

Lupptt Parish Council Annual Report 2010

LUPPITT PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2010

1 Chairman of the Parish Councils Annual Report – Chairman Cllr Gavin Brake

A full compliment of eight Parish Councillors were appointed at the 2007 uncontested local election. Parish council officers were appointed at the election of Officers held at the Annual General Meeting of The Parish Council on 4th May, 2010 as follows:

Chairman – Gavin Brake

Vice Chairman – Lindsey Dalgety

Tree Warden – Andrew Tucker

P3 Co-ordinator – Julia Sparks

Planning Committee: Lindsey Dalgety, Julia Sparks, Andrew Tucker, Gavin Brake, Bernard Clapp, Brian Pulman, Paul Prettejohn, Derek Hooper (whole parish council, with committee to be quorate at three)

Parish Council meetings

There have been twelve Parish Council Meetings since the last Annual Parish Meeting held since May 2009. The parish council meetings are open to the public and we encourage you to attend.

Planning

We have dealt with 15 planning applications in the past year (the same number as 2008-2009). There has been 1 planning appeal, which was unsuccessful, in line with the comments of the Parish Council.

Regarding Planning Enforcement, many situations have arisen during the past year. We have continued to adopt a straightforward, consistent, zero tolerance approach. Any concerns raised with me or to the Parish Council are immediately reported to the Enforcement Team at East Devon District Council, no matter who is subject to the resulting enquiries.

Parish Plan and Quality Status

We have continued to work through the action points from the Parish Plan. In particular this year we have focused on the condition of the roads, but we have also pushed for better recycling and debated at some length renewable energy for the parish. The feasibility of solar panels is currently being investigated for the village hall. We have also continued to push for improved broadband, and improved services (including continuing to push to move the mobile Library to coincide with the Friday market).

We intend to achieve Quality Status as a parish, which will give us more control over decisions affecting our community. All the current parish councillors have now undertaken the Power of Wellbeing training, and the Parish clerk is shortly going to start working on the Quality Status application.

Donations

Donations were given to the following parish and district organisations during the year;

Honiton and District ring and Ride £50.00
East Devon Citizens Advice Bureau £50.00
Honiton Tourist Information Centre £50.00
Honiton Library Advice and Information centre £50.00
The Luppitt Packet £135.00

These donations are made from the precept.

Footpaths and Bridleways

The parish received £600 P3 footpaths grant from Devon County Council for the coming year and paths are benefiting hugely, we hope this will encourage their regular use for the enjoyment of all. Our thanks once again go to Councillor Julia Sparks for her tireless work as footpaths warden. She continues to make a big difference and we all owe her a big thank you. She spends a considerable amount of time on this role, and she is very effective in getting things done.

Let me give you a few selected highlights from the last 12 months.

- The diversion of footpath 17 is now finalised.
- The planned diversion of footpath 14 is progressing, with the GPS mapping of the new route taking place right now. This is an extensive diversion and has involved a significant amount of input from Julia and myself on behalf of the Commons Trustees.
- The work on the footbridge in Wick (footpath 38), after two years of campaigning by Julia, is about to start.

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Roads

Our relentless campaigning to get action taken on the roads in Luppitt has finally met with some success this year. South West Highways (funded by Devon County Council) undertook extensive road works on the main route into Luppitt from the crossroads on Luppitt Common, and on Shelf Lane up to Hartridge. The very poor sections of road by Dolish, and by the telephone exchange, were dug up and renewed.

Long overdue, and in part, questionable quality in terms of the repairs, but a big step forward based on the situation we were facing one year ago. But we still need urgent repairs carried out, with, for example, the main route from Beacon to the A30 still in very poor condition and an indefinite road closure in place at Coombeshead Farm up to the Common.

We have also focused-in on the Parish Lengthsman and what work is actually done for our 5 allocated days each quarter. For example, Councillor Tucker and I spent one Saturday morning, just after the snow had thawed, surveying the roads in the Parish and produced a list of 19 urgent actions for the Lengthsman to address at the next scheduled visit, plus 9 potholes in need of urgent attention. I am pleased to say that the potholes were fixed, but only one of the 19 issues flagged for the Lengthsman was addressed. This very unsatisfactory situation is still being pursued with the assistance of our District Councillor.

