Plympton Rural District Council Parish Council Housing

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Plympton Rural District Council (RDC) covered a great area, from as far away as Tamerton Foliot across Devon into Newton Ferrers and Holberton. Looking at different parish councils, it is possible to check what houses – especially council houses – were built during the 1920s.

On 17 July 1923, the Mayor of Plymouth said he looked forward to the time when Plympton would be more and more a residential town for the surplus population of Plymouth. He hoped the day was not far distant when they would work together and when even a part of Plympton, which touched Plymouth so closely on the Cattewater, would be commercially developed. He wanted to see Plympton prosper. The prosperity of Plympton was wrapped up in the prosperity of Plymouth.[1]

Compton Gifford

In July 1922 Plympton Rural Council's Housing Committee reported that after a visit by Mr Priest and Mr J. L. Fouracre, their engineer, the Ministry of Health had agreed to new houses in the Compton Gifford district being built for the working classes. They had also agreed to accept the Vinestone site under the assisted scheme and hoped that this would solve the problem of housing for the working classes in Compton.[2]

Plympton District Council placed an advertisement for tenders to build on what was the Vinestone site, which originally formed the council's Compton housing estate and was now ripe for development. This became known as Briar Road, Compton.

[1] *Western Morning News*, 17 July 1923.
[2] *Western Morning News*, 29 July 1922.

Figure 1: In 1926, John Davey, builder, lived at Briarville, Briar Road, Compton. He and his son were the builders of Briar Road, Compton and during the 1920s he was also chairman of Plympton District Council.

On Thursday 2 August 1928, the *Western Morning News* reported that many houses had now been built in Compton and needed electricity.[3]

In May 1928 it was reported that Devon County Council recognised the growing importance of the parish of Compton Gifford – within the boundaries of which is the residential suburb of Hartley – by granting it a parish council with seven members. At that meeting, the clerk was directed to draw the attention of the Plympton Rural Council to the unsatisfactory – and in some cases dangerous – condition of the footpaths, which had been disturbed by the contractors laying the cable for electricity.[4]

During the 1920s and into the 1930s, Hartley Park Estate grew vastly. There was Higher Compton and Lower Compton Road (although Lower Compton Road building began before the 1920s), some council houses and other private houses.

Private houses built in the 1920s and carrying on into the 1930s were: Hartley Park Villas; Hartley Park Gardens, built in 1924; Bainbridge Avenue; Langstone Estate; Lockington Avenue; and Widey View Estate, which was built between 1923 and 1926. Russell Avenue, Hartley also had houses being built pre-1920s, in the 1920s into the 1930s.

[3] *Western Morning News*, 2 August 1928.
[4] *Western Morning News*, 9 May 1928.

Crownhill

1–10 Meavy Avenue, Crownhill Estate, was built between 1926 and 1927. In May 1927 an advert was placed in the newspaper stating there was immediate possession of a freehold five-room house in Meavy Avenue, Crownhill for £600.[5]

Cornwood

From as early as 1922, 28 houses were built in Cornwood called 'Newtown'. A great deal of the men were working as labourers for the English China Clay Company.

On 13 August 1921, Plympton Rural Council's Housing Committee recommended rent at the houses in Cornwood should be 8s, excluding rates.[6]

Eggbuckland

On 30 March 1927, at an annual parish meeting of Eggbuckland, Mr R. J. Townsend, a member of the District Council, gave a brief resume of the council's activities and difficulties, especially with regard to road improvements and housing. He expressed the opinion that the housing scheme for the parish would be put in operation at an early date.[7]

On Tuesday 12 April 1927, the *Western Morning News* reported that Mr P. Loosemore stated that the transactions with regard to the building site at Eggbuckland had been completed. Instructions were given to proceed with the erection of the semi-detached houses as soon as possible.[8]

