

KENTISBEARE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 12/05/2026 in Kentisbeare Village Hall at 7pm

Present: Cllrs. Nick Allan (Chairman), Neil Woofenden, Mrs Elise Ellicott, Martin Disney, Mrs Felicity Ryan, Edd Southerden, DCC Cllr. James Buczkowski, the Clerk and one member of the public.

55/05/26. Welcome and introductions and to receive apologies: The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Cllr. Oliver Forster and MDDC Cllr. Cathy Connor.

56/05/26. Review of the year from the Chairman of the Parish Council: The Chairman reported as follows - We are now in year three of a four year term and subject to any changes, the next scheduled district and parish council elections will take place in May 2027.

We were sad to lose Mark Kent as Parish Councillor late last year, following a long period of illness. He was a parish councillor for a relatively brief period, given his health, but during his tenure he was a very constructive influence. He was quick to offer help, be it with a suggestion or well-judged diplomacy. He also contributed greatly to the harmonious nature of council meetings.

As always, I would like to thank everyone involved with the Parish Council for their continuous commitment and hard work. We have also benefited over the last year with input from Devon County Councillor James Buczkowski following the county elections last year – many thanks James for your support, insights and detailed monthly reports.

We continue to receive support from our District Councillors for which we are most grateful – notably Mid Devon District Councillor Cathy Connor for keeping us informed of what is taking place at MDDC and also more locally for her input over the last few years with the Christmas Eve celebrations in Kentisbeare. Thank you.

Culm Garden Village - Delivery Board: As Chairman I endeavour to attend all of the meetings which generally take place online nowadays. If I am unable to attend, we aim to send a replacement which is usually Neil Woofenden and Melanie is our reserve.

We have made good progress on achieving protection for Kentisbeare from the proposed garden village and to maintain the rural nature of our parish as a distinct rural community. MDDC has agreed that there will be no housing proposed beyond Horn Road and that there will be a significant belt of woodland between the sports pitches planned to the east of Horn Road and Dead Lane. This woodland is proposed to be required Biodiversity Net Gain, which should be undevelopable and provide great comfort in the long term. As to the progress of the garden village itself, the town centre relief road is now going ahead which means that up to 500 houses may be built on our side of the motorway after it is completed. Further development requires a new motorway junction. While the proposed works for this are now on a shortlist for consideration by central government, there is still no confirmation that funding will be forthcoming, and so resultant development looks to be at least 5 years off.

Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Devon Consultation

We submitted a response to the Devolution consultation which is the possible reorganisation of local government and would mean abolishing the existing two-tier systems (county and district councils) and replacing them with new, larger unitary authorities. This will undoubtedly mean more responsibility for Parish Councils and will result in significant financial implications.

The Parish Council has concerns and is dubious that there is any benefit to the proposed reorganisation and is unclear why it is necessary and is particularly concerned about the proposals for Exeter and Plymouth.

Key to any change is the nature of the implementation. Parish Councils are not wealthy and are largely comprised of volunteers. If we are going to be required to provide additional services adequate funds will be required.

PLAYING FIELD - Improvements: We were delighted that phase 1 of the pump track early last summer. The track remained closed for the first few weeks to allow the grass seed to take following the extremely dry period of weather. Once opened we were pleased at the popularity of the track and many good comments have been received. When funds permit, we hope to look at phase 2 - we would like to undertake some landscaping, install some benches and upgrade the access track. Many thanks to the Advisory Group, Neil and Melanie for liaising closely with the contractor throughout along with help and support from Edd, Olly and Elise.

FOOTPATHS & THE WOODLAND TRUST – The series of evening summer walks continue to be well attended and Elise does a great job co-ordinating. For the last few years we have ended the first walk, being the Annual Clifford Pike Memorial Walk, at The Wyndham Arms where we provide light refreshments which has proved popular.

Melanie and Elise endeavour to maintain contact with the contractors working for The Woodland Trust and aim to hold a site meeting once or twice each year.

WEBSITE AND E-NEWSLETTER – Last year after ten years or so Maria our Digital Communications Assistant resigned from her position. We would like to thank Maria for her input and hard work over the years which is greatly appreciated. Maria remains actively involved in the Parish with other groups. We were pleased to find Helen to take over the role last autumn to support and help with digital communications and most importantly “K-Net”, our electronic newsletter. K-Net remains a good source of information with many groups feeding into it with information and events and we would like to thank Helen for her work and support.

CHRISTMAS EVE – Thanks again to everyone involved with this village celebration; those who helped to co-ordinate the Carol singing, Cathy for her organisation of Father Christmas and his crew and many thanks to The Wyndham Arms for hosting the event which continues to be a great success.