In line with the report given at last year's Annual Parish Meeting, the Parish Council has, on certain occasions, taken the unusual step of using funds from its precept to hire a local contractor to undertake certain works such as ditching and unblocking easements. We believed this work was necessary in order to prevent further damage to the roads. We worked with Devon County Council and South West Highways (SWH) and agreed what areas required attention, and then hired the contractor to undertake the work.

As I have said on numerous occasions, perhaps using the precept in this way is unfair. Perhaps these works should be done by Devon County Council out of our council tax. But this is not happening, and despite aggressive and frequent complaints, we are still behind in terms of desperately needed roadworks.

Some of you think we should not use the precept in this way, others argue we should do even more works from the precept. This is one of those situations where you cannot possibly please everyone.

The recent situation with snow and ice earlier this year is a good illustration of this. We used the precept to pay for a local contractor to clear several of the main routes into and out of the village. Devon County Council had flatly rejected our numerous requests for salt spreading and road clearing. Their stated policy is to grit only 20% of the roads in Devon, focused on the main routes. Our principal road into and out of the village is only deemed to be of "secondary importance" and if we are lucky, is gritted only if time and resources are available, long after the snow has fallen. No roads whatsoever in Luppitt are on the list of routes for a snow plough.

It may interest you to know that the work done to clear the main road of snow this past winter took 6.5 hours of contractor time, for a total of £175.50. This was paid for out of the precept. Again, some agree, some disagree, but we need to keep a sense of perspective here. Take my own farm as an example. I pay roughly £2500 of council tax each year. About £63 of this (2.5%) is my contribution to the Parish Council precept. The precept totals £8000 per year, so I personally contribute about £8 per £1000 of precept.

In other words, this road clearance work has cost me £1.40.

Also, this is what most people would describe as a "fair tax". If you have a big house, you pay a higher rate of council tax, so you pay a higher contribution to the precept. If you live in a smaller house you pay less council tax and a smaller contribution to the precept. Some people pay no council tax at all.

The Parish Council believes we should spend a few hundred pounds buying our own reserve supplies of salt, using the precept to pay for this. For example, 100 bags of salt last year would have cost about £250. So if the Parish Council spends £250 on salt, this has cost me £2. If we assume one out of every two other winters is harsh, I am paying about £1 each year for this salt. I believe this is £1 well spent, but everyone has their own view.

In an ideal world, if the Parish Council uses the precept to fix a problem, then perhaps we should be given a refund on our council tax. Idealistic perhaps, but there is scope for the Parish Council to have more control over expenditure through achieving Quality Status. It is also something I raised as an important topic with our new MP, Mr Neill Parish, when he visited the village during his canvassing.

Play Park

Mr Tottle has continued to care for the maintenance of the Millrise playpark and we thank him for his continued good

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work.

Councillors

I would like to thank all the parish councillors, our District Councillor David Key and our County Councillor Paul Diviani for all their hard work and support during the past year. We have a strong and committed team who are taking active roles in all areas of concern to the parish. In particular, David kindly chaired the renewable energy meeting and Paul has helped us campaign for better roads.

I would like to thank our Beat Manager Clive Vickery and PCSO Phil Anning for their continued support and attendance in our parish and especially at parish council meetings.

Emergency Plan

This year we have put together a comprehensive Parish Emergency Plan which has been submitted to Devon County Council. This has been used as a precedent in by other local parishes, a compliment to the quality of the work here.

Other Actions

This has been a busy year for the Parish Council. In addition to the above points, we also submitted our views on the Local Development Framework, in particular expressing the view of our community on our need for new affordable housing for local people.

We also resubmitted our views on the proposed unitary council for Devon, an ongoing topic many of you will have read about in the papers.

Final Comment

As a final comment I would like to outline some of my thoughts on the debate on my planning application for small wind turbines on my farm earlier this year.

It was interesting to see that a small number of individuals in the parish decided it was appropriate to behave in a certain way after my application was submitted. Thankfully, this involved a very small number of individuals who live in the village, but I received some rather unpleasant emails and various allegations of wrongdoing were then voiced. It is rather sad to have to say that I had to involve a litigation partner from well known firm of solicitors, who advised me that at least one of the emails I received represented a possible threat of blackmail. These allegations, which were of course wholly without substance, also included general criticism of other Councillors on the Parish Council.

