

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN
LUPPITT VILLAGE HALL ON TUESDAY, 6 MAY 2025, AT 7 PM**

Present: Parish Councillors Michele Turner (in the Chair), Charles Murray, Martin Summers, Paul Prettejohn, Brian Pulman, Susan Tucker, Rosalind Buxton (clerk) and 8 members of the public

1 Welcome and Apologies

Michele Turner welcomed everyone to the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting for Luppitt. Apologies were received from Parish Councillors Lindsay Hill, Andrew Tucker, Ward members Yehudi Levine and Colin Brown

2 Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 3 May 2024

It was proposed by Brian Pulman, seconded by Michele Turner and carried unanimously that the Minutes of the meeting held in the Village Hall on Friday, 3 May 2024, were signed as a correct record of that meeting.

3 Annual Report from the Chair of the Parish Council

There have been 12 Parish Council meetings since the last Annual Parish Meeting. Our meetings are very informal and are open to the public and it would be nice to see more residents attending.

At last year's AGM of the Parish Council, I was elected as Chair and John Thorne as Vice-Chair.

There have been 12 planning applications. The Parish Council always refers to Neighbourhood Planning policies when making any comments to the Planning Department at EDDC. I'm pleased to report that, so far, our comments have carried some weight. There has also been one Certificate of Existing Lawfulness which has proved to be a contentious issue. EDDC Planning Officers have not reached a decision to date and the matter remains unresolved.

EDDC funds a small number (no more than 3) of Housing Need Surveys each year and Luppitt Parish Council was successful in securing one of these. The Parish Council advertised the Housing Need Survey widely and, despite the short notice, 105 surveys were completed making a very high response rate of 53%. The Survey showed that there would be a need for 4 units of affordable housing within the next 5 years. However, EDDC's Housing Enabling Officer's view is that a housing need for 4 affordable homes is too small to interest most registered providers who would not see it as a viable proposition. It was also pointed out that a Housing Need Survey represents a snapshot in time and personal circumstances are constantly changing. The Parish Council has met its commitment in the Neighbourhood Plan to carry out a Housing Need Survey and it was agreed to monitor the situation in case options become available.

The condition of our roads remains a chief priority. Andrew Tucker continues to keep the ditches and gullies clear throughout the parish. The clerk regularly reports potholes around the parish in need of repair to Devon Highways. Some are repaired but many are not, with Highways stating that they do not reach their criteria for repair. Despite the clerk's best efforts, Highways funding towards parish maintenance appears to have dried up which is very disappointing.

Changes made to the Employer's National Insurance contributions and the Minimum Wage, which took effect in April this year and which will have an effect on all businesses, together with dwindling funding in all areas, were considerations taken into account during the Parish Council's annual discussion regarding precept. It seems likely that, with the changes being made to Local Government, there will be less support for communities (especially rural ones) and that more responsibility will fall to Town and Parish Councils. Taking this into account, it was agreed that the precept should be raised to £14,000. It is never an easy decision or one that is taken lightly but it was felt prudent for the Parish Council to carry sufficient reserves to meet any unexpected eventualities.

The Footpath Wardens continue to monitor the footpaths in the parish and report any problems to the Parish Council. As a result, Andrew has carried out repairs to gates and posts and other remedial work during the year on various footpaths.

Thanks are due to Chris Tottle who continues to cut the grass at the play area at Millrise.

Donations from the precept totalling £620 were given to the following organisations:

Devon Freewheelers
Devon Air Ambulance Trust
Royal British Legion
Luppitt Children's Christmas Party
British Heart Foundation
Luppitt Packet

The Parish Council held an event with barbecue, bonfire and firework display on Thursday, 6 June 2024, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day. The event was very well attended and provided a good opportunity for

residents to meet up. The success of events like this depends on volunteers who willingly give up precious time to organise things.