HISTORY PROJECT – Thank you to Lorna for arranging for Culm U3A history visit last September and for all of the others involved in making the afternoon a success and most informative and enjoyable. We were sorry when Lorna resigned from the Parish Council late last year and following her resignation we hope that someone else will step forward to help with the history project.

POST OFFICE – We were delighted to see Deepak take over the running of the village shop last year. Whilst sadly it looks unlikely that we will be able to get the Post Office reopened, he is looking at expanding the range of services he offers and the shop has a very welcoming atmosphere. I would encourage all members of the community to use it.

HIGHWAYS – There has recently been a change in the post of DCC Neighbourhood Highways Officer; we look forward to meeting Ricky shortly and to look at plans to take the Road and Snow Warden schemes forward. Neil and a few others have expressed interest in assisting.

I would also like to thank Neil for his support and work as Vice Chair as well as Melanie, our Parish Clerk, who has provided outstanding support to us for another year.

Finally – thanks again as each year to everyone for volunteering with various events and helping within numerous organisations and for making our Parish what it is.

57/05/26. Devon County Council Report: DCC Cllr. James Buczkowski had provided a written report:

The past year has been one of significant change at DCC. Following the May 2025 elections, a new administration was formed without overall control. That has required a more collaborative approach to decision-making, but it has also meant difficult conversations about priorities, resources, and delivery. From my perspective, the focus has been on maintaining financial stability, strengthening oversight, and ensuring that investment is directed toward the services residents rely on most.

For rural communities like Kentisbeare, that matters greatly. Rural areas face higher infrastructure costs, greater transport challenges, and more limited access to services, yet are too often overlooked within national funding models. Part of my role has therefore been ensuring that the needs of villages and rural communities are properly represented within wider county decision-making.

Kentisbeare and Local Priorities

Highways and Infrastructure - if there is one issue that has defined the year, it is highways. That is not new, but the scale of the problem has become much more visible. Across Devon, thousands of potholes were outstanding at various points over the winter, with repair teams working at full capacity simply to keep up with safety defects.

Locally, the picture has been no different. Kentisbeare, like much of rural Devon, has experienced increasing potholes, edge deterioration, drainage failures, and standing water over the past year, particularly on narrower rural routes where repairs have repeatedly failed under pressure.

Residents are right to be frustrated. The condition of many roads is not where it should be. This is not simply the result of a difficult winter. It reflects years of underinvestment, combined with a system that has prioritised short-term patching over long-term maintenance. The challenge in rural areas is often not simply potholes themselves, but the underlying condition of the road network and drainage systems. Water remains one of the biggest causes of long-term road failure, particularly on narrow rural lanes where drainage infrastructure is limited or deteriorating.

In response, DCC has increased investment significantly, with over £100 million committed to highways maintenance next year, alongside additional revenue funding for repairs, drainage, resurfacing, and preventative maintenance. Over the next five years, more than £546 million is planned to be invested into Devon's highways infrastructure.

Funding alone will not fix the problem. I have been clear that this investment must be matched by improved delivery, stronger quality control, better communication with Parish Councils, and a return to preventative maintenance rather than repeated short-term patching.

Locally, I have continued to raise issues including:

Traffic safety between Post Cross and the village/HGV access concerns on Fore Street and Croyle/speed and signage concerns on Rectory Road/visibility issues at Post Cross and drainage and repeat defects on rural lanes I have also worked to improve engagement between Highways officers and the Parish Council, including arranging interim Neighbourhood Highways Officer support where staffing gaps existed. The real test is whether residents see a consistent improvement on the ground. My focus remains on ensuring that happens locally, not just in reports or programmes.

Cullompton and Wellington Railway Stations: The proposed new railway station at Cullompton, alongside Wellington, has made steady progress over the past year. Funding has been secured for the current design stage, with Network Rail progressing technical work and aiming for key approvals during 2026. If those milestones are achieved, construction could begin in 2027, with services running by 2028. There are still risks around cost, land, and delivery, and it would be wrong to assume success at this stage. However, for the first time in many years, there is a credible pathway to delivery, and that represents real progress.

M5 Junction 28: The proposed improvements to M5 Junction 28 have been shortlisted by government for national funding, which is a significant step forward. This scheme is critical to supporting growth in Cullompton and reducing congestion on the strategic network. However, like many major infrastructure projects, it remains dependent on central government decisions. The role locally is to ensure that the case for investment is clear, evidence-based, and consistently made.

