

Merton Parish Council

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Minutes of the Council meeting held on Monday 14th November 2022 at 7:30pm at the Clinton Hall, Merton.

Cllrs Present: Steve Papworth (Chair), Bill Brown, Laura Twomey, Brian Stacey, Nigel Lang, Giles Kops, Rob Nancekivell & Paul Scantlebury.

Also in attendance: Alice Turner (Clerk) District Cllr Hurley & County Cllr Saywell. No members of the public attended.

BUSINESS TRANSACTED

1.11.22 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. The recording will be deleted once the draft minutes are published.

2.11.22 Apologies for absence:

Apologies from District Cllr Wiseman and PFCSO Brown were noted.

3.11.22 Minutes of the Last Meeting (Chair): [Minutes can be found on the website.](#)

Cllrs to consider the approval of the Minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2022.

[Cllr Twomey proposed that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2022 be signed as a true and accurate record, seconded Cllr Lang. All in Favour – Motion Carried \(RR2022/037\)](#)

4.11.22 Declarations of Interest: None declared at this time.

5.11.22 Public Speaking Time: None.

6.11.22 District / County Councillors & Police Reports.

a) County Cllr Andrew Saywell

Main updates across DCC

Budgets - You will probably have seen the media coverage now about this. The projected £40m overspend for this financial year has been brought down to £6m... but that has been achieved through having to make savings on existing budgets this year and postponing long term projects in IT and recruitment etc. However the Children's Services Budget continues to overspend and every possible effort is being made to contain and reverse the overspend but it is not easy.

Nonetheless, we should be able to balance the books for this financial year... the challenge is going to be next year. At the moment we are looking at a projected budget gap of £60m, which on top of the £15m planned savings identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, means that we are looking at overall projected savings of £75m.

Unlike a lot of central government institutions, local government has to balance our budget every financial year by law. If we do overspend, then that has to be covered from reserves or some other external income stream. If we can't, we have to issue what is called a Section 114 notice which, in effect, means the local authority becomes bankrupt.

Needless to say, a bankrupt council cannot help anyone. The £75m savings can be achieved but it will mean deep and painful cuts as the Council Leader has already outlined.

This is not a problem that is unique to Devon. It is a national issue, from speaking to colleagues across the country their budget problems are similar, and many actually are worse! Cornwall's budget deficit for next year is £62million (they are smaller than Devon), Plymouth is facing similar problems. Further afield, Norfolk County Council has a £60m budget gap for this year. Kent's is £70m.

Inflation has been the main driver for a lot of these cost pressures, with some sectors such as Highways actually experiencing hyperinflation. I hope that we will have much more clarity

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after the Autumn Statement and when the Local Government Finance Settlement comes through.

Non Budget Matters

- **Cost of Living Help** – Devon has received a further £5m funding to help households weather the rising costs of living, with help to pay for food, energy and other essential items. More information about this is online here - [Councils to receive additional funds to help support households with rising food and energy costs - News \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)
- **Support for Children during school holidays** – Free holiday activities with hot meals are now available for children during the Christmas 2022 holidays. All children are eligible to register, although priority places will be given to children aged five to 16 years old (or four-year-olds, if in reception), who are eligible for and receiving benefit-related free school meals and their families. More information available online here - [HAF providers – Christmas 2022 – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)
- **Devon Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy** – A public consultation is being held on the draft Devon Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy. This consultation aims to find out your views on the draft strategy and its recommendations. Information about the Strategy can be found online here - [Devon Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy - Have Your Say](#)
- **Recruitment of Chief Executive** – Shortlisting for the Chief Executive position has now taken place with 4 candidates going forward to final rounds and interviews on the 23rd and 24th November. All four are good, strong candidates and I am looking forward to seeing how they do over the next phases of interviews and assessments. All being well we will appoint on the 24th with a start date for March/April next year.

So in summary, very busy times at DCC but if there are any other local matters you'd like me to look into please let me know and I will follow them up.

b) District Cllr Richard Wiseman – to include discussion on [Full Council vote to boost Affordable Housing Provision through Development of Council owned Land which includes Part of South Street Car Park, Great Torrington.](#)

Cllr Wiseman sent a written report as follows:

Regarding the "housing on part of south street car park". At the last full council meeting of TDC, a proposal was put forward and agreed to look into the feasibility of providing social housing (which is different to affordable housing, affordable being 20% below market value and social housing being awarded by need) on TDC owned land, several sites are being looked at, from small undeveloped areas in housing estates to provide 2 or 3 houses up to larger areas including South Street Car Park to provide several houses, most of these sites are around the Bideford and Northam area.

As a background to this proposal, the council has a responsibility to house anyone in dire need, this is currently provided by social housing associations but we are very aware that we have an increasing need for social housing and it is costing the Council a great amount of money to provide temporary housing, we are currently way over budget in this area and expect the problem only to get worse.

The first step is to identify any possible sites, then put those sites forward for study, the proposals for the study will come back to the council for discussion and a decision before planning permission has to be sort.

