



October 2025

Newsletter

In this edition ...

In this edition can be seen the next instalment in the ongoing story of local government reorganisation in Devon: Devon County Council have now produced their plan for the county, 'New Devon' which suggests a single Devon-wide unitary authority with with the exception of Plymouth and Torbay. Their recent press release is reproduced as a summary of the proposal, and there are continuing roadshows and opportunities for residents to give their views until October 14th. Final plans for all councils are to be submitted to central government by 28th November.

As usual, planning issues come under the spotlight. The recent application for a wind turbine in the Bigbury area has been withdrawn, but its background and the implications for possible similar applications in the AONB are discussed, as well as the story of how Kingsbridge came to acquire its very own derelict 'quarry' at Locks Hill. The Moorland building in Kingsbridge is a more successful example of development, as its then and now images show.

Woodcot in Salcombe has featured in both the local and national news in recent weeks, since it became public knowledge that its owners Age UK are exploring the sale of the house with its listed gardens and woodland, all in a prominent position on the Salcombe waterfront. There are strenuous local efforts to retain Woodcot as accommodation for older people, as its original donor intended, and to secure the continuing community use of the gardens and woods. The article explains how the campaign to save Woodcot came into being and is still growing.

Devon County Council's proposals for a 'New Devon' authority

Devon County Council released a statement on their plan for New Devon on 25th September, and it is available in full on their website. The following gives a summary of the proposals.

The Government has given local authorities in the county until November 28 to come up with proposals to replace the 'two-tier' district and county council structure.

Councillor Paul Arnott says that after extensive work by officers, and wide-ranging community engagement, it has become clear that a single unitary authority to replace the existing eight district councils and Devon County Council is the most logical option. The new council would work alongside the existing Plymouth and Torbay unitary authorities.

With decisions shaped by local communities through Neighbourhood Area Committee structures, the new council would be simpler, and be able to deliver change in partnership with local residents. Crucially, evidence shows it would have the scale and resilience required to deliver for those who most need local government support. The council's leader, Councillor Julian Brazil, has described the model as the 'least worst' option as the council faces real terms funding cuts from central government.

More than 6,000 Devon residents have completed a New Devon survey on LGR, with roadshow events taking place around the county, and expert financial and legal advice has been assessed before this leading option emerged.

Key stakeholders' views will be sought on the option before the council makes a final decision in November.

Cllr Arnott, Deputy Leader of Devon County Council and



A county-wide unitary authority, with Plymouth and Torbay retaining their own boundaries

LGR lead, said: "New Devon would provide stronger local accountability, smarter use of public money, consistent, high-quality public services and will create opportunities for our area's economy bringing in new investment and jobs.

"It will allow us to join up local services, bringing together the strengths of district councils and the county council and will also allow for much closer working, and enhanced local decision-making, with key partners including the NHS, police and voluntary sector.

"It gives Devon a stronger voice – in government, in devolution negotiations, and in shaping the county's future. It cherishes the 'Devon Brand' and the strong affinity felt by residents to our amazing natural environment.

"We want to engage and hear from our residents, communities and businesses on this ambitious plan as it develops and for everyone to have their say."

Neighbourhood Area Committees would potentially

be decision-making bodies comprising of representatives from a range of organisations including town and parish councils, police, and local health services. These committees would bring a new and enhanced level of local decision-making to communities.

Cllr Julian Brazil, Leader of Devon County Council said: "The Government is intent on forcing through changes which will cost many millions of pounds to implement and provides a great deal of uncertainty for residents and staff who provide critical services.

"This option has emerged as the least worst, and if we do not put it forward then we may inadvertently pave the way towards a disastrous disruption to existing key services such as adult social care and children's services.

"We've not reached this position in isolation. We have canvassed the views of many, from across all sectors, which we are continuing to do. This is

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‘New Devon’ continued ...

