

DIPTFORD PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING - HELD AT DIPTFORD PARISH HALL TQ9 7NY

ON TUESDAY 17th March 2026 @ 7.30pm

1) Open Forum – Public & Parishioners (15 minutes) –

a) Many thanks to the team of litter pickers who did a brilliant job picking up rubbish around the Parish.

b) Road to Bearscombe, SHDC have now refused to pick up the rubbish because of the condition of the road. This may have many other serious implications such as if emergency services needed to get to the properties or deliveries. Cllr S Franklin confirmed that Dan Thomas DCC has been informed about this situation which will be discussed later in the meeting under Highways.

2) Present - Cllr S Franklin (Chair), Cllr T Crocker, Cllr G Paterson, Cllr L Carroll, Cllr D Dugdall, D Cllr G Pannell, Cllr L Lethbridge.

In Attendance – no public present.

3) Apologies for Absence – C Cllr D Thomas, Cllr S Parker-Davidson, Cllr C Peach.

4) Declarations of interest – Item 9a) Cllr L Carroll has declared an interest.

5) Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 17th February 2026.

Minutes have been circulated and read – proposed by Cllr T Crocker & seconded by Cllr G Paterson with all in agreement and duly signed by the Chair – Cllr S Franklin.

6) Matters Arising

a) Emergency Plan – carried forward to the next meeting.

b) LGR – Consultation – Cllrs all in agreement to support the 4,5,1 option with the comments formulated by Cllr C Peach as follows:-

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Devon will have several practical, strategic and financial effects on Parish Councils in the South Hams area. Because the new unitary councils will be much larger geographically, Parish Councils will become the main local voice for communities as decision-making will move further away from local communities. Since the Unitary Council will cover a larger area, local planning input from parish councils may become more important politically. If more services are transferred locally, Parish Councils will need to increase this precept to fund them.

The likely overall effect is that Diptford PC may become more important locally and responsible for delivering more community services at a cost to residents.

c) Harberton Neighbourhood Plan Consultation – this has been circulated to Cllrs.

7) Reports

a) County Councillor D Thomas – reported by email as follows:-

February and March have marked a significant moment for Devon. After months of scrutiny, debate and difficult decisions, the County Council has now agreed its 2026–27 budget. This is our first full budget of the new administration, and it sets a clear direction: stabilising essential services, repairing what has been neglected, and investing in the foundations that keep Devon moving. As you'd expect from a budget of over £2 billion, it has taken a long time to get to this point.

£19 Million Extra for Devon's Roads - The headline for many residents will rightly be highways. This year's budget includes an additional £15 million investment in Devon's roads, alongside a commitment to maintain £10 million per year in additional funding over the following five years. This is a major shift in approach. For too long, highways funding has been reactive and insufficient, leading to a cycle of patching rather than repairing. The extra funding will allow us to move beyond emergency pothole filling and begin tackling structural deterioration in a more strategic way. That means more resurfacing, more preventative maintenance, and more drainage work to stop water destroying road foundations in the first place. After one of the worst winters on record for storm damage, this investment is both timely and essential. While it will not fix every problem overnight, it represents a serious and sustained commitment to improving the condition of Devon's roads. At the same time, an extra £4 million of revenue funding will allow us to fix the potholes that we have now, as well as addressing the regular issue of blocked culverts, grips and buddle holes in quicker order.

Protecting Frontline Services Despite the continued unfairness of national funding arrangements, we have delivered a balanced budget that protects frontline services. Adult social care remains the largest area of council spending, accounting for nearly half of the total budget. Demand continues to rise, particularly as Devon has one of the oldest populations in the country. This budget provides stability while work continues to modernise services in a way that protects dignity and independence. Children's services and SEND provision also remain a priority. While financial pressures are significant, we are committed to improving outcomes and ensuring that vulnerable children receive the support they need. There was also significant national news on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities funding. The Government has confirmed it will write off around 90 per cent of councils' historic High Needs deficits, including Devon's, which will equate to approximately £200 million. It is important to be clear that this deficit did not arise from local overspending. Councils have a statutory duty to support children with SEND, and when national funding failed to keep pace with rising demand, local authorities were required to meet those costs regardless. In effect, councils have been carrying debt on behalf of central government in order to protect children and families. This decision is therefore the Government repaying money that should have been properly funded in the first place. I welcome both the write off and the stated commitment to put SEND funding onto a sustainable national footing so that councils are not placed in this position again.

Importantly, our budget is built around long-term sustainability, with a renewed focus on rebuilding reserves after years of erosion.

Libraries, Communities and Local Investment - There is additional funding to strengthen library services and develop them as resilient community hubs, particularly in rural areas. Libraries are so important for our communities, they are warm spaces, digital access points, advice centres and meeting places. In the National Year of Reading, this investment sends an important signal about literacy and opportunity. As the consultation has only just closed, we will have to wait until later in the spring to hear what residents want the library services to look like in the future, however what is clear is that communities want these spaces protect. Message received, loud and clear.

Locality budgets are set to continue and expand in the new financial year, with the allocation opening in April. Each councillor will now have £10,000 to allocate to community projects, up from £8k last year. These funds may be modest in the context of the overall council budget, but their impact at parish level can be transformational. From supporting defibrillators to funding youth activities or small infrastructure improvements, locality funding remains one of the most direct ways to strengthen community life.

