

Merton Parish Council

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Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 8th March 2021, 7:30pm via Zoom.

Parish Councillors Present: Steve Papworth (Chair), Bill Brown (Vice-Chair), Brian Stacey, Laura Twomey, Nigel Lang, Paul Scantlebury & Rob Nancekivell.

Also in attendance: Alice Turner (Clerk), County Cllr Andrew Saywell & District Cllr Richard Wiseman. No members of the public were in attendance.

BUSINESS TRANSACTED

1.3.21 Welcome:

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed them that the meeting was being recorded by the Clerk to assist in the preparation of the minutes.

2.3.21 Apologies for absence:

Resolution required to approve apologies (with reasons) made to the Clerk prior to the meeting.

The Clerk reported that she had received the resignation of Cllr Knightley who is moving out of area. Clerk will notify TDC.

3.3.21 Minutes of the Last Meeting:

Cllrs to consider the approval of the Minutes of the virtual meeting held Monday 11th January 2021. Cllr Lang questioned the accuracy of the apologies resolved in the meeting. Cllrs agreed to defer approving the minutes to enable the Clerk to investigate.

4.3.21 Declarations of Interest: No interests declared.

5.3.21 Public Speaking Time: No members of the public in attendance.

6.3.21 District / County Councillors & Police Reports.

a) County Cllr Andrew Saywell

Coronavirus

- Stats – As of 8th March the DCC area of Devon now up to 19,496 coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic.
- Since the 3rd March that is a weekly increase of 173 infections.
- By way of comparison... in Torridge there were 8 new infections in the last 7 days, North Devon 11 in the last 7 days, West Devon 5 cases in the last 7 days.
- There are over 20,000 tests a week being carried out in the County.
- In all 18 Parishes within Torrington Rural there were 3 new infections in the seven days up to 3rd March recorded in Great Torrington, with 0-2 cases in the rest of Torrington Rural. When there are fewer than 3 infections the Government does not show the data to protect individuals' identities.

So the good news is... infection cases have fallen sharply during the lockdown locally, District-wide and County-wide. Locally we are still doing incredibly well to keep our infection rates low. Devon has the third lowest upper-tier local authority infection rate in England (21.6), with only Cornwall and the Isle of Wight recording slightly lower rates. At District level, Torridge has the 5th lowest infection rate in England (11.7), just behind the South Hams, West Devon and North Devon. All rates are well below the England average of 66.

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However, these numbers can change quickly, and while the falling infection rates are good news, new infection cases are still around the same level now as they were towards the end of September, though numbers are continuing to decline.

Infection cases in Devon are highest among the 20 to 39 year old age group. But they all falling in all age groups, and most rapidly with the over 80s.

We are however still seeing the virus spreading in some workplaces, often attributable to car sharing. We have also seen some localised spikes in the County, with one recently in Tiverton which caused a rise in the infection rates in Mid Devon.

Key workers should also look to use Community Testing sites when they become available (more information below).

As infections fall and vaccinations ramp up, we must not let our guard down now.

Please **stay at home**, and only leave home if you absolutely have to. When you do go out, don't forget to **socially distance, wear a face covering in indoor public spaces and wash your hands regularly**. While numbers are so low it doesn't take much, a few cases in a couple of workplaces, for the figures to go in the wrong direction and to see a high percentage increase, so keeping to the rules is still very important.

Community Testing

DCC has started to roll out Community Testing for coronavirus, with testing facilities now in Barnstaple, Okehampton (Tuesday & Friday only), Tiverton, and Exeter.

Plans are afoot to have a mobile testing facility to cover Torrington, Holsworthy, Hartland and Bradworthy in March, though exact dates to be determined. The aim is to have testing as accessible as it can be.

Community testing will help to find individuals who have COVID-19 but do not have symptoms and need to isolate and who may inadvertently be spreading the virus. A positive or negative result will not remove the need to follow existing COVID measures socially and in the workplace.

Rapid lateral flow tests will be used, which will provide a result within thirty minutes. This will not be a substitute for the national coronavirus testing – **if you are symptomatic, people should book a free NHS test via the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website or by calling 119. Do not use community testing**. When this is up and running locally, or if people would like to use the Barnstaple site, please use devon.cc/testing to book a test.

Please remember, if you have symptoms book a test through the Government website. Don't use DCC Community Testing.

COVID Vaccinations

The rollout of the vaccine in Devon and in Torrington Rural continues to go well.

