

MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
OF BUCKLAND BREWER PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON
THURSDAY 21st JANUARY 2021 AT 7:30pm
(MEETING HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM)

Members Present: Mrs Barbara Babb, Mr George Heywood, Mr Richard Hooper, Mr Jim Lowe, Mr Trevor Mills, Mr Frits Takken, and Mr David Watson

Also in attendance: Cllr. Barry Parsons (DCC)

Parish Clerk: Mr P Blossie

KEY: Actions are shown in bold blue type Decisions are shown in bold red type
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315. Apologies for Absence Andrew Hewitt and Cllr. Phil Pennington (TDC)

316. Declarations of Interest None

317. Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on 13th January 2021: The minutes of the meeting held on 13th January 2021 were agreed and will be signed by the Chair in due course.

318. Public Participation None

319. County and District Councillors' Reports

- a. Councillor Barry Parsons (Devon County Council): Cllr Parsons had supplied a written report which is attached at appendix 1. He was fairly confident that the County Council would announce a council tax rise of 4.99% this year. He provided an update on the roll out of high-speed broadband in the Holsworthy Rural area:

- Total premises: 7,817 (*i.e. the number of homes or businesses in the area*)
- superfast broadband achieved: 5,552
- gigabit-capable planned: 1,146 for completion by the end of 2021
- Commercial superfast achieved: 327
- Commercial planned: 0
- Current total delivered: 5,878 (75.20%)
- Total delivered and planned: 7,024 (89.86% up 14.66%)
- Remaining: 793

Cllr Parsons also gave an overview of changes to local bus services which is covered in full in his written report. At the time of the meeting, he said there 20 centres, including GP Services in the Holsworthy area providing covid vaccinations and that all elderly residents in care homes should have received their first jab by 24th January. 43 deaths have been reported in the Torridge District, the lowest in the South West.

He had been liaising with Kieran Stanbury, the local Highways Manager about the lack of signage about the road closure scheduled for 5 days starting on 25th January.

Cllr Parsons was also concerned about the election planned for May 2021. Not only would the election itself be difficult to manage under covid restrictions but it would also impact on the election campaign. Torridge Council is conducting a campaign to encourage people to register for postal votes.

- b. Councillor Phil Pennington (Torridge Council): Not present

320. Clerk's Report

- a. Correspondence There had been 69 items of correspondence forwarded by email including letters of thanks from the Playing Field Association and Citizens Advice for their grants.
- i. He also highlighted an email received today confirming approval of a grant of £350 towards the telephone box refurbishment offered by Cllr Phil Pennington at the last meeting.
- ii. Notification had been received today that the planning applications for the change of use of the Coach and Horses is to be heard by the Plans Committee on 4th February 2021. **The Chair will attend the meeting on behalf of the Parish Council.**
- b. External Audit Report 2019/20 PKF Littlejohn had supplied the final external audit report for 2019/20. They were satisfied that everything was "in accordance with proper practices and no other matters had come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met". All of the Parish Council's annual financial documents, governance returns, and audit reports are available on the community website.
- c. Meeting dates for the Fields and Allotments Sub-Committee The Clerk suggested the following dates for inspections and sub-committee meetings for 2021, which were **agreed unanimously.**
- | <u>Inspections</u> | <u>Meetings</u> |
|--|--|
| Saturday 10 th April 2021 | Thursday 22 nd April 2021 |
| Saturday 10 th July 2021 | Thursday 22 nd July 2021 |
| Saturday 16 th October 2021 | Thursday 28 th October 2021 |
- d. Advertisement for new councillor The Clerk reported that the official notice about the vacancy for a new councillor will be posted on notice boards and the website on Friday 22nd January 2021 and that parishioners had until 11th February to submit requests for a bi-election. If less than 10 signatures are received by the Elections Officer, the Parish Council will be given permission to co-opt. This information had been supplied to Village Scene.
- e. Date of Next Meeting The Clerk reported that he might be moving house on the date of the next meeting, 10th February 2021. It was agreed that next month's meeting would be deferred to Thursday 25th February 2021.

