

DIPTFORD PARISH COUNCIL
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

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

ON TUESDAY 21st April 2026 @ 7.00pm

Present – Cllr S Franklin (Chair), Cllr S Parker-Davidson (Vice Chair), Cllr T Crocker, Cllr L Lethbridge, Cllr G Paterson, Cllr D Dugdall, D Cllr G Pannell.

In Attendance – 2 members of the Public.

Apologies for Absence – Cllr C Peach, Cllr L Carroll.

1. Chairmans report – Cllr S Franklin

The last year has been another interesting one to be on Council with varying challenges sent our way.

I think we have seen less Planning applications than usual, some of which have proved contentious, but it has been hugely disappointing to again see no progress on the site opposite Wheat Park. Our hopes were raised earlier in the year when Morrish Homes wished to address Council on their plans. Not only did they not turn up but we have been unable to contact them since.

The Playing Field again has seen huge progress this year following the installation of the Multi Use Games Area last year. With some very generous donations and funding from the Devon Community Fund, we now have some lovely new equipment in the Playing Field which is already well used. Now we are fundraising again to replace the ageing climbing frame.

Highways, potholes and safety issues are always important and, this year, after many years of trying we have been promised that the dangerous junction at Diptford Cross in the centre of the village, will have its Give Way status raised to a Stop. However we are waiting for this to happen as to be legal a Stop sign has to be illuminated, and we are chasing Highways who in turn are chasing Western Power, for this to happen.

Disappointingly, we have had Litter Picking Days, but it seems as soon as some is removed, more appears in its place.

I would like to thank all Councillors for their willingness to put themselves forward for the good of the community in which we live, and this year we have had a full complement of hard working Councillors. We hugely appreciate the input of Ralph Mortimore too.

I and my fellow Councillors were delighted to welcome our new Parish Clerk, Sharon Raggett this time last year, who has made our job so much easier.

We continue to have been well supported too by Dan Thomas, our County Councillor, and Guy Pannell and David Hancock, our two District Councillors, all of whom have generously provided us with Locality funding when requested.

2. County Cllr's Report – Cllr D Thomas reported -

Highways - I have been able to introduce 2 projects to the department during 2025, with a third about to start-

The 'Common Sense' pothole trial

This ran across 2 electoral divisions in 2025 (1 urban, 1 rural) where the process was that for every pothole reported that met the safety criteria (300mm by 40mm vertical edge), the team would be empowered to fix other defects that did not (meet the criteria). So enthused were the gangs that they decided to use a range of 500m in either direction or to the nearest junction. In practical terms, this is too costly and too large an area. In 2026, a larger version of the trial will run across 7 divisions where the gangs will be asked to follow the 'reasonable person' test, ie would the public reasonably expect you to mend that pothole while you are there as well as this one. Locations will be picked on pothole data as well as those areas high in elderly, disabled and/or pregnant road users, who are disproportionately affected by poor road surfaces.

The Parish Protocol

We are in the process of employing a member of staff specifically to run the PP, which will support towns and parishes to buy bespoke schemes of work from DCC – this will include 20mph zones, parish white lining remarks, zebra crossings, extra road signage – anything in short that the county either does not feel is essential or which it has budgeted for, but not within the time frame requested by the Town or Parish Council.

The Fast Response Squads.

These will be set up for 2026/27 as four geographically based teams with a short work programme, meaning that Councillors and their Neighbourhood Highways Officers will be able to get some quick results in areas that are causing particular issues for a community. This is precisely the short of rapid response that will help to change the 'Computer says no' belief that many have about the Highways Department

On top of these, and as previously reported, 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. It is worth pointing out that we have had 50 gangs out all the time over the winter, fixing around 2500 potholes per week.

At the same time, an extra £4 million of revenue funding will allow us to continue 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.

Integrated Adult Social Care priorities

We are continuing with our existing four priorities that will shape our work over the next twelve months, building on the progress we've made. As a reminder our four priorities remain:

- We will reduce waiting times
- We will find local solutions that promote independence
- We will consistently deliver best practice
- We will work within our budget

Children's Services

In a report published in December last, the Department for Education's Commissioner Nigel Richardson CBE recognises significant progress in improving services for children and families, while acknowledging that further work is needed.

The Commissioner concludes that Devon now has the capacity and capability to improve itself, and recommends that operational control of services should remain with the council rather than be transferred to a trust.

