

# BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

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**Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at 7.00pm.**

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

**In attendance:** Cllr John Nutley and Stuart Rogers (Teignbridge District Council). Pam Barrett (Be Buckfastleigh - Hello Summer), Becci Eriksson (Be Buckfastleigh - Hello Summer) and Phil Northcott (Victoria Park & Swimming Pool) and 6 members of the public.

**Press:** None

**24/130. Apologies for absence:** Cllrs Steven Burch, Ron Fox and Jack Major (Teignbridge District Council)

**Councillors invited to declare any interests:** Joanna De Groot-Marzec, Christmas Fair Larger Grants and Sue Clarke, Victoria Park Trustee.

**24/131 To approve and sign the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and review actions from these meetings and review actions from this meeting:**

Minutes signed by the Chair.

No actions to report.

**24/132. To receive and note the minutes of the Finance Committee held on 13th November 2024 – See Agenda item. 5 re Larger Grant Applications and Agenda Item. 15 re budget & precept discussion:**

Cllr Paul Georghiades spoke regarding Finance – it was agreed that no decisions regarding grants applications should be determined by the Finance Committee. Recommendations from this meeting to be resolved at full Town Council in a Part II session with the decision noted under Part I and sent in writing to the applicant by the Clerk.

**24/133 Questions and comments from the public:**

None

**24/134. To consider 5 Smaller Grant Applications and 2 Larger Grant Applications:**

**Buckfastleigh Library Board Games Club** – this club is aimed at children who are 10 years and upwards and encourages engagement with the library. The club is held in the Town Hall which is an inclusive and enjoyable space. They have had 6 sessions so far with up to 15 children on each occasion. Requested grant - £412.

**Buckfastleigh SEND Parents Support Group** - The Councillors were informed that there is a growing need for SEND support and it is acknowledged that parents of SEND children can struggle financially due to the additional burden on income for eg. where one parent needs to stay at home to provide care and support. It is a good resource which started as a Facebook group meeting monthly for 2 hours. The group needs a new regular venue and safe space. Requested £500.

Member of the public: The Youth Club are looking to hire their space out as some users have moved to another venue.

There are generally 6-14 attendees and is the only group in town that provides this type of support.

Cllr John Nutley encouraged people to apply for Teignbridge District Councillor Funding.

**Buckfastleigh Dungeons and Dragons Group** – this group is run under the umbrella of the Buckfastleigh Youth Project and has requested £500 to run the for 7 weeks after Christmas. The Bungalow has funded the Dungeons and Dragons for 18 months. Over half the attendees are now joining other activities at the Bungalow and are developing more social skills. Membership is becoming oversubscribed.

**The Friendship Group** - application to be discussed in Part II.

**Wintertide** – request for £490 for free children’s activities across both of their venue sites; the Town Hall and the Brew Hub during the craft, food and drink festival on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> November. The activities will be nature based and include wreath and crown making. The organisers said that the event benefits local businesses too, not just the event itself.

Cllr Paul Georghiades asked about costs and donations by those who may be able to pay.

Parking will be available on the Devonian site at £2.00 per vehicle with stewards in attendance and a map provided to encourage people to walk around the town. This will also be good event for the swimming pool too.

**Buckfastleigh Christmas Fair** - Joanna De Groot–Marzec as Chair of the committee gave a summary of the event and requested funding for core costs of £1500 for eg. risk assessments, road closure, traffic management etc and £2000 for the hire of the Victorian Carousel. The Christmas Fair is very different to Wintertide with more entertainment than craft activities.

### **24/135. End of Year report for Hello Summer youth activities programme with representation from Better Places – Be Buckfastleigh.**

Pam Barrett and Becci Eriksson reported that the activities in the park, Town Hall, swimming pool, trips on the Steam Train and free lunch provision were well attended. Despite the weather it was another successful summer. Hello Summer is seen as part of the town now.

Cllr Paul Georghiades said that it will not be the same without The Living Room premises.

Becci Erikson reported that without The Living Room as a base it is now a problem with planning, coordination, advertising and feet on the ground to organise activities. The Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) funding has been reduced from 60 children to 30. There has been no Government announcement to date in relation to further funding. The original Hello Summer project which started in 2017 was very different to what is offered now.

Pam Barrett reported that the take up rate for HAF is poor in other areas of Devon.