On 13 March 1928, the newspaper reported that complaints that outsiders were occupying the rural council houses at Eggbuckland had been made at a parish meeting the previous day. Mr Cox said he was opposed on principle to people from outside the parish getting houses before those who resided in the parish. He wanted to send a letter to the Ministry of Health urging that residents in the parish should get first choice in the selection of tenants. Mr Townsend felt that the houses in Eggbuckland were built for anyone in the Plympton district who might require them. It was a 'storm in a teacup', and all the occupants of the houses were deserving classes. The clerk suggested it would be better to write to the Rural Council urging that preference should be given to people of Eggbuckland. A motion to approach the Plymouth Gas Company in an endeavour to get a supply brought to Eggbuckland was unanimously approved.[9]

On Tuesday 27 March 1928, the Eggbuckland Council read a reply from Plymouth Gas Company stating they would invite estimates for service when the matter of supply would receive due consideration. The council expressed the opinion that the majority of the

[5] *Western Morning News*, 20 May 1927.
[6] *Western Morning News*, 13 August 1921.
[7] *Western Morning News*, 30 March 1927.
[8] *Western Morning News*, 12 April 1927.
[9] *Western Morning News*, 13 March 1928.

inhabitants of the village would welcome a gas supply. It is understood that the District Council would raise no objection to gas cookers being installed in their houses.[10]

On 19 March 1929, at a parish meeting at Eggbuckland, the parish decided to ask the Rural Council to prepare a sewerage scheme for the area between Bowden and Crownhill to meet modern conditions and improve the sanitary arrangements in connection with the number of new houses being built in the district. The parish also passed a resolution requesting the council to proceed with the completion of the housing scheme, and at the same time asking them to revise the rents so that all houses in the district might be put on the same basis.[11]

Elburton

On 26 August 1922, the *Western Morning News* reported at a meeting of Plympton St Mary Rural Council the previous day that the council houses at Elburton were ready for occupation.[12]

In September 1922 the Ministry of Health refused the council's recommendation of 7s a week rent for their Elburton houses; 8s 6d being the figure the council were requested to consider with a view to its adoption. A resolution was passed to the effect that the Ministry be informed that the council still thought 7s sufficient rent on the basis of other houses in the district and that the council would be willing to discuss the matter with a representative of the Ministry.[13]

Plympton Rural District Council and the Ministry of Health disagreed over the next few months as to how much to charge for rents; the Ministry wanting 8s 6d a week, while the council stuck at 7s a week rent. At a meeting in October 1922, Mr J. Glover asked the question, 'How were the working men going to pay such a rent?' He regarded it as ridiculous. Another member said by such a rent they would be turning out those for whom the houses were intended.[14]

On Saturday 3 November 1923, petitions were received from Cornwood, Elburton and Plympton for reductions in rents of the council houses. The clerk was instructed to communicate with the Ministry for a reduction.[15]

Honicknowle

On 30 August 1927, Plympton St Mary Rural District Council (RDC) were inviting tenders for the construction of a new road on their housing site at Honicknowle in the parish of St Budeaux.[16]

In the 1920s, Plympton St Mary RDC built 40 houses at Woodland Villas, Honicknowle:

[10] *Western Morning News*, 27 March 1928.
[11] *Western Morning News*, 19 March 1929.
[12] *Western Morning News*, 26 August 1922.
[13] *Western Morning News*, 9 September 1922.
[14] *Western Morning News*, 7 October 1922.
[15] *Western Morning News*, 3 November 1923.
[16] *Western Morning News*, 30 August 1927.

When St Budeaux Parish Council met on Monday, Mr J. H. Coughling (Honicknowle) submitted a petition of protest, signed by all the occupiers of Honicknowle council houses, regarding the increase of 1s per week in their rents. The matter was adjourned until next meeting.[17]

Newton Ferrers

Newton Ferrers Electoral Register does not give house names or house numbers; in 1929/1930 they were called Council House. On 2 February 1932, the council proposed to change the name from Council House. Rev Charles Burrell Yonge, vicar of Newton Ferrers, appealed against the names that the council proposed to assign to four roads in the parish.