I sent a briefing note from the NHS to the Parish Council this week but the main points for vaccine rollout:

- 445,074 people in Devon received their first vaccine dose between 8th December – 14th February
- Latest estimate is 95% of over 65s in Devon have received their first dose.
- The NHS in Devon are focusing on people aged 60 and over, and those who are clinically vulnerable.
- Plans are now being made to roll out second doses for care home residents and staff, and to start first doses for over 50s.
- Torrington's GP Surgeries now administering vaccines locally
- Vaccinations of inpatients at the North Devon District Hospital is also taking place.
- **Even when you have been vaccinated, you must still continue to follow the COVID-19 safety rules – stay at home as much as possible and remember hands, face, space.**
- The NHS is also looking at mobile roll out for more isolated rural communities.

This remains a huge logistical exercise, very much dependent upon the speed and rate of vaccine supplies. Please wait for the NHS to contact you when it is your turn. The roll out is

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getting more localised, those who cannot travel far should be able to get their job administered locally.

DCC Budget

The main work over January and February at the County Council has been the budget setting process. The Budget was approved at Full Council on the 18th February with more cash for vulnerable adults and children, health and potholes.

Key points:

1. £37m extra cash injection into vital services, including an additional £21.7m for Adult Care and Health, and £11.4m for Children's Services.
2. For Highways there will be an injection of extra revenue into the service including £600,000 for potholes and a new £100,000 fund for Town and Parishes to enhance street features.
3. An additional £600,000 into the Hardship Fund, to be distributed to the District Councils, to help people badly affected by the pandemic who may have been made redundant but are not yet receiving universal credit or benefit support.
4. The total overall revenue budget will be in excess of £578m.
5. To help pay for these increases, Council Tax will unfortunately have to rise – up 1.99% for general services and 3% dedicated solely to Adult Social Care. This will equate to an extra £1.38 a week for an average Band D household.
6. I know Council Tax rises are never welcome... but this will mean we both maintain vital services and can endeavour to improve them.
7. The backdrop to the budget is one of huge uncertainty and risk – we do not know how long the pandemic will continue for or what the longer term impact on the economy, public health and demand for services will be.

Highways

Unfortunately due the inclement weather there is a large backlog of potholes to repair. Extra Gangs are being deployed to fix these however they are prioritising safety defects on the **main road network first**, ahead of minor roads and non-safety defects and serviceability patching. There have also been localised flooding incidents on the highways around Torrington Rural though these are being reported and being attended to.

Support for Families over Easter – Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)

Devon County Council has been awarded £1.69 million from the Department for Education to provide Holiday Activities and Food for children aged 5-16 on benefit related Free School Meals. **DCC are starting this process for the Easter Holidays and would welcome applications from Torrington Rural** if they can demonstrate it is for the eligible children on Free School Meals. The timescale for the HAF is 4 hours per day for 4 days over the Easter Holidays, which includes a nutritious hot meal, if you would like to contact the relevant officer, Melissa Filby 01392 383000 or email at melissa.filby@devon.gov.uk, she would be happy to discuss your project and if it fits the HAF criteria.

The scheme will be run across all of Devon for the summer holidays.

Support during Half Term

Over Half Term DCC will provide more than 15,000 children's families in Devon with food vouchers. Families of children currently receiving free school meals were automatically sent supermarket vouchers by DCC to help them buy food over the week-long holiday to replace the meals a child would have received during term-time. This was for more than 15,000 children in the County. The vouchers – worth £15 a week for each child – were redeemable in major supermarkets across Devon. Arrangements were put in place for families who cannot get to a supermarket.

Elections

The Government have confirmed that the May Elections to Devon County Council **will** be taking place on May 6th. I will be re-standing and am hopeful of re-election! I have worked hard for Merton in the last four years and working together I believe we have achieved a lot,

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though as ever there is still more to do. A priority for me in the next term will getting the worst sections of the A386 resurfaced and be to continue the work on the speeding issues in the village. I will remain at your service until May, and I hope to be afterwards as well.

b) District Cllr Richard Wiseman

District Cllr Wiseman reported that TDC have set their budget for the next financial year, there will be a £5.00 increase per band D property on the Council tax from TDC in order to maintain services.

The rock armouring at the village end of Westward Ho! has been completed with large boulders now in place. This has had no direct financial impact of TDC as the money comes via the environment agency.

Elections will be held on the 6th of May for Devon County Council and the Police and Crime commissioner. One to one election campaigning can begin from the 8th of May. The 19th of April is the deadline for registering to vote with the deadline for applying for postal votes of the 20th of April, proxy votes can be applied for by the 27th of April.

