

# LOVE DEVON



RURAL ISSUE

STORIES FROM OUR COMMUNITIES: ISSUE 8, 2024



Author and CIP founder Michael Maisey

Meet your Town & Parish Councillors

Eden Project Community

Devon Young Farmers

New  
interactive  
map of Devon's  
Village Halls!

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



# WELCOME



Welcome to the 8th annual edition of our LOVE Devon magazine.

As the Rural Community Council for Devon, Devon Communities Together has a special focus on working alongside and supporting our rural and coastal communities. That's why we've given this issue a rural focus, featuring people and organisations that, like us, work to support rural communities in Devon.

We couldn't do a rural issue without involving Devon Young Farmers and we were delighted to speak to County Chair Dan Grist about how they're working to improve mental health in Devon - and not just for farmers (pg. 4). We also chatted to some of Devon's Parish and Town Councillors, who do an incredibly important job in helping our rural communities thrive. Take a look at pg. 8 to find out what the roles entail and please do contact your local council if you think you might like to get involved.

During the research for this edition we came across the inspirational Michael Maisey and when we heard the story of how he established his Change is Possible social enterprise in rural Devon, we were delighted to include an interview with him in this issue (pg. 12).

Finally, I would encourage you all to take a look at our new interactive Devon Village Halls Community Asset Map (pg. 7). These wonderful community spaces are vital assets in our rural communities but they need everyone's support to survive and thrive. Use our map to find the perfect space for your next event or community outreach service - you'll be surprised at just what they have to offer!

*N. Corkery*

Nora Corkery, Chief Executive, Devon Communities Together



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 Devon Communities Together

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# NOT JUST FOR FARMERS!

DEVON YOUNG FARMERS: AMPLIFYING THE MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION IN RURAL DEVON

AT DCT we have a special focus on our rural communities, ensuring their experiences and needs are listened to and amplified. An important part of this community - and a group we have often engaged with across our projects - is Devon Young Farmers. LOVE Devon chatted to Dan Grist, County Chairman about work and wellbeing in rural Devon.

Dan Grist knows the farming industry and agriculture inside and out through his family's farm, located on the edge of Dartmoor. Devon Young Farmers has been a huge influence on his life, as his family are all farmers, and as County Chairman he aims to support many more of his fellow agricultural workers with their mental health and wellbeing.

Devon Young Farmers is the largest county federation in the country, with 37 different clubs across the county and 1,800 young people involved. The sheer size of Devon's rural population means Dan and his team are working hard to support everyone who's going through challenges that are associated with living and working rurally. **"This is why Devon Young Farmers is so important. We are providing support and opportunities to young people from isolated rural areas, because it's not just farmers - that is important to say - it's all young people in rural areas. Yes, we are called Young Farmers, but you don't have to be a farmer, and a lot of our members aren't farmers"**






Living and working in rural areas can be isolating, and Devon Young Farmers works a lot on supporting mental health, as well as signposting people to other organisations for support. **"It is essential that people living in rural areas feel confident in talking about mental health and understand where to go when they need help."**

In general, Dan feels that there is too little focus on farmers and rural communities. Since Brexit, there's been a lot of uncertainty amongst the farming community when it comes to accessing meaningful support. Yet it is extremely important for the industry that farmers feel supported. **"We have a lot of young people working in agriculture within our organisation and they are quite literally the future of farming in Devon."**

To broaden this support, Devon Young Farmers has great relationships with the Farming Community Network and farming charity RABI, as well as a close connection with Devon mental health service TalkWorks.

They have also delivered 'Curve' workshops which bring young people together to cover a whole range of topics, including mental health, resilience, safety, crime prevention and more.

The Curve workshop on mental health was delivered to every club in Devon, and explored an understanding of mental health, the different types of mental health disorders and where to access help. The interactive session made people think more deeply about mental health and



"We have a lot of young people working in agriculture within our organisation and they are quite literally the future of farming in Devon."

have proved beneficial in raising awareness and keeping the conversation going.

Dan is keen to encourage more young people into farming and agricultural careers, where - despite the challenges - there are also lots of great opportunities.