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a decision that affects us all, and one that ultimately must benefit all those who live and work in Devon. That’s why we’ve taken this time to thoroughly evaluate all options, taking into account the views of others.”

The council’s New Devon survey is being used to influence decisions around LGR. Devon residents have until October 14 to complete the survey, which can be accessed via the council website.

Key benefits of a New Devon Unitary Authority:

Financial Sustainability and Efficiency

It creates a more financially resilient Devon with a highest scope for efficiencies, helping to cover forecasted budget deficits, short payback period (2 years), and avoids high transition costs.

Smarter Use of Resources

Maximises economies of scale, reduces duplication, and enables rapid integration of services for better value and delivery.

Merging key services that have an important stake in enabling sustainable development will help to unleash our economic and housing potential.

Protects and Improves Key Services

Maintains momentum in improving children’s and SEND services, avoids disruption to county-wide services, including adult social care, and enhances public protection.

Supports Public Sector Workforce

Aids recruitment and retention, offers career stability, and strengthens the public sector workforce.

Agile and Responsive

Greater capacity to respond to risks and opportunities through streamlined governance and service delivery.

Strengthened Partnerships

Builds on existing collaborations with NHS, police, and voluntary sectors to improve outcomes and reduce operational risks.

Keeps Democracy Local

Enhances local governance, supports town and parish councils, and ensures decisions are made close to where people live.

One Front Door for Services

Simplifies access to all council services—online, by phone, or in person—making it easier for residents.

Respects Local Identity

Maintains existing boundaries and recognises the unique identities of Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay.

Empowers Local Communities

Focuses on place-based delivery, recognising the unique strengths and needs of different communities.

Minimises Disruption and Confusion

Avoids splitting services or creating uncertainty during transition, ensuring continuity and clarity for residents.

Background

Earlier this year, the Government invited all councils in Devon to submit proposals for changing the current structure of local government. Final proposals need to be submitted to government by the end of November. Government will then decide which proposal(s) will go to statutory stakeholders for consultation during the first half of 2026 and is expected to then make a final decision in the summer. If New Devon is selected, following the required legislation being passed, a shadow authority would be created in 2027 with the new authority ‘vesting’ or commencing from 2028.

The consultation details can be found at:

www.devon.gov.uk/haveyoursay/consultations/new-devon-have-your-say-on-our-future/

The Moorland, Union Road, Kingsbridge



2021

The building’s previous history has included its use by W.H.Prowse & G.H.Prowse, brewers, whose brewhouse was next door at the former Coast nightclub; the Moorland Mineral Water Company; Lonsdale’s Cash and Carry for storage of frozen food and canned goods; and the last business use, by Savill Funeral Services.

In 2021 the property was purchased by the Watchtower Society of Great Britain for the proposed use as a meeting hall facility. As a welcome change to the practice of destroying



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history, the building is being transformed into the new Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses for Kingsbridge.

The building work is nearing completion and a community open day will be held shortly.

The link below is to a walk through the property when it was up for auction in 2021.

www.devonlive.com/news/property/gallery/inside-dark-former-kingsbridge-funeral-5405169

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Bigbury wind turbine application withdrawn ...

On Thursday 3 July Octopus Energy finally submitted their long-awaited application to construct a wind turbine, some 90 metres high, on land at Challonscombe Farm in the parish of Bigbury. Had the application been approved it would have been the largest proposal to date for a wind turbine on a site in the South Devon National Landscape.

Instead, and two days before Bigbury Parish Council was to meet to discuss the application, the notice (below) was posted on the Bigbury Community website:

The explanation offered, that the application was no longer financially viable, might be considered questionable given that the price the government is guaranteeing for onshore wind is now both higher and for a longer period than it was previously.

An alternative possibility may have been the fact that earlier in the day the draft five-year review of the Bigbury Neighbourhood Plan had been published. It continued to insist that proposals for wind turbines and solar arrays on open farmland would not be supported.