Contact with our PCSO has still not materialised – a point that has been raised at each Annual Parish Meeting since 2019. The promise of stronger communications with Parish Councils has not materialised.

John Thorne resigned from the Parish Council in October 2024. John felt that he was spending more time away and, as a result, was unable to devote as much time as he would like to the Parish Council. John has made significant contributions since becoming a Parish Councillor in 2012 and serving as Chair of the Parish Council from 2014 to 2023. His local knowledge and expertise have been much appreciated over the years. Our thanks go to John for his contribution and support as a valued member of the Parish Council.

The casual vacancy created by John's resignation has been filled by Sue Tucker who attended her first meeting last month. Sue is part of a local farming family and we are pleased to welcome her to the Parish Council. Martin Summers was elected as Vice-Chair at our December meeting.

Thursday, 8 May 2025, marks the 80th anniversary of VE Day and the Parish Council is organising a barbecue, bonfire and firework display to celebrate this important date. It will take place at a different location this year between Hartridge and Mathayes Cross and will be well signposted. We hope that the weather will be kind and look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible so please spread the word.

A White Paper on English Devolution was introduced by the new Government which proposes the abolition of District Councils and the establishment of unitary authorities headed by a mayor. East Devon District Council will be dissolved in 2028.

The Parish Council is grateful to our two District Ward members, Colin Brown and Yehudi Levine, and our Devon County Council representative, Iain Chubb, for attending our meetings and keeping us up to date with matters at East Devon District Council and Devon County Council. Finally, I'd like to thank all the Parish Councillors and the clerk for their support over the past year.

4 Reports

Report from District Councillor Yehudi Levine

The past year has been a topsy-turvy journey for EDDC councillors. The reasons are simple: the chopping and changing of the planning policies and housing allocations, not to mention the Local Government Reorganisation. The less said about the latter the better, in the absence of clarity about the plans for Devon.

In May 2024 I found myself assigned to 5 Council Committees: Audit and Government, Licensing and Enforcement, Overview, Scrutiny and Strategic Planning with each requiring a different mindset. The bulk of the business transacted by the Committees had little bearing on everyday life in our Ward. But let me take you on a tour of the more interesting events (or should I say highlights) of my Committee work.

Far and away the most time consuming activities were the debates and discussions around the emerging Local Plan. These occasioned the Strategic Planning Committee to meet two days a week in the months September to December. The main consideration was the selection of potential sites for developments to meet the housing allocation imposed by Whitehall from now till 2042.

The Committee had little leeway and discretion except to find the sites for building development which would cause the least disruption, or least worst sites in technical terms. And in doing so it had to contend with the displeasure of residents affected by the loss of amenities and increased pressure on infrastructure, schools and GP surgeries. It was not an easy task to sift through the sites identified by Officers and to make informed choices using the few and small differences between them. I cannot claim that members were consistent in the discussions, but the question that hung over us was 'if not here, then where?' to make the numbers add up.

The public was quite vociferous in its opposition to the developments and pressure groups made forceful presentations. Our email inboxes were overwhelmed by avalanches of complaints and objections. Many of our residents have failed to appreciate till this day that the Committee was stuck between a rock and a hard place: Whitehall dictated that choices had to be made, if not locally, then by planning inspectors parachuted in from outside the district. The house building programme has been espoused by Westminster with missionary zeal and there is no way we can stop that juggernaut from rolling over us.

The work of the Committee, and not to forget Officers, happened under a considerable time pressure so as to avoid the raised housing allocation planned by the new government following the July election. But luckily the Local Plan was prepared in time for public consultation and submission under the pre-election rules. It must be said that our Ward weathered the storm almost unscathed, with only a small development approved in Dunkeswell. The umbrellas of the National Landscape and designations as unsustainable locations have not started leaking yet.