There is a perception that farming is generational and family orientated, and with lots of family farms in Devon that can be true. However, there are more opportunities than people realise, and the industry is a lot more diverse. Devon Young Farmers wants to promote that there is a whole industry and different departments that you can get involved with, depending on your skills and interests.

The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture website has lots of information for young people thinking about farming as a career, from crops to animals, technicians to managers and more. Visit [tiah.org/careers](http://tiah.org/careers) to explore.

Here in Devon, anyone between the ages of 10 and 28 is welcome

to join Devon Young Farmers - you don't have to be a farmer! There are lots of local clubs that are solely for junior members, ranging from 10-16.

Their programme is diverse from competitions to sports, performance arts to travel, with plenty of non-farming activities. If this sounds like your bag, check out Devon Young Farmer's website to find your local club, or get in touch with the office who can point you in the right direction.

Finally, we asked Dan what his favourite part of Devon is. His answer? The community and feeling like being a part of something in Devon, particularly in farming.

**"Devon Young Farmers is a vast network of supporters, leaders, advisory, general supporters of the farming community. We all stick together, support each other and to feel a part of that is special."**

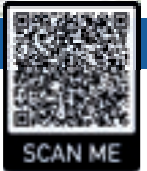
If you're interested in getting involved in Devon Young Farmers, visit [www.devonyfc.co.uk](http://www.devonyfc.co.uk)

# Brand New Village Hall Asset Map for Devon!



Village halls are at the heart of many rural communities and for the first time ever, 80% of them have been added to an exciting new map, created by Devon Communities Together to highlight the county's amazing community spaces!

<https://tinyurl.com/8mbfvpc9>



After spending 18 months visiting an impressive 339 Village Halls in all corners of the county, our specialist Village Halls support team have plotted the halls and all their facilities on to an interactive asset map.

Need to a venue nearby with lots of parking? Perhaps you're after a space with an accessible toilet or a hearing loop? Maybe you have a big party planned a need a venue with a sound system? All this and more can all be searched for on the new map.

Many halls are heavily reliant on bookings for income, however 67% of Halls we visited said they are currently unoccupied for over 50% of the time. There are some fantastic venues out there in rural Devon, so let's make sure we use them and keep them thriving!

Along with details of their facilities as 'venues for hire', we also gathered lots of information about what other services the halls may be able to offer in the future and what challenges they're facing. We hope that this evidence will help us - and others - have a greater understanding of these amazing volunteer-run community facilities so we can provide the right support to keep them at the heart of their communities for decades to come!

If you're interested in reading about our full findings, you can download the report here: [www.devoncommunities.org.uk/projects/village-halls-community-buildings-audit](http://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/projects/village-halls-community-buildings-audit)



Let's meet some of your ...

# Parish & Town Councillors

Did you know that there are 362 Parish and Town councils in Devon? They are the first tier of local government and play a vital role in acting on behalf of their communities. LOVE Devon spoke to some Devon Parish Councillors to find out more about what being a councillor involves.

**Meet:**

**Liz Brookes-Hocking** – Crediton Town Council – 27 years

**Ian Cowling** – Bishops Nympton Parish Council – 18 years

**Ruth Pearson-Bunt** – Plasterdown Grouped Parish Council – 15 years

**Glyn Richards** – South Brent Parish Council – just started a 30th Year

**Phillip Dredge** – Ivybridge Town Council – 19 years

**Jo Rice** – Kingskerswell Parish Council – just under a year

**Mike Joyce** – Newton Abbot Town Council – 8 years

**Q: What drew you to the role of being a Councillor?**

**Jo:** I was dismayed at the lack of community development in my local area and knew that my professional skills could make a difference.

**Ruth:** After an extensive career across a range of public sector employers, Parish Council work provided the opportunity to make



Cara Stobart, Devon Association of Local Councils, with Liz Brookes-Hocking, Crediton Town Council

a real local difference, reflecting community needs without a political dimension!

**Phillip:** I was invited to apply for co-option following leading a successful campaign to save rail services for the town.