Emergency proxy votes can be applied for 6 days before the election, this is for anyone who has been instructed to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or Public Health England.

c) Police report - FPCSO Brown – Written report received as below:

Offence	Recorded crime 10/01/2021 – 06/03/2021	Recorded crime 10/01/2020 – 06/03/2020	Recorded Crime % Difference
Violence without injury	1	1	0.0%
TOTAL	1	1	0.0%

Incident Closing Category	Incidents 10/01/2021 – 06/03/2021	Incidents 10/01/2020 – 06/03/2020	Incidents % Difference
Anti-Social Behaviour	1	0	-
Crime Recorded	1	1	0.0%
Public Safety	1	0	-
Transport	5	1	400%
TOTAL	8	2	300%

7.3.21 Governance Documents & Policies

Cllrs to review the following documents (circulated to Cllrs and available from the Clerk):

- a) **MPC 005 Complaints & Grievances Procedure V 1.0 R2**
- b) **MPC 006 Data Retention & Disposal policy V 1.0 R2**
- c) **MPC 007 Freedom of Information Policy V 1.0 R2**
- d) **MPC 008 Equality & Diversity Policy V 1.0 R2**
- e) **MPC 009 Anti-fraud & Corruption Policy V 1.0 R2**
- f) **MPC 010 Confidential Reporting Policy V 1.0 R2**
- g) **MPC 011 Press & Media policy V 1.0 R2**
- h) **Annual Planner March 2021 – March 2022**

Cllrs discussed the documents and as documents MPC 005 to MPC 011 inclusive were for annual review with no amendments required Cllrs reviewed them together. Cllr Papworth proposed that the following policies be accepted without amendments: MPC 005 Complaints & Grievances Procedure V 1.0 R2, MPC 006 Data Retention & Disposal policy V 1.0 R2, MPC 007 Freedom of Information Policy V 1.0 R2, MPC 008 Equality & Diversity Policy V 1.0 R2, MPC 009 Anti-fraud & Corruption Policy V 1.0 R2, MPC 010 Confidential Reporting Policy V 1.0 R2 and MPC 011 Press & Media policy V 1.0 R2, seconded Cllr Stacey. All in Favour – Motion Carried. (RR2020/051)

Cllr Brown proposed that the annual planner for March 2021 to March 2022 be approved, seconded Cllr Papworth. All in Favour – Motion Carried. (RR2020/052)

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8.3.21 Current Business:

a) Update on Flowerbed in Square (Cllrs Papworth/Nancekivell)

Cllr Nancekivell reported that this job has been completed, and is ready for replanting. Cllr Papworth to look into options for replanting and report back to the next meeting.

b) Traffic & Highways Concerns (Chair)

Cllrs asked the Clerk to recirculate the DCC report it link and to advertise it on Facebook and the Website.

c) Drainage Issues with the Square (Chair/Clerk)

Cllr Scantlebury updated on the current situation. Mr Newell has reported that he could carry out the remedial works for £650, Cllr Lang proposed that the Council authorise Mr Newell to carry out the remedial works in the square for £650 with the money to be taken from the Earmarked Reserve "Square Improvements", seconded Cllr Scantlebury. All in Favour – Motion Carried. (RR2020/053)

d) Concerns over Post Office (Chair)

Clerk reported that she had only written to the Owner of the PO as she was unable to find any other contact details, and is awaiting response at this time. The Chair reported that the PO is now open 3 mornings a week.

e) Appointment of internal Auditor for 2021-22 (including year-end 2020-21) (Clerk)

Cllrs to consider appointment of Mrs Melanie Bickell as Internal Auditor for the 2021-22 year (including year-end 2020-21). Following discussions Cllr Papworth proposed that the Council re-appoint Mrs Melanie Bickell as Internal Auditor for the 2021-22 year (including year-end 2020-21), seconded Cllr Twomey. All in Favour – Motion Carried. (RR2020/054)

f) Retrospective approval of DCC Grass cutting contract 2021-22 (Clerk)

Cllr Papworth proposed that the Council retrospectively approved the submission of the 2021-22 Grass cutting contract with DCC Highways, seconded Cllr Brown. All in Favour – Motion Carried. (RR2020/055)

9.3.21 Clerks reports:

a) Update on Additional Employment.

As per the terms of Employment contract Council is to be informed of any additional employment undertaken by the Clerk.