The report praises:

- strong corporate leadership: children's services are now the council's top priority, with clear commitment from senior staff
- strong political leadership, with the Leader and Cabinet having made children's futures their top priority
- a stabilised leadership team: An experienced interim Director of Children's Services (DCS) and a strong Deputy Director have brought confidence and clarity, supported by a permanent senior leadership team for the first time in years
- workforce development: recruitment and retention are improving, supported by initiatives such as the Social Work Academy and Leadership Development Programme
- strategic investment: the council has committed £156m over 10 years through its Growing Futures programme to provide more local homes for children in care.
- improved partnership working: relationships with Ofsted and safeguarding partners have strengthened

As a footnote, we should hear imminently both from OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission regarding progress in Children's and Adults' services respectively.

Young People

Over the course of 2025/26, the Devon Youth Forum has been re-energised, with a series of events taking place at County Hall.

The priority for 2025-26 was '**Places to go, things to do**'.

This project is based on the belief that all young people in Devon should be able to access "*affordable activities and places in our local areas; somewhere to go with friends for fun, relaxation and to try new things*".

(This was the most voted topic in our [Make Your Mark 2025](#) ballot, receiving 20% of the vote. **Mental health** and **public transport** came second and third in the ballot, receiving 16% and 13% of the votes respectively.)

Locality - I was delighted to support the Parish with the following projects over the last 12 months:

I would be delighted to hear from any community group in 2026 in need of seed funding for projects or groups that benefit the village.

3. District Cllrs' Report – Cllr G Pannell –

A written report has been received and circulated to Cllrs and placed on the website with the minutes of the meeting.

4. Short Mat Bowls – Mrs N Hill

We meet in the Village hall every Wednesday 7-9pm. At present we have 15 members who are all registered with Devon this allows us all to play in the South Hams League. We have two mats but on club nights only get to use one as numbers are so low. The club still feel the loss of Ham so when we play we have his cap on display which he wore when playing bowls. The SHSMBA season starts in October with two Divisions, we are in div 2, this season we were top before Christmas as most of our matches were played at home giving us the advantage. We also enter a KO competition and Graham Collier 10's each year, we find it good to play different teams within the league and allows me as club captain to pick as many members who want to play. In previous years in the KO competition we have lost in the first round but this year we found ourselves in the final which in the 30 years of the club has never been achieved before. The final was played April 2nd at the Presentation night held at Stoke Fleming village hall. Our opponents were Slapton Swifts so expectations were not high, as they are very good players and also are top of the first division. We had a very good game albeit we lost on both mats, but we came away with a runners up medal. It's getting harder each year to put teams out as numbers are so low, we are lucky to have members who travel from Torquay every week, they love the atmosphere and friendship we have, everyone is very welcoming it's just really hard to recruit new members. Please do come and give it a go, it is suitable for all ages, we have spare bowls and would love to have new members.

5. Ladybirds – Pat Sampford –

Ladybirds is still going strong with a membership of 23. We met in the afternoons during the winter and last summer in the evenings, but the members have voted to stay with afternoon meetings for this coming summer. We will trial this and see how everyone feels later in the year. Our meetings are the second Monday of every month at 2.30pm. We have had a busy year both within the village and going further afield on outings. We have visited Buckfast Abbey Christmas Fair, Avon Mill Garden Centre, Clarks Village on a coach trip, curry night in Totnes, painting at China Blue and a Christmas lunch at the Avon Inn. Most of which included food!!! Within the village we have helped at the Parish Boundary walk, joined with the school at their Fair, helped at Father Peter's Funeral and run a cake stall at the Church Fete. Our meetings have been very varied, ranging from marbelling, armchair yoga, Totnes food bank, stained glass demonstration and felting a Father Christmas. We have also been busy making Christmas and Easter cards with Juli as our teacher. In order to raise money for our charity, we have run a Cream Tea in the summer, the Advent Fair in the Autumn and a Soup Lunch in the Spring. This enabled us to finally hand over a cheque for just over £1600 last week to E.L.M. the hedgehog rescue centre at Seale Hayne. Our thanks go to the village for their support with these events. Without the village they would not be such a success. Our charity for next year is St. Luke's Hospice in Plymouth. Our Meetings are fun and without the restraints of the W.I. we have had a lot more time to get to know each other. New members are always welcome, and needless to say there is always tea and cake.

