

## **A review of Town Council activities during the year and a look ahead to future plans by Councillor Sue Clarke, Mayor of Buckfastleigh**

Since the installation of our Ram Sculpture at the junction of Plymouth Road and Strode Road, I have had a number of conversations with residents and visitors about him. He certainly has prompted a lot of conversation. So much so that we decided to have a naming competition by ballot, hoping to get as many people involved as possible.

We had a good number of votes on the list of names supplied and, in the end, by a very small margin, Ramalldinho was chosen for our outstanding Ram. This I suppose serves to demonstrate the enduring popularity of football in our culture and the desire to celebrate it as I cannot image any other connection with our ram and the popular ball sport.

Having been successful in being awarded the money for Ramalldinho, our lovely new town signs and street furniture and for the renovation of the information centre at the Valiant Soldier, we decided to try for another pot of money from the Uk Shared Prosperity Fund. Again, we were successful and used it to set up The Cosy Cinema in the Town Hall complete with new comfortable chairs, bar tables, plants, themed decorations and a traditional roped entrance with a red carpet. Going to see a film and enjoy a few drinks from our bar has now become a really special experience.

I called in at the Town Hall during the Hello Easter activities which the Town Council helps to fund to see the children with their painted faces enjoying a movie. Keep an eye on the website, social media and notice boards to see the films that are coming (including the amazing Oscar winning Hamnet scheduled for June) and feel free to drop in or email to suggest movies you would like to see. The cinema/bar is available for private hire if you fancy a luxury private viewing or a celebration event with a touch of Hollywood glamour.

We have continued our commitment to funding activities, events and groups in our community, recognising that the District and County have withdrawn from funding for rural communities and many cannot afford to attend clubs or children's events in the bigger towns due to the cost of travel.

Over £56,000 grant funding has been awarded during 2025/26 to support groups and organisations in the parish including the swimming pool, weekly Citizens Advice outreach service, the Christmas Fair, the Football Club, Moorland Community Caring, Little Lambs, the Scouts and the weekly Social Supermarket. We also continue to provide funding for the Hello Seasons

activities and youth wellbeing cafe and outreach at Dart Mills. Pushing the funding we have out into our community to actually provide opportunities for fun, engagement and learning has been the thing that I am most proud of during my four terms as Council Leader and Mayor. Unlike some other towns and parishes our size, we do not sit on large reserves, we give the money back to town to work for residents with a special focus on the children in our community and how important it is for them to have access to free activities and opportunities.

Some other highlights of our year have been:

- In partnership with Dartmoor National Park, we hosted our first Buckfastleigh Water Day in the Orchard Millennium Green in July. Learning about flood management planning whilst eating homemade cake was a treat!
- Last December we were able to deliver over one hundred free 2 course Christmas dinners with treat bags. This has been our biggest round of deliveries yet and speaks to the popularity and need for this service in Buckfastleigh and Buckfast.
- I have been able to assist residents with educational appeals, housing issues and liaison with the local policing team.

In recent months, we have been mobilised in town to fight for the retention of hours for our library and the consultation on libraries launched by Libraries Unlimited received over 25,000 responses! Let's hope we get the right outcome for our library.

The Town Hall has had a difficult journey regarding failed roofing repairs which led to a catastrophic flooding incident during recent storms. There have also been expensive issues with asbestos removal and heating which have led us to think about how we move forward and make our Town Hall fit for the future and we have some exciting plans. We will be publishing more about this in the coming months but suffice to say the Town Hall remains open for business and events so please book our rooms, come to our cinema and keep attending!

As many already know, Teignbridge District Council (TDC) voted to close our public toilets in early 2027 unless the town can arrange to take them on before that date. There has been a vocal public campaign against these plans across the region as taking on the costs of the toilets will lead to a significant increase in our precept (the amount you pay in Council Tax).

The toilets are not the only asset that TDC wish to divest before the District Council disappears under the terms of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) which is fast approaching. They are in consultation with small towns and parishes about parks, green spaces, bus shelters etc. but have decided that any new elected body will retain the car parks (which actually raise revenue). The Town Council has LGR on our agenda every meeting so please come along with your thoughts about this or to ask any questions.

In December 2025, we lost one of our Town Councillors, Joanna De Groot when she moved out of area but earlier In July, we welcomed Ben Leaney as a new Town Councillor and have also enrolled two more new candidates in February and March Colette Luscombe known as Cem and Rod Denley Jones. We still have three vacancies on the Town Council and would be happy to have an informal chat with anyone who may be interested in joining us.

Kiki Sykes our caretaker who was employed by the Town Hall charity also left following 11 years of service. We wish Kiki the best for the future in her new job and we are very grateful for her years of service and hard work.

We move into the next financial year in some uncertainty. Not knowing what exactly we will be able to afford to manage in terms of the assets that TDC wish to transfer or what LGR will mean for Buckfastleigh.

Whatever may happen, we should remain committed to transparency, consultation and using any money we have to help our community grow and thrive.

I have been honoured to represent Buckfastleigh and Buckfast and serve its people. I would like to thank my fellow councillors, our Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, Town Ranger, Town Hall staff and all those in town that we work in partnership with for doing such amazing work.

***Councillor Sue Clarke, Mayor of Buckfastleigh***

***April 2026***