**Liz:** The first time they needed young people with ideas (I was young, once) and I'd come from the voluntary sector where we survived on our ideas. The second time, there was only one woman left on the council which sounded like a very bad idea so I put myself forward for co-option.

**Q: Is there a typical day, or is your role varied?**

**Jo:** There is no typical day as you can be involved in as much as you want to. I've been involved in buildings, community development, grant applications and planning.



**Q: What is the most rewarding part of the role?**

**Glyn:** Making a difference within my own village by providing facilities and supporting other community organisations.

**Mike:** Knowing that I am there for my town.

**Jo:** For me it has to be being Chair of the Youth Committee and creating a youth strategy for our parish. We have secured funding for our Youth Engagement Project and we can now make a real difference to the lives of young people in the village. To create something unique and bespoke for our area has been amazing.

**Ian:** Being able to get projects completed for the Parish.

**Q: Can you tell us something that would surprise members of the public about the role of a councillor?**

**Glyn:** People may not be aware of the extensive list of Parish Council powers, from grass cutting to providing allotments, or funding both village and district service providers.

**Ruth:** Being a councillor provides the opportunity to build networks and learn a whole range of new information and skills, there is extensive training available and advice on tap.

**Phillip:** There are openings for members to represent council on other organisations.

**Ian:** There is a legal framework about

conducting Council business and meetings that should be adhered to by responsible Councillors.

**Q: If someone is interested in becoming a councillor, what words of advice would you give them?**

**Jo:** I would recommend to do all of the DALC (Devon Association of Local Councils) training to learn the basics, get a mentor, network with other parishes and listen to the experienced councillors. It may take a while for it all to sink in but don't be afraid of the strong personalities.

**Mike:** Talk to serving Councillors, clerks and bodies that represent Councillors, do your homework, it pays off.

**Ruth:** Think about the interests you have and the skills you can bring - this is not a passive role and you should expect to invest time and energy. If you do it can be very rewarding but also requires a degree of patience!

**Liz:** Make sure you have the time to give to it to be effective; don't try to change everything the minute you start but do ask questions and be willing to volunteer for anything that interests you, especially if it's your skill set

**Ian:** Get in contact with your local Council who are quite likely to be looking for new members.

**For more information on Devon's local councils, including vacancies, visit [devonalc.org.uk](http://devonalc.org.uk).**



Focus on:

# EAST DEVON

DCT provides support to the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations of East Devon, thanks to funding from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. We're enjoying meeting a diverse range of local organisations doing amazing things in their communities! Take a closer look at some of them here ...

## Loving the Llamas

Did you know that llamas can be fantastic therapy animals? In April 2024 Llamas4Good community interest company (CIC) was established to provide therapeutic visits in the community with Llamas including to care homes, hospitals, day centres, and schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities. They all have very individual characters and their docile temperaments have a real calming effect, making them ideal walking companions and also excellent therapy animals.


Our dedicated team has helped Llamas4Good with 1-2-1 support and training, covering all sorts of areas areas involved in establishing the new CIC.

**"There is so much to consider when setting up a social enterprise – how and where to find funding, how to write policies and procedures, how to measure impact, how to plan and budget etc – all of which can seem quite daunting!"** Maggie Jee



## Vibrant Village Halls


If you live in a rural community, chances are there is a voluntary or social enterprise organisation in your vicinity - that's right, your local Village Hall! The volunteer trustees and committee members face exactly the same struggles as other types of charities; trying to find the funds to make improvements to the hall, finding new volunteers, trying to generate bookings - the list goes on. With DCT's help, some of the enterprising halls in East Devon have come together for the first time to form a supportive 'cluster'. They've met at Membury Village Hall to share their experiences and help each other out.



"[We] came away from it with lots of useful takeaways, and hope that there will be more events like this in the future."

## Settling in

Have you ever thought about how tricky it is for non-English-speaking people to settle into new communities in Devon? That was the inspiration for Settle UK, set up by East Devon resident Olimpia, originally from Poland. Olimpia identified the need for a support service to help people integrate into their new communities and to enhance the diversity and inclusivity of the area. She has attended several of DCT's training sessions and we've really enjoyed meeting her for 1-2-1 support sessions to see her make her dream into a reality. .