6. FODS & Diptford School –

As we start the Summer Term, it's hard to believe just how much our school community has experienced and achieved this year. It has been full of learning, enrichment and activity. Looking back at the Spring term in particular, we had a fantastic visit from the Barn Owl Trust, giving children the rare opportunity to see these beautiful birds up close and learn about their protection and habitats - the Parish Hall was the perfect venue. World Book Day was another highlight, with pupils embracing reading, stories, and imagination in wonderfully creative ways. We were also delighted to welcome families into school for our Parents Evenings, where we shared the children's progress and all the wonderful learning taking place across the school. More recently the whole school set off on a memorable trip to Buckfast Abbey, exploring its grounds, history, and peaceful reflective spaces. But the awe and wonder didn't end there! The incredible WonderDome Planetarium arrived to give classes an "out of this world" immersive experience of space, stars, and galaxies. Kingfisher Class demonstrated impressive teamwork, resilience, and sporting spirit at a recent Link Academy Hockey Tournament in Paignton which they thoroughly enjoyed. We are lucky to be part of such an active Academy Trust who provide great opportunities of collaboration between our local hub of schools in the South Hams. To round off another busy term, we gathered with our school community at Diptford Parish Church for a beautiful and reflective Easter Service, celebrating hope, renewal, and the sense of new beginnings that spring brings. Which leads to our last day of term, where school was

filled with excitement as pupils took part in our annual Easter Egg Competition, showcasing an array of wonderfully creative designs. The fun continued outdoors

with our Easter Egg Hunt, where families joined in the adventure by following a special "Cross Curricular" orienteering course around the school grounds. Parents and children gathered to navigate each checkpoint, collect clues, and enjoy a festive afternoon of teamwork, discovery, and community spirit. It was a fantastic celebration of creativity, collaboration, and Easter fun! Alongside these special events, we have been thrilled to welcome some new visitors for Welly Walks - which was especially apt taking into account the very wet winter and muddy grounds — and a wonderful way to share our beautiful surroundings with the wider community. Best of all, we have welcomed some new families into our school, strengthening and enriching our community even further. Growing our school community continues to be key, taking into account the falling birthrate and our semi-rural location. Bringing new families to the village is very important for our small school, as well as local housing and ensuring transport links are available. The children have been making excellent use of our fantastic outdoor spaces throughout the year. We are incredibly grateful to Friends of Diptford School (FODS), who work tirelessly to provide enrichment opportunities for the children. This half term alone, they have supported the creation of our new polytunnel, funded new books, EYFS outdoor storage and offered parents with vital financial support for trips — all of which make a huge difference to the experiences we can offer. Our dedicated staff are also working tirelessly to help achieve the best possible outcomes for the children, for which we are very thankful. So far, it has been a year to remember, and we look forward to even more exciting adventures and enriching experiences as we head into the Summer Term.

7. Amenity Trust (Playing Field) –

With a re-vamp of the Amenity Trust responsibilities this year, winding up the previous Working Group, Council brought the Amenity Trust totally back in-house. This has seen a much more hands-on approach by your Parish Councillors which has enabled us to source considerable funding for the Amenity Trust to make further improvements to the Playing Field. Cllrs Crocker and Paterson have extended the life of the slide, making it safe to use again and have been out and about keeping an eye on things. In particular, we have to thank a number of generous donors, funding from Devon Community Fund and from our County and District Councillors, all of which have been a huge help. The Amenity Trust is a registered charity, and is also registered for Gift Aid so any donations made with Gift Aid can be increased by the donor's marginal tax rate. In March 2026, we were gifted 10 fruit trees and a Landmark tree, chosen by our Tree Warden Will Young to be a Devon Whitebeam. We held a very successful community planting day, when all the trees were planted and the Whitebeam was dedicated by Steve Partridge to the memory of our muchloved previous Rector, the Rev Peter Willis and also to commemorate the 800th anniversary of St Mary's Diptford in 2026. We continue to look at improvements to the Playing Field, fundraising to replace the ageing Climbing Frame being the foremost of these as despite the work to make the legs safe, there is still work to be done. During the year, the Ladybirds donated an outside Table Tennis table which is as great addition to the field. We have also put in place a wheelchair accessible picnic table which we hope will be well used.

Mike Cox continues to organise the 'Boundary' walk, which will take place on Sunday 26 April this year. Why not come along, support the fundraising for the Amenity Trust and have a lovely day out.

In closing, we must express our huge thanks to Mike for all the work he has led in the Playing Field for many years.

