

BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Wednesday 16th July 2025 at 7.00pm.

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

In attendance: Cllrs Jack Major, John Nutley (Teignbridge District Council) and Cllr Stuart Rogers (Teignbridge District Council and Devon County Council), 16 members of the public including those representing grant applications and the Dart Valley Cycle Trail

Press: None

25/73. Apologies for absence: Cllr Steven Burch (Buckfastleigh Town Council) and Becci Eriksson (Be Buckfastleigh)

Councillors invited to declare any interests: None

25/74. To approve and sign the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 18th June 2025 and review actions from this meeting:

Minutes signed by Cllr Sue Clarke.

Actions (Town Council Meeting):

Outstanding actions to follow under Minute No. 25/80

25/75. To receive the minutes of the Finance Committee held on 9th July 2025:

Cllr Georghiades stressed to the meeting that applicants must refer to the published guidance due to the number of incomplete applications submitted which require further information. As a local authority we are accountable for how we spend public money.

25/76. Newly co-opted Town Councillor welcome:

Councillor Ben Leaney was introduced to the meeting, welcomed by the Chair and enrolled by the Clerk.

25/77. Representation from members of the Dart Valley Cycle Trail:

Four representatives of the Dart Valley Cycle Trail presented a brief update about this project.

Originally tasked by Staverton Parish Council to find active travel routes to Totnes and Dartington, Riverford Organics asked if the proposed cycling and walking route could extend to Buckfastleigh and avoiding the A384

Sustrans who are the custodian of the National Cycle Network undertook a feasibility study for safe cycling and walking.

The group held a cycle day in 2024 which was attended by 120 people and have received support from Dartmoor National Park, Totnes Town Council, Dartington Parish Council and Staverton Parish Council. They now have a project manager and lots of volunteers.

Members reiterated their support for this project and the Chair thanked the group for their attendance at this meeting.

The Chair moved the agenda to item no. 7.

25/78. Questions and comments from the public – to include an invitation to residents to express their views about the proposed closure of the Teignbridge District Council owned Woodholme Car Park Toilets:

Cllr Clarke said it was disappointing that only 5,577 (4%) of the public completed the public toilets consultation last November concerning the proposed closure of 22 toilets across the Teignbridge area. This result does not give a fair representation of public opinion and did not include children as one of the primary users when using the park. If the Hello Summer programme of activities that take place in the park annually need to hire portaloos this will have a significant impact on cost and what they can realistically provide in the future. No further consultation has taken place.

Buckfastleigh residents are asking “What do actually get from Teignbridge?” Only 5% of the total Teignbridge budget is actually spent in the rural areas.

The Chair has received numerous emails and social media posts from residents expressing their concerns and dismay.

On the one hand the Town Council is being encouraged by Teignbridge District Council (TDC) to increase footfall in the town which will boost our economy as demonstrated by our recent successful bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and on the other are proposing to close the only public toilets in the town in the car park that visitors are the most likely to use when they arrive.

Cllr Nutley: There is no confirmation of closure. A Member briefing was held today, and a decision will be made at Full Council on 29th July.

Cllr Nutley has already voiced his concerns regarding how this will affect the economies of both Ashburton and Buckfastleigh

The Chair asked Cllr Nutley whether he will vote against the proposed closure of the toilets at the Teignbridge Full Council meeting and he replied “Yes.”

Member of Public: *The toilets are also used by the bus drivers who stop there, delivery drivers and the local walking group depend upon it.*

Member of Public: *“There is a concern by business owners that there is the expectation that pubs and cafes will be used without any reference to the additional cost of cleaning, water rates, toilet paper etc.”*

There is the assumption that the toilets can be handed over to the towns and parishes without any funding and that the towns and parishes can raise their precepts as they do not have the same restrictions as the larger authorities.

Estimated costs provided by TDC are that each toilet block costs £15,000 pa to run which includes the cost of a contractor to clean, unlock and lock 7 days a week, but this does not take into consideration the need for refurbishment and repairs. Buckfastleigh toilets are neglected and run down and would require considerable investment to update to an acceptable standard.

Cllr Major explained that TDC Councillors were shown a series of slides at the Member’s briefing which included a scale of points. A toilet may be saved from closure if it scores 8 points or above. Buckfastleigh only scored 3 and Ashburton 5 but it is not known how this

scale is calculated. TDC want to save £250,000 and can meet this by closing the toilets identified.

Cllr Georgiades: We are the 7th or 8th largest economy in the World and yet we cannot afford toilets!