"I received the knowledge I needed to open an organisation [it] helped me fulfil my dream!"

**Get VCSE support:** Whether an existing organisation or an individual with a kernel of a great idea, if you're based in East Devon, you can contact us at [eastdevonvcse@devoncommunities.org.uk](mailto:eastdevonvcse@devoncommunities.org.uk) or visit [www.devoncommunities.org.uk/projects/east-devon-vcse-support-service](http://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/projects/east-devon-vcse-support-service) for useful resources. Elsewhere in Devon? Check out [devonva.org](http://devonva.org) to find your local organisation. You can also use [devonconnect.org](http://devonconnect.org) to share events and volunteering opportunities. Let's keep Devon's VCSE sector thriving!

# CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

At DCT, one of our core aims is to support rural businesses, social enterprises and charities, and promote wellbeing in rural communities. That's why we were intrigued when, deep in the heart of rural Devon, we uncovered The CIP (Change is Possible) Project, a social enterprise that supports a range of people, including current and ex-offenders, to overcome trauma, build resilience and develop emotional intelligence through seminars, workshops and events. LOVE Devon spoke to author, motivational speaker and founder Michael Maisey about his journey.

## How did you get started with The CIP Project?



I came out of prison for the third time around 20 years ago, before my 19th birthday. I was dealing with a lot, including crime, addictions and a suicide attempt.

I wanted to change my life so I saved up every penny from minimum wage jobs so I could attend self-development seminars and workshops but realised that these resources were only available to people who could pay for them. How could I reach people like those who grew up on my council estate? How could I give them these tools for free? So, that's how it started and it's just grown and grown every year.

## Have you experienced any challenges setting up the project?

I did have some opposition at the start. My house is on a 10-acre plot and my intention was always to use this land to help people. So, when CIP first started, we used to do it in my back garden, with ex-offenders and men who'd just arrived back from Afghanistan coming and going up my driveway. Local farmers were hugely supportive as they had lost a colleague to suicide and understood the need, but other people were more hesitant and shared their views at a Parish meeting.

However, the wife of one of the Parish Councillors had - by complete chance - just read my book 'Young

Offender' and had worked out I lived locally. The next day he phoned to offer me a new 10-acre piece of land in an ancient oak forest away from the houses. At this moment - I'm not deeply religious - I definitely looked up to the sky and was like, 'thank you.' Within one day I'd gone from potentially being closed down to being given an even better piece of land. So that initial challenge actually led to our Outdoor Retreat Centre.

### **Can you explain a bit more about how the CIP project is supporting prisoners on their rehabilitation journey?**

We work in the prisons, including Exeter, delivering workshops by myself and four other men, all of whom have been in prison and come through the programme. We can use our lived experience to help others.

When they come out of prison, they're put straight into an online group, which we call the 'man clan'. They also have weekly online meetings where they come together and connect. They also have access to a community group for both men and women.

Then they get access to our programme of monthly events where they sit around campfires, get out in nature and experience real connection. It's like 'put your phone away, put your cigarettes and your vapes away. Let's just connect.'



What we found is for the men who've been locked up in a cell for 23 hours a day, to experience connection at this level, is hugely transformational.

We're not meant to live isolated in our little homes by ourself. We're meant to be connected and I think when people experience that there's a remembrance that takes place in their mind and in their soul. They remember the times humans sat around campfires and talked about myths and legends and I think once you've experienced that, you can't unsee it, you can't unhear it. You've had a slice of what life is, what really living is all about.

### **What has been the most rewarding part of creating the CIP Project?**

There's no greater show on Earth to than to have a ringside seat for watching the lights come back on in



someone's eyes, or watching someone go and be a father again, or watching a son go and be a productive member of society and make his mum proud.

It's like the business of recycling, isn't it? We're turning all that pain and recycling it to something positive.