Mr Percy Loosemore said the names were applied in the parish as a result of representations made by the postal authorities. Postmen had experienced difficulty in delivering letters on account of the absence of specific names for many roads. The names the Rural Council proposed to assign did not come originally from his council but from the parish councils. Since complaints had been received about the names it was proposed to give to roads in Newton Ferrers, it had been reconsidered by the parish council in conjunction with the rural authority. The Bench decided that Riverside Road should remain.[18]

The sixteen council houses built in the late 1920s in Newton Ferrers that were known as Council House became Butts Park.

Stone Barton, Plympton

This was the largest amount of council houses built in Plympton and the surrounding area. There was at least sixty-seven council houses at Stone Barton, Plympton in the late 1920s.

Figure 2: Stone Barton Road.

[17] *Western Morning News*, 19 March 1930.
[18] *Western Morning News*, 2 February 1932.

In July 1922, Mr H. G. Murdoch stated that a number of houses had been sold to non-residents already and if the council carried on with the present policy, the housing shortage in Plympton would not be relieved and they would probably be 'landed with another housing scheme'. He said:

> When the scheme was first considered members of the council said, "We are going to build these houses for our heroes," and now there were more applications on the books than the number of houses they were building, was it not a breach of faith with the ratepayers to sell the houses to outsiders? People had come from Lostwithiel, Bere Ferrers and Plymouth.[19]

On 16 December 1922 there were allegations of shoddy workmanship and poor materials in the building of new houses at Stone Barton. A fireplace fell out at 27 Stone Barton, which was occupied by Mr Samuel Hitchen, and struck Mrs Hitchen as she snatched her three-year-old-son out of danger, flinging burning coal on to the carpet. Mrs Hitchen extinguished the fire by means of buckets of water, but considerable damage was done, in respect of which the Housing Committee of the council reported received a claim for £20 16s.[20]

Mr H. G. Bicknell, writing in December 1922 about the housing defects in the Stone Barton houses said:

> I should like to make the remarks I made at the Rural Council meeting with reference to the above perfectly clear. They were made in a somewhat heated atmosphere and convey probably to many people a wrong impression. They referred essentially to details and in no part to constructional work, which I believe to have been carried out in a thoroughly sound and workmanlike manner. But I believe that for safety's sake the wood should be taken out and fixed in a better and stronger manner.[21]

He believed that Mr Coles's workmen were already making good any defects that had been pointed out to them.

On Monday 9 July 1923, the tenants of houses erected by the Plympton Rural Council at Stone Barton addressed a petition to the council requesting that they will reconsider the question of the reduction in the rents of the houses. It is argued that rents in council houses in other parts of the country had been reduced and that the relative rents in comparison with the present reduction in wages was too high. It was also thought that the price of electric light should be reduced.[22]

On 17 November 1923, a letter received from the purchaser of one of the new council houses at Stone Barton, complaining that the slates were coming off and letting the rain in, was read at Plympton Rural Council. The clerk was instructed to reply that the owner was now responsible.

At that meeting it was reported that applications had been received from tenants of the houses for permission to take in paying guests. Mr Lewis thought it would be a big mistake if people were allowed to do so. Stone Barton would, in his opinion, be 'slumdom' in a few years if this

[19] *Western Morning News*, 1 July 1922.
[20] *Western Morning News*, 16 December 1922.
[21] *Western Morning News*, 18 December 1922.
[22] *Western Morning News*, 9 July 1923.

were allowed. Mr H.G. Murdoch mentioned that three lodgers were found in one house, each paying 10s a week, and the rent of the house was only 10s a week. The matter was referred back.[23]

On 29 December 1923 more defects in Stone Barton Council Houses were found. The council had received a complaint that fire grates had fallen down in some of the council houses. Mr Hendy stated that in one case, where the fire was burning in a room in which an old lady lay in bed, the grate fell out and but for prompt attention her life might have been endangered. He asked upon whom the responsibility for the repairs rested.

Mr P. T. Loosemore, said it was for the architect to see that the building defects were made good by the contractors. Most of the defects appeared within the three month period of liability of the contractor, and notices regarding them were sent to him but they were not all remedied. Those were the houses in which the grates were falling out. He stated that half of the retention money was still in hand and Mr P. Hine thought the council had better stick to it.