321. Appointment of Parish Gardener Only one person had expressed an interest in the role of Parish Gardener. **It was agreed unanimously to appoint Sarah Stevens** with effect from Spring 2021 at the rate of £14.00 hour. A contract/job description was approved providing for 36 hours work per annum and expenses of up to £100 per year reimbursable on the provision of VAT receipts. Cllr Barry Parsons advised **discussing suitable signage with Keiran Stanbury, the Highways Officer.**

322. Drainage in Northwood Lane A resident in Northwood Lane had complained about 'flooding' that was coming from the bank adjacent to the entrance to the Playing Field off Northwood Lane. The Clerk had inspected it but did not feel that it warranted any urgent attention as the water was finding its way to the drain which was clear and running normally.

323. Installation of electric charging points The Parish Council had been approached by a company called JoJu Solar about installing electric vehicle charging points. The issue had also recently been discussed by the Village Hall Trustees. Trevor Mills said that the zero-cost finance option that had been suggested in the original email would not apply to the village hall car park. **The Clerk was asked to investigate what options might be open to the Parish Council, possibly working in partnership with the village hall or other landowner.**

324. South Church Park

- a. Footpath redirection Nothing to report
- b. Gateway and drainage works Trevor Mills has yet to put compile the quotes from two companies into a workable project but the total cost is expected to be less than £2,000. Work will not start before better weather in the spring.

325. School Field Rental Agreement and Proposed Licence to Gain Access Cllr Barry Parsons had spoken to the County Solicitor and asked her to expedite matters. It was reported that the Village Hall Trustees had asked for a change to allow for an official custodian to take responsibility for the licence to avoid seeking new signatories when there are changes of trustees.

326. Snow Warden's Report: George Heywood said that salting would probably be required on Sunday 24th January. David Watson asked for a bag of salt for the chapel. It was also agreed to supply a bag of salt for the community shop.

327. Members Reports:

George Heywood said that the road from Buckland Brewer to Parkham was breaking up again and also that Monkleigh Mill Lane is as bad as ever. **The Clerk will write to Keiran Stanbury.**

Richard Hooper reported that residents from Castle Meadow had complained about dogs off leads being walked to the playing field and defecating on the open plan lawns. The Clerk will write a piece for Village Scene and the website. Trevor Mills said that this would complement another piece being contributed by the Playing Field Association.

Jim Lowe i) reported on the lack of signage provided by Kier for the South West Water works planned for next week. He and Jane had been trying to get confirmation of whether the works were going ahead or not as this closure will cause a lot of disruption. ii) ***Jim also highlighted the latest NHS news release explaining that Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust (NDHT) and the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust (RD&E) have received the go-ahead from NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) to continue working on plans to formally join together. He was concerned that this would undermine the level of service in North Devon. It was agreed that the Clerk and Jim Lowe would draft a letter to Geoffrey Cox, MP.***

Frits Takken said that the newly refurbished parish notice looks very good. The Clerk had written to Mark West to thank him for doing it.

David Watson talked about the parking by the phone box. He said that if cars were parked facing the hedge rather than lengthways next to it, there would be space for 3 rather than 2 cars. He suggested that road markings should be reinstated. This was supported by Barbara Babb. ii) David also suggested that an article should be published in Village Scene and on the website thanking all the volunteers who have helped out with their neighbours during the covid epidemic. iii) He also mentioned there had been some minor flooding in Winslade Lane but that this had now been sorted out. Trevor Mills said that this road was on the list for resurfacing.

