

**WEST HILL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
TUESDAY 14th April 2026**

DRAFT Minutes Annual Parish Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> April 2026

**Present:** Cllr Francis Pullman (FP), Chairman, Cllr Mike Owen, Cllr Ben Jewell, Cllr Shirley May Saunders (SMS),

**In attendance:** Parish Clerk Anne Oliver, County/District Cllr Jess Bailey, 24 members of the public,

**Apologies:** Cllr A Cooper, Local Police Team

---

## Minutes of the Meeting

### APM 26/1 Welcome and Chairman's announcements

The meeting started at 7.30pm. Chairman Cllr Francis Pullman (AC) welcomed Councillors and members of the public.

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.

### APM 26/2 To receive and approve the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2025

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> March 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record. Proposed: Margaret Hall, Seconded: Colin Veale. Chairman FP signed the minutes.

### APM 26/3 To receive a report from the Parish Council Chairman

The Chairman's report included:

1. **Council Membership:** The Chairman welcomed the co-option of two new members Cllrs Ben Jewell/Mike Owen and reported the resignation of Trevor Ingram who had resigned due to family matters. The meeting thanked him for his contribution over the past years.

The Chairman then reported on the Council's activities in support of the Council's mission was "Working with the community to maintain and enhance West Hill's special character".

2. **Finances:** Expenditure was carefully managed through the work of the Parish Clerk and the Finance Working Group which had enabled the Council to hold the village precept constant for the past few years unlike many councils which have increased their precepts significantly. Whilst the Parish Council precept is a comparatively small part of the overall Council Tax bill it is the only part that the Parish Council could directly control.
3. **Planning and Tree-work applications:** During the year the Council responded to 49 applications concerning West Hill and represented West Hill at Planning Committee hearings. As EDDC cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing supply, the "tilted balance" applied such that there is a presumption that planning applications for new housing will be approved unless there are very strong reasons for not doing so.

However, the Council successfully resisted applications such as a proposed development at West Hayes where the EDDC Planners appeared to have completely missed the ecological impact on a number of bat species found at the site which had been recognised as a site of

national importance for bats. This application was refused but is now subject to an appeal by the developers.

Developers are required to demonstrate a Biodiversity Net Gain in their proposed developments. However, the Parish Council was concerned that it is permissible for this “gain” to be delivered by buying credits in a “Biodiversity Bank” elsewhere so they are allowed to damage the ecology of West Hill provided they pay a commercial operator to “replace” this biodiversity loss elsewhere. Similarly, requirements to build a proportion of “affordable housing” in a development could be met by building some of those elsewhere so West Hill may have to accept more development in a village with very limited infrastructure whilst somewhere else benefits from the affordable housing. The Parish Council had raised these concerns in consultee responses to EDDC.

4. The **Neighbourhood Plan** Working Group had carried out substantial work and were making good progress towards a dedicated neighbourhood plan for West Hill, which will enhance the community's ability to shape planning decisions.
5. **Emergency Plan for West Hill:** With the help of a number of residents, the initial Emergency Plan had been completed. The plan had been approved by Devon Communities Together Resilience team and they had awarded us a grant to buy some two way radios for use in an emergency.
6. A major achievement during the Council year was the completion of the **Village Hall Foot Path** which is now in operation. All the required safety audits have been completed and documented. DCC Highways Department inspected the works on West Hill Road and were so satisfied that they decided not to wait the normal 12 months before formally adopting the road works.
7. Two Councillors, Ann Cooper and Ben Jewell, were working on a long term strategy for the **playpark** that will give many more years of safety and enjoyment for the youngsters of the village. The playpark has a detailed regime of weekly, monthly and annual inspections carried out by the Parish Council, EDDC and RoSPA. Cllr Cooper had recently completed a training course and qualified as a playpark inspector.
8. **Grants awarded** over the past year (PTFA annual summer fair, RBL). Village organisations/groups were encouraged to apply for a 2026/7 grant award.
9. A new initiative for 2025 was the installation of a **Village Christmas Tree**. It was well received by a lot of people so this year the Council was planning to for a larger-scale village event. Residents were asked contact Cllr Ben Jewell with ideas for the 2026 event.
10. **Local Government Reorganisation.** The Government has requested councils to submit proposals to replace the two-tier system of county and district councils with new unitary authorities. Devon councils could not agree on a common proposal but have submitted 5 different options for the Government to consider. Whether the Government will pick one of the 5 or tell the councils to refine their proposals remains to be seen but the transition to the new system should take place through 2027/28 with full implementation by April 2028. All of this means that Councils are distracted from their main task by working on the new organisation and obviously incurring costs for doing so.