The Clerk informed Cllrs that she has taken on the position of Clerk & RFO to Exbourne with Jacobstowe Parish Council.

b) I.C.O Renewal – to inform Cllrs that as a Direct Debit has been set up this will be automatic at the end of March.

c) To approve request from Wayne Mansfield (contractor) to use the £200 fee for the flowerbed as follows: £100 to be used on purchase of plants for flowerbed & £100 donation to DAAT.

Cllr Twomey proposed that the Council approve Mr Mansfield's request to use the approved fee of £200 as follows £100 to be used to replant the flowerbed and £100 to be donated to DAAT, seconded Cllr Scantlebury. All in Favour – Motion Carried. (RR2020/056)

Cllrs asked that a letter of thanks be sent to Mr Mansfield.

d) Norton Anti-virus subscription.

Cllrs to consider approval of the Clerk purchasing of this 5-device licence and splitting cost with the Clerks other Councils, the cost to the Council would be £10.21 rather than £24.99.

Cllr Scantlebury proposed that the Council approve the Clerk purchasing Norton Deluxe (5-device licence) and splitting cost with the Clerks other Councils, the cost to the Council would be £10.21, seconded Cllr Twomey. All in Favour – Motion Carried. (RR2020/057)

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- e) Cllrs were informed that the Annual inspection of the Play equipment had been booked.

10.3.21 Cllr reports and Items for future agendas:

Cllr Stacey reported that he has been informed play are bin needs emptying, the weeds in play need spraying and bus shelter needs sweeping out.

Cllrs requested that the Clerk write to the landlady at the Malt Scoop to thank her for tidying up the rubbish in the village.

Cllr Scantlebury reported issues regarding mud on the road. Suggested that a quiet word be had or report it on DCC report it page.

Cllr Papworth asked that Extension of Double yellow lines be added as a future agenda item.

11.3.21 Finance: Clerk to present documents for this item at the Meeting.

- a) To receive and approve financial schedule of payments. (See [Appendix A](#))

Cllr Scantlebury proposed that the financial schedule of payments as presented by the Clerk at the meeting be approved, seconded Cllr Lang. All in Favour – Motion Carried.

(RR2020/058)

12.3.21 Confirmation of next meeting date:

Cllrs to consider moving the Annual Parish Council meeting from the 10th to the 4th of May to enable it to be held via Zoom.

Cllrs discussed this matter and Cllr Scantlebury proposed that the Annual Parish Council meeting be moved to Tuesday 4th May 2021 at 7.30pm via Zoom, seconded Cllr Twomey. All in Favour – Motion Carried. (RR2020/059)

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting at 8.30pm.

Appendix A: Financial Schedule.

Pre-authorised payments made since last meeting

Payment Ref	Amount	Payee	Details	Power	Expenditure approval Minutes Ref & RR
PM2021/039	£250.56	Alice Turner	Clerks Salary 11.01.21 - 07.02.21	LGA 1972 S.112	11.9.20 b) RR2020/035
PM2021/040	£15.00	Drewsteignton Parish Council	Contribution to Clerks attendance GDPR training.	LGA 1972 S.111	10.11.20 a) RR2020/042
PM2021/041	£250.56	Alice Turner	Clerks Salary 08.02.21 - 07.03.21	LGA 1972 S.112	11.9.20 b) RR2020/035
Total	£516.12				

Payments for authorisation (retrospective approval):

Payment Ref	Amount	Payee	Details	Power	Funding Source
PM2021/042	£91.33	Alice Turner	Clerks Expenses (Feb & Mar 2021)	LGA 1972 S.111	Staff Costs/Office exp. Staff costs/Clerks costs & Staff costs/Training
TOTAL	£91.33				

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Receipts since last meeting for information:

Payment ref	Payment method	Details	Amount
PR2021/019	Bacs	2 x Parking Permits	£2.00
TOTAL			£2.00

Monies held as Reserves:

Amount	Details
£1,500	Election cost
£8,000	Square Improvements
£500	Defibrillator replacement
£636	TAP Fund
£1,000	Precept Contingency
£500.00	General Reserve
£12,136	TOTAL

Bank Situation

Bank Total 08/03/2021	£15,711.86
Less Payments presented	£91.33
Plus receipts Received (if after Balance date)	£0.00
Less Money held as reserves	£12,136.00
Available Balance	£3,484.53

Signed as a true record: _____

Printed _____ Date: _____

Approved by Resolution: **RR2020/061**

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