Audit & Governance is an interesting Committee as its remit can be encapsulated by the question 'who spies on the spies?'. Essentially it all has to do with overseeing accountability and transparency in the working practices of the Council. Lengthy reports by the external auditors were brought to Committee about financial and governance issues, but the interesting bit is that the auditors were reluctant to award a green light in order to cover their backs in case some shortcoming was overlooked. Nevertheless, EDDC was found to be in a good place and its performance compared favourably with other District Councils. The only fly in the ointment was the backlog in the auditing of the accounts, in contravention of legal obligations. It turns out that the problem lies with the stringent accounting regulations set by Whitehall. There is simply a national shortage of qualified accountants to undertake the complex audits and the Council's finance department struggles to cope with the sheer volume of work needed to produce the accounts in the prescribed format. The only consolation is that the majority of councils nationally are in the same boat.

And now we come to the committee whose work I enjoy most: Licensing and Enforcements. Taxis, Private Hire Vehicles and Alcohol Licences as well as Street Trading, Gambling Venues and Charitable Street Collections Permits. Why do I find the work enjoyable? I suppose it is dealing with the vagaries of everyday life where a Councillor can make a tangible difference.

The Council is tasked with setting the maximum fares for taxis in the district, taking into account the running costs of operators and affordability for the public. An interesting balancing act. And as you can guess there is a wide difference in the operational costs of a taxi service in urban and rural areas, especially in our diverse district. I discovered that dead miles are not those covered by hearses, but the leg of a journey to or from a rural location when a taxi carries no passengers. This year the Committee agreed to a 10% rise in fares to take account of the rising costs of insurance and repairs.

Hold on to your paper, just two more Committees to go! But I shall take Overview and Scrutiny together as their work is interconnected. Overview looks at proposals for new Council policies and makes recommendations to Cabinet about their implementations. While Scrutiny looks at the policies once they have been debated by Cabinet and looks for improvements in their implementation and the working of all current policies. But a joint meeting is convened to look at and approve the budget. The work is probably best illustrated by the policy for Coach Tourism adopted by EDDC, which deals with dedicated parking bays, signage and recreational amenities for drivers. The object of the exercise is to increase tourism in all areas of the district. After a passage through the Committees, the policy was overwhelmingly approved this month by Full Council.

And I shall end here as I can see that your attention is starting to wander. I hope that you will agree with my assertion at the beginning of the report that most Committee work is peripheral to the everyday life in our rural Ward.

Report from County Councillor

This is my final Division members report for this version of Devon County Council, where a new, much different in member composition, (largely due to around half of DCC Councillors retiring from what at times can be an unforgiving role) that will be elected on May 1st.

I would like to thank Parish Councillors and members of the public for the support that they have given me in the last 4 years. This has seen a huge amount change taking place, as we emerged from Covid and continue to recover from that dark time, set against a background of a severely underfunded Local Government sector facing huge challenges to fulfil its statutory obligations, particularly in Adult, children's and Highways services.

My report is limited and of a factual nature only, given we are currently in the election regulated period or 'purdah' which restricts what Councillors can and cannot say or do. The period ends on the 2nd of May following the completion of DCC elections.

New Domestic Abuse Support Service launches

A new integrated Domestic Abuse Support Service has been launched by Devon County Council, and it aims to transform how people in the county access and receive support.

The service will be provided by the Devon Domestic Abuse Alliance, a partnership of seven local organisations. North Devon Against Domestic Abuse (NDADA), Encompass Southwest, CoLab Exeter, More Positive Me, The Olive Project, CRAFT Training and Development and Surviving Abuse North Devon.

Each partner brings a wealth of expertise, which will help ensure that those in need of the service, their friends and families as well as professionals receive the right advice, information and care at the right time.

At the heart of this approach is My Story, a person-centred approach led by a dedicated support team, which aims to avoid individuals being referred to multiple services and then asked to share their traumatic experiences multiple times.