That, when coupled with NPPF and JLP Policies which also continued to weigh against the development and the precedents set by previous applications, meant that had the application proceeded to determination it may well have been refused.

To help understand why it is worth beginning by looking

at the field at Challonscombe Farm, Oldhouse Lane, Kingston where the wind turbine was due to be located.

And there have been a number of previous wind turbine applications in the South Hams District, the most notable applications rejected were:

In the South Devon Area of Outstanding Beauty (Winslade Farm near Frogmore).

43/2567/13/F – ‘Application for erection of 1no. wind turbine (estimated output of 0.05 megawatts) with 24.6 metres hub height, 34.2 metres tip height and associated infrastructure for agricultural use (following judicial review and the court order dated 18.08.14 quashing the decision dated 21.05.14)’.

The application was approved by the District Council, decision quashed by the Judiciary, called in and dismissed by the Secretary of State.

Two other applications just outside the South Devon Area of Outstanding Beauty.

Torr Quarry near Kingsbridge.

08/1968/12/F - Erection of 2 wind turbines (0.90MW) up to 78 metres tip height and associated infrastructure was **withdrawn**.

08/0600/13/F - Resubmission of planning application 08/1968/12/F for erection of 1 wind turbine (0.90MW) up to 78 metres tip height and associated infrastructure for a period of 25 years (down from two) was **refused by**

DW61 1MW



The type of turbine proposed for the Bigbury site
the District Council and dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate.

Luscombe Cross near Harberton, Totnes - TRESCO and Totnes Community Wind Farm.

23/1990/12/F - Installation of 2 wind turbines (hub height 64m, tip height 99.5m) to generate 2.3MW per turbine. **Refused** by the District Council but no appeal followed.

By comparison with the Totnes community wind farm proposal, the Octopus application was weak on

community involvement and demonstrations to assist the wider community in gauging the visual impact of the proposal.

While even Friends of the Earth, who actively promote onshore wind turbines, and say:

‘Friends of the Earth is a leading environmental organisation working to create a sustainable future. We fight for climate justice through grassroots campaigns and legal action. Whether that’s using the law to stop fossil fuel projects,



The proposed site at Challonscombe Farm



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CANCELLATION OF EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3RD

by Ian Bramble | Sep 1, 2025 | News & Notices, Bigbury Parish Council, Memorial Hall, PC Planning, Bigbury News, Bigbury Net Zero | 5 comments

Due to the applicant Octopus Energy withdrawing its wind turbine application as now no longer commercially viable the Extraordinary Council meeting on September 3rd is now cancelled.

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<https://SouthHamsSociety.org>

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Bigbury wind turbine continued ...

With the drone positioned 85 metres above the location of the turbine, this image looking northwest, Highlands is to the left, Modbury is to the right 3.2 km away (two miles).]



View to the west. Ayrmer Cove and Westcombe.

Kingston is in the distance (3 km).



The views in all directions from the proposed site

Bolt Tail (8.7 km) St Ann's Chapel (1.2 km) Burgh Island (4.7 km)



Looking towards the early morning sun, the Avon Estuary (2.5 Km)



or pushing for greater rights to protect nature and our environment.

Join our passionate community of campaigners and lawyers to local action groups and supporters across the country. Together, we can create a greener, fairer future'.

And who emphasise for renewable energy:

'But if the UK is to produce the cheap, green electricity it needs by 2030, we need to see lots more onshore renewable energy as well, and quickly. For reasons of speed, most of this will need to be built near to where the electricity grid already has spare capacity.

Onshore renewable energy is fast to build, taking as little as 1 year if planning and grid constraints are resolved. **The government has amended planning policy to remove long-standing, unfair constraints**
<https://www.facebook.com/SouthHamsSociety>

on onshore wind introduced by the previous Conservative government. It's shifted the balance in favour of granting permission for onshore renewable energy developments in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)'.