328. Planning Decision, 1/0934/2020/FUL, The Old Blacksmiths, Erection of garden shed and greenhouse – Granted permission

329. Accounts:

a. Receipts and Payments to date 2020/21

i) Bank balances as at 31st December 2020 (£69,830.61):

- (1) Parish Council Current Account was £10,454.47
- (2) Thornhillhead Moor Account was £12,070.80
- (3) Savings Account was £47,305.34

ii) Fund balances as at 31st December 2020 (£69,830.61):

- (1) General Account - £29,759.81
- (2) Thornhill Head Account - £40,070.80

iii) Payments due (£2,076.80 + VAT)

- (1) P G Blossie, December salary - £587.83 (including £96.00 PAYE and £69.70 +VAT for Microsoft licence renewal)
- (2) E.on, Electricity - £6.16 + VAT
- (3) Buckland Brewer Village Hall, grant - £990.39
- (4) Citizens Advice, grant - £100.00
- (5) Buckland Brewer PCC, room hire - £84.00
- (6) John Cole Contractors Ltd, Thornhillhead Moor maintenance - £321.75 + VAT

iv) Receipts (£8,874.08)

- (1) RPA, Thornhillhead stewardship fee - £8,846.60
- (2) Barclays Bank, interest earned – £27.48

The Clerk was asked to remind Hicks and Co. to supply an invoice for the management fee for Thornhillhead Moor. There was a general discussion about the funding of Thornhillhead SSSI and it was still not clear about the Parish Council's claim on any balances in the Thornhillhead account at the end of the current stewardship scheme. The Clerk has invited Andrew Heywood to come to the next meeting and will investigate the legal position regarding the finances.

- b. Final Approval to the 2021/22 Annual Budget and Precept** The Clerk had distributed a revised projected outturn for 2020/21 and budget for 2021/22 prior to the meeting. He had made one small change to the figures agreed on 13th January, pulling back the expenditure on refurbishing the telephone box and moving the defibrillator into 2020/21, and including an anticipated grant towards the work from Councillor Pennington of £350. **The revised draft was proposed by Jim Lowe, seconded by David Watson and approved unanimously, and it was agreed that a precept demand of £13,500 would be levied for the next financial year. The Clerk will submit the precept form by the due date of 25th January 2021.**

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9:00 pm

Dates of Future Meetings:

Parish Council, Thursday 25th February 2021 (7:30pm, remotely via Zoom)

Signed as a true record:

Chairman: **Date:**

Holsworthy Rural – County Councillor ‘Update’ (January 2021)

Hello Everyone! A belated “Happy New Year to one and all!”

If I haven’t yet got around to seeing you ‘remotely’ or speaking with you I hope that you have had a good Christmas and that things, certainly, take a turn for the better for us all in 2021. These are truly unprecedented times, and along with expressing our great sadness for those who have lost loved ones or are currently suffering at the expense of the pandemic within our communities I would also like to express thanks to the determination and selfless acts of local volunteers alongside those involved in care provision more formally.

At this time of the year, and with the cost of the pandemic (financially, and otherwise) uppermost in the minds of many I want to focus this ‘Update’ on matters very much related to the business side of things and to give a sense of where we all stand regarding this year’s County Council Budget. Detail below includes information given to me in preparation for Budget decision-making.

Last month the Government published the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2021/22. Excluding Government assumptions about council tax nationally, the **increase in Government funding for the Council is £3.7m or 2.2%**. This includes:

- An additional £3.1m from a new Social Care grant of £300m nationally. This is to support both Children’s and Adults Social Care;
- An increase in Devon’s allocation of Rural Services Delivery Grant of £368,000;
- A reduction in New Home Bonus Grant of £957,000;

For Council Tax, the Government has announced that:

- The **Council Tax** increase that will trigger the need for a referendum is 2%;
- Local authorities can also set an **Adult Social Care Precept of up to 3%**. If the full percentage is not used in 2021/22 there is an option to carry forward the unused amount to 2022/23;
- A grant of £670m nationally has been announced to offset some of the **impact the Pandemic** is having on the Council Tax Base for next year. **Devon’s share is £6.358m**;
- A Council Tax Income Guarantee Scheme has been announced that will compensate authorities for 75% of irrecoverable losses in the current year.

