



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release 13 January 2017

BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL VOTES TO SAVE LOCAL SERVICES

Buckfastleigh Town Council voted unanimously to save local services threatened by cuts imposed by central government and Devon County and Teignbridge District Councils at its meeting on 11 January. Town Councillors heard how County and District Councils had cut youth and leisure services in Buckfastleigh by 100%, while still funding such services in more prosperous towns across the District. The meeting also heard how the Town Council had cut its own costs while improving the services it offers.

In order to maintain facilities and improve local services, the Town Council took the decision to fund eight projects, some of which are new. These are:

- The creation of an annual programme of free activity for young people in the town.
- Creating a new Town Ranger post to carry out vital outdoor improvement and maintenance work in public areas.
- Funding a dedicated Citizen's Advice Bureau service in Buckfastleigh.
- Supporting the running costs of the refurbished Victoria Park, Swimming Pool, Skate Park and Play Area.
- Creation of an Air Ambulance landing pad for emergency night flights by the Devon Air Ambulance.
- Installation costs for solar panels on community buildings to save money in the future.
- Community Development Fund Grant Programme to support community based projects.
- Keeping the Town Hall open as a community venue.

In order to fund these initiatives, it will be necessary to increase the Council Tax 'Parish Precept' - the part of your Council Tax that is paid to the Town Council and funds the services we provide.

Council Chair Pam Barrett says: *"I'm delighted that the Council voted unanimously to step in and take on a range of projects that the community has identified as important to them. It's been a*

tough decision, and not one we have taken lightly, but it is clear that unless the Town Council acts, a whole range of services would be lost. We believe that we have identified a number of essential projects, all of which will help make life substantially better for our community. On average, it will cost each household less than £1 per week to deliver all these projects and the increased costs will still be much lower than travelling to the closest alternative locations that can provide these services.”

“Our town has seen a relentless decimation of services recently, with threats to close our community parks and swimming pool, failure to maintain roads, pathways and drains and cuts to public transport which have left people unable to get to work and college. We are also facing further cuts in school and hospital budgets. This is having a significant negative impact on our community, leaving us with unsafe and unsatisfactory facilities, and an inability to access services in other locations.

“Buckfastleigh has the highest levels of child poverty in the Teignbridge District (over 33% of our children are classified as living in poverty, which is one of the highest rates in the country) and has a very high dependency on the local food bank. Because of local government cuts, volunteers are now running many of our essential community services and these services are also in a precarious financial position and are not sustainable. The decision to fund them will ensure that our population keeps many of the things that they depend on, in line with those enjoyed by other local communities, and as a result will have a positive impact on their quality of life.”

Cllr Andy Stokes, who has run numerous public engagement projects, added, *“Our consultation started in earnest a few years ago, with the development of our Neighbourhood Plan. Our active presence on social media and numerous meetings with local people and groups of all ages helped us to find out what services people want. This has ranged from saving the park and the pool to introducing a cinema club to the Town Hall and much more in between. People are calling for more things for young people to do, and worry about the increasingly poor condition of many of our pavements, footpaths and drains.”*

Chair of Buckfastleigh Town Council Finance Committee, Cllr Neil Smith said, *“The stark reality is that unless the Town Council acts, Buckfastleigh will be faced with nothing but more cuts in future years as central government cuts funding and Devon and Teignbridge councils grapple with their financial woes. Legally mandated costs – such as funding their huge pension deficits – unfortunately take priority over basic community needs such as maintaining roads and pavements or enhancing community infrastructure. On top of this, we think Teignbridge Council has made some questionable decisions to fund expensive projects in already better served communities: Buckfastleigh residents are effectively funding services in other communities that are not being provided here. A revolution is needed in the way local government funds community services. With no government, County or District Council money coming to help us, we needed to act, because the truth is that the pool and CAB service would close, our pavements and paths will be broken and over-grown, posing risks to elderly residents and our children will have no basic activities. To put it bluntly, the town council’s ability to provide meaningful support for the Buckfastleigh community would be in serious jeopardy.*

For further information, please contact: Buckfastleigh Town Clerk, clerk@buckfastleigh.gov.uk
01364 642576