

BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary Town Council Meeting held on Wednesday 13th August 2025 at 6.30pm.

Present: Councillors: Sue Clarke (Chair), John Bailey, Steven Burch, Joanna De Groot-Marzec, Ron Fox, Paul Georghiades, Sylvee Phillips and Judith Hart (Town Clerk).

In attendance: Cllrs Jack Major (Teignbridge District Council) and Cllr Stuart Rogers (Teignbridge District Council and Devon County Council – arrived at 7.17pm), 20 members of the public

Press: None

25/95. Apologies for absence: Cllr Ben Leaney and Cllr John Nutley (Teignbridge District Council)

25/96. Councillors invited to declare any interests: None

25/97. Questions and comments from the public:

All questions and comments raised under the following two items.

25/98. Planning Applications for commercial sites and areas of significant development or interest:

Planning Application 0257/25 – Outline planning permission (with all matters reserved apart from access) for the phased development of circa 75 dwellings, highway improvements to Timbers Road and associated infrastructure at Land at Timbers Road, Buckfastleigh

The Chair welcomed residents to the meeting and explained that this is an opportunity for the public to raise their concerns and ask questions although the Town Council can only forward observations regarding the Timbers Road planning application and has little influence over the final decision. The public are encouraged to submit comments and objections on the Dartmoor National Park website.

The following comments, observations and questions were raised by both residents and Town Councillors:

1. *Why was the appeal dismissed?*

It was noted that the developer had previously submitted two appeals based on the non-determination of the planning applications within the prescribed time both of which were dismissed by the Planning Inspector in May 2024

2. *The proposal is to widen Timbers Road which regularly floods up to the entrance of the site, but the road will then continue as the existing narrow lane into Fairy Lane where there are parked cars outside each property. Further on there is Duckspound which is used by cyclists, horse riders and walkers. Access and parking will be further restricted.*
3. *This route is also used by traffic for the Football Club.*
4. *An additional 75 dwellings will place a considerable burden to existing infrastructure*

and whilst this development lies within the parish of Dean Prior and the district of South Hams the impact will be on Buckfastleigh.

5. *A concreted landscape will exacerbate the existing problem with surface water run-off and who will manage the proposed attenuation ponds?
How does this align with future flood mitigation measures?*

The Town Council and Dean Prior Parish Council have been informed that the Section 106 payment will be for the benefit of Buckfastleigh.

A management company will be responsible for the maintenance of the ponds but there is no indication as to who this will be.

6. *Increased traffic will impact existing access and visibility.
Previous consultations facilitated by the developer were not well advertised and their findings and relevance are now out of date.*
7. *Cllr Clarke; We now have extreme variations in weather caused by climate change.
With lower summer rainfall the ground becomes hard and impacted increasing the risk of flooding from rainwater run-off.*
8. *Why has the number of dwellings increased from 60 to circa 75?
Access to the site and the future management of the attenuation ponds is of major concern.*
9. *It has been widely acknowledged that hedge removal is contributing to flooding and yet still continues. This application raises considerable environmental concerns and removes another field previously used for food production.*
10. *Cllr Clarke: The affordable housing to market housing ratio does not add up.*
11. *Cllr De Groot Marzec: Affordable housing is not affordable to young people and the need for social housing is not being addressed.*
12. *This application is seeking outline permission for circa 75 dwellings, but this figure and the property/tenure type could be changed by the developer and is clearly dependent upon permission for the road to be widened.*
13. *Cllr Phillips: Widening the road will be a considerable expense and may be used as an excuse by the developer to reduce the number of affordable dwellings proposed.*
14. *Town Clerk: The Planning Inspector approved this area as an allocated site following the withdrawal of the Holne Road and Devonian sites leaving only Barn Park.*
15. *Cllr Phillips: The Planning Inspector requested another site in Buckfastleigh, but this site does not lie within the parish boundary.*
16. *Cllr Major: Dartmoor National Park boundaries do not always align with District and Parish boundaries, so this site is regarded for the purpose of planning as within Buckfastleigh. The Holne Road site is also not off the table for future development.*
17. *Affordable housing is defined as 20% below market value but is still not affordable in relation to average income for people in the south west.*
18. *A member of the public requested that the planning authority includes a local occupancy clause giving local families priority for housing.*
19. *The Council Tax paid on each property will not benefit Teignbridge District Council or the Town Council as it will be paid to South Hams and yet residents will use the schools, medical centre and facilities available in Buckfastleigh without contributing to them. It is unlikely any additional funding will be available too.*
20. *This new development does not include any infrastructure such as a children's*

playground or shop and is not necessarily within walking distance for many so will increase traffic into the town.