'For our original analysis published in 2024, Friends of the Earth worked with the UKRI Centre for Doctoral Training in Environmental Intelligence based at the University of Exeter to identify the land that could be most suitable for new onshore renewable energy. For this updated analysis, we've taken on board feedback we've received from developers and others since we first published the article'.

Go on to stress that for National Parks and National Landscapes:

'We've been deliberately conservative in this analysis, for example we excluded:

'Wind and solar farms in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). We'd support smaller developments in these areas if sensitively located. We also support the National Farmers' Union and Renewable UK's call for small turbines (i.e. less than 25 metres tall) to be granted planning permission (so-called "permitted development") in such protected landscapes, subject to prior approval'.

The Bigbury turbine would of course have been noticeably taller than 25 metres and, as the photographs that follow demonstrate, it would have been far from sensitively located:

And as the current government guidance for renewable energy makes clear:

'In the case of wind turbines, a planning application should not be approved unless the

proposed development site is an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan'.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy>

While the crucial Bigbury Neighbourhood Plan Policy states:

Policy BP29 - Renewable energy

Proposals for small scale renewable energy schemes, close to or attached to individual properties will generally be supported providing these have no harmful impact on the appearance or character of a designated or undesignated heritage asset or on the South Devon AONB, including cumulative landscape and visual impact.

Proposals for solar arrays or wind turbines on open farmland will not be supported.

<https://SouthHamsSociety.org>

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Bigbury wind turbine

In their submitted Octopus Energy planning application document 'The Rolliers Planning statement (Inc. Design & Access)' Octopus argued in paragraph 5.2.10

'As such, policy BP29 is considered out of date given the number of important wider policy, political and environmental matters that have continued to develop since the NP was prepared, not just the passage of time'.

However, and as previously noted, Bigbury Parish Council have commenced a five year review of their Bigbury

Neighbourhood Plan.

So it is almost certain that there will be a coordinated campaign by groups such as Bigbury Net Zero to change the wording of BP29 to permit the Octopus application to be resubmitted with a far better chance of success.

Consequently Society members and others who wish to ensure that our protected landscapes remain free from the imposition of industrial-scale renewable energy installations also need to make their opinions known.

BIGBURY PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 5 YEAR REVIEW

by Ian Bramble | Sep 13, 2025 | NP Papers & Consultations, Neighbourhood Plan, Community | 3 comments

 [Bigbury Neighbourhood Plan Five Year Review](#)

"Bigbury Parish Council invites members of the public to comment and add their views to the Parish's Neighbourhood Plan as part of the five year review process. The Neighbourhood Planning Committee has proposed amendments that are highlighted and take into account the updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), The Plymouth and South Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) and JLP Supplementary Document. Bigbury Parish Council needs all your views and comments etc. Please let the Council have your views/comments via 'Comments' on this website or send them to the Parish Clerk at clerk.bigburypc@gmail.com or to the Chairman on cllrhainwright.bigburypc@gmail.com by Friday 24th October 2025

Locks Hill

OR: how did Kingsbridge inherit a wasteland derelict site in the South Devon National Landscape?



Recent images of the Locks Hill site

To find the answer you have to go back to the South Hams Local Development Framework and the formation of the Kingsbridge Site Allocations Development Plan Document February 2011.

However before that the May 2009 Sustainability Threshold Assessment had given Lock's Hill an amber sustainability rating, stating the constraints to the development of the site to be poor integration and relation to adjacent land uses with steep topography.

Yet despite the amber assessment, the field still made it into the 2011 Kingsbridge Site Allocations adopted by South Hams District Council as K4.

But by the time of the 2017 Joint Local Plan the site was still shown as amber and so removed.

