

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN LUPPITT VILLAGE HALL ON FRIDAY, 3 MAY 2024, AT 7 PM

Present: Parish Councillors Michele Turner (in the Chair), Lindsay Hill, Charles Murray, Brian Pulman, Martin Summers, Yehudi Levine (EDDC), Rosalind Buxton (clerk) and 5 members of the public

1 Welcome and Apologies

Michele Turner welcomed everyone to the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting for Luppitt. Apologies were received from Parish Councillor John Thorne.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 4 April 2023

It was proposed by Brian Pulman, seconded by Charles Murray and carried unanimously that the Minutes of the meeting held in the Village Hall on Tuesday, 4 April 2023, were signed as a correct record of that meeting.

3 Annual Report from the Chair of the Parish Council

There have been 13 Parish Council meetings since the last Annual Parish Meeting.

At the Parish Council's AGM last May, I was delighted to be elected as Chair and have very much enjoyed my first year in office. John Thorne was elected as Vice-Chair having been Chair since 2014. The Parish Council is grateful to John for his hard work during those years and appreciative of his wide local knowledge.

2023 was an election year for the Parish Council. Beth Hooper stood down as Parish Councillor at the end of April 2023 as she had moved outside the area. Three candidates applied for the casual vacancy this had caused and Charles Murray was the successful candidate.

Christine Ryder resigned from the Parish Council at the end of December 2023 because of increased business commitments. That casual vacancy was filled by Lindsay Hill who attended her first meeting last month. We are pleased that Charles and Lindsay have joined us on the Parish Council. Our thanks go to Christine and Beth for their contribution and support as members of the Parish Council.

There have been 13 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.

The condition of our roads, not helped by the extremely wet weather, remains a chief priority. Andrew Tucker has been able to fill potholes throughout the parish that don't meet Highways' criteria for repair, using cold tar supplied free of charge under the Road Warden scheme. Andrew continues to keep the ditches and gullies clear throughout the parish.

The wet weather has made walking the footpaths almost impossible at times. Our three footpath wardens do their best to keep the Parish Council advised of any problem areas. Andrew has carried out repairs to gates and posts and other remedial work during the year on various footpaths. The Parish Council is very grateful to Andrew for his hard work throughout the parish.

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

It was agreed at our January 2024 meeting to increase the precept from £12,000 to £12,800 per annum as it was felt prudent for the Parish Council to carry sufficient reserves to meet any unexpected eventualities. This decision was not taken lightly and it was agreed that the increase should be kept as low as possible whilst being realistic.

The Parish Council had obtained funding from the Locality budget for a gate at the new play area at the Village Hall. Martin Summers managed to negotiate a very generous deal with Blamphayne Sawmills and the money stretched to a picnic table and bench.

Donations from the precept totalling £500 were given to the following organisations:

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

The Parish Council held an event with barbecue and firework display on Friday, 5 May 2023, to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III. The event was very well attended despite the weather which turned misty and cold.

Music was supplied by Luppitt musicians, Roger Hicks, David Kalisch, Sue Wilson, Robin Nancarrow and Barbara Thorne who gave up their time to provide an entertaining evening.

Contact with our PCSO has still not materialised – a point that has been raised at each Annual Parish Meeting since 2019. I attended a meeting at Dunkeswell arranged by the police with the intention of strengthening communications with Parish Councils so it is disappointing that no noticeable progress seems to have been made.

One of the Community Actions in the Neighbourhood Plan is to encourage residents to engage in a new Green Code for Luppitt to help reduce the parish carbon footprint, reduce household and farm waste, increase recycling and reduce soil erosion within the parish. I shall be organising a group to work on a Green Code so I do hope that the many residents who feel strongly about climate change will join me in taking the project further.

Thursday, 6 June 2024, marks the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the Parish Council is organising a barbecue, bonfire and firework display to celebrate this important date. It will be held on Hartridge again close to where the shepherd's hut used to be. We hope that the weather will be kind this time and look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible so please spread the word.

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

This is probably not the report you were expecting. It is simply my view of the events shaping EDDC in the period from my election as Ward Councillor on 4th May 2023 to mid-April 2024.

I was pleasantly surprised to become your Councillor and have striven in the past year to carry out my duties in the best interests of the Ward Residents and to avoid being an annoyance to the Parish Council. And having been elected at a good age, I am not trying to carve out a political career for myself.

