

BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Wednesday 20th May 2026 which followed the Annual Town Council Meeting at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors: Paul Georghiades (Chair), John Bailey, Steven Burch, Sue Clarke, Rod Denley Jones, Ron Fox, Cem Luscombe, Sylvee Phillips and Judith Hart (Town Clerk).

In attendance: Cllr Jack Major (Teignbridge District Council), Cllr Stuart Rogers (Devon County Council & Teignbridge District Council) and 1 member of the public

Press: None

26/36. Apologies for absence: None

Councillors invited to declare any interests:

Cllrs Steven Burch, Rod Denley Jones and Sylvee Phillips declared an interest in Agenda No. 9 as trustees of The Valiant Soldier Museum and Heritage Centre (The Buckfastleigh Trust).

26/37. To approve and sign the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 22nd April 2026 and review actions from this meeting:

Minutes signed by Cllr Paul Georghiades

Actions: No actions to report

It was noted that outline planning permission for the proposed development of circa 75 dwellings at the Timbers Road site has been approved by Dartmoor National Park Authority and that the developer must not go below the 45% threshold for the provision of affordable housing.

26/38. Questions and comments from the public:

None

26/39. Questions to District and County Councillors and comments on reports relevant to this meeting:

Cllr Rogers will be sending an announcement about the future of Devon libraries. The focus now needs to be funding for the Town Hall and confirmed that Devon County Council (DCC), Teignbridge District Council (TDC) and the National Park are all onboard regarding the provision of services in Buckfastleigh.

A decision about Local Government Reorganisation in Devon will be announced by the Government in mid July following their rejection of all the options submitted by Devon local authorities.

Cllr Rogers is organising a second site visit with representatives of Devon Highways. The first visit looked at the parking problems within Buckfastleigh and this visit will be a fact-finding mission to assess traffic flow.

Additional funding has been secured for the repair of potholes and Buckfast Road is scheduled to be repaired in the last week of May. Mobile speed cameras will soon be in situ in key areas.

TDC is asking residents to flatten their empty Tetra Pak cartoons to help with their roadside collections and the Crisis Resilience Fund is now open for applications for help with emergency household funding.

TDC has also allocated more resources to supporting the increasing number of homeless individuals and households within the district. Residents who wish to be considered for the new affordable housing at the Timbers Road site must register with Devon Home Choice and tenants in the private sector can get help and support from TDC regarding landlords and the new Renters Rights Act effective from 1st May 2026.

BT are offering support to households regarding the change from copper to digital landlines which is a free service. People should be aware that there are many scammers pretending to be from BT who are demanding payment.

Cllr Major advised that the TDC Councillors Community Fund is now open for 2026/27 for applications up to £1,000 and encouraged Members to attend the online Local Leaders Event on Wednesday 3rd June at 6.00pm.

The fly tipping incident on Station Road has been cleared, and the tennis courts now have an assigned TDC Officer who is looking at recruitment for the provision of free tennis coaching and access passes for community groups. The condition of the tennis court lights will also be assessed.

Cllr Clarke reported that the boundary fence has been damaged and Cllr Bailey reiterated that issues with the tennis court only highlights that TDC failed to embrace local knowledge and consultation with the Town Council when the new tennis court was originally commissioned.

The People's Emergency Briefing which is a new film to raise awareness of climate and environmental risks in the UK will be shown to Dartmoor National Park and TDC officers and is being offered to various groups for community screenings.

Cllr Clarke expressed her concern at the increasing amount of graffiti which is appearing on National Highways road signs along the A38 which often project negative messages. Cllr Rogers confirmed that this should be reported directly to National Highways and not Devon County Council.

Cllr Rogers thanked the Town Council for facilitating the DCC Fosters Event in the Town Hall on 1st September 2026.

The Chair returned the meeting to Agenda No. 3 to allow representation from a member of the Buckfastleigh Youth Club (BYC) who acknowledged that their larger grant application had not been submitted in time for the April Finance and Town Council meetings. The landlord, the Exeter Diocese has given the BYC six months to undertake the repairs identified in accordance with their lease agreement, so work has already commenced due to the urgency of the situation. The building is listed but Members were informed that repairs rather than replacement are being undertaken.

This application will be discussed at the next available Finance Committee and in the meantime, it was suggested that both the Ashburton Hospital League of Friends and Buckfast Abbey are approached for funding.

26/40. Planning Applications for commercial sites and areas of significant development or interest:

Covered earlier in the meeting.

26/41. To review the Police Reports for April to May 2026:

Cllr Clarke will be meeting the Chief Inspector of Devon and Cornwall Police and will re-visit the request to include crimes against women statistics in their published data.

It was noted that incidents of vehicle theft are increasing.

26/42. Local Government Reorganisation Update:

The Government has reviewed and rejected all the options submitted by the Devon Councils and will therefore make their own selection which will be announced in July. Devon Councils will have 21 days to comment on this proposal.

