to submit an objection, however additional charges totalling £4,792.52+vat had been incurred over the past three years, with little benefit, if any, to the community.</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To note the completion of the External Auditor's Review for the year ended 31st March 2024 and the outcome. b. To approve payment of the External Auditor's fee of £315 plus VAT; c. To approve payment of the additional audit fee of £1,065 plus VAT incurred due to an individual lodging Objections under Section 27 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 with the External Auditor. d. To publish the Notice of the Conclusion of the Audit and to confirm the Finance Working Group recommendation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To set a charge of £20.00 for any person requiring a copy of the AGAR and - to set the time limit for the period for right of inspection to be a minimum of 14 days. e. To publish the meeting paper prepared for the meeting.
24/359	<p>West Hill Neighbourhood Plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To consider if the Council has the resources to progress a Neighbourhood Plan for the West Hill Neighbourhood Area. If yes: b. To confirm a start date for the project. c. To establish a Working Group including a councillor representative d. To approve Terms of Reference for the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. e. Confirm funding allocation for 2024/25 and 2025/26. <p>Cllrs were keen to progress the development of a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for West Hill as the current joint Ottery St Mary+ West Hill NP is becoming out of date. The Council discussed the resources required to deliver the lengthy, complex project and were confident that a Working Group could be resourced from interested members of the community.</p>

	<p>It was resolved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of the Neighbourhood Plan will start immediately (3rd December 2024) 2. To establish a Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (NP WG) to progress the project. 3. Cllr AC to join the NPWG. 4. To approve the Terms of Reference for the NPWG. 5. The project will be funded from earmarked reserves and Government grant funding available for the development neighbourhood Plans. 6. To advise Ottery St Mary of the WHPC project and timetable.
<p>24/360</p>	<p>Playpark Working Group: To consider a draft playpark strategy.</p> <p>Cllrs discussed a short paper published for the meeting. Cllr AC gave an update on a meeting with EDDC's s106 Officer and advised Cllrs of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the funding available for new playpark equipment • the process to release s106 monies for projects <p>Cllrs AC/TI outlined possible short, medium, long term options for new playpark equipment. Cllr FP felt that short/medium term decisions should be set against a long term strategy (5-10 years), but stressed that the necessary actions should be in place in the short term to ensure that the playpark is a safe and enjoyable place for users. Cllr FP encouraged the working group to seek community views and to develop a long term vision for the playpark.</p> <p>Action: Cllrs AC/TI to develop a proposal for community consultation on plans for the playpark to be considered at the Council meeting in February 2025.</p>
<p>24/361</p>	<p>Village Hall Pedestrian Path Working Group: To receive a verbal report:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Phase 1 construction works <p>It was reported that the Phase 1 construction works have been re-scheduled and are expected to be completed by the end of the year.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> b. Traffic Regulation Order: consultation timetable (if available) <p>DCC Highways have not yet provided details and a timetable for the Traffic Regulation Order consultation.</p>
<p>24/362</p>	<p>Emergency Plan Working Group: To receive a verbal report on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The Emergency Plan booklet distributed to residents during November 2024 b. The development of an Emergency Plan for West Hill. <p>The meeting received a short report on the Council's Emergency Plan booklet which was distributed to village households. Very little feedback was received from the community.</p> <p>The Working Group will now focus on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encouraging more people to register if they will help in an emergency situation - recruiting Village Emergency Responders - developing plans to ensure the Village Hall has the facilities to operate as a community hub in an emergency situation. <p>Cllrs discussed the possibility of a pro-longed power cut and the need for the Village Hall to have an alternative power supply such as a generator.</p> <p>The Working Group highlighted concerns about the forthcoming telephone landline switchover. By January 2027, most UK providers plan to retire the analogue landline network and migrate customers to digital services.</p> <p>Action: The Clerk was asked to arrange a community briefing session on landline switchover.</p>