EDDC acquired a new Administration last May, supported by a coalition of 18 Lib Dem and 11 Independent Councillors. Seventeen Conservative, 9 Independent, 3 Labour and 2 Independently Independent Councillors were also elected. And it gives me great satisfaction to be able to tell you that the vast majority of Council decisions were approved unanimously, showing that Councillors of all political hues join forces in the interests of East Devon Residents.

The first couple of months following the election were taken up with catching up with affairs left on hold during the election campaign and compulsory training courses in all aspects of Council work. The new Administration undertook a number of exercises to review and improve the working of EDDC, so it can better serve the public. The recommendations made by the Peer Review Challenge carried out under the auspices of the Local Government Association are currently being implemented.

I am privileged to be a member of 5 committees and during their discussions have discerned an unfortunate, but unavoidable, fault line in EDDC between the rural and urban areas. You are well aware that around 70% of the East Devon area is rural with two designated National Landscapes, but sheltering only about 20% of the population. The much smaller coastal strip and so called West End, are home to 80% of Residents and the larger share of economic activity. The Greater Exeter area is the undisputed economic engine which brings in investment and generates jobs. Consequently it also draws resources and developments to our West End. The big puzzle for me is how to ensure that the East End of East Devon receives an equitable share of the economic activity in the future. As a representative of a rural ward I am outnumbered by Councillors representing the urban areas, and more often than I would like I find it a struggle to make my voice count.

The two matters affecting East Devon which featured prominently this year were: 1) New housing developments and 2) Sewerage.

I'll start with the less smelly one first. Whitehall imposes an annual target of new housing developments on EDDC and the current figure is about 920 dwellings per annum. But as developments in National Landscapes are restricted and discouraged, building sites must be sought in the coastal strip and West End; not a popular course of action for the residents in those areas. The EDDC Council is of the view that the target figure is inappropriately high and has written to our MP's urging them to lobby Parliament to change the Whitehall formula for new housing allocation and take account of the geographical constraints in East Devon. Nonetheless, we were fortunate this year in that planning applications for housing developments can be refused by planners if EDDC can demonstrate the availability of 4 years of housing land supply rather than the previous figure of 5 years. As a result a number of communities were spared the imposition of inappropriate new developments.

And now hold your noses. Sewerage has been the bugbear of the past year, with appalling spillages into our beaches and rivers. In some communities the woeful drainage systems have led to raw sewage floating in the streets following a heavy rainfall and in others sewage had to be removed by tanker due to failures of the water treatment plants. Unfortunately the only action open to EDDC was to pass a unanimous motion of no-confidence in South West Water in hope that this will result in some action. I just hope that the voices of Council and Residents will move SWW to undertake the necessary upgrade of the sewage pipelines and water treatment plants, not to mention our water reservoirs.

The Strategic Planning Committee, of which I am a member, has grappled with the thorny question of whether to enlarge our towns and villages to accommodate the required house building programme or to plan instead another new town. The former option is certainly attractive as it will help revitalize small and rural communities and stop the migration of our younger demographic away from the countryside. And now comes the However. If we are to realise this, we need to overcome the problems arising from the creaking and inadequate infrastructure of our established communities. Services like drainage, sewerage, schooling and medical care are overstretched and oversubscribed. Moreover, fast internet connections and public transport are not available in many rural communities. Besides, plans for the enlargement of communities are more often than not met with hostility from residents who are unhappy with the loss of countryside and green spaces, and yes, additional stress on services. In view of all this, the Committee has recommended the creation of a new town which will provide its residents with modern, fit-for-purpose infrastructure.

And finally on a positive note, I am glad to report that the Administration is forward looking and training our younger, talented Councillors so that they acquire the necessary experience to take over the lead roles in the future

Report from County Councillor

This state of the public highway is by some distance the item that features most in conversations and correspondence with constituents and below is a more detailed report on how this last winter has gone for DCC Highways who are trying to keep up with rising demand, combined with limited human and financial resources.

As is typical for the winter period, DCC Highways has recorded a gradual increase in the number of publicly reported pothole defects (PIPs) since November, mainly via the 'Report a Problem web site. A team of Highway Safety Inspectors undertake assessments, using extended weekday and weekend working where resource allows. The Main contractor called Milestone are currently in the process of recruiting three additional permanent inspectors to assist in driving further efficiencies and timely inspections.

There have been more pothole defects this financial year than 2022/23. Whilst a further 12 months of network deterioration has occurred, the impacts on network condition of the relatively early and harsh freeze/thaw cycles experienced during last winter (2022/23) were felt deep into the summer months of 2023, added to by a number of severe storms and torrential rainfall.