Mr R. Priest asked if a report on the houses was made by the architect when he was instructed to do so 12 months ago. The clerk replied that the architect submitted a report about three months ago to the Housing Committee intimating that he had given notice to the contractors to carry out certain repairs.

Mr Priest considered it should have been seen that the terms of the notices were complied with. The delay was due to the architect not making reports upon the houses from time to time. The clerk admitted that there had been a lot of delay from that cause and he could not make 'any head or tail out of the whole thing'.[24] Some pressure should be brought to bear to get it squared up, but he did not think it wise to discuss it further in public. The matter was referred to the committee.

On 2 March 1925, Mr J. H. Glover said it was most unfair for the council to sell a house at Stone Barton over the head of the tenant. They should have notice that the houses were going to be sold. Mr Townshend thought the sooner the council got rid of their houses at Stone Barton and relieved the ratepayers to the extent of a penny rate, the better it would be. The matter dropped.[25]

In September 1927, at a meeting of Plympton St Mary RDC, Mr Loosemore announced that 165 applications had been received for the 34 houses in course of erection at Stone Barton.[26]

Complaints were made at a special meeting of Plympton Rural Council on 28 July 1928 that the press were not notified of such meetings. The chairman, Mr W. H. Elford, said he refused to discuss the matter then and declared the meeting ended. Nevertheless, one or two questions were raised and a resolution passed in respect of the abatement of nuisance alleged to be created by the use of loud speakers on the Stone Barton housing estate. The clerk stated that several

[23] *Western Morning News*, 17 July 1923.
[24] *Western Morning News*, 29 December 1923.
[25] *Western Morning News*, 2 March 1925.
[26] *Western Morning News*, 10 September 1927.

complaints had been received of annoyance caused by neighbours through owners of wireless sets taking their loud speakers outdoors, or using them with the windows wide open.[27]

Sparkwell

On Monday 5 May 1930, Plympton St Mary RDC asked for tenders for the erection of forty houses at Sparkwell.[28]

Tamerton Foliot

In the late 1920s, Plympton RDC built twenty houses at Harwood Villas, Tamerton Foliot.

In 1926 there were reports in the newspapers of arguments between Mr Percy T. Loosemore, clerk of Plympton RDC, and Mr Walter Radcliffe, J. P. of Warleigh, Tamerton. Mr Loosemore shared a letter he had written to Mr Radcliffe:

> As you are probably aware my Council have under consideration a housing scheme for the parish of Tamerton Foliot and a committee have inspected among other sites, land belonging to you, situate and abutting on Old Warleigh Lane. I have pleasure in enclosing herewith a sketch showing the land in question, coloured pink, which is approximately 2.25 acres in extent. I shall be glad to hear whether you are disposed to sell this land to the Council for the purposes mentioned, and, if so, upon what terms.[29]

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Mr Walter Radcliffe's reply was in the *Western Morning News* on Wednesday 10 November 1926:

> Dear Sir, I am in receipt of your letter of the 22nd instant with sketch enclosed, showing that your Council desires to acquire the entire road frontage of No. 465, leaving the rest of the field inaccessible from the road and landlocked, and also destroying the lower entrance into the adjoining field, No. 458, which, owing to the levels cannot be entered from Old Warleigh Lane on the south except through the gateway leading into No 465 and across the land coloured pink.
>
> These important points do not appear to have been considered by the inspecting committee, and there are other objects to this particular site. I am not only willing, but anxious, to assist your Council in its endeavour to provide houses, and if your surveyor will be good enough to call upon me (by appointment) at my chambers, 6 Princess Square, Plymouth with the necessary Ordnance sheet, I shall be happy to indicate other sites near the village which I can dispose of on reasonable terms and which I consider more suitable for the purpose.[30]

Mr Radcliffe said that his letter was not acknowledged, nor does it appear to have been mentioned to the council:

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[27] *Western Morning News*, 28 July 1928.
[28] *Western Morning News*, 5 May 1930.
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[30] *Western Morning News*, 10 November 1926.