LGR -At the same time, we continue to face uncertainty around Local Government Reorganisation and future national funding reforms. Large rural counties like Devon are still disadvantaged by the current funding formula. We will continue pressing for a fairer settlement that reflects the real cost of delivering services across a geographically large and dispersed county. Two Labour-run councils up country have openly said that they will not be cooperating with the government on LGR. In the face of cancelled and then un-cancelled elections in Exeter and 29 other areas, it's looking more and more of a possibility that the government are about to U-turn on LGR.

Looking Ahead -The coming months will be about delivery. Highways teams will move from winter emergency response into planned recovery and resurfacing programmes. Drainage work will be critical to ensuring that new road surfaces last. Parish councils can continue to support this work by reporting issues promptly and sharing reference numbers where follow-up is required. This budget does not solve every challenge facing Devon. The financial climate remains extremely difficult. But it does mark a turning point. It demonstrates that even in constrained circumstances, we can choose to invest in the essentials, protect communities, and begin repairing the foundations.

- b) District Councillor G Pannell & D Hancock – copy report circulated to Cllrs and can be found on the Parish Council website.
- c) Diptford Amenity Trust.
 - 1) New Play Equipment Installation – Cllr S Franklin - many thanks to Cllrs who helped getting the site ready, this has now all been installed and a brilliant job has been done. The swing seat is still to be fitted.
 - 2) Planting of Fruit Trees x 10 & the Landmark White Hornbeam Tree – Friday at 3.30pm tree planting will take place. The Landmark Tree will be in memory of Peter Willis who was vicar for 30 years and 800 years of the church in Diptford, all Cllrs were in agreement of this and a commemorative plaque will be purchased.
 - 3) Hedgecutting – a price to be sought for this in the Autumn.
 - 4) Play Tower – Cllr L Carroll confirmed - a price from Rhino Play has been negotiated and now some fund raising will be looked into.
 - 5) Cllr Crocker & Paterson have looked at some of the items flagged up in the safety report, Cllrs are all in agreement that they go ahead and purchase any materials needed to do necessary repairs.
 - 6) Bench has been delivered and will be put in place.

- 7) Sunday 26th April Parish Boundary walk is being organised by Mike Cox.
- d) Tree Warden.
- e) P3 Co-Ordinator.
- f) Parish Councillors reports.

8) Planning Applications / Matters.

Applications received from South Hams District Council –

a) Application no 0664/26/CLE – The Workshop, Halwell TQ9 7JY – Certificate of Lawfulness for the existing residential use of the enclosed section of the barn identified on the submitted floor plan -

Comments from the Parish Council -

As far as we are aware Mike Campbell did not live at the property as was stated in the documents provided.

We understand that enforcement officers advised Mr Hollingsworth to apply for planning which was refused, it then went to appeal in Bristol and was again refused.

As far as we are aware it has not been occupied for the last 12 years, the past Chairman of the Parish Council confirmed he had to get locked gates opened to access machinery as no one was living on site.

Decisions received from South Hams District Council

a) Refusal – Application no 1837/25/FUL – Gladsfield TQ9 7PD – Erection of permanent rural workers dwelling and associated works.

9) Correspondence

a) Funding Request from Diptford FODS - £250 towards raised beds and gardening equipment – Cllr L Carroll has declared an interest. All Cllrs in agreement to fund this.

b) Tubs in Diptford Square – new planter and compost to be purchased – all Cllrs in agreement for up to £150 budget to be used.

10) Highways

a) Dumped caravan has been reported and a notice put on it, it should be removed within 2 weeks.

b) Some potholes have been repaired but the fixing of some is very poor, they are just washing out again within a few days.

c) Lane to Bearscombe - Dan Thomas and Nick Colton to be made aware that SHDC are refusing to come down the lane to collect the rubbish because of the poor state of the road. There are 4 properties with one resident approaching 90 years old. The drainage system also needs looking at as this will just happen again once the potholes have been filled.

11) Finances.**Payments**

BACS – 17.2.26 = £1980.00 (vat £330.00) – MJ Patey (Salt Spreader).
 BACS – 25.2.26 = £34.40 (vat £2.25) – Devon Hampers (Snow Warden Gift).
 BACS – 2.3.26 = £180.00 (vat £30.00) – John Widdicombe (Lengthsman).
 BACS – 2.3.26 = £6011.40 (vat £1,001.90) – Rhino Play (Play Equipment).
 BACS – 17.3.26 = £700.20 – Sharon Raggett (Clerks Wages, Jan, Feb & March).

Bank Balances March 2026

<u>Parish Council Community Account</u>	£19,975.36
<u>Parish Council Instant Access Account</u>	£7,266.26
	<u>£27,241.62</u>

<u>Including P3 Monies</u>	£2,460.00
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<u>Amenity Trust Treasurers Account</u>	£1,465.68
<u>Amenity Trust Instant Access Account</u>	£6,336.42
	<u>£7,802.10</u>

<u>Including Play Equipment Monies</u>	£2,800.00
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12) Any Items to go onto the next Parish Council meeting Agenda.

There be no further business the meeting closed 8.41pm

Next Meeting Date – Tuesday 21st April 2026 @ 7.30pm.

ANY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC WHO HAS SPECIAL NEEDS AND REQUIRES A COPY OF THESE MINUTES SENT TO THEM – PLEASE CONTACT THE CLERK 01364 654607.

They can also be found on the Parish web site – diptfordparishcouncil.org