Unfortunately it was already too late. During 2015 an outline application had been submitted but refused by South Hams District Council for four reasons:

1. *The development by reason of its scale, layout and design would result in harm to the setting of a Grade II Listed Building (Buttville House) and this harm is not outweighed by any public benefit of the proposed scheme. The development would therefore be contrary to the advice contained within paragraphs 132 and 134 of the NPPF, S66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings) Act 1990, and Policy DP6 of the Development Policies DPD.*

2. *The development is*

considered to constitute Major Development in the AONB and would cause visual harm to the character and appearance of the area, there are no exceptional circumstances to justify the development contrary to the advice contained within Paragraph 116 of the NPPF. Furthermore, it has not been demonstrated that the development within the AONB is in the public interest. The development would be contrary to Policy DP2 of the Development Policies DPD.

6 →

6	Lock's Hill	1.45	Grade 3	1	AONB	Constraints	Poor integration and relation to adjacent land uses	Steep topography
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Sustainability Threshold Assessment, May 2009

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<https://SouthHamsSociety.org>

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Locks Hill continued



South Hams
Local Development Framework



Kingsbridge Site Allocations
Development Plan Document
February 2011

Adopted

*Kingsbridge Site
Allocations 2011 -
Garden Mill is still
listed as site K4*

6 Development Proposals

Garden Mill Area

- 6.23 The Garden Mill area comprises an employment estate and informal open space. The proposal for its regeneration is part of a wider strategy for the town to maximise PDL opportunities and improve employment areas. Although it is relatively close to the key services and facilities of the town, the area is used inefficiently. The proposal will seek to intensify its use, ensuring maintenance of at least the existing number of jobs, and improve pedestrian and cycle links to the town centre.
- 6.24 The Garden Mill area is at risk from both tidal and fluvial flooding. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment concluded that there is a flood risk, but safe access and egress routes are considered achievable via Derby Road (the main access to the area).

Proposal K4: Garden Mill Area

Mixed use development is proposed beyond 2016, to include:

- Maintenance of at least existing numbers of jobs in the area;
- Offices and workshops;
- About 50 dwellings; and
- Cycle and footpath provision including enhanced access to the town centre.

Development of this area should accord with a Masterplan previously approved by the Council.

The K4 proposal

Table 1: Kingsbridge Site Allocations to 2016 and beyond

Site	Development up to 2016		Development beyond 2016	
	Total Dwellings	Employment land (Ha)	Total Dwellings	Employment Land (Ha)
Proposal K1 North West Kingsbridge	100	1	-	-
Proposal K2 Quayside	-	-	100	1
Proposal K3 Union Road Area	-	-	150	-
Proposal K4 Garden Mill Area	-	-	50	-
Proposal K5 West Alvington Hill	75	0.5	-	-
Proposal K6 Avon Centre	10	0.1	-	-
TOTAL	185*	1.6	300	1

Site Allocations 2011 - details of Kingsbridge sites

3. The design and layout of the development is incoherent and fails to take the opportunity available for improving the character and quality of the area. It does not, therefore, represent good design and is contrary to the provisions of Policy DP1 of the Development Policies DPD and paragraph 64 of the NPPF; and

4. The applicant has not adequately demonstrated that a sufficient level of affordable housing and other necessary financial contributions cannot be delivered. In particular the Council considers that the land value used in the applicant's viability assessment is too high. The development would be contrary to paragraph 173 of the NPPF and Policy CS6 of the Core Strategy DPD.

The applicant then appealed the decision and the appeal was upheld.

The Planning Inspector concluded:

61. The appeal site does not form part of any proposed application in the emerging Local Plan and it has been suggested that this indicates it is unsuitable in planning terms. However, the Council acknowledges that the emerging plan is at an early stage on its route to adoption and thus very little weight can be given to this. Rather the situation is that the site forms part of the allocated site K4 in the current Development Plan and the Council has confirmed that the proposal complies with this policy. I have found no prejudice to delivery of the rest of the allocation as a result of the appeal

Considering Sites for Development in Kingsbridge Parish

Site Information Pack

This pack contains:

A Site Information Table

This table sets out information about the constraints and opportunities for each site which have been considered. Depending on the constraints identified, we have concluded that there are either 'significant constraints' to development or 'limited constraints' to development.

