

Ringmore Parish Council (RPC) Meeting

Thursday, 5th February, 2026 at 7.00 pm in the WI Hall

MINUTES

Meeting to discuss maintenance of highways in the parish, notably pothole repairs and arranged by LW as part of her much appreciated initiative to improve the quantity and quality of work done in the county.

Present: Cllr. M. Campbell, Chairman (MC), Cllr. A. King (AK), Cllr. M. Findlay (MF), DCC. Cllr. L. Wainwright (LW), Mr. A. Keay (AKy) DCC Highways, Ian Bramble (IB) (Clerk)

Roads were seen by Cllrs and Council Taxpayers as essential environmental infrastructure with a strong need to maintain them in good order. The current state of many roads makes them dangerous to all road users, including cyclists and the cause of much expensive damage to vehicles.

The discussion then moved onto the road from St Ann's Chapel to Challaborough and the need to keep it open. Its current state is poor to the point of being dangerous, with the added hazard of water run off across the road, bringing mud with it and obscuring potholes. Water damage is now causing the road to break up. Severe cold weather in the immediate future will cause of further disintegration. A. Keay indicated DCC's understanding of the essential nature to residents and the local economy of keeping this road open and in good order, that the road should be capable of supporting vehicles of up to 40 tons and that DCC is committed to maintaining it. He advised that the road is also assessed with regard to road safety criteria.

Repair techniques were discussed and these need to be reviewed.

Comments were made about the adequacy of Chapter 8 training and that it is intended to satisfy insurance company requirements, rather than be a technical, repair training exercise.

LW has understood that close cooperation between parishes in her division, to share their resources could increase the rate at which potholes can be repaired and that more resources devolved from DCC to parish groups could help achieve this.

LW strongly advocated membership of the DCC Road Warden scheme to allow parishes to obtain free cold tar and public liability cover and to facilitate cooperation between parishes to achieve a closer coordination with DCC.

Criticism was voiced by Cllrs that no-one seemed to be accountable for highways maintenance and for producing some form of solution to mitigate the damage that is being allowed to occur through a combination of underfunding and inefficient repair practices. Also, it was pointed out that DCC's own figures suggest that not all the additional funding from central government, specifically for potholes repairs, was being used for that purpose.

There is a general feeling that spending priorities are not in line with taxpayers wishes and highways maintenance is not given the weight of priority required.

Should targets be set and should activity to achieve them be closely monitored with a department head made accountable for results arising?

Summary/Observations/Comments/Conclusions

It is clear that Devon, with the largest mileage of road network in the country is underfunded for highways maintenance and that this will continue within the foreseeable future, given other social priorities that have been established by elected DCC Councillors. Estimated costs of pothole repairs are c£180mill. in 2025 but only £100mill. has been allocated to this task. How much that has been spent to date in 2025/26 has not been revealed.

The only way to improve upon the current position with this funding shortfall is to conceive more efficient spending of the funds available, i.e. 'more potholes per buck'.

Although not raised specifically, a question lurking in the background is whether the foundations of our roads are no longer fit for purpose. They were laid down decades ago, quite often hurriedly for the sake of expedience and did not anticipate the more extreme weather we are now experiencing, nor the huge increase in traffic volume nor the massive increases in the weights of private and commercial vehicles. Are DCC building into road maintenance budgets the strengthening of road foundations?

Highways maintenance has been contracted out to Milestones Ltd, who are instructed by DCC Highways.

This meeting concentrated on potholes as an immediate priority and LW explained DCC repair procedures;

- they start with confirmation of size and depth of each reported potholes by individual DCC inspection to check against DCC's size criteria before authorising its repair. (This seems to be a bureaucratic process which adds cost for no outcome).
- Milestones Ltd is then instructed to repair only checked and authorised potholes, hence the practice of repairing only one pothole whilst ignoring other reported or unreported potholes in the near vicinity that could be dealt with whilst 'on site'.
- The rate of repair of potholes per hour of paid activity could be increased if this practice was changed.
- However, this contract with Milestones runs until 2028 and seems to be written so tightly as make any changes in procedure impossible
- Therefore, until a new contract is written it appears that nothing can be done to institute a more efficient use of those repair resources by increasing the number of repairs made per visit to a specific locality.
- Water run off is a problem which has worsened in the last few years with the huge increases in rainfall suffered and needs the cooperation of landowners to mitigate the problem.

A follow up meeting will be arranged.

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