

Burlescombe Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting 2026

Chair's Report

After a very tough and turbulent 2024/25, this has been a year of working to bring stability to the Council. We've sought to build trust in the community, develop our collective knowledge and skills, expand our network with other councils and organisations, and start to prepare for what could be big changes ahead.

The fact that the same Councillors are sitting around this table as this time last year is to be celebrated and I'd like to take the opportunity to thank councillors, who are all unpaid volunteers, for their continued hard work in support of our community.

Our residents' survey in late 2025 – and the input we regularly get from the people who attend our meetings – have guided our priorities this year. Green spaces/nature, the roads, the quarry and finding opportunities to bring the community together have all been regularly highlighted.

- Green spaces and nature – The Old Railway Line is an important habitat and nature corridor that the Parish Council owns and wants to manage in the right way. We've been getting expert advice and managing the space in a balanced way, that protects nature *and* keeps it safe and useable for people too. We'll continue to do all we can to look after this important space.
- Roads – we've been making strong representations to Devon County Council to highlight roads issues in the Parish. The state of the roads continues to be a source of great frustration and we will continue to relentlessly bang the drum for better repair and maintenance.
- Quarry – through Quarry Liaison Meetings and other correspondence, we represent residents' views to the quarry, highlighting issues and campaigning for solutions. We also look to identify ways Holcim can positively contribute to the community, for example by providing expertise, resources and funding to support community projects. The repair of Black Bridge was one topic we made strong representations about in 2025 and we were very pleased when it was reopened. Another issue is the relocation of the Asphalt plant that would bring with it a reduction in lorry movements and noxious smells, and we have written to the CEO of Holcim, copying in our MP, to raise our concerns about the ongoing delay.
- Community events – our recent Spring Clean-Up Day was our first event aimed purely at bringing people together to look after our area. This was a great success and a real positive moment for us, that we will look to build on going forwards.

We've also worked hard to keep improving our communication, using our website, Facebook, the parish magazine and noticeboards to highlight our activities to residents. We hope the recent addition of an email newsletter will help to keep even more people informed, without overwhelming them.

The biggest decision we make in any year is setting the precept, the part of the Council Tax that funds Parish Council activities. We have a duty to manage our finances responsibly and we take this extremely seriously. We have to look after local assets, meet our legal obligations, and ensure we have sufficient savings in the bank to cover any unforeseen or emergency costs. Having gone through our budget information, we felt we had no choice but to increase the precept. This meant that a Band D household had an increase of around £1.97 per month. We knew that any rise was not going to be welcome, particularly in these difficult times, but we felt this was the lowest we could set the precept, while still being financially responsible.

Due to this continued financial responsibility, including recouping several thousand pounds of unclaimed VAT and footpath grants, the parish bank account is the healthiest it's been in years. We will start the next budget discussions in November and it will be interesting to see how this improvement will affect the figure for next year.

I would like to thank our Clerk for her tireless efforts and continued wise council which has been instrumental in getting the Council back on track. We are almost there with reinstating all the different policies, procedures and documents that a well functioning parish council requires. The conclusion of these activities over the coming months will ensure that Burlescombe Parish Council is ready for a future well met.

Looking ahead, there are significant changes on the way.

Local government reorganisation is approaching and for us that may mean more assets (namely Burlescombe play park and open space) coming under our care. We would welcome the opportunity to protect this facility, but we also understand the financial responsibility that would come with it. Understanding what will be involved in terms of taking it on is what we will be focussing on next, along with weighing possibilities for enhancing the space in the future.

Changes to planning nationally will undoubtedly see more development within the parish, particularly surrounding J27 and Tiverton Parkway Railway Station and we will be making sure we strongly represent residents' needs at every opportunity. This will be another key focus for us for the rest of the year and will be supported by our work on a Neighbourhood Priority Statement – a document that will be compiled with input from the community about what facilities and housing we actually require to address our needs.

The other major piece of work for this year is to put together our Emergency Plan. The very real and immediate effects of the climate crisis are already being felt, with experts warning that things are only going to get worse. We have a responsibility as a council to make sure our community is as well prepared as possible to face the challenges ahead caused by extreme weather impacts. I also have to emphasise the role the community itself needs to play in this preparedness– by following the government guidance already issued about household planning for emergencies, and also volunteering to be involved in the wider community response activities.

So in conclusion, another productive year for the council which I for one have found very enjoyable and rewarding. This time next year all Parish Councillor roles will be up for election. So if you think spending some of your time making a positive difference to your community might be for you, there's never been a better time to get involved.