> The land I can dispose of, and practically, any part of which the Council can have on reasonable terms, is situate close to the village, conveniently high, abutting on a good road, within easy reach of the school, no great distance from the termination of a main sewer and the Plymouth water pipes, and, in my opinion, and that of some of the most practical men in Tamerton, admirably suited for the Council's purposes.[31]

On Saturday 23 April 1927, the *Western Morning News* reported that Mr Percy Loosemore, at a Plympton RDC meeting, read a letter from a firm of Plymouth solicitors on behalf of the owner of certain land at Tamerton Foliot, which it was proposed to acquire under a Compulsory Acquisition Order. Mr Loosemore was unhappy at the tone of the letter and said that its terms reflected more on him than on the council. There had been no question of compulsion at all, and the man had never been led to believe that the land would be acquired compulsorily. Mr Loosemore said:

> The owner was, indeed, pleased with his bargain, and the question of compulsory acquisition was not raised until the Ministry had declined to accept the terms of the agreement. The man was a willing seller and they were willing buyers, and it was only the question of price.[32]

On Friday 23 September 1927, the *Western Morning News* reported on the opposition to an application of the Plympton St Mary RDC to acquire land compulsorily at Tamerton Foliot for housing purposes. This was conducted by Mr W. H. Collin, Ministry of Health inspector, and the land in question was owned by Mr Sidney Avery. Mr John Davey, chairman of the council, described it as an ideal site.

Mr W. H. Thompson, engineer and surveyor to the council, stated there was greater need for houses at Tamerton than in any other part of the rural district. Most of the existing houses were old and in very poor condition. Many were unsuitable for human habitation and would have been closed long ago but for the serious shortage of houses in the village. Only six houses had been built in the last six years and two of these were of temporary wooden character.

Mr P. T. Loosemore, clerk, said the question of a housing scheme for Tamerton Foliot had been under consideration by the council for some years and he outlined the steps taken to find suitable sites. At a conference with Mr Avery, he had suggested a price of 4d per square foot of land, and a provisional price of 3d was agreed to. Unfortunately, as the district valuer was not approached at the time, the Ministry would not sanction the purchase of the site at the figure suggested and the council, after further negotiations failed, decided on the compulsory acquisition of the land.

Mr Avery's solicitors wrote suggesting that the land formed part of a smallholding, to which he was shortly going to retire on account of ill health, and that its acquisition would be detrimental to his making a living. Mr Loosemore suggested that Mr Avery's livelihood would not be affected by the acquisition of the land, because he had certain private means, and that by obtaining building value for land which his father obtained at agricultural rates, he was adding to those means. He also suggested that the land was of comparatively little value from an agricultural standpoint.

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[31] Ibid.
[32] *Western Morning News*, 23 April 1927.

Mr John Davey, chairman of the Rural Council, said there was great need for houses in Tamerton Foliot. Various sites had been inspected at different times but were regarded as unsuitable. When asked by the inspector Mr Davey, he said they needed something like 20 to 24 houses. There was then a discussion as to what land the council had tried and failed to successfully acquire since 1919.

Mr Walter Radcliffe, one of the chief landowners in Tamerton Foliot, stated that he had always been willing to sell land to the council, but his invitation that they should send a responsible official to discuss sites had never been taken advantage of. He had never been approached from 1920 to 1926. It was untrue to suggest that he had prompted Mr Avery's opposition because he (witness) wanted to sell his land and it was a very unjust acquisition.

Answering Mr Loosemore, Mr Radcliffe said his opposition was due to his desire to defend Mr Avery against gross injustice and because from past experience he felt he ought to be present to defend himself against any mis-statements that might be made. The inquiry was closed.[33]

On 31 October 1927, at a special meeting of the Plympton St Mary RDC, the question of erecting new houses at Tamerton Foliot was discussed. It was decided to invite tenders for twenty houses of two different types. Mr Percy Loosemore reported that as a result of the recent inquiry, the Ministry had confirmed the Compulsory Acquisition Order in relation to the land owned by Mr Avery at Tamerton. It was resolved that the necessary steps should be taken for acquiring the land.

