

BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Wednesday 22nd November 2023 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Sue Clarke (Acting Chair), John Bailey, Paul Georghiades, Sylvee Phillips, Leigh Walker-Haworth, and Judith Hart (Town Clerk).

In attendance: 3 members of the public, Cllr Stuart Rogers (Teignbridge District Council) and Phil Northcott (Trustee of Victoria Park)

Press: None

23/148. Apologies for absence: Cllrs Huw Cox, Emma Fitzpatrick, Ron Fox, and John Nutley (Teignbridge District Council)

23/149. Councillors invited to declare any interests:

Cllr Phillips and Judith Hart both trustees of the Valiant Soldier Museum and Heritage Centre. Cllr Phillips did not vote.

Cllr Clarke as a trustee of Victoria Park.

23/150. To approve and sign the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 18th October 2023 and review actions from these meetings:

Minutes signed by Cllr Clarke.

Response from Anthony Mangnall MP for Totnes regarding the Community Project Access initiative. Town Hall to be used as a police hub when required.

Feedback re lack of rural transport provision. Still no response from Ashburton or South Brent councils. Cllr Clarke asked Cllr Rogers to consult with Ashburton Town Council. It was hoped that feedback could be sent to Devon County Council as a combined approach rather than just one parish council to emphasise the impact on all rural communities.

23/151. Questions and comments from the public:

Stuart Rogers, as Ashburton Postmaster, presented information on the new community Post Office Hub in Ashburton and a Post Office on wheels service for rural communities. HSBC, Lloyds, and Barclays are on board to provide face-to-face advice together with an enhanced Post Office service, library and community hub which is the first combined initiative in the UK.

23/152. To consider Two Smaller Grant Applications and One Larger Grant Application:

One smaller grant application has been withdrawn.

Friendship Group to broaden range of activities offered.

Decision: Members agreed to award £500

The Valiant Soldier Museum – Philippa Wood presented.

The trustees are trying to make the centre a more vibrant hub but there is limited space. They would like to refurbish the two ground floor rooms which are not part of the actual museum, one of which is damp, and both are poorly lit and can be cold. It is hoped that a more welcoming space would attract more events and generate more income. New flooring is needed due to a residual damp

problem caused by flooding and an underground water course.

The trustees want to develop the Valiant Soldier and have secured a grant to look at the future of the barns. Revenue is not enough to support expenditure. Funds came from the Teignbridge District Council (TDC) Covid grant which is effectively their reserve. There are no paid employees and all quotes for repairs and refurbishment are from local companies.

The total amount of grant requested is £5,000.

Cllr Clarke proposed £2,500 with a commitment to a further £2,500 in the new financial year. It is important to bring visitors into the town. Cllr Bailey asked about the leaks in the roof – should this not be done first? Philippa said this was currently being investigated but is a different part of the building.

Cllr Georghiades asked if archive access will increase income? Philippa: If people are interested in the history of the town, they are more likely to visit events in the pub. Cllr Georghiades would like to support the Valiant Soldier, but the application is premature and would like to see quotes for the roof.

Cllr Clarke: The Valiant Soldier is independent of the Town Council and why are we questioning their decision-making?

Cllr Georghiades would like greater scrutiny.

Cllr Bailey agreed with principle of giving a grant, but the Town Council has a duty of care regarding how public money is allocated.

Cllr Phillips: Funds are ring-fenced for various projects.

Cllr Bailey: Would like assurances that this grant is ring-fenced for one specific purpose.

Cllr Georghiades: If funds are not spent on this project due to the roof they should be returned to the Council and paid at another time.

Cllr Clarke: Need evidence of how work is progressing before second payment is made.

Decision: Award £2,500 now and another £2,500 when evidence of work provided in the new financial year.

23/153. Questions to District and County Councillors and comments on reports relevant to this meeting:

Cllr Rogers will attend every meeting if possible but covers a large Ward. Street cleaning is a problem and would like to work collaboratively between the parishes. He suggested the purchase of a street cleaning machine operated by the Buckfastleigh and Ashburton Town Rangers and that the surrounding parishes could also join this initiative. TDC would like to devolve powers. How within the framework of law can the parishes do this?

The Clerk highlighted that TDC has a statutory duty to clean the streets and that the Town Council will lose the General Power of Competence in May 2024 due to the loss of the required number of elected councillors so it is unlikely that the Council could legally participate in this scheme. There is also the issue of insurance, risk, training, health and safety, working with and disposal of potentially hazardous materials, the size of the parish and that the Ranger only works part time.

Cllr Rogers is looking at warm space locations to provide hot meals following funding from an anonymous benefactor.