As I have said in public many times, I welcome those with different views, and very much respect everyone's legal right to either object or support any planning application.

However, whilst I am pretty much immune to personal criticism, I do find it quite frustrating when this small minority of individuals also sees fit to level criticism at my fellow parish councillors for my actions. In my view, this is unacceptable behaviour.

Thankfully these actions were taken by a very small number of individuals, but they should be ashamed of their behaviour.

It is worth reminding everyone that Parish Councillors are volunteers. These people give up their time because they care about their community. They spend significant time trying their best to improve things in the Parish. At the last local election Luppitt was only able to find 7 people willing to be councillors, despite there being 8 positions on the Parish Council. As I have said to many of you, quite openly, I am very proud to be Chairman of the Parish Council, but this is not a position I have ever asked for or aspired to. I am the Chair for two main reasons – (i) I care deeply about my local community, (ii) not many people are willing to be the Chair. This is because being the Chairman of the parish council and doing the role thoroughly takes an increasing amount of time, and in my case has to be fitted around my family and business commitments.

Looking at the positives here, I would strongly encourage as many of you as possible to consider standing as a parish councillor in the next local elections in May 2011. If necessary I for one will more than happily take a back seat to allow new people to come onto the Parish Council, and as you can see in the minutes of last week's meeting, I made this quite clear at the AGM held last week. I believe it is a good idea in principle (and if possible) for different people to take turns in being the Chair.

I would also politely suggest that the small number of individuals I referred to before who seem to enjoy complaining from the sidelines should instead pluck up the courage to stand to be parish councillors at the next local elections in May 2011. Invest less time in complaining, instead I challenge you take action yourselves & stand to be parish councillors. Try

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making a positive contribution to the parish.

1. Reports from:

i. District Councillor

Unfortunately Cllr Key has another important meeting and so sent his report in writing as follows;

Several planning applications have been put forward by parishioners from agricultural dwellings, farm buildings, house extensions, a Brewery pavilion, wind turbines, conversion of woodland buildings to a coarse fishing lake. Most of the applications have been processed in line with the Parish Council demands.

A meeting of the Wind Turbine issue was held and hopefully all who attended learnt something to their advantage.

The problem of the potholes and road maintenance is ongoing but this is a County issue.

The parish Council are pushing forward to become a quality Council which will give them some extra powers. I fully support their ambition.

There had been a good attendance during the year but sadly little support from public attendance. I wish the parish Council all success in the forthcoming year.

ii. County Councillor

It seems like yesterday that we celebrated winning the County elections amongst all the trauma of the expenses scandal up in London. Indeed on my second day at County Hall, I received a call from the local press wanting to know if I could justify having the highest travelling expenses at East Devon. Poor love hadn't done the homework or would have known I had traversed the County and beyond in my own car as Chairman of the Council... When I discovered all the other Chairmen had been asked the same, I didn't feel so victimised!

At the business end of things we had promised to tackle the ballooning debt (£614m) which we had inherited by having greater efficiencies – stripping out layers of bureaucracy where possible and supplying better services for less. This looked to be a tall order as we discovered, for example, that some of the extra “spending” on the roads proved illusory – the cost was there but the revenue was not! Nevertheless with no diminution in service I am pleased to say we have already reduced the County's debt by £28m in ten months! Whilst it is usually easier at the start to make quick savings, in the longer term these can prove to be more difficult to achieve, we are nevertheless committed to our principles and will deliver best value.

When I started, Stuart Hughes (whip) asked me for my areas of interest to which I responded anything to do with the environment and economy – the result being the list of appointments above; some are fairly tenuous but should give me an exposure to more areas than if I'd been a bit more reticent! EEC Scrutiny has proved one of the more varied and I have been a member of a Task Group scrutinising Carbon Reduction commitment in schools – they are autonomous bodies but are responsible for almost 50% of our carbon footprint - £750k fine pa if we can't show reductions. And then of course, along came a severe winter for the second year running.