**Do you think there is a public perception about people that have offended or are struggling with their mental health?**

Often, that's why people go back to their old lives - because people reject offenders, addicts, people who are going through trauma and they end up feeling lonely and thinking I may as well go back to what I know. Yet if they just push through for a little longer, they can find a new group of people to

connect with who will support, not judge.

**Would you like to share any tips or advice to anyone wanting to start up their own CIC (community interest company) or social enterprise?**

Part of me that wants to prepare people for how hard it is. Getting funding is very, very hard. And if it's not your passion? You will probably quit.

Don't just look at slices of lives on Instagram and think ohh, I'm going to do that because that looks cool. What pain have you really been through and come out the other side of? Because I guarantee you there's other people out there who are suffering from what you suffered from.

**Finally, what is your favourite part about living in Devon?**

It's very different to the council estate I grew up on in London. There's less traffic, there's fresh air, there's more nature. It's nice being so close to the beach.

And the people - I seem to just get along so well with the natives and the farmers - I just love them!

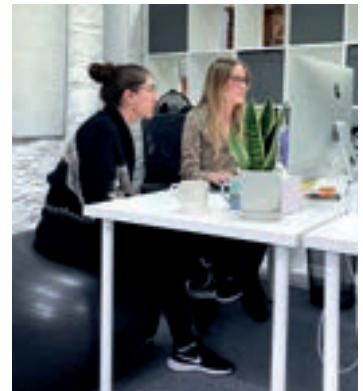
[www.thecippproject.com](http://www.thecippproject.com)

# Co-working Communities

Starting a rural enterprise doesn't have to be a lonely business...

Small businesses play a vital part in Devon's rural economy and DCT regularly undertakes projects to support people to start and develop small enterprises. But for entrepreneurs in remote areas, it can be lonely working long hours at the kitchen table with nobody to lunch with or bounce ideas off. That's why it could be worth investigating your local coworking space ...

Devon Work Hubs is a thriving network of flexible coworking spaces located throughout Devon. For those in rural communities, the hubs provide a great way for people to come together to work, collaborate, learn, and socialise, while supporting a good work-life balance. The community vibe and atmosphere can really help contribute to people's wellbeing.



Each venue in the network has hospitable facilities as well as great internet connection. As well as this, the Devon Work Hubs network can provide signposting to a range of helpful organisations and resources to support growing ventures. Each venue has its own unique layout that provides some form of hotdesking, office space, private work pods, and meeting rooms.

Devon Work Hubs network is ever growing, but at present you can find work hubs in: Axminster, Barnstaple, Braunton, Buckfastleigh, CREDITON, Cullompton, Dartington, Dawlish, Exeter, Great Torrington, High Bickington, Honiton, Ilfracombe, Ivybridge, Kingsbridge, Modbury, Newton Abbot, Payhembury, Tavistock, Teignmouth, Tiverton, and Totnes.

Visit [www.devonworkhubs.co.uk](http://www.devonworkhubs.co.uk) to find your nearest hub and get support for your enterprise!

# Small steps, big difference

*Many of us will have ventured over the Tamar to visit the Eden Project. Home to 35 acres of landscaped garden and over 1,000 types of plant in its rainforest biome alone, it attracts up to a million visitors a year. But how many of us know that it's also an educational charity and social enterprise, and the reach of its work stretches far beyond Cornwall? LOVE Devon spoke to Eden Project Community's Kate Groves to find out more...*

## **Tell us about the ethos of Eden Project Communities**

We use our gardens, exhibitions, art, events, experiences and projects to explore how people can work together – and with nature – towards a better future. Everything that we do is underpinned by a belief that we're all capable of changing things for the better and Eden in itself is testament to what can be achieved when we work collaboratively and resourcefully, driven by hope and determination.

## **How has this developed beyond Cornwall into community initiatives?**

In 2009 we decided to see what the transformative effect of getting to know our neighbours might be, by starting The Big Lunch. We invited communities to come together for a few hours of friendship, food and fun and this simple experiment quickly became our flagship campaign,

bringing millions together on the first weekend in June each year.

Research carried out annually shows how Big Lunches have a lasting and significant impact on the communities that take part, with people feeling more connected, taking more pride in their local area, and it leading to more events and community action.