Buckfastleigh has a high uptake of eligible children at 12; or 80%. The programme takes a huge amount of time and effort to administer, and they would need to look at what can be delivered realistically by the Town Council funding if no other funding is available. They will hopefully still receive HAF for children who qualify for free school meals.

73 children are entitled to free school meals in Buckfastleigh but only 30 are funded by HAF. HAF is subject to very strict criteria and must be used for a specific level of food and activities. Building community is a priority objective.

## **24/136. Annual report for Victoria Park and Swimming Pool by the Treasurer for the Victoria Park Charity.**

Phil Northcott, Treasurer of Victoria Park and Swimming Pool and recently appointed Chair, thanked the Town Council for the £15,000 energy grant from the Town Council and £9,000 received in donations from local businesses. There has been a substantial increase in energy costs from £9,000 to £31,000 and fewer grants available or donations given in 2024. Footfall for 2024 was 7,600. As a result of less funding, the trustees have reduced the amount of funded free passes to eligible children. This is to be reviewed.

Plans for the Pool in 2025: Energy costs are not decreasing with estimated costs for 2025 at £24,000. Phil is in dispute with the energy supplier who will not accept that the pool is seasonal. It was suggested that they go to an energy broker.

The Charity received a £50,000 grant for the refurbishment of the new children's play park.

The Pool and Park Manager will be undertaking training for cold water swimming and to be a qualified First Aid Trainer who can be hired out.

Over 200 people attended the 'Changing Rooms of Doom' Halloween Event.

The Charity will need to increase their fundraising activities for 2025. The play park for older children requires essential maintenance with an initial cost of £6,000 estimated, followed by a further £8,000 or it will have to close.

Cold water swimming is still a very popular activity and revenue stream.

Cllr Sylvee Phillips questioned Phil regarding free passes from the Town Council grant. Phil Northcott explained that there was no funding from South West Water this year and that the Town Council grant is used to cover everything involved in the running of the pool not the provision of free passes.

Sue Clarke, in her position of Trustee to the pool Charity provided safeguarding training to the Lifeguards for free.

Cllr Joanna De Groot-Marzec asked about Green Energy. Phil Northcott explained that they would need a football sized pitch for enough Solar Panels to heat the pool. A ground source heat pump is also not a viable option.

Phil explained that ticket prices had been increased with a reduced price for residents from the TQ11 postcode. It is mostly locals that use the pool in season but cold water swimmers come from as far away as Bristol. They cannot exclude people from the park or charge them to use it.

Sue Clarke said that if the park closes, this would have cost implications for the pool.

Cllr John Bailey asked why the Buckfastleigh Youth Project rent for the Bungalow is so low. Phil Northcott explained that the rent cannot be significantly increased under the terms of the lease and Buckfastleigh Youth Project cannot afford a higher rent.

Sue Clarke said that there needs to be a better use of the Bungalow.

Cllr Paul Georghiades thanked Phil Northcott for his report.

**24/137. Questions to District and County Councillors and comments on reports relevant to this meeting.**

Cllr John Nutley spoke briefly about the Public Toilets Consultation and said that no decision would be made until the results are known. This would be discussed further in January. One possibility was to look at assets and transfer ownership to Town and Parish Councils.

Cllr Sue Clarke highlighted that the consultation questions are poorly worded and that there are concerns that unused and empty toilets would be open to vandalism. The town should not be dependent on the availability of business toilets and that this will have a financial impact too.

Cllr Stuart Rogers spoke about the Cost-of-Living event in Ashburton which hosted 16 organisations to provide advice. There were no attendees from Buckfastleigh other than the Town Mayor. They are working on a list of information for residents to access including South West Water support and a community interest bank funded through the Connectivity Fund.

Teignbridge District Council (TDC) also want to identify plots of land for sale for new housing.

Joanna De Groot-Marzec asked why does Ashburton have free parking for their Christmas Fair/late night shopping event and not Buckfastleigh?

Cllr Rogers to speak to the TDC Car Parks Officer.

Cllr Rogers: I know there have been some comments and concerns from some Councillors regarding the TDC owned toilets, and as you are aware, a public consultation is being carried out.

We cannot enter meaningful discussions on individual assets until the results of the public consultation are known and a decision is made by full Council together with officer recommendations.