Having lots of phone calls / emails, I asked for an emergency debate at Scrutiny and for my initiative was made Chairman of the Task Group scrutinising Highways Winter Maintenance. In for a penny... As everything these days has to be evidence-based, we have spent the last couple of months doing just that (we are still waiting for the Highways Agency - a national body in purdah because there is some sort of election on the go). We will then produce a report with recommendations to go to Scrutiny and then Cabinet. Whilst we have examined what happened in the really cold spell in January, we of course have the pothole residue problem which affects the whole country but as we have the largest County network of 8k miles, we get more of them than anyone else. Ours is also a mature network – especially in rural areas – made from tar macadam until 1974. Whilst there are sometimes intervening protective layers, the bitumen we now lay is attacked by tar through the intermediate layers which are broken up by water penetration, exacerbated by freezing with inherent expansion. Some estimates put the cost of sorting Devon's roads at £260m which is an investment I don't see galloping over the horizon in the near future. Our recommendations will be addressing the areas we can sort.

All County Councillors have access to a £10k Locality Budget (which is not ours but your money after all!) and in the past I have channelled money to Awliscombe Village Hall for boiler repairs and the Eclipse Carnival Club (based in Weston at the Otter), Broadhembury for notice boards, Dunkeswell Village Hall for stage curtains, Honiton Allhallows Museum, the Baptist Church and Littleton Nursery for essential repairs, Monkton for Village Hall railings, Payhembury for the Tale Vale Community Players, Plymtree Church House Charities for essential repairs to affordable housing, Stockland Village Shop viability launch, Upottery Manor Room railings. The amounts are not large but can be useful as match funding for larger projects or helping small groups who might otherwise struggle.

District Council Report (for Yarty Ward)

In the cloistered world of local government it has been quite a momentous year! We all awaited Hazel Blear's announcement on unitary government, then her bike came off the rails, her successor then had to declare an interest as

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his mum is active in Uplyme... In the almost end, Exeter's pyrrhic victory in its original colours is debated in the High Court as I write, tomorrow, the 28th and 29th April, courtesy of the two Counties involved.

At least as far as Yarty is concerned, we maintain the status quo. Or not quite. As you will be aware, we have one of the lowest Council Tax rates in the country, the band D equivalent of £2.34 per week. This represented a rise of 2.9% - in line with inflation. As the costs of our services tend to rise above the rate of inflation, this is a substantial achievement arrived at through months of scrutinising our budgets and making savings across the board and a small amount from reserves which we had built up in the good times for recessionary times such as this. We have always been a lean operator but next year and thereafter we know we will have reduced central government funding and we have looked to closer working with our neighbours.

We have, for example, worked with Teignbridge District Council on our Shoreline Management Plan, Mid Devon on housing, we are sharing our Environment Director with Exeter City Council, but perhaps most intriguingly we are sharing our Chief Executive with South Somerset District Council and are looking for more integrated working with them. Whilst we will both keep our individual identity and sovereignty, we anticipate considerable back office savings. This cross-county and cross-party co-operation has attracted national attention as the most ground-breaking and the largest in the country. Obviously in the Blackdown Hills, SSDC has been a funding partner since 1991 so some of us are already used to working together! Equally since the last County elections we now have 9 out of 11 of our East Devon County Councillors wearing two hats so we can look to greater co-operation across the board.

With the new year came an end to my two-year stint as Chairman of the Council, and my new post as Chairman of Development Management, a much more onerous and serious undertaking. Whilst a lot of planning applications are uncontroversial, a substantial number excite passions for and against so there will always be winners and losers and you'll be really surprised to know that one person always gets the blame! Still, if you can't stand the heat... On the plus side, we have established "pre-apps" which help an applicant get the application into the best shape to complete the process, resulting in a speedier system, enabling good development and improving satisfaction ratings and exceeding targets.

At the Annual Rural Conference, the key issues were trying to establish (difficult) a potential Government's policies and influence thinking (impossible), but we did have some impact at subsequent meetings and in March the Chairman of the LGA (Local Government Association) Dame Margaret Eaton agreed to take forward concerns many Members had on NHS provision – with particular regard to Honiton's maternity unit and the Bungalow.