At the moment this proposal is just a feasibility study and factors need to be taken in to account such as financial, finding a developer who is interested, and of course the positive and negative impact on the towns and surrounding areas.

It is too early to predict the outcome of the study, however in my opinion TDC should be very careful not to negatively impact the economies or the future economic needs of any of our towns, any land built on will be lost to communities. This is very important that we get this right, as it will have long lasting effects, so as I await the finding of the study with great interest I would like to know the parish council's opinion.

Cllr David Hurley was also in attendance and gave the following report:

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Spending Plan for £996k Government Rural Prosperity Fund

Recently at a Full Council meeting TDC Councillors voted to approve outline plans for the allocation of £996k the council is due to receive under an allocation from central governments Rural Prosperity Fund in April 2023. Defra are distributing the fund on behalf of the government. Councillors voted for the majority of the funding, £650k, to be allocated to a new fund to be administered by the council's economic regeneration partners North Devon+. Two community infrastructure projects are also being funded on top of this, with £150k earmarked for Victoria Park play area improvements in Bideford and £195k for the rejuvenation of the Grade II* listed Great Torrington Market Hall.

Enforcement at Torridge

At present there is only one Enforcement Officer at Torridge. Recruitment is underway and it is hoped that a new Officer will be in post prior to Christmas.

Rail Extension to Bideford

You may have heard about the ACE Rail (Atlantic Coast to Exeter Railway project) to upgrade the existing Tarka line (Exeter to Barnstaple) and to extend it to Bideford. The Initial Business Case is now fully funded and is fully supported by GWR. The project will also be an agenda item at the Devon Rail Forum in a couple of weeks time, and this announcement will certainly be greeted positively as upgrading the existing Tarka line (Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon and North Devon) and then extending it to Torridge (Bideford) will be transformational for Devon.

National Grid

Western Power Distribution become National Grid a few months ago. I have attended two Stakeholder meetings recently, the second of which was held in Barnstaple a few weeks ago. The media have warned that we may face blackouts this winter. Nat Grid say that their website will give 24 hour notice of such an event taking place in any area.

<https://nationalgrid.com>

Affordable Housing Provision through Development of Council owned Land

Homeless Issues Sept 2021

“Both N Devon and Torridge District Councils are looking at ways to try and alleviate the local housing crisis. For TDC's part, it has been suggested that an at arms reach Company be set up with a view to building council houses.” Report to Merton PC Sept 2021
Torridge District Councillors have voted overwhelmingly to progress the evaluation of 11 sites and parcels of council owned land for affordable or mixed housing development The debate at Full Council followed on from a decision in July which authorised the commissioning of an inventory of council owned property and determine which sites would be suitable to progress for development. The sites included a mixture of council owned garage units, vacant land, car parks, and offices spread across multiple parishes. Meetings and negotiations with registered housing providers will now commence to discuss the potential for partnerships to build-out and manage the units as part of their housing stock. Government bodies will now be approached to seek opportunities for grants and funding. The decision does not mean that housing will be developed for each of the sites as the studies so far have only confirmed that housing development is possible. More detailed proposals and a business case will be prepared and brought back to full council ahead of any planning application submissions.

Properties to be affordable rent or shared ownership

The list of sites approved for further progression included:

- Pynes Lane Garages, Bideford
- Garages, Tuckers Park, Bradworthy
- Land at The Crescent, Langtree
- Land at Cliveden Road, Bideford East
- Jackets Lane, Northam
- End of Ethelwynne Brown Close, Bideford
- Windmill Lane Offices and Car Park, Northam

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- Bone Hill Car Park, Northam
- Springfield Car Park, Chanters Road, Bideford
- Part of South Street Car Park, Great Torrington
- Land at Cleave Wood, Bideford East

Excluded:- Part of West Appledore Car Park

- c) **Police report - PFC SO Brown – [Written report received](#).**

7.11.22 Current & New Business:

- a) **Traffic & Highways Concerns (Chair)**

The Cllrs reported that some patching works have been undertaken.

- b) **Drainage Issues with the Square (Cllr Scantlebury/Cllr Nancekivell)**

Cllr Scantlebury has not heard back from the Contractor, and Cllr Nancekivell reported that he had been in contact with Mr Mansfield who has looked at the situation.

Cllr Nancekivell suggested that Mr Mansfield be asked to quote. **ACTION: Cllr Nancekivell**

- c) **Update on installation of safety rail on footpath by Garage – Cllr Stacey/Chair.**

Cllrs discussed and raised a variety of options including asking for additional parking provision at the former garage site.

A robust discussion took place and Cllrs instructed the Clerk to contact County Cllr Andrew Saywell to ask when double yellow lines are to be done.

- d) **Update on relocation of Noticeboard to The Square Bus stop – Cllrs Lang & Papworth.**

Cllr Lang agreed to install and Cllr Papworth agreed to drop over the noticeboard.

- e) **Discussions on decorating a tree in the square for Christmas (Cllr Brown)**

Cllrs discussed a variety of options including purchasing 300 solar power lights £20-30 to decorate the oak tree.