The Chairman concluded his report by thanking fellow councillors for the work they have done over the past year and for sticking with the council despite the fact that it was desperately short of members. He also thanked the Council's underpaid and overworked Parish Clerk Anne for her guidance, advice and

impeccable governance of the council's activities, adding 'I'm not sure the village fully appreciates how fortunate we are to have such a person in this important role'.

**APM 26/4** To receive a report from County/District Councillor

District/County Councillor Jess Bailey thanked the Parish Councillors for their unseen work on behalf of the village. In particular she thanked the Parish Clerk for her hard work and support over the past year.

Her report included:

1. More than 2,500 people had responded to the DCC consultation on the future of Devon's libraries. A special DCC meeting was scheduled to review the proposals and responses to the consultation.
2. EDDC have not yet submitted the Emerging East Devon Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate for assessment. This will be considered by EDDCs Strategic Planning Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2026.
3. No further information had arisen regarding the Morrison's site during the past year.
4. Local Government Reform (LGR): Cllr Bailey expressed her concerns about the possible disaggregation of Devon's Adult Care Services and Children's Services. She felt that LGR had impacted the focus of the County Council during the year.
5. Grant awards are available from her Locality Budget.

**APM 26/5** To receive reports from local organisations, groups and grant recipients

Representatives of Council Working Groups, local organisations, groups and grant recipients gave short reports to the meeting, including:

1. **Neighbourhood Plan Working Group:** Margaret Hall, Chair of the Working Group, gave a progress update. Since beginning work in January 2025, the group had conducted a community consultation and had begun the development of Design Codes for West Hill. The consultation generated a strong response with a clear message that residents care deeply about protecting the character of the woodland village.

Margaret explained that Design Codes are evidence based locally tailored rules and guidelines that set out what 'good' development should look like. They don't stop development but help shape the materials, layout, how trees and hedgerows are treated etc. There will be a further consultation seeking views on the draft design codes.

A further workstream will be to consult local landowners, including owners of the Morrisons site.

2. **Road Safety Working Group:** Cllr Mike Owen gave a short report. Residents have regularly raised concerns regarding road safety. However, it was clear from discussions with DCC Highways they were unlikely to take action as West Hill was generally seen as a low priority area due to its good road safety record. Cllr Owen encouraged residents to report 'near misses' to the Police via their 101 telephone/inline service.

The working group planned to investigate actions that the Parish Council could self-fund with DCC highways permission. Any proposals would be considered at a council meeting.

3. **Local Police Team:** Cllr Pullman gave their report to the meeting. Overall the area was quiet, however there was an increase in the number of telephone/online scams reported. Residents were reminded to avoid providing their personal and banking details, particularly in response to WhatsApp messages.
4. **Village hall:** Colin Veale gave a report on behalf of the Trustees who manage the hall, a registered charity. The hall continued to be a popular venue for village activities with 26 groups/organisation using the hall on a regular basis. Also, the primary school and pre-school use the hall on a daily basis. However, the trustees were deeply concerned that the future of the hall was in doubt. Despite repeated calls for new volunteers no new Trustees had been appointed in recent years with one exception, Margaret Piper, who sadly passed away shortly after her appointment.

Collectively the current Trustees had served the Village Hall and village for over 68 years. They plan to stand down in 2<sup>nd</sup> half 2026. As a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), the present Trustees are required to report a Critical Incident if new Trustees cannot be found. Should this occur the Charities commission will decide the future management and running of the hall.

Anyone interested in becoming a Trustee was asked to contact the Chairman, Colin Veale or Lynda, the Village Hall Booking Secretary.

5. **Community Speedwatch:** Amanda Townsend gave a report on behalf of the Speedwatch volunteers. The group were trained by the Police and operated from sites across the village allocated by the Police. The group's purpose was to act as a deterrent and to get drivers to respect the speed limits. According to the data gathered by the group, the B3180 ranked among Devon's leading spots for speeding violations during periods of 2025. Additional volunteers would enable the group to add more sessions to their schedule.
6. **Arboretum Group:** Eileen Perkins, the Village Tree Warden, introduced herself to the meeting. She was pleased to report that she had received an increasing number of calls for advice during 2025. As the Village Footpath Warden she raised concerns that faults reported to Devon County Council were not being remedied. Eileen introduced the new Chairman of the Arboretum Group, Selina Herbert, who gave a report on upcoming walks planned by the group.
7. **Craft Group:** The Craft Group met fortnightly/monthly to work on individual and group projects. The group hoped their postbox toppers raised a smile. Future plans include a banner for the upcoming centenary of West Hill RBL branch.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions.

**APM 26/6** Public Question Time  
None of the attendees wished to speak.

**APM 26/7** Chairman to close the meeting  
The Chairman closed the meeting and signposted the village groups present at the meeting.  
Refreshments were served.

Meeting closed at 8.25pm

Anne Oliver, Parish Clerk, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2026

Minutes Signed:

Date