Mr Walford Thompson, engineer, stated that he had designed a smaller type of house for Tamerton than had been erected previously by the council. He hoped that they would cost £100 less than those which were being built at present. The total floor area of the Tamerton house would be 90 square feet less, but nevertheless the living room would measure 17 ×12 feet and the best bedroom 12 feet × 10 foot 4 inches.

This led to a discussion by various members, some liking Mr Thompson's suggestion, others not. Mr E. J. W. Watkins declared that it was the duty of the council to provide houses for people with families, 'They ought to recognise that the working-class children wanted as much room as those of the upper classes.'[34]

Mr S. F. Lee proposed that ten houses should be built according to the engineer's plan and ten similar to those already being erected by the council, but it was finally decided that tenders be invited for twelve of the smaller type and eight of the larger.

On Tuesday 8 November 1927, Plympton St Mary RDC placed an advert asking for tenders for the erection of twenty houses in pairs at Tamerton Foliot.[35]

On Saturday 26 January 1929, the *Western Morning News* reported that the exclusive rents for the new council houses being erected at Tamerton was be 8s per week for type A and 5s 6d per

[33] *Western Morning News*, 23 September 1927.
[34] *Western Morning News*, 31 October 1927.
[35] *Western Morning News*, 8 November 1927.

week for type B, subject to review when the final accounts were completed. Mr J. F. Hollow suggested that the respective rents be reduced from 8s to 7s and 5s 6d to 5s, and moved that the recommendation be referred back for further consideration: 'Rents of council houses in the area are too high'.[36] However, the committee's recommendation was adopted by twenty-two votes to five.

Yealmpton

Just like at Tamerton, there were various complaints about the way that Plympton Rural Council wanted to acquire land for housing needs. There were disagreements between the council and Colonel Bastard and his agent.

On 21 April 1927 at a Yealmpton parish meeting, a resolution was passed petitioning the Ministry of Health to hold a public inquiry 'into the unbusinesslike method adopted by Plympton Rural Council to acquire a site for workmen's dwellings'.[37]

Mr Samuel Snawdon, who presided, explained what the Rural Council had already done and said that, in his opinion, Colonel R. Bastard had been treated very discourteously by the Plympton Rural Council. Colonel Bastard had been anxious to place sites at the disposal of the council for this purpose and had written through his agent on several occasions and expressed his willingness to help forward the matter, but could not get anything definite from them. He continued:

> The correspondence between the Rural Council on the one side and Colonel Bastard on the other proves conclusively that the statement of the Rural Council is absolutely false and contrary to the facts. Colonel Bastard has repeatedly offered to sell any sites to the Rural Council and has invited them to select any they consider suitable. These offers have all been ignored by the Council, and, moreover, no application has been made by them to Colonel Bastard for any other site than that of Horn Lane.[38]

It was further resolved that the clerk write to the Rural Council to know why Colonel Bastard's letter of August 1925 was not answered.

At a parish meeting on 12 January 1928, Mr S. Snawdon said there had not been much growth in the matter of housing at Yealmpton. He believed in the 30 years, he could remember only something like 50 houses being erected.[39]

On Saturday 19 May 1928, the engineer reported that the first twenty-two houses at Yealmpton had been completed. The committee recommended that tenders be invited for the erection of fourteen semi-detached houses of a similar type to those erected at Eggbuckland, and also for the construction of the new road on the Yealmpton site. The council agreed to this being done.[40]

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[36] *Western Morning News*, 26 January 1929.
[37] *Western Morning News*, 21 April 1927.
[38] Ibid.
[39] *Western Morning News*, 12 January 1928.
[40] *Western Morning News*, 19 May 1928.

In 1928, on the Electoral Register, the houses were named 1 to 19 Council House, but by 1930 the name had changed from Council House to Yeo Park with the same tenants living in them and eleven more houses having been built – 1 to 30.