[Cllr Scantlebury proposed that the Council authorise Cllr Brown to purchase 2 sets of lights at a cost of no more than £60 to decorate the square, seconded Cllr Kops. All in Favour – Motion Carried \(RR2022/038\)](#)

- f) **Initial discussion on the Coronation of HM the King on the 6th of May 2023. (Chair/Clerk)**

Cllr Stacey to ask Jubilee committee to hold the money for Coronation celebrations.

Planting a tree to commemorate was suggested.

Cllrs were asked to think of events/ideas to be discussed at the March meeting.

- g) **Discussion and approval of Meeting dates for 2023. (Clerk)**

[Cllr Scantlebury proposed that the Council approve the following meeting dates for 2023: Monday 9th January, Monday 13th March, Wednesday 10th May \(Annual Council Meeting at 7pm\), Monday 10th July, Monday 11th September, Monday 13th November and Monday 6th March for Annual Parish Meeting, seconded Cllr Papworth. All in Favour – Motion Carried \(RR2022/039\)](#)

- h) **Arrangements to review/update the 2012 Emergency Plan (Chair)**

Cllrs discussed ideas and asked the Clerk to circulate some templates.

8.11.22 Council Documents & Policies

Cllrs to consider for approval the following policy: [MPC 022 Reserves Policy V2.0](#)

[Cllr Papworth proposed that the Council approve and ratify MPC 022 Reserves Policy V2.0 with immediate effect, seconded Cllr Brown. All in Favour – Motion Carried \(RR2022/040\)](#)

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

- a) **To approve financial schedule as presented by the Clerk.**

Cllrs received the [financial schedule which can be found in Appendix A](#).

[Cllr Scantlebury proposed that the financial schedule as presented be approved, seconded Cllr Twomey. All in Favour – Motion Carried \(RR2022/041\)](#)

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b) Banking Checks for period 10-10-2022 to 13-11-2022.

The Banking Checks were carried out by Cllrs Stacey and Nancekivell and all documents were signed.

c) To receive and discuss the 1st Draft 2023-2024 Budget.

Cllrs had a robust discussion and opinions varied greatly between Cllrs.

The Clerk took onboard the feedback to incorporate in the 2nd draft for discussion at the January meeting.

10.11.22 Clerks/Cllr reports and Items for future agendas:

a) Notification of Annual Leave: 14/12/2022 to 02/01/2023 inclusive. (Clerk) Noted.

b) Update on relocation of Post Box in the Square (Chair) – Location agreed, pending installation.

c) Update on Defibrillator for outside the Hall (Cllr Kops) - Has been installed and is functioning.

11.11.22 Confirmation of next meeting date:

The next meeting will be on Monday 9th January 2023 at 7.30pm in the Clinton Hall.

Please note that any changes to the meeting date or venue will be updated on the Website.

Cllrs Brown and Scantlebury sent their apologies for this meeting due to prior commitments.

12.11.22 Confidential matters (PART II) Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s1 (2)

a) Parishioner correspondence – No correspondence received so the Council did not move to Part II.

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting at 9.07pm.

Appendix A: Financial Schedule.

Pre-authorised payments made since last meeting:

Payment Ref	Amount	Payee	Details	Power	Mins Ref & RR
PM23/026	£255.12	Alice Turner	Salary (Sept 2022)	LGA 1972 S.112	12.5.21 b) RR2021/015
Total	£255.12				

Payments for authorisation (retrospective approval):

Payment Ref	Amount	Payee	Details	Power	Funding Source
(PM23/027)	£329.71	Alice Turner	Salary (Oct 2022 & Back pay)	LGA 1972 S.112	Staff Costs/Salary
PM23/028	£100.00	Colin Jones Design	Website hosting fee	LGA 1972 S.111	Admin/IT
PM23/029	£37.95	Alice Turner	Expenses (Nov 2022)	LGA 1972 S.111 & S.112	Staff Costs: /Salary / Office Exp / Training
TOTAL	£137.95				

Monies held as Reserves (after payments):

Amount	Details
£1,500.00	Election cost (Earmarked Reserve)
£8,000.00	Square Improvements (Earmarked Reserve)

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£2,305.62	Defibrillator Fund (Earmarked Reserve)
£636.00	TAP Fund (Earmarked Reserve)
£238.30	Defibrillator Supplies (Earmarked Reserve)
£667.88	Assets Fund (Earmarked Reserve)
£100.00	Hall Hire (Earmarked Reserve)
£2,500.00	Precept Contingency
£1,250.00	General Reserve
£4,300.00	Play Equipment Fund (Earmarked Reserve)
£328.64	Staff Costs & Training (Earmarked Reserve)
£21,826.44	TOTAL

Bank Situation

Bank Total 14/11/2022	£25,387.09
Less Payments pending	£137.95
Plus receipts Received (if after Bank date)	£0.00
Less Money held as reserves	£21,826.44
Available Balance	£3,422.70

Signed: Steve Papworth Date: 23rd January 2023