We expect to be in that position early in the New Year, following which officers will meet with Town and Parish Councils to discuss the outcomes. In advance of that all we can do is share a list of assets by ward

In the meantime, we are compiling all information to share with Town and Parishes including financial and asset information. We envisage that discussions will take place over the next 12 months with Town and Parishes regarding toilets and other assets and therefore, in terms of setting their precept, this will impact their 2026/27 budget not 2025/26.

**24/138. Planning Applications for commercial sites and areas of significant development or interest: None**

**24/139 To review the Police Report's for September and October 2024:** Noted

**24/140. To receive the Teignbridge Citizens Advice Buckfastleigh Outreach Activity report July to September 2024:**

Report noted. A good service is provided.

**Action:** Thank you letter to be sent to Citizens Advice by the Clerk

**24/141. Response to Government online consultation on enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings:**

It was felt that remote attendees were less likely to be heard and that it would reduce both councillor and public engagement. Technology costs would have to be taken into consideration, and it would be difficult to manage.

Proxy votes are not valid without adequate discussion as more information may be brought to the in-person meeting.

**24/142. The Buckfastleigh UK Shared Prosperity Fund Update and to ratify the decision to lease the area of green space at the junction of Plymouth Road and Strode as agreed in the attached terms:**

The Clerk referred to how the bid was split between the refurbishment of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) and the provision of new street furniture/entrance to the town. Currently she is waiting for orders to be delivered. Progress at the TIC has been good despite the unforeseen problems of working in a listed building with uneven floors and walls.

**Decision:** Members voted retrospectively to lease the TDC owned land at the junction of Plymouth Road and Strode Road for a period of 10 years at £1.00 per annum to create a more attractive entrance to the town and one-way system. Resolved.

**24/143. To comment on the online Dartmoor National Park active travel plans (deadline for comments 24th November 2024):**

All Councillors were asked to look at general access to Dartmoor National Park.

**24/144. To discuss the draft budget and precept 2025/26:**

Following discussion at the Finance Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and recommendations by the RFO, it was agreed to raise the precept from £156,000 to £172,250 to cover increasing costs to the Town Council and the services it provides it. This equates to a Council Tax rise of 7.80% for a Band B property from £103.43 per year to £111.50 or £8.07 per annum.

**Decision:** Unanimously resolved. Statement to be issued to the community from the Chair.

**24/145. Budget Analysis Reports 01.09.24 – 30.09.24 and 01.10.24 – 31.10.24:** Noted

**24/146. Bank Payments Reports and Bank Statements 01.09.24 – 30.09.24 and 01.10.24 – 31.10.24:** Noted

**24/147. Multi-Pay Card Statements July 2024 to September 2024:** Noted

**24/148. Quarterly Bank Reconciliation July 2024 to September 2024:**

Noted and signed by the Chair.

**24/149: Recommendation from the Personnel Committee held on 6th November 2024 to adopt the reviewed and updated Buckfastleigh Town Council Equality and Diversity Statement:**

The Clerk highlighted some suggested amendments to the existing policy.

**Decision:** Amendments agreed and updated policy adopted.

**24/150: Chair's Announcements:**

Cllr Clarke spoke about the Cost-of-Living Event held at Ashburton Town Hall and the upcoming Buckfast Abbey Rowcroft Hospice ;Celebration of Christmas' Event at Buckfast Abbey.

Members rejected the request to relocate the bench in Chapel Street following reports of antisocial behaviour.

**24/151: Councillor updates relevant to this meeting:**

Cllr Phillips provided an update following her attendance at the Dartmoor National Park Forum.

**24/152: Items requiring Urgent Attention:** None

**24/153: Summary of Key Messages:**

Clerk to action

**24/154: Motion to move into a Part II (private) session to note the minutes of the Personnel Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> November, discuss one item of confidential business in accordance with Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and resolve all grant applications as listed below:**

The public and District Councillors left the meeting.

**Meeting returned to Part I**

The following smaller and larger grant decisions were agreed:

**The Friendship Group** – rejected on this occasion due to insufficient information.

**Wintertide** - £490

**Buckfastleigh SEND Parents Support Group** - £500

**Buckfastleigh Library Board Games Group** - £412

**Buckfastleigh Dungeons and Dragons Group** - £500

**Buckfastleigh Christmas Fair** - £1,500 for core costs and £2,000 for the hire of the Victorian carousel subject to receipt of invoices.

Meeting closed at 9.20pm