	A member of the public left the meeting at 9.02pm
24/363	<p>Remembrance Service Working Group: To receive a report on the road closure for the Sunday 10th November 2024 Remembrance Service and to consider any recommendations arising.</p> <p>The meeting received a report on the road closure for the Remembrance Sunday service at the War Memorial (10th November 2024). Cllrs noted the preparations for the event had worked well and the budget was underspent. Cllrs reviewed several (minor) learning points including: the timing of events continues to cause some confusion. A small number of residents expected the wreath laying service at the War Memorial to begin at 11.00am rather than 10.15am as set by the RBL (West Hill).</p> <p>Cllrs raised a number of questions: is the road closure was necessary? why does the road closure begin at 9.30am? Cllr FP explained that the Parish Council had agreed to be responsible for the event and the road closure was necessary to ensure that the event took place safely. It also allowed the event to take place in a respectful manner.</p> <p>Cllrs formally thanked West Hill RBL personnel, road marshal volunteers and Martin Jelf for their assistance.</p> <p>Action: The working group to discuss the learning points from the 2024 event with members of the RBL (West Hill).</p>
24/364	<p>Road Safety Working Group: To approve the Vehicle Activated Sign schedule for 2024/25.</p> <p>It was resolved to approve the Vehicle Activated Sign transfer schedule for 2025.</p>

Other Matters

24/365	<p>To consider a response to the Government consultation on remote attendance at council meetings and proxy voting.</p> <p>Cllrs agreed a response to the Government consultation. In principle they supported the opportunity for remote attendance at council meetings but with tight restrictions on its use. Cllrs raised concerns about the arrangements necessary for a hybrid of in-person/remote attendance at parish/town council meetings. They noted many areas lacked sufficient broadband speeds and would require additional equipment and storage facilities. Cllrs were unanimous in their opposition to proxy voting at Council meetings.</p> <p>The Chairman encouraged Cllrs and members of the public to respond to the consultation. Consultation deadline:19th December 2024.</p> <p>Action: Cllr FP to respond to the consultation on behalf of the Parish Council.</p>
24/366	<p>To consider arrangements for the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting Thursday 27th March.</p> <p>Cllrs were reminded to consider ideas for the 2025 Parish Meeting to be discussed at the next Council meeting.</p>
24/367	<p>To consider amendments to the WHPC Grant Policy.</p> <p>Cllr TI asked if the policy should be amended as the Council has awarded a number of grants in excess of 50% of the applicant's project. Cllr FP explained that this was not contrary to policy and considered the wording of the current policy allowed for some flexibility when considering grant awards. Cllrs AC and SMS supported this view.</p> <p>It was resolved not to amend the WHPC Grant Policy.</p>
24/368	To consider specific correspondence received No specific correspondence was discussed.

24/369	To note the receipt of a Freedom of Information request and actions taken. It was reported that the Parish Council had received a Freedom of Information request during November concerning: (a) Cllr Declaration of Acceptance and (b) the Council's application for a Traffic Regulation Order. The request was processed according to Council policies and a reply sent within the standard timescales.						
24/370	To receive a report from the Parish Clerk. It was agreed to arrange for minor amendments to the Council's website (contact details).						
24/371	To review WHPC's Action Tracker . The Chairman led a review of the outstanding actions. No further actions were identified.						
24/372	<p>Financial matters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To consider and approve, if appropriate, the Schedule of Payments. Cllrs considered the Schedule of Payments and invoices circulated and published before the meeting. No questions were raised. It was resolved to approve the payments and sign the invoices. To consider and approve, if appropriate, any additional payments presented to the meeting. Cllrs resolved to approve and sign three additional invoices presented to the meeting: <table style="margin-left: 40px; width: 80%;"> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">West Hill Village Hall - Room Hire Nov-24</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£32.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">RBL Room Hire Nov-24</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£60.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">Inv 3207 PLG Services VAS Transfers</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£96.00</td> </tr> </table> To receive, if available, monthly Bank Reconciliations and finance trackers. The Finance WG reviewed and signed off the bank reconciliation and financial reports (Oct-24) at their November meeting. 	West Hill Village Hall - Room Hire Nov-24	£32.75	RBL Room Hire Nov-24	£60.00	Inv 3207 PLG Services VAS Transfers	£96.00
West Hill Village Hall - Room Hire Nov-24	£32.75						
RBL Room Hire Nov-24	£60.00						
Inv 3207 PLG Services VAS Transfers	£96.00						
24/373	<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> No matters were raised.</p>						
24/374	Next meeting: To confirm arrangements for upcoming WHPC meeting on Tuesday 7th January 2025 7.30pm at the Village Hall.						

All remaining members of the public left the meeting.

Part A ended 9.52pm

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. **None**

Meeting closed at 9.52pm.

Signed

Date