In the Hills, our "economic arm" the Making it Local LAG with East Devon AONB continues to be a market leader and we are especially involved with apprenticeship schemes such as the woodland workers with the Forestry Commission and Sylvanus Trust. There are details of projects already running and information on how to apply can be found on the Blackdown Hills AONB www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk or Making it Local websites www.makingitlocal.org .

A gentleman asked whether many accidents were caused by swerving to avoid potholes, and whether there had been incidents reported? PC Vickery said he couldn't say, Cllr Brake said if the public report the potholes they are generally attended to much quicker and urged people to phone the county council as soon as they are spotted.

Mrs Fry explained that from Hillend to Upottery there is mud from the maize harvest last September which is now forming a hump along the road centre and that the road above Gould has become narrower due to a widened gully on one side, the problem seems to be exasperated due to large vehicle access and this needs to be concreted.

iii. **Parish Plan**

This years more in depth questionnaire on renewables had not attracted a very high response rate so far, the next Packet will carry a further reminder and it is hoped to publish the results thereafter.

iv. **Hall Committee**

The hall is well used and kept in good repair, it has a variety of users from both outside and within the parish. There is currently investigation being done into installing photovoltaic panels to generate electricity. Mrs Fry complained about the heavy reduction of the tree outside the hall, Cllr Pulman explained that this was a misunderstanding and the tree will be given a chance to shoot before it is condemned despite its present looks as it is special.

v. **Commoners**

Mr Brake gave a brief report on the last year as one of the four trustees of the Commons.

Regarding Hense Moor, a significant amount of work has taken place on this common. We are now two years into a 10 year Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England. The purpose of this agreement is to return this common, which is also a SSSI, to its natural status as a species-rich grassland.

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This year over 6 hectares of scrub has been cleared from Hense Moor, a very significant amount of work since most of this was done by hand. Tractors cannot get to these sites.

We also topped 25 hectares of bracken. This form of bracken control is what the National Trust and Natural England recommend.

More will be done this year, making this common more accessible for members of the public who wish to exercise their right to roam. Please be careful though – the stocking levels are increasing so please keep dogs on a lead.

Regarding Hartridge and Luppitt Common, these areas of cultivated land continue to be managed for the benefit of all commoners. I would recommend the walk along the top of Hartridge (the Trustees keep a track topped on the ridge) and we have also put in place a small length of permissive bridleway from Hartridge down to Hill End farm.

Mrs Fry commented that she has not seen anyone use the permissive Footpath.

vi. **Police**

There were 15 Crimes 2009/10 broken down as follows:

5 Assaults Four occurred at the same private location – juvenile female offenders.

One was a domestic incident where the female party was assaulted.

2 Criminal Damage to Motor Vehicle Both occurred at the same time/location – during a private party male offender damaged two motor vehicles.

2 Sexual Assault Both occurred at the same private location involving two separate juvenile females.

1 Rape At private location male offender known to female aggrieved allegation of rape made by female.

1 Dwelling Burglary Three female juveniles broke into a secure room of a private dwelling and stole cash and car keys.

1 Criminal Damage to Dwelling Three female juveniles who reside in a private house caused damage to property inside.

1 Criminal Damage Wooden fence post at side of road broken

1 False Representation (Fraud) Internet Fraud – male paid £1373 for a camera, which was never delivered.

1 Public Order – Affray Three female juveniles threatened and used violence against a juvenile female aggrieved.

- Decrease of 3 crime from last year. There were 18 Crimes in 2008/09 and 19 Crimes – 2007/08
- 9 crimes are linked to the same private location.
- The main crime within the parish this year is assaults – 5 – although 4 are at the same private location.
- The 3 sexual offences occurred at private locations and all parties were known to each other.
- The most positive news is NO Non Dwelling Burglaries. There were 5 last year making it the main crime within the Parish.

Reference the Non Dwelling Burglaries the Stop a Thief Scheme (loaning alarms to farm premises) launched in April 2009 continues to be a success within the Rural Honiton area. We have loaned alarms to over 85 properties and seen a reduction of 38% for Non Dwelling Burglaries.

Tracey Bell

Clerk to Luppitt Parish Council 26th May 2010

Contact details for your parish council are as follows:

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