Site Maps

These maps show all of the sites which have been considered as part of this exercise.

Constraint Maps

These maps show the different constraints, such as conservation areas, flood zones and wildlife sites.



Site Information Packs March 2017



For more information

South Hams and West Devon Place Making Team
Follaton House, Plymouth Road, Totnes, TQ9 5NE
Email - Strategic.Planning@wdevon.gov.uk
www.southhams.gov.uk
www.facebook.com/southhamsdistrictcouncil
www.twitter.com/SouthHams_DC

2017 Joint Local Plan - the site is still shown as 'amber' and therefore removed

scheme. The Council stated in the hearing that it can demonstrate less than a two year supply of deliverable housing sites and whilst the proposed development would deliver less than the policy target level of affordable homes it would nevertheless accord with the relevant policies and make a valued contribution towards meeting the need for such dwellings. Given the extent of the shortfall I give this benefit considerable weight'.

62. The setting of the adjacent listed building would be preserved and I have found no significant harm in terms of design quality or the effect on the interests of 3rd

parties. In all these respects the proposal would accord with the Development Plan policy. Whilst I give great weight to the protection of the AONB, given the limited extent of the harm and the plan allocation of the site for development, I conclude that the considerable benefit of the provision of housing is sufficient in this instance to outweigh that harm. The appeal should therefore succeed.

The decision by the Planning Inspectorate was a reminder of the importance of the Local Plan while Neighbourhood Plans also carry significant weight in planning decisions.

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Save Woodcot campaign surges ahead

The Save Woodcot campaign continues apace thanks to the South Hams Society doing everything it can to protect this last precious slice of Salcombe woodland and water frontage....

There are at the time of writing, nearly 3000 signatures on a petition asking Age UK to gift Woodcot on to another charity, as it was gifted to them, rather than selling it and dishonouring the covenant that was put on it to ensure that it remained as a residential home for old people.

For any readers who aren't familiar with the story behind the Woodcot Campaign read on. It is a fascinating story from a time in the not so distant past, when Britain still ruled the waves and one family had such great wealth that they could afford to donate two magnificent houses on Salcombe waterfront to charity. Such magnanimity is unthinkable today. Salcombe owes the McIlwraith and Jennings families a huge debt of gratitude.

It all began earlier this summer.

A SHS member was contacted by a local woman who, like her had attended Salcombe Girls school back in the 1960's. She wanted to discuss Woodcot. So a meeting was arranged at a house in Salcombe and after a quick catch up the bombshell that would make the blood run cold, was dropped: Woodcot was being sold by Age UK the charity who had inherited it from Help the Aged.

The friend had attended a dinner party in London; She had been seated next to Paul Farmer, the CEO of Age UK and quite casually, by way of conversation he told her that Age UK were planning to sell Woodcot. Understandably, upon hearing these words, alarm bells began to ring in her mind.

Back in Salcombe meetings were convened, of local people who knew the family, of those who had lived at Woodcot or worked for the family. Anyone



Woodcot is the detached property to the lower right in this image, with its gardens and woodland extending along Cliff Road and inland

who cared or who simply couldn't countenance the loss of such a jewel from Salcombe's crown.

Fast forward to today. The campaign is still in progress but the cause to persuade Age UK to pass Woodcot on to another charity as it was passed to them....is still not won.

Perhaps most pertinently it is in the dishonouring of Miss Jennings' generous bequest by the charity that is supposed to uphold it, that sparked the moral outrage that has sustained the campaign to date. That a national charity like Age UK should seek to use its charitable income to overturn a covenant which is there to favour its own beneficiaries and precisely to stop such a thing happening, sits ill with many.