21. *Cllr Phillips: How will this impact capacity at the Kilbury sewage works?*
22. *The proposed road widening will only create a two-way road and pavement up to the entrance of the site leading from the Plymouth Road direction and will then revert to a narrow lane.*
23. *Concern was raised as to how this will impact water supply and pressure when there is already a problem in this area of the town.*
24. *Water issues and the proposed road widening have not been adequately addressed.*
25. *Cllr Georgiades: would a one-way system ease access and parking difficulties?*

It was noted that the original proposal to have the entrance to the site from Rocky Road which would be more workable than Timbers Road.

26. *Not only is there no dedicated play area there is no dog walking area.*
27. *The Ecology Report is out of date.*

Members of the public asked the Town Council to include a request for a public consultation within the response to the planning authority due to the strength of feeling and unanswered questions raised by residents.

25/99. The public are invited to comment regarding the decision taken by Teignbridge District Council at the full Council meeting held on 29th July 2025 to close the Woodholme car park toilets in 2027 unless transferred to Buckfastleigh Town Council.

A slide presentation to Ashburton Town Council at a public meeting on 6th August 2025 by an Ashburton resident was shown to the meeting.

Cllr Major explained that originally 13 public toilet blocks including Buckfastleigh were identified for disposal by Teignbridge District Council (TDC) either through asset transfer to the towns and parishes or sold to the highest bidder. This was increased to 22.

Following an overwhelming response by the public including petitions and an exhaustive list as to why this proposal had no rationale was deeply flawed, TDC Councillors still voted to approve the revised proposal to continue the provision of public toilets until April 2027 during which time a transfer of toilet provision will be negotiated with the affected towns and parishes with no regard as to whether these authorities can actually afford to do this and with the assumption that precepts can be increased to accommodate the cost.

Cllr De Groot-Marzec: The predicted cost of £19,000pa to run the toilets is inaccurate.

Cllr Clarke: Will the current TDC Councillors be standing for election to the new unitary authority?

Cllr Major: Yes. Toilets will be disposed of either by an assets transfer, a buyer or will close prior to handover.

Cllr Rogers: There is still a plan for TDC officers to engage with the parishes.

Cllr Clarke highlighted the overwhelming response by residents she has spoken to or have contacted her. She expressed concern that the Hello Summer programme of events for young people will suffer from the loss of toilets with up to 80 children participating in activities in the

park. The hire of portaloos will be an additional expense that will impact costs. The Town Council contributes to this project and the swimming pool and park.

Cllr Georgiades left the meeting at 7.35pm.

The proposal is to close if the towns and parishes cannot or will not take on this additional burden with no evidence of costs or additional resources provided so far.

The Clerk confirmed that the cost of transferring an asset is not just £1.00. The Town Council would be required as the applicant to meet all the legal costs in addition to increasing the precept to cover the annual cost of running and maintaining the toilets.

It was confirmed that the toilets will not be refurbished by TDC prior to handover.

Cllr Rogers: The total amount of debt held by all the lead Devon local authorities will not be known until early autumn. This debt will be transferred to the new unitary authority together with reserves. TDC currently has £12 million in reserves. This is still being used for capital expenditure, but operational reserves must be retained and therefore cannot be spent.

Protection of public health and social care is essential, but the higher tiers of local authorities think it is acceptable to transfer the burden down to the parishes because we are not restricted by a cap on setting our precepts. There is however no regard on how this impacts residents.

There is debate amongst Ministers about introducing a cap on parish precepts to this effect.

Member of Public: *There should be a push by MPs for statutory provision to provide public toilets. TDC in the meantime should safeguard all assets and spend on these until 2027.*

TDC does not own all their assets within Buckfastleigh as some are held in trust with TDC as the trustee.

Cllr Major: Other asset transfers are now being considered including the car parks, but it is unlikely that these will be offered for £1.00 due to their value. If the parishes do not take on TDC assets secondary provision such as a Community Interest Company or commercial sales will be looked at. Handover to a unitary authority will nevertheless take place on 1st April 2027.

Meeting closed at 8.25pm