Culm Garden Village and Protecting the Identity of Kentisbeare: One of the most important long-term issues for Kentisbeare remains the impact of nearby development associated with the proposed Culm Garden Village. Throughout the year, I have supported the Parish Council's efforts to ensure that Kentisbeare's rural identity and separation from future development are properly protected. This has included support for proposals around the buffer zone and woodland belt between Kentisbeare and the garden village, helping ensure that future development respects the character of the village and surrounding landscape. Growth and infrastructure must be planned properly. Development should enhance communities, not overwhelm them.

Community Engagement and Residents' Surgeries: I launched monthly residents' surgeries in Kentisbeare during the past year, held on the first Saturday of each month at the village hall. These sessions are deliberately informal and accessible, providing residents with the opportunity to raise concerns directly and discuss local issues first-hand.

The same themes come up repeatedly: Highways and drainage/infrastructure pressure/access to services and concerns about rural isolation.

That consistency matters. It demonstrates that many of these issues are structural rather than isolated incidents. Alongside individual casework, this helps identify wider patterns that need to be escalated within the county council.

I also continue to attend Parish Council meetings regularly and provide written updates to ensure that local concerns are represented clearly within county-level decision-making.

Investment in Kentisbeare and Local Communities: Each County Councillor is allocated a Locality Budget to support community projects and volunteer-led activity. Locality funding may be relatively small in the context of wider council budgets, but it often delivers significant value because it supports projects led directly by local communities and volunteers. For 2026–2027, the Locality Budget has increased to £10,000 per councillor, and I would encourage local groups to get in touch if they are considering projects that would benefit the community.

County Council Work and Decisions

Budget and Financial Position

The 2026–27 budget reflects the reality facing local government.

- Increased investment in highways and infrastructure
- Continued and growing pressure from adult social care and SEND
- A focus on maintaining financial resilience rather than short-term fixes

As Cabinet Member for Finance, my priority has been to ensure that the Council operates within its means while protecting essential services and maintaining a clear line of sight on long-term risk. There is no simple solution. Demand continues to rise, particularly in social care, while funding does not keep pace. The challenge is to make decisions that are sustainable, not just expedient.

Support for Residents. Several programmes have been developed or expanded over the past year:

- A new Crisis and Resilience Fund replacing the Household Support Fund
- Additional support for rural households facing high heating costs
- A strengthened domestic abuse strategy

These are important interventions, but they also reflect the scale of underlying need and the increasing pressure on households.

Children's Services and SEND. Improving outcomes for children, particularly those with SEND, remains a central priority.

There have been structural changes, including a more localised approach to EHCP support and efforts to improve timeliness and coordination.

However, demand continues to rise, and it would be wrong to suggest that these changes have yet translated into a consistently improved experience for families. This remains one of the most challenging areas facing the council, both in terms of service delivery and long-term financial sustainability, and it will continue to require sustained focus and scrutiny.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). LGR remains one of the most significant strategic issues facing Devon. Government will determine the future structure of councils, with options ranging from multiple smaller authorities to a single county-wide unitary. Having considered the evidence, I have supported the single unitary option. This is not about structure for its own sake, but about managing risk.

The delivery of complex, high-cost services such as children's and adult social care requires scale, resilience, and consistency. Fragmenting those services across smaller authorities carries a real risk to both financial sustainability and service quality.

That does not mean a single authority is without risk. The challenge will be ensuring that local decision-making remains strong and visible. That is why I have consistently argued for properly empowered Area Committees, with real authority rather than symbolic roles.

The key test remains simple: any change must improve services for residents. If it does not, then it will have failed.

Looking Ahead. The coming year will be defined by three pressures:

- Infrastructure recovery, particularly highways and drainage
- Financial sustainability
- Structural change through LGR

There is always a temptation to focus on announcements and new initiatives. The real test is delivery. Many of the issues raised by residents a year ago remain the same today. That is the reality, and it is where the focus needs to be. My priority remains straightforward: to ensure that the investment and changes already agreed result in visible improvements locally.

The standard is simple:

- Better roads
- Reliable infrastructure
- Accessible services

If residents do not see that difference, then the system is not working as it should.

58/05/26. Any Other Reports: (i) Cllr. Mrs Ellicott P3 Footpath Co-ordinator reported that the series of evening summer walks continue to be well supported. The format will remain the same this year with the first walk being the Annual Clifford Pike Memorial walk, finishing at The Wyndham Arms where light refreshments are served.

Works have been carried out along the footpath 4 between High Street and Bonds Bridge.

59/06/26. Public Participation: None.

The meeting closed at approximately 7.30pm.