No other options have been offered and TDC is not saving money by transferring the costs to the parishes.

Member of Public: *Disabled toilets belong to the Radar Key scheme. This proposal goes against the right to have disabled access to toilets.*

Cllr Rogers referred to Public Health England who references the importance of accessibility to public toilets.

TDC hope to sell Old Forde House but due to its Grade I listed status and numerous covenants which restrict the use of its grounds this may deter potential buyers.

Members were asked why they are in such a hurry to offload assets when TDC will cease to exist in 2028 under Devolution proposals. Is TDC facing bankruptcy?

Cllr Major: No

Will TDC go into the red before it vanishes?

Cllr Rogers is not aware of the level of debt between all the District Councils, Devon County Council and Torbay.

It was noted that out of the proposal to close 22 toilets across the area only is in an urban area, Newton Abbot.

Cllr Major: Savings will have to be made (2.5 million) before devolved status and the proposed closure of the toilets is in anticipation of this.

Cllr Fox reminded the District Councillors that when they refer to TDC they are in fact TDC Councillors and are therefore talking about themselves and should accept accountability for the decisions made.

Cllr Rogers stressed that this is a LibDem led proposal, has called for a named vote and will be voting against it.

Cllr Major is not happy with the figures and is asking more questions. He too confirmed that he would be voting against the proposal too.

Cllr Bailey: TDC should look somewhere else to make savings and that this would be a very poor decision.

Member of Public: *There needs to be transparency and accountability and to take account the needs of our children.*

TDC cannot raise their precept by more than 4.9% but towns and parishes can without the need for a referendum, but the electorate cannot afford it.

Will Buckfastleigh be left with another derelict building?

Member of Public: *It is also a question of hygiene. If there are no toilets children will just urinate in the bushes.*

Cllr Georghiades summarised the discussion.

The media are aware of the TDC meeting on Tuesday 29th July at Forde House.

Action: Clerk to publish the instructions provided by TDC as to how a member of the public can submit a question to the above meeting.

The Chair returned the meeting to agenda item no. 6:

25/79. Representation from Larger Grant Applicants:

- **The Wool Hub** – application for £1,000 to contribute to running costs and workshops.

A representative of the group highlighted the success and popularity of the Wool Hub and how it has become a unique and integral part of the town and its wool heritage.

Although organisers continue to seek alternative sources of funding and revenue streams, they are struggling to meet the day-to-day costs of renting and running the premises.

- **Be Buckfastleigh Social Supermarket** - application for £1,1800 to cover weekly room hire in the Town Hall until June 2026.

Representatives of the Social Supermarket explained that although they receive some free food donations from local suppliers which is not included in the suggested £4.50 donation per customer, the main delivery weekly delivery of food costs approx. £4,000 per year in addition to room hire, insurance, publicity etc. 50 to 60 residents per week use the Social Supermarket but they are dependent upon donations and grants to meet the shortfall.

The Town Council acknowledges that this initiative is very important to the town and entirely supports it, but Members continue to be unclear regarding the accounting process.

Applicants to be advised in writing following further discussion by Members. Applicants left the meeting.

25/80. Questions to District and County Councillors and comments on reports relevant to this meeting:

The Chair raised the issue of Ashburton Town Council not contributing funds to Teignbridge Citizens Advice who's weekly outreach service in Buckfastleigh is being used by their residents too and yet they have funds to buy a Freedom of the Town medal and scroll and replacement flags?

Cllr Rogers confirmed that he is looking at his County Council fund to contribute to this.

Cllr Major has submitted questions to TDC regarding the public toilets issue and attended a drop-in session in Ashburton about Devolution which was also attended by Cllr John Bailey on behalf of Buckfastleigh. Ultimately the final decision lies with the Secretary of State.

Cllr Major also went the Wool Hub AGM who are struggling to secure funding and need help with IT. He offered to help distribute their wool trail information to the National Park visitor centres.

The Buckfastleigh Action for Nature Group are also promoting the Swift Project and are

encouraging people to install swift boxes.

Cllr Nutley attended a Local Government Reorganisation workshop. TDC will engage with Town and Parish Councils regarding the transfer of assets but confirmed that none of these assets will be upgraded prior to handover.

There are no plans to reconnect the lights at the tennis court, but Cllr Nutley has asked for this to be undertaken so that the court can be used in the evening by players.

Cllr Nutley also reported that community policing is trialling a more compassionate and common-sense approach.

Members are waiting for further information regarding delays with the Housing Support Fund.

The Chair asked how the Housing Support Fund identifies those who qualify who are not aware it exists or do not have internet access?