The service will include:

- Single Entry Gateway – A single point of contact offering clear, accessible pathways to support, with phone, text, email, and online chat options to make help easy to reach.
- Community Domestic Abuse Support – Specialist teams providing risk management, and safety planning tailored to each person's situation, as well as whole family support and interventions to address the behaviours of those causing harm.
- Safe Accommodation, Staying Put, and Resettlement Support – A range of refuge and dispersed safe accommodation solutions and help for people to remain safely in their own home.
- Trauma-Responsive Recovery – Dedicated one-to-one and group therapeutic interventions peer support, ensuring survivors receive the emotional support needed to heal.
- Specialist Support – Addressing complex needs such as mental health, substance use, and homelessness, including safe accommodation and outreach options.
- Behaviour Change – Interventions to help those who harm break the cycle of abuse and take responsibility for change.

For more information, support, or to refer someone to the service from April 1st 2025, contact: 08082 816161

Children with EHCPs allocated places in their first-choice mainstream school

One hundred per cent of families of children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) have been allocated places in their first-choice mainstream school from September.

Families sometimes request that we consider specialist education alongside mainstream provision, and where specialist provision was requested by families, 87 per cent have been allocated places suitable to their child's special educational and disability needs. Thirteen per cent were allocated places in their mainstream school of choice or their nearest suitable school that can meet their child's needs. The latest figures follow our announcement earlier this month describing an overall increase in the number of families being allocated their first choices of Devon secondary school places for September. Seven thousand, three hundred and ninety-eight allocations were made in total for places at Devon mainstream secondary schools this September. In allocating places for pupils with EHCPs, we first consult with the requested school or other setting to ask if they are suitable in being able to meet the child's needs, and whether they have space. We consider the schools' or settings' response against a range of criteria as well as the parents' preferences before deciding to determine a setting by name (of school, for example) and/or what type of setting or provision to name on their EHCP.

DCC to maintain Free School Meal vouchers as support fund reduced.

The Government has confirmed a 11.87% decrease in this year's Household Support Fund allocation. The Fund, operating since 2021 and now in its seventh round, was introduced to help individuals and families that are struggling financially with the rising cost of living, such as the costs of energy, food, and other essential household items. Over that period, DCC channelled our allocation of Household Support Funding into providing a range of support, including the provision of Free School Meal holiday vouchers to families with children and young people who are eligible for free school meals during term time.

Citizen's Advice Devon has used some of our allocation to support households that use pre-payment meters, often paying higher unit costs and digital meters to help them afford and budget for their energy usage.

Devon's District Councils have used their allocation of the Household Support Fund to support older residents and individuals known to be on low incomes and/or claiming certain benefits, and who are struggling with the high costs of living. The Department of Work and Pensions' decrease means that were last year, we received £10.1 million, this year Devon will receive £8.9 million. The impact is likely to hit some of the county's most vulnerable residents, at a time of continued high prices for food, fuel, and other essential household items. DCC has confirmed that it will maintain the Free School Meal holiday vouchers, at the same £15 per week per eligible child level, for this Easter and May half-term holidays.

Beyond that though, with Devon County Council heading towards local elections on 1 May, it will be a decision for the council's new administration about how it will allocate the reduced purse to its partner organisations that support people struggling with the cost of living.

Report from the Hall Committee

No report was received.

Report from the Chairman of Luppitt Commons Ltd

No report was received.

Report from the Police

No report was received.

Questions

The clerk confirmed that emails had been sent to the various organisations requesting a report for the meeting. The Annual Parish Meeting provides an ideal opportunity for local organisations to share with residents what has been happening over the past year.

The internet is a great addition to the Village Hall. It was generally agreed that more support for local events would be very welcome. There was a discussion about lack of support for local events which is disappointing. Over the years, guest speakers have been invited to the Annual Parish Meeting but this has not improved attendance and can be embarrassing when only a small number of residents come to the meeting.

There were no further questions. Michele Turner thanked everyone for attending. Refreshments were served and the meeting closed at 7.40 pm.