The Government has also announced:

- Devon’s share of **National COVID Funding** for 2021/22 is **£14.823m**.
- The Fairer Funding Review, 75% Business Rate Retention and the Business Rates Reset have been delayed.

- A **public sector pay freeze** has been announced, except for those earning less than £24,000 per annum who will receive an increase of at least £250. The pay freeze **does not apply to front-line NHS staff**; and
- The **National Living Wage will increase by 2.2%** next year to £8.91 per hour (each additional 1% costs the council around £1.5m).

Whilst, councils are in receipt of governmental support for the pandemic its financial impact is expected to result in reduced council tax collection rates and increased numbers of claimants for council tax support.

Learning disability services (including autism) have seen **significant growth** in activity over recent years and continue to be under pressure going forward, particularly as children in care transition to adulthood. **Devon has an above average elderly population** too, when compared nationally, which is forecast to continue increasing and therefore could risk additional pressure on services.

In the autumn of 2020, the Government announced that the **National Living Wage (NLW) will increase by 2.2%** in April. NLW is the principal driver of price inflation in the care markets because it impacts directly on the price of labour. In Devon, NLW is now estimated to add £2.6m to the cost of adult social care packages in 2021/22. Care workers are predominantly women.

In Children's Social Care some of the greatest pressures come from an increase in referrals and a **rising number of children in care**. In part this is driven by the impact of the pandemic on families and children, including those with disabilities. Across the service £6m has been provided in the budget to meet growth in demand in addition to £0.7 million for inflationary pressures.

The budget provides for an additional investment of £1.6m in social work staff for improvement and demand response. £1.8m of infrastructure, running costs and other efficiency savings are planned along with a re-alignment of resources for disabled children to ensure families receive the right support at the right time.

Within Public Health Nursing infrastructure and running cost savings of £0.7m are planned.

In terms of overall social/equality impacts, increases will benefit older and younger people, carers (who are predominantly women) and disabled people.

Running up to the end of 2020 Devon has some of the lowest numbers of cases with COVID-19, so may not experience significant direct effects of the illness. Economically, the impact appears to be more severe than many other places in England, especially coastal and rural areas like ours more dependent on hospitality. Some communities are affluent and more resilient, though it is the lowest paid who have seen the largest percentage furloughed or who have lost their job.

In a world increasingly connected digitally, digital isolation presents barriers to accessing employment, services, and training. The inability to work remotely became a key barrier

during lock-down. This is especially so, too, for our children and their ability to work remotely regarding home-schooling. Those who cannot readily access digital services or skills may find themselves disadvantaged during recovery in accessing employment, especially if home or remote working becomes the norm.

Digital working has increased during lock-down, and will most likely continue, whilst the decline in investment in the high street and offices has also accelerated. Conversely, those who could access digital media suggested there was an overload of information about services and support (Healthwatch, 2020), something which I have been keen to highlight with our County Council Communications Team.

There is a real focus, too, that people on low incomes or in areas with poor broadband may become digitally excluded without action to address digital access although the COVID-19 response has created new and strengthened relationships between communities, local government, local businesses, and non-for-profit organisations.

Some charities who rely on cash donations have expressed concern about ongoing funding, though benefits of cashless payment may develop. As has been identified, a move towards cashless payment has occurred during lock-down affecting those without bank accounts and more vulnerable groups. Following lock-down, the **'cashless society' may become the new norm** (some of you may have seen the documentary on television just this week?) as people become used to using technological payment methods, including mobile phones.

During lock-down, there was an increased engagement with people's local environment, and appreciation of the benefits to the natural world. I am informed today, too, that since the start of 2021 traffic flow has reduced by around 30%.

Lock-down perhaps demonstrated our impacts on the environment, and that changes can be made. With proposed changes in planning there are threats and opportunities. One opportunity is to build in planning design and requirements around greenspace as an **increasing proportion of people recognised the importance of green space and well-being**. It's, perhaps, just one of the reasons why significant numbers of people are looking to re-locate to our part of the world!