26/43. Transfer of Teignbridge District Council assets update, community consultation and what next in the process:

The Clerk advised that there is a lack of knowledge regarding Local Government Reorganisation and this will affect residents. Communication of information to residents via a consultation event in the Town Hall has not proven to be well attended and other options such as delivery of a leaflet to each household could be more effective.

Cllr Clarke also suggested that outdoor community consultation should be considered such as councillor surgeries and Cllr Phillips suggested a Town Council information table at a community event such as Fun Day.

Action: Clerk in consultation with the Chair of Finance to call a Finance meeting to discuss the above and the larger grant application now submitted by the BYP.

Cllr Rogers: Community groups need to examine their constitutions to assess if they can take on a TDC asset and apply for funding as a third party.

26/44. To consider an initial proposal from the The Valiant Soldier Museum and Heritage Centre regarding the management of the museum garden as a micro allotment for the benefit of the community and biodiversity:

Cllr Denley Jones: For 26 years The Valiant Soldier garden has been a problem. In accordance with the Charity, it cannot be built on or developed, it needs to be cared for but is a liability for the trustees. Various projects have been considered, started and failed and at a recent meeting it was agreed that the trustees propose the above idea to the Town Council which would fit in with the objectives of both the charity and the Council's statutory duty to provide allotments and promote biodiversity.

Town and Parish Councils are permitted to lease land from a charitable organisation if it is for the benefit of the community. The Town Council would administer the micro plots and oversee the tenancies, rules and regulations in agreement with the Charity.

Decision: Members agreed that the Clerk and Town Ranger undertake further research and report back to this meeting.

26/45. Budget Analysis Report 01.04.26 – 30.04.26:

Noted.

The Clerk explained that the first instalment for the hire of the Christmas lights is now due for payment earlier in the season and there have been higher than expected costs regarding the transfer of the website to the Town Council's IT contractor which took much longer due to unforeseen difficulties.

26/46. Bank Payments Report and Bank Statement 01.04.26 – 30.04.26:

Noted.

26/47. Chairs Announcements:

Cllr Clarke was again thanked for her service to the Council by the new Chair which was endorsed by the rest of the Councillors.

26/48. Councillor updates relevant to this meeting:

Cllr Clarke reported that the meeting held on Friday 1st May in the Town Hall with local representatives and Professor Sir Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England and Chief Medical Advisor to the Government who visited Buckfastleigh as part of a tour of Devon's rural towns and communities was productive. Sir Chris Whitty is looking at the health challenges and inequalities for people living in smaller towns and rural areas and highlighted the importance of trusted local spaces in supporting public health and prevention and how libraries link into this vision. The Town Hall could become a new community hub delivering a wider range of services including public health initiatives for eg. vaccination clinics, working in partnership with the library, the Town Hall trustees and other partner organisations such as early years support and SEND services.

Buckfastleigh is viewed as an excellent example of where the Town Council uses a substantial amount of its relatively small precept on services to its community. There is a high level of recorded anxiety in the town due to lack of access to day-to-day services for eg. the scheduling of appointments at Torbay Hospital for a Buckfastleigh resident at 9.00am when there is a lack of public transport. This could be resolved in some instances with a remote appointment.

The Clerk highlighted that staff frequently signpost information that is beyond our remit to help residents who do not have access to the internet or lack family support.

The Town Hall is a trusted building particularly for the elderly who remember attending numerous social occasions and activities and regard it as a safe place to visit.

Cllrs Burch and Bailey attended a meeting of the new Buckfastleigh Business Forum at the Football Club. Previously holding the Tourism, Traction and Economic Development meetings in the Town Hall was viewed as restrictive and not necessarily productive. Having meetings at different venues is popular with traders and membership is gradually increasing. The Forum is an association of businesses rather than a sub-committee of the Town Council and it has been agreed that Gordon Searle will be the group representative to Devon County Council regarding re-visiting the one-way system in the town centre. Cllr Burch as a member of the Forum will report progress to the Town Council when required.

Cllr Burch confirmed that the Town Hall Manager has circulated financial reports regarding the current status of the Town Hall, it is clear that the building is running at a loss.

Cllr Denley Jones attended the Devon County Council cabinet meeting regarding the future of Devon Libraries and submitted his question. Due to the strength of feeling from the public and supporting organisations following a county wide consultation, the future looks more positive with £1 million allocated for development. Buckfastleigh will benefit from this investment and the Town Hall is being looked at as a prospective family hub bridging some of the gaps identified in rural connectivity.

26/49. Items requiring Urgent Items:

None

26/50. Summary of Key Messages:

To include:

- Devon Libraries update
- The meeting with Professor Sir Chris Whitty
- Resilience Crisis Fund applications

Clerk to action.

Meeting closed at 8.40pm