Cllr Clarke: The Town Hall was a warm space last winter. Better Places is running a social supermarket at the Football Club and the Town Council is again providing a free Christmas meal. Cllr Cox has had a conversation with the school heads regarding a voucher scheme for families.

23/154. Planning Applications for commercial sites and areas of significant development or interest:

The Clerk advised the meeting that yet again Dartmoor National Park (DNP) have arranged for a significant planning application for Buckfastleigh to be considered at their Development Management Committee meeting just after the Christmas period. It is likely that notification of this meeting would have been received when offices are closed. The development of Land at Timbers Road to provide 75 dwellings will be discussed at the DNP meeting scheduled for Friday 5th January 2024.

Cllr Georghiades volunteered to represent the Town Council with support from Cllr Haworth-Walker if available.

Action: To discuss further at the December meeting.

The King's Arms planning application: 0462/23 Change of use from public house to a dwelling: Members agreed that this is another business lost in Fore Street.

Cllr Bailey highlighted that this may be a High Street initiative – the Government Future High Streets Initiative.

Member of the public: The pub was advertised for sale, but this may not have been known as a commercial agent was used. This is not an application to convert to residential and there is no parking.

Action: The Town Council objects to this application on the grounds that we need to retain our retail and leisure businesses having already lost several to residential use on Fore Street which has had a detrimental effect on footfall. There is also no parking at this property.

23/155. To review the Police Report for October 2023:

No comments. Cllr Clarke met with the local PCSO to discuss breakdown of statistics and description provided in the report. Monthly police surgeries are taking place in the Town Hall.

23/156. Feedback from Buckfastleigh Youth Forum meeting held on 9th November 2023:

In the absence of Cllr Cox, it was agreed to defer this item until the December meeting.

23/157. The Chairman moved to Agenda Item No. 12: To receive the Victoria Park Perennial Grant Report and estimated energy costs:

Cllr Clarke questioned the continuation of the successful cold water sessions.

Phil Northcott: This is going very well and the trustees are hoping to extend this to March. The sessions incur minimal costs for the pool, the main cost is the running of the filtration unit and pumps.

Cllr Georghiades: Can Victoria Park see a time when financial support from the Town Council tapers?

Phil Northcott: No, will need the perennial grant indefinitely.

Cllr Phillips: Is additional funding being sought?

Phil Northcott: Grants and donations from businesses and individuals amount to possibly £5,000 per year or more. They received a grant for new filtration and pumping system which has contributed to some savings. Energy costs are £22,000 per year at present. There has been a 16% increase in ticket sales this year and that does not include the cold water swims.

The children's play park – a consultation seeking the views of the community for redevelopment ideas has been undertaken. Feedback results are predominantly in favour of a safe area for young children to enjoy.

23/158. To comment on the Teignbridge Local Plan 2020-2040 Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Addendum Consultation:

No comment as there is no significant reference to Buckfastleigh.

23/159. To receive the Teignbridge Citizens Advice Buckfastleigh Outreach Activity Report July to September 2023:

Citizens Advice are now based at the Food Bank Hub. The Town Council is pleased to continue to support this service.

23/160. To receive the Annual Report from Totnes Rural Areas Youth Engagement Project (TRAYE), letter of thanks and request for funding in 2024:

Cllr Clarke explained the project and that she had attended a recent Halloween event.

The Clerk explained the Town Council funding element for this project.

23/161. To discuss the draft Budget and Precept 2024/25:

The Clerk gave a short presentation regarding proposed increases and decreases to the new budget which includes the following:

- To increase the budget from £150,550 to £156,100, an increase of 3.69% to the precept and 2.74% to a Council Tax Band B property which includes increases to the Victoria Park and Town Hall perennial grants and Hello Summer budgets.
- To continue to ring-fence the remaining amount in the Victoria Park Energy Costs budget approx. £7,475 due to the uncertainty of future energy bills.

Decision: Resolved unanimously by all Members present.

23/162. To note the External Auditor's Report and Certificate for 2022/23: Noted

23/163. Budget Analysis Report 01.10.23 – 31.10.23: Noted

23/164. Bank Payments Report and Bank Statements 01.10.23 – 31.10.23: Noted

23/165. Chair's Announcements:

Cllr Clarke attended the Camphill new barn opening on behalf of the Chair – the Camphill community are moving towards a more self-sufficient future.

The Christmas Lights will be put up on Sunday 26th November from 10.00am. Volunteers are needed.

The WI Christmas Fair will be held on Saturday 25th November in the Town Hall.

23/166. Councillor updates relevant to this meeting:

Cllr Georghiades attended a meeting about the cinema starting up again in the Town Hall.

23/167. Summary of Key Messages:

Clerk to action

Meeting closed at 8.36 pm.