The covenant that Miss Jennings and her team of lawyers had had drawn up in 1969 was in line with Miss Jennings' deeply held Christian belief. When she gave her family home, Woodcot and its 7 acres of lush waterside gardens and 8 acres of woodland to VCS Voluntary Christian Services, it was tightly bound in a protective wrapper of a restrictive covenant limiting all further use of Woodcot to be only and ever used as a residential home for old people. If Age UK sell, it will trash this.

Lots of documents were pulled together adding color and content to the story of Woodcot. Everyone learned a bit more about the fascinating story behind the house and how it came to be such an important part of the fabric of Salcombe.

Miss Jennings' grandfather Andrew McIlwraith already a self-made man who had amassed his fortune through pioneering refrigerated shipping, sailed into Salcombe one evening in 1906 and fell in love with Woodcot. He bought it as his retirement home, a place where he and his wife could heal their grief at having lost two sons in the Boer war. In 1919 he purchased Cliff House, now home to Salcombe Yacht Club, Salcombe Town Library, the Town Council offices, the War Memorial and Cliff House Gardens. On the opposite side of the estuary he purchased land and gave much of it, from Rickham to Bolberry to the National Trust.

Compare and contrast such generosity of spirit to today. Where we have the ignominy of a national charity overturning a covenant in favour of their own bottom line.

Feelings about the potential sale of Woodcot ran high in Salcombe this summer. But still nothing happened. People were sad. A collective sigh of

resignation of here we go again seemed to settle as it had so many times before was the local people resigned themselves to yet another loss for the town. Even the town council seemed to be beaten. At a meeting in May they said that Age UK had said Woodcot wasn't viable "the figures don't add up - it's too expensive to run" and everyone accepted that it must be so.

It can't be saved.

But then something happened. One of the six remaining members still living at Woodcot got in touch with the South Hams Society. Could they help?

It turns out that they could. And they did. That willingness to not accept defeat without a fight, to not lose out to the vagaries of corporate charitydom, to utilize the civil society that thankfully still exists here in the South Hams. Several things happened all at once. Synchronicity.

It started with a simple petition on an online platform run by a local campaigner going by the name of Mediamaid. That petition got picked up by the Sunday Telegraph who published the story on 6th July 2025:-

"AGE UK "betraying elderly' by selling retirement home for millions..." ran the headline. The story was quickly picked up by the Daily Mail, the Daily Express, Devon Live, Western Morning News, Salcombe Gazette and Country Life.

Eventually after dithering the BBC decided to come out and covered the story on the local news on September the 9th. (To watch the news clip, click on the link to the crowdfunder at the end of this article.)

Fast forward a few months and the campaign has really pulled the community together. Now instead of accepting that Woodcot is unviable people have started to do some basic back of envelope arithmetic.

Age UK made a decision in 2015 to not re-let flats in Woodcot <https://SouthHamsSociety.org>

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... Save Woodcot

despite there being evident need and demand. Had they let out the ten remaining flats at a reasonable market rent of say £1000 pcm, they would have had an income of £10,000 a month, which is £120,00 per year. Multiply that by ten years and that is over a million pounds that Age UK have let slip through their fingers. Their story starts to unravel.

So with the media interest and the petition growing daily, other institutions started to take an interest. Other charities came forward to offer to take Woodcot on and run it in the spirit of Miss Jennings' covenant. Age UK aren't interested. Instead of passing Woodcot they want to cash it in for their wider charitable aims. All very laudable.

Except that it leaves Salcombe town and community, the remaining Woodcot residents and the future of charitable legacy giving rather worse off. Of course Age UK will be several million pounds better off - but - and here's the crux of the matter: is the loss to the region of such a wonderful asset really worth it? Woodcot could be turned into a wonderful asset for the town and community if only Age UK would do the charitable thing and gift it on as they themselves were gifted it in the first place? But as someone said "they aren't simply going to roll over and walk away from millions of pounds".

But do Age UK really need to sell Woodcot?