Additional in year Government funding of £7.5 million is enabling more reactive, short notice and planned works, including minor hand patching and dragon patching will be delivered on the minor network in Devon as a result of it. While there have been challenges around plant breakdowns and availability relating to gully cleaning, it is anticipated the programme to clean 150,630 gully assets will be completed on time for the current financial year. The additional high pressure jetting resource is currently resolving approximately 800 recorded issues per month, effectively maintaining pace with the number of issues reported during the flooding events experienced over the 2023/24 winter period. The Service continues to trial a different approach to cleaning both urban gullies and gullies that require multiple cleans per year.

After a protracted and very difficult period of negotiation, a high-level agreement has been signed between Devon County Council and the Government, which will see an extra £95 million of national funds set aside to reduce the deficit on special needs education. The cumulative spending on education for children with special needs and disabilities (SEND) over the past 10 years is set to create a deficit of £163 million by the end of this financial year. In common with many councils across the country, DCC had been negotiating with the Government for extra funding for special needs education under the so-called Safety Valve programme. £10 million has been set aside in 2023/24 to help bring down the deficit. The new agreement will see the Government contribute £38 million by the end of March with the remaining cash being spread out over the following eight years.

We will contribute a further £5 million a year from its revenue budget and £20 million from reserves to bring the deficit back into balance by the end of the agreement.

It is recognised that DCC must improve its service to children needing help in this area and is committed to doing this, as well as managing its finances most effectively, keeping the Council on a long term sustainable basis.

Report from the Hall Committee

Tracey Rosewell was elected as Chair. 2022/23 saw bookings up by approximately 25%. The projector and retractable screen had been purchased – this is part of a wider plan to improve IT/internet at the hall. The hall continues to work on improvements to insulation, kitchen equipment and the bar.

Internet at the hall

The management committee continues to work with Gigaclear to bring internet to the hall. Progress has been slower than the committee would have liked but installation is now anticipated in Summer 2024.

Entertainments Committee

Continues to work hard to Pirate Footpath Fun, Bingo, Movie nights, Flower show and Fete, Pub games night, Christmas Party and quiz. The movie nights have proven popular especially with younger audiences with attendance averaging 40 (children and parents).

Report from the Chairman of Luppitt Commons Ltd

We are now in the 7th year of our Natural England Countryside Stewardship agreement for the Commons. As in previous years, we have again topped the bracken and gorse on Hense Moor, and on Hartridge we will shortly be erecting temporary fencing using a 6 month Section 38 exemption under the 2006 Commons Act, to facilitate grazing by cattle. As before, all such works have been undertaken with the full support and knowledge of Natural England. We have continued with our ongoing programme of maintenance around the various Commons, repairing fence lines, installing new gates and undertaking tree works (in particular, ash trees), repairing tracks and ditch clearance where required.

The Commons are a key part of the recently successful Luppitt Landscape Partnership bid to secure long term funding to improve the farming landscape in the parish. This project will be very important to everyone in the community over the coming years.

We recently installed a new car park surface and 4 new pedestrian gates on the popular circular walk around Hartridge, using a FiPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes) grant. This is a very popular walk with local people and these accessibility improvements will benefit us all. As in previous years, the Commoners pay a local contractor to top the permissive path several times year.

Luppitt Commons has recently completed a 2 year project to change its legal status. It was originally set up as a trust in May 1960, to hold the freehold title to the Commons, on behalf of all commoners. This legal structure worked for just over 60 years, but due to a number of recent legal changes regarding trusts, tax and other developments, we decided it was time to update our legal structure to a more modern arrangement. Luppitt Commons Limited is now the legal entity for the Commons, and this company is a CLG (company limited by guarantee) with a board of 12 directors who are all commoners.

Report from the Police

Good evening and I apologise for not being able to attend this meeting. I hope to attend one of your meetings over the next few months.

The Police.uk website looks to be up and running. You can search on the internet for this site which will show crimes in your area. We have had some changes over the past 12 months around staffing for the team. We are currently looking at employing 2 volunteers to help with our social media and connectivity. We are also looking at updating our monthly newsletter. Currently we are sending out a newsletter every 3 months.

We are still asking people to sign up to Devon Alert. This can be done on the Devon and Cornwall police website. I have noticed a rise in reported scams to the police. Action Fraud UK website is the national reporting centre for fraud and cyber crime reporting. I am also looking into setting up an event around rural crime prevention and property marking in the near future.

Questions

There were no questions. Michele Turner thanked everyone for attending. Refreshments were served and the meeting closed at 7.30 pm.