Cllr Rogers explained that the fund can be paid in 3 different ways and Devon County Council (DCC) are reviewing numbers, how it can be paid and eligibility.

Cllr Rogers has met with the member of the public who previously raised the speed limit issue on Plymouth/Strode Road. DCC will not reduce the limit from 40mph to 30mph as the road does not meet the required criteria however, it is hoped that Speedwatch will become involved for eg. siting a speed camera van together with the 20's Plenty campaign.

The issue of indiscriminate parking has also been raised which is preventing access for emergency vehicles and certain areas have been identified for pothole repairs.

25/81. To discuss the second round of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and include the proposed cost and design for a mural on the Plymouth Road junction bus shelter as a possible element of this bid.

The Clerk confirmed that the second round of the UKSPF application must be submitted by Wednesday 6th August. She asked if Members would agree to include the Plymouth Road bus stop mural as part of this bid or if not whether this could be agreed for expenditure.

In addition to a new Town Guide, other options could be considered such as a replacement tourist directional sign at the entrance to the railway but without the outcome of Cllr Burch's meeting with TDC Economic Development Officers earlier in the day the Clerk could not provide any further information.

25/82. Planning Applications for commercial sites and areas of significant development or interest:

Planning Application 0226/25 – Partial demolition of warehouse building and replacement extension to form additional light industrial floor area including the renovation of existing stone warehouse building at Devonia Sheepskins and Tanney Ltd, Town Mill Building, Mardle Way, Buckfastleigh.

Response from the Town Council: *Whilst Buckfastleigh Town Council does not generally support the demolition of buildings which are of historic interest we also recognise that this particular structure is fairly dilapidated and would not meet modern employment needs. The proposed designs are very sympathetic to the existing and adjacent buildings, and we encourage new and increased workshop/factory space to provide much-needed employment and business to the town.*

25/83. To review the Police Report for June 2025:

Noted.

25/84. English Devolution White Paper Update:

Update provided by the District Councillors covered under Minute No. 25/80

25/85. Budget Analysis Report 01.06.25 – 30.06.25:

Noted.

The Clerk provided a brief synopsis of how the Town Council accounts are managed and submitted for audit for the benefit of the Cllr Leaney.

25/86. Bank Payments Report and Bank Statement 01.06.25 – 30.06.25:

Noted.

25/87. Multi-Pay Card Statements April 2025 to June 2025:

Noted

25/88. Quarterly Bank Reconciliation April 2025 to June 2025:

Signed by the Chair

25/89. Annual review of Town Council Standing Orders:

The Clerk highlighted one addition - reference to the new Procurement Act 2025 procedures.

25/90. Chairs Announcements.

The Chair has recently visited Buckfast Primary School and Buckfastleigh Scouts and attended the annual Fun Day at the Orchard Millennium Green.

25/91. Councillor updates relevant to this meeting.

Cllr Phillips: The Valiant Soldier will be hosting a wine bar to support the Water Day event on Saturday 26th July.

Cllr Bailey attended the Devolution Roadshow drop-in session and out of the 3 options proposed joining Teignbridge with South Hams, West Devon and Torbay Councils seemed the most workable option. The session did not however provide many answers to what was asked.

Cllr De Groot-Marzec represented the Town Council at the recent meeting of the Ashburton and Buckfastleigh Hospital League of Friends AGM. The remit of this organisation is to support the hospital and its patients including those who have completed treatment, but little seems to be spent from the large amount of funding they have available. They have however awarded a grant to the Ashburton GP practice which is a business and wish to spend £40,000 for furnishing the new Health Hub.

There is no breakdown of where and how funding is allocated and Cllr De Groot-Marzec felt that this organisation is not very transparent and would encourage applications for health-related projects.

Decision: Members agreed that the Town Council should have representation at these meetings and Cllr Georgiades was appointed to this effect. Clerk to action

Cllr De Groot-Marzec is also collating information and photographs for 'Filming in England'

following on from recent and future television productions who have chosen Buckfastleigh as a film location.

25/92. Items requiring urgent attention.

None

25/93. Summary of Key Messages

Clerk to action.

25/94. Motion to move into a Part II (private) session to discuss items of confidential business in accordance with Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Meeting moved to Part II.

The public and District Councillors left the meeting.

Meeting returned to Part I

Larger Grant decisions:

The Wool Hub CIC - £1,000 agreed

Buckfastleigh Social Supermarket – £1,180 agreed

Clerk to action

Meeting returned to Part I and closed at 9.25pm