Will Age UK's gains cancel out the losses to Salcombe, to the wider community, the future residents? No.

What about the damage being done to Age UK's charitable reputation. The optics of their actions are not good. The Charity Commission is watching

but of course, like so many other governing bodies, it is pretty toothless. The media has woken up to what is going on. They smell a bigger story behind the headlines. They are watching and waiting too.

Now don't get us wrong. No one wants to knock a charity. It is a sad indictment of our times that a local community should be put in the position of having to stand up and expose a national charity in this way. Age UK only have themselves to blame. Salcombe has long since been plundered for its wealth, it has been changed out of all proportion from its days as a small yachting haven, now it is a town for the UK's super rich, it garners column inches in all the media. Nothing that happens in Salcombe stays quiet for too long. Even a Hollywood movie has just been shot there....

But Woodcot is a step too far. Woodcot is a much loved local institution. The town isn't going to give it up, Age UK are going to have to fight for it.

It is a testament to civil society that the town has pulled together the way it has.

One gets the feeling that there is something else at play here. Different local institutions such as Salcombe Holy Trinity Church, Salcombe Town Council, the South Hams Society, Salcombe Over 60's club, South Hams District Council, the local MP and Kingsbridge Care Hub have all stepped up to help the remaining Woodcot residents fight the challenge presented by Age UK's announcement that they were exploring selling Woodcot. Everyone is trying to reach Age UK and its trustees to persuade them to stop the sale and do what is best for Salcombe and the elders who Miss Jennings wanted to help. They aren't listening.

The campaign continues. If Age

UK, who are legally entitled to sell their asset, but are absolutely not allowed to ignore the covenant, then decide to dishonour Miss Jennings legacy, it will be a nail in the coffin for charitable giving for all charities.

The recent case in the High Court offers hope that donors' intentions will take precedence over charitable aims. British Camelids v Others (or similar). Alpacas/ Candida Midworth Estate:

'Judge Master Katherine McQuail ruled on 8/9/25

'...that the money should support the ongoing "charitable purposes" for which Midworth intended the gifts, even if the specific charities she named in her 1994 will no longer exist in their original form.... Focus on purpose not entities.'

If the defined purpose of a donor's covenanted gift can be ignored and the asset cashed in to be added to the charities cash pot - what is the point of leaving a gift under covenant?

Not all gifts have a single purpose. Miss Jennings wanted to leave Woodcot for a specific purpose: to provide residential accommodation for old people.. If she had just wanted the charity to have the cash, she could have sold Woodcot herself and given the money to charity - instead she wanted to leave a lasting legacy which is why she placed the restrictive covenant on Woodcot in the first place.

The need and demand for residential accommodation in Salcombe hasn't gone away - quite the contrary - Salcombe has a lack of affordable housing both for young and old people. It's bad enough that Age UK have been running Woodcot at a quarter capacity for years and turning old people away who wanted to live there. To

now sell will further reduce Salcombe's capacity to provide for old folk.

The SHS is seeking the opinion of leading counsel to identify the salient points, and to suggest how best to respond to Age UK on the relevant legal and equitable issues. This advice doesn't come cheap and money donated to the campaign will be used to pay for this, with any money left over going to support the charity that successfully takes over Woodcot. Please donate if you can.

The campaign will not stop until it has persuaded Age UK to pass Woodcot on to one of the substantial regional charities who have offered to take Woodcot on and run it as Miss Jennings intended.

If Age UK won't do that, it really does beg the question: Is Age UK CEO Paul Farmer running a charity that respects donors' wishes or is he a commercial landlord indulging in some property speculation?

[https://
gofund.me/320d2a65b](https://gofund.me/320d2a65b)

[https://
www.change.org/
SaveWoodcotSalcombeAgeuk](https://www.change.org/SaveWoodcotSalcombeAgeuk)



Letters of Representation submitted by the Society on recent planning applications can be found on our website: www.southhamsociety.org/objectionlist