

Chairmans Report Apr 25 to Apr 26

An interesting year from many perspectives

Firstly I would like to say a special thank you, for all of your efforts on our behalf, to our Parish Clerk Mrs Tess Nishino, who does a superb job in keeping us all on the straight and narrow

Secondly I would like to thank all of the volunteer and unpaid council members for their time, energy and patience in ensuring that the council can run the village smoothly.

I must also express the councils gratitude to our previous Chairman Mr Martin Richards who has had to stand down for numerous personal reasons. Martin who had been a long time chairman several years ago before standing down, stepped up once again in 2023 when a large proportion of the newly re-elected councillors resigned before the first meeting, leaving the council in disarray, Martins previous experience was essential in getting a new and relatively unknown parish council functioning in a short period of time.

We were sorry to see Angela Smith, Lee and Simon Reeves and Caroline Thompson leave the council and thank them for their commitment and hard work during their time with us, We also extend a welcome to some new faces, Simon Whitelock, Mark Finney and Jane Morrow who will be working hard with us to ensure the village operates smoothly and trying to bring the powers that be to task over issues that matter. We are still down on councillor numbers so if anyone would like to join the team please put a letter of application in to the clerk

Local Government Reform (LGR) . EDDC are preparing for the commencement in a couple of years time, of the new unitary authority, how this will affect us is not completely known, however we need to keep abreast of developments that may affect us. Fortunately we have John Heath as a BPC member as well as being an EDDC district councillor, who brings updated information to us very quickly.

Finances: Pleased to report that the parish council is in good financial health, due to the procedures adhered to by the council. Income revenues from our Lorry, Coach and Car Parks, along with income raised from events such as Beer Eats ensure that the parish council precept rate remains one of the lowest in East Devon.

Community Pay Back: The Parish Council was pleased to welcome the Community Pay Back teams , return to Beer, to continue the fine work that they do for us, in helping keep the Jubilee Grounds and other areas of the village neat and looking nice for residents and visitors alike. Especially before the Start of Beer Eats and most importantly the Regatta. Karen Stevens has spent a great many hours organising logistics for them, arranging what needs doing and access to sites, rubbish collection bags, extra signage if needed and getting the rubbish bags collected and rubbish correctly disposed off. Later this year after a great deal of Health and Safety Discussions with their management, the teams will try to tackle the issue of digging out of the brook, as all of the authorities supposedly responsible for it have disowned themselves from it.

Beer Eats: We were pleased to welcome Unique Boutique Events “Beer Eats” back to the Jubilee for the summer season. Hopefully they will be returning for more of the same this year

Regatta: The parish council supports the regatta committee, and is available to give help and advice when dealing with the local authorities as required, and to provide qualified section 8 personnel for road closures. We wish them well for Regatta 26

Common Lane, Mo Westlake and Martin Shobrook have put a great deal of time and effort into bringing the condition of common lane to the public, district and county councils attention. The consultation event in the mariners hall was a great success, with the vast majority of residents agreeing that the 6 foot width limit in the centre section must be correctly policed to prevent heavy vehicles from using the road and thereby preventing damage to it.

The Head of DCC and the Head of DCC Highways were invited to come to the meeting, along with Richard Ford our MP, and several district councillors from EDDC, We were pleased to note that EDDC councillors John Heath and Jeff Jung attended right from the opening of the meeting, with Paul Arnott arriving later, and all stayed until midday, speaking with a lot of residents, so many thanks to them. Richard Ford MP had already emailed that he fully supports the councils position, but could not attend due to a prior engagement. It is a poor indictment that neither of the county council senior officer's even bothered to have the good manners to respond the invitation, let alone turn up.

Contrary to Beer Rumour control the council IS NOT trying to close common lane, rather we are taking measures to ensure its existence for as long as possible. by limiting the size and hopefully weight of vehicles able to use it. Beer Parish council cannot close the road, only Devon County Council Highways HATOC committee has that power. However should the road collapse or crack, DCC can place an immediate road closure on it, A TRO (Temporary Road Order) would prevent any use of the roadway including pedestrians, it is a prosecutable offence to breach the terms of a TRO. Yes its is temporary, but it only needs to be assessed every 18 months, as the road is closed highways have no responsibility to maintain it, so after 18 months nothing would have changed and the TRO continues.