14.1 million people took part in Big Lunch or Coronation Big Lunch events across the UK in 2023. From Honiton to Holsworthy and Ilfracombe to Salcombe, thousands of street parties and community events took place across Devon last year (2023) and it's estimated that over 600,000 people took part in 5,600 events in the West Country!

We also run Community Camps in person and online, to help volunteers from across the UK start or develop projects, with over 1,000





## What small step will you take?



initiated so far. This includes seed libraries, supper clubs, community gardens, lunch clubs, litter picks and schemes to reduce loneliness.

### What else do you do with communities here in Devon?

In Devon, Annabel Wills, our Community Network Developer for the South West, puts on events to bring people together, learn new skills and build their confidence to take action in their communities.

In April 2024, she teamed up with a local community venue, Leadworks in Stonehouse to host a free event to help people connect with one another and with nature, and explore community action in Plymouth. Over 50 locals from in and around Plymouth got stuck into a Big Lunch including homemade dishes that people brought and delights served up by local social

enterprise Café Abundance.

The event offered the chance to hear inspiring guest speakers and take part in collaborative and creative workshops to explore our collective relationships with nature and how to access more green spaces within the city. It was a beautifully

sunny day inspiring planet positive community action in Plymouth!

As a year-round programme, we also run activities and events to encourage connection in the colder months, with our Winter Warmers campaign. From sharing mince pies or inviting a neighbour for a winter walk to larger Big Lunch at Christmas events.

However, wherever and whenever you want to join in, we know that every small step and action can make a difference and help shape a brighter future for people, communities and the planet. What small step will you take?

Find out how you can get involved, get in touch with Annabel and become part of the Eden Project Communities Network at [www.edenprojectcommunities.com](http://www.edenprojectcommunities.com)



**Never  
bin hidden  
batteries.**

Search "Recycle Your Electricals" to find all your local electrical and battery drop off points: [www.recycleyourelectricals.org.uk](http://www.recycleyourelectricals.org.uk)

## NEVER BIN LOOSE OR HIDDEN BATTERIES



Anything with a plug, battery or cable can be reused or recycled - including the plugs, batteries and cables themselves



There are hidden batteries inside electricals - when these electricals are thrown away in household bins, the batteries get crushed in bin lorries and recycling centres and can cause fires



Over 1,200 fires in the last year were caused by batteries



Over 1.6 billion electricals with hidden batteries were thrown away in the last year - that's over 3,000 a minute!



If possible, remove batteries from your electricals and recycle them separately. If you're unable to remove the batteries safely, recycle the whole electrical at your nearest electrical recycling point



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# What is Devon Communities Together?

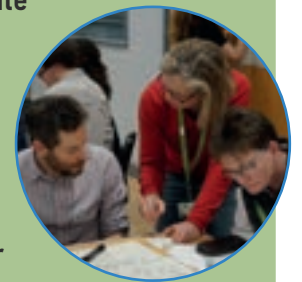
You've read the magazine, you may even have met us at an event, but do you know what it is we do? The answer is .... A LOT!

Devon Communities Together is an independent charity. We work with communities across Devon - particularly rural communities - to help them tackle the challenges they are facing, which have recently been exacerbated by the pandemic and Cost of Living Crisis.



It can be tricky to list everything that we do, as our projects and services change over time, depending on what communities need. However, our work includes:

- working with communities to address the lack of affordable housing for local people
- supporting Village Halls committees to develop their spaces
- designing initiatives to help people to access important services such as healthcare
- helping communities to address the climate emergency
- supporting people with digital connectivity and skills
- supporting communities to plan for serious weather conditions and other emergencies
- helping people to develop their own small businesses
- giving advice to people in fuel poverty
- and much more!



There are already people and groups that are doing wonderful things for their communities. We are here to support them to create sustainable solutions that have a big impact on the lives of local people!

Have a look at our website and our most recent Impact Reports to see the full breadth of what we do - and if you think we might be able to help you to make a difference in Devon, get in touch! [www.devoncommunities.org.uk](http://www.devoncommunities.org.uk)