You will, perhaps, have seen recent figures regarding new Covid-19 cases with Torridge best-placed amongst all places (including Cornwall) in the South West. Please maintain every effort to keep this so. You have been superb to date and my view is that the light at the end of the tunnel, despite current rates of infection is becoming brighter.

Local and Community Bus Transport: The latest letter from the Government to local authorities and bus companies outlines the principle of reducing services to eliminate empty capacity and to reflect the fall in passenger numbers which has inevitably occurred, whilst preserving links for schools, key workers and other essential travel such as shopping. The local bus will also be many people's way of getting to appointments for COVID vaccinations and the latest Government guidance stresses the need for access to vaccination centres.

The aim is to preserve the current geographical network coverage. Many Devon services are infrequent and cannot realistically be reduced without rendering them unattractive and undermining the requirement to continue catering for essential travel - bearing in mind the continuing need for social distancing, which limits permitted capacity.

Operationally, where a vehicle and driver have been allocated for essential services, no substantial saving arises from a partial withdrawal. For these reasons, we are not at present implementing any reductions to County-supported services and we propose to continue this position for as long as sufficient Government funding remains in place.

We have suspended the school and college duplicate buses (funded through the Department for Education) because there is adequate capacity on the main services. There are also some schooltime alterations on some services to reflect the reduction in school travel whilst preserving the links which are still required. This situation will be continuously monitored.

There is also scope for reduced frequencies on the main commercial routes and in stages Stagecoach are implementing some changes in this category. The Government requires bus companies to discuss these changes with the local authority and in this context we are in continuous contact with Stagecoach. Changes so far include reduced frequencies on Service 12 (Newton Abbot - Torquay), Service A in Exeter on Saturdays, the UNI between Exeter City Centre and the University and the withdrawal of the Red Park & Ride. In all cases, travel is still possible along the routes concerned. Full details are available on the Stagecoach web site:

<https://www.stagecoachbus.com/promos-and-offers/south-west/covid-19-timetables>

The ability of bus companies to maintain services may be subject to staff availability. Where this becomes an issue we will work with bus companies to ensure the best use of available staff.

The Travel Devon web site will also continue to provide advice to the public, including how to get to vaccination centres and, as and when information is available, the lateral flow testing sites:

<https://www.traveldevon.info/bus/>

<https://www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/travelling-to-hospitalhealth-appointments/travelling-to-your-c-19-vaccination-appointment/>

The community transport sector is largely continuing its range of services:

The Ring & Ride schemes are maintaining services for essential shopping journeys (with the exception of the Exeter and Okehampton schemes who are ensuring passengers have alternatives available). Each scheme can be contacted via their usual telephone numbers. Full details at : <https://www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/community-transport/ring-and-ride/>

In general, the Community Bus schemes are continuing to operate their regular scheduled timetables.

The Coleridge Bus has made minor alterations to reduce waiting times for passengers in Kingsbridge whilst many local shops are closed, departing Peacocks at 1120 and Morrisons at 1130.

The Tavistock Community Bus has temporarily suspended all services.

Voluntary Car Schemes are helping patients to attend medical appointments and a number of schemes are involved with helping people to reach vaccination centres. Details are being updated regularly at: <https://www.traveldevon.info/accessibility/travelling-to-hospitalhealth-appointments/travelling-to-your-c-19-vaccination-appointment/c-19-vaccinations-volunteer-transport/>

Some of you, I'm sure, will know that I am stepping down at the next election. It's a decision I've not taken lightly as I've been a thorn in the side of many for some 14 years (12 years at DCC) and, I've loved every minute of it!

I want to say a big thank you to all members of our town and parish councils (past and present) for their ongoing 'support' over the years. I know that support comes through different channels - sometimes, very challenging, but, nevertheless supportive in trying to improve things for others. Make no mistake I am extremely saddened in needing to take this decision of stepping down, which is the result of my need to focus, essentially, on matters of health and well-being within my own, quite unique family.

My very best wishes, as always, to you all, and please keep safe.

Barry