Speed Limit, every year DCC Highways asks for proposals for speed limit in villages, every year Beer applies and every year the parish council gets turned down due to costs. For the past few years the parish council has offered to pay for the signs but this is never acknowledged. We have now done the same by offering to pay for the supply and installation of the signs and bollards to protect common lane, we wait in anticipation for their response. One can only wonder if DCC highways actually reads anything put in front of them.

Mariners Hall: As you are all aware the Mariners Hall is owned by the village, the parish council are trustees of the charity that controls it. In 1960 Management of the hall was delegated by the parish council, to a management committee who are responsible for the running of the hall and its finances. Following a rather acrimonious meeting, the trustees looked closely at the management committee and its procedures and found failings in a number of areas, one being Data Protection regulations which could have had severe financial implications. The Delegation of Authority (Hall Constitution Document) was found to be out of date and a "proposed" document with alterations was submitted, This caused several more unpleasant and acrimonious meetings at which certain members of the committee stood down. The trustees and the new MHMC then worked together to bring the 65 year old document up to a modern standard, so many thanks to the two Chiris's J&P for their work on this.

To solve legal issues with mariners hall data protection procedures, the trustees (Parish Council) have paid for a new secure email system for the hall management committee, and the very outdated website for the hall is now being revamped and will take its place in the parish councils new village website at no expense to the hall

There was also a serious structural problem with a retaining wall identified and then denied by the previous chair of the MHMC, the new Chair immediately had the wall inspected and several recommendations were made. The first thing was that temporary reinforcement of the wall had to be installed, as it was of an emergency nature and to keep the hall open, this was paid for by the trustees (the parish Council) however the mariners hall committee will be responsible for further ongoing costs.

Bio Nutrient Recycling Plant: A great deal of councillors time and effort has been expended trying to get to grips with this scheme. BPC set up a joint working party with Branscombe parish council as the plant is actually on their ground, and it is they who the developers and DCC deal with. Towards the end of 2025 it all went very quiet and for 2026 so far nothing has happened. We therefore wait, however one item from the meeting in Branscombe, the developers were asked “if they could not supply gas into the national network was the plant economically viable?” Silence was the loud reply.

BERT: An ongoing concern, the EA and Devon Resilience Forum are pushing for an emergency response team. The issue is that if this under the auspices of the parish council, then we are responsible for the volunteers health and safety, and would be liable should an accident occur. Neither organisation listed above seems to be able to provide pro forma templates to allow us to produce the required documentation such as assessment criteria, risk assessment surveys which then allow a properly constructed safety plan to be produced.

Chapel of Rest; After a public meeting a committee of residents was formed to try to preserve the chapel of rest, down to their efforts the roof is now fixed and non leaking, whilst the parish council supports the restoration, we do not donate any funds towards it, the chapel is the property and responsibility of the bishop and diocese of Exeter, and it is they who are responsible for the costs, however getting the church to put its hand in its pockets is proving an exercise in futility.

Ashill Play Park: After complaints from some residents that balls rolled downhill and got caught in brambles. Simon Whitelock and friend installed after some very hard digging, a wire net fence at the bottom of the park. One resident complained that it is not tall enough to stop ball being kicked over the top, but fences of that height around a playpark would need to comply with playground regulations, would require engineers reports, plans etc and would then require planning permission, The playpark is inspected on a regular basis and any repairs /improvements noted are swiftly dealt with. We will soon be installing a bottom gate as it is a playground requirement.

Buns Yard: Issue with the roof leaking onto neighbouring property is still ongoing with insurers arguing who is responsible for paying.

Little Hemp Hay: This plot of land has been leased from Clinton Estates for some time rent £100 per year at one point it was a BMX bike track now no longer used, but we still have to maintain it cutting grass and hedges and insure it. Having looked at several different uses for it to increase revenue for the council, however on reading the lease we can do nothing with the land due to the covenants imposed, no structures allowed, allotments not allowed infact we are not allowed to place a rubbish bin up there. The lease is up for renewal later this year and we will not be renewing it nor will we maintain it

Coweresly Way: A permissive footpath which BPC has no responsibility for. Historically Bun has done a small amount of maintenance up there, however this year we had to find out who is responsible for what it turns out that Devon County Highways are responsible for the road side hedge, and that Clinton Devon Estates are responsible for the inside hedges, with EDDC possibly responsible for the path.

Probably a lot I have missed but I think this covers the major issues from the past year

Many thanks to you all

Regards TIM