8. St Mary the Virgin Church – Rev David Sayle

Aim and Purpose St Mary the Virgin Diptford with North Huish's Parochial Church Council (the PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the Rector, the Reverend David Sayle, in promoting in the Ecclesiastical Parish of Diptford with North Huish and the Benefice (Diptford with North Huish, Ermington, Halwell, Harbertonford, Moreleigh and Ugborough), the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. The PCC has responsibility of maintaining the Church itself, which is a Grade I Listed Building. Objectives and Activities When planning our activities, the PCC has considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit, and in particular the specific guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. We continued to build on the Diocesan Mission Statement: Grow in prayer, Make new disciples and Serve the people of Devon with Joy. And seek to build the Pray Grow Serve 2035 initiative by taking into account the Diocesan five missional priorities: missional leadership, missional DNA, vocations, children & young people and mixed ecology (varied missional expressions of church) in all or planning and activities. Safeguarding The PCC has complied with the Duty under Sec on 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults). Our Safeguarding Policy is kept under review and revised following the Diocesan recommendations and accepted by the PCC. Church Officers have been DBS checked and continue to complete the necessary safeguarding training. Achievements and Performance: Our services are held on Sunday morning at 11am. The pattern of a Service of Holy Communion on the second and fourth Sundays of the month and a non-Communion service, 'Service of the Word' alternating between Morning Prayer and Morning Praise on the first and the third Sundays of the month was continued. The non-Communion services are led by members of the Local Worship Leaders team. On the Fifth Sundays of the month. Diptford Church is the venue for the Benefice Service of Holy Communion. All the services are in contemporary language. A Benefice Lent Study course was held along with services of Compline during Holy Week. Services of Holy Communion were held on Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday with An Hour at the Cross reflective service on Good Friday. In October a successful community Harvest Festival service was held supporting the work of Farming Community Network followed by pasties and cider. In November the church supported the Royal British Legion through its Remembrance Sunday Service and at Christmas the yearly Carol and Christingle Service was held in aid of The Children's Society and the very popular Carols around the Tree on Christmas Eve continues to support Young Lives vs Cancer. During school term we Diptford Primary School continued to have weekly services of Collective Worship held in the church. The school also held a Easter and Harvest Service in church and performances of the Nativity Play in December. Brick Church has continued to be held in the Parish Hall on the afternoon of the first Sunday of the month. This is a popular service with young families and as we have gone on their theological reflection and interpretation of the Bible stories has been quite profound. This is one of our key regular services that connects our local families, many of whom are from the

local school, and our church community. The party tea is always very much enjoyed by all. As a rural village community we are most grateful to the church family who live at Diptford Court for allowing us to hold a Garden Fete in the beautiful house and garden settings. The village all gathered together for a game of skittles, a fun dog show alongside lots of stalls selling cakes, books and a fabulous plant stall. Cream teas were also enjoyed along with plenty of ice creams. It was a huge effort but it was a very special day when the village met up and enjoyed fellowship together. Thanks to the Diptford Court family for their hospitality. 'Diptford and North Huish Parish News' continues to be circulated mainly via email with the usual reports on previous activities and local advertisers, though hard copies sent through the post can be arranged. Church services and other events arranged by the church are publicised through the Parish News, the noticeboards at Diptford and North Huish churches, the Community Noticeboard in Diptford Village and other places as appropriate as well as on the websites www.3rivers.org.uk and www.achurchnearyou.com.

Volunteers The PCC are extremely grateful to all who volunteer their skills and me. In particular our Churchwarden and those who clean once a month on Saturday mornings and maintain the services throughout the year when needed. Those who help provide tea and coffee refreshments after our services or help welcome people to our services are much appreciated. All those who prepare and lead services, offer to read the Bible and or lead intercessions are what makes our church a good example of community team work. Their commitment to do this with sometimes a small team does not go unrecognised. Once again we have enjoyed the lovely flowers that have graced the services for special occasions and are we are most thankful for all who give of their me and talent in this way.

Annual Church Fabric Report Apart from the annual Church Boiler, Lightning Conductor and Fire Extinguisher services. The PCC has continued with West Access Conservation carrying out routine maintenance checks in the summer and winter on the church roof and they have once again cleaned out the roof valleys, rainwater goods and the gully surrounding the church. The PCC also commissioned a full electrical Inspection to take place, some repair work on part of the internal lighting system and a radiator pipe repair in the South Transept. We are hugely grateful to those who have kindly kept an eye on the building and helped when contractors have been to inspect or visit. Being present at these site inspections and learning the specifics of caring for our Grade 1 listed building is important and we are pleased that our Churchwarden is happy to do this on our behalf.

Diptford and North Huish Churchyards As the churchyards of Diptford and North Huish are formally closed to all new burials, the ongoing maintenance of them is the responsibility of South Hams District Council. However the PCC wish to record their thanks to all who throughout the year have helped to maintain Diptford Churchyard by cleaning, weeding, trimming and clearing a er South Hams District Council have been working there. The Parochial Church Council of St Mary the Virgin Diptford with North Huish is an Excepted Charity

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.34pm to be followed by a Parish Council meeting.