



## Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council

**Minutes, number 308 of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025, at 7.30 pm at Meldon village hall, Meldon, Okehampton**

**Councillors Present -**

M Littlejohns – Vice Chair  
M Cooper - Chair  
P Heard  
J Heard  
S Norris  
A Ewen  
J Goffey

Also present Inspector Julian Fry, Cllr George Dexter and E Young Parish Clerk

**Cllr Cooper opened the meeting at 7.35pm.**

**1. Members of the Public** – Inspector Julian Fry spoke about a new proposal to develop a bespoke heritage scheme to report ongoing vandalism, theft, etc., at Okehampton castle. The goal is to bring local people (as volunteers) to be the eyes and ears for this listed building. The next step is to hold a community meeting to gauge support. If it goes ahead, it will be the first one in Devon and Cornwall.

**2. Declarations of Interest** – None.

**3. Apologies** – Received and accepted from Cllr B Wood.

**4. Approval of Minutes** of previous meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024 plus signing of 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024 minutes (previously approved)

**The minutes were approved as being an accurate record and were signed by Cllr Cooper. Proposed by Cllr J Goffey, seconded by Cllr S Norris, agreed by all.**

**5. Matters arising - To ensure the tasks assigned at the previous meeting have been completed** – Clerk – to arrange collection of free landmark tree (**to be delivered**), liaise with Men in Sheds ref wildlife boxes (**collected**). Cllr Cooper – Contact army camp (**to do**) and Lloyds bank (**done**). All – to consider next years' budget prior to next mtg (**done**). Consider new salt bin at Southcott (Clerk to ask Highways) Cllrs Cooper, Heard and Littlejohns – fencing repairs (**done**).

**6. Planning** – to consider and agree response to applications listed below together with any others received up to date of this meeting:

**6.1.1 Reference 3870/24/HHO** – Lower Chichacott Barn, Chichacott – Householder application for proposed garden room. **Proposed by Cllr Norris to support, seconded by Cllr Goffey, agreed by all.**

**6.1.2 Reference 3869/24/LBC** – Lower Chichacott Barn - Listed building consent for proposed garden room . **Proposed by Cllr Norris to support, seconded by Cllr Goffey, agreed by all.**

The following applications arrived during the Christmas period and were responded to via email to meet the deadline (see below). To be ratified at this meeting:

**6.2.1 Reference: 3493/23/VPO East of Okehampton Development (Parcels 3 and 4), Okehampton, Devon** – Councillors support this application.

**6.2.2 0468/24 Consultation Request Letter - Application at East Okement Farm, EX20 1QR** - Councillors support this application.  
Cllr Cooper declared a pecuniary interest and did not vote.

### **6.3 Planning decisions –**

#### **6.3.1 Ref - 0128/24**

Mr D Heard Extension to existing dwelling  
8 Meldon Cottages, Meldon, Okehampton, Exeter, EX20 4LU  
**Grant Conditionally 16/12/2024**

#### **6.3.2 Ref - 0468/24**

Mr JJ Cooper Replacement agricultural building  
East Okement Farm, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 1QR  
**Prior Approval not required 19/12/2024**

#### **6.3.3 Ref - 3858/24/COM – Near Higher Hughslade, Tavistock Road, Okehampton**

Proposal Notice of Intent to Install Electronic Communication Apparatus Comprising 6 x New 9m Light Wooden Pole  
Status **Approved**

#### **6.3.4 Ref – 3857/24/COM – Tavistock Road Okehampton**

Notice of intent to install electronic communication apparatus comprising 1 x 9m wooden pole (7.2m above ground) –  
**Approved**

#### **6.3.5 Ref – 3785/24/CLP - Beggars Roost Upcott Hill Okehampton EX20 1SQ**

Certificate of Lawfulness for proposed removal of a porch, conservatory and timber outhouse to be replaced by a portecochere and glass room.

**Refused**

#### **6.3.6 Ref – 3656/23/FUL - Land At Sx 561 943, Okehampton**

Change of use from agricultural land to use ancillary with Manor House Hotel (Retrospective & Resubmission 2045/23/FUL)

**Approved**

#### **6.3.7 Ref – 3736/24/ARC - Ashbury Hotel Higher Maddaford Southcott Okehampton EX20 4NA**

Application for approval of details reserved by condition 3 (SUDS (pre-commencement)) to planning consent 0077/24/FUL

**Approved**

#### **6.3.8 Ref - 2508/23/HHO – Appeal decision - 11 Watts Drive, EX20 1XT**

**Appeal dismissed**

### **7. DCC and WDBC – 14<sup>th</sup> January report from Cllr G Dexter**

#### **Budgets**

WDBC is now in the process of creating its budget for 2025/26 following the publication of the Local Government Finance Settlement. It is proposing a balanced budget, but with great uncertainties in successive years.

In summary the Settlement says that the Council will receive about £200,000 less funding than previously envisaged in its Medium Term Financial Strategy. This is mainly due to a lower allocation of New Homes Bonus funding.

- We were envisaging £0.4m for New Homes Bonus and it will actually be nearer to £0.2m.
- The Funding Guarantee scheme (under which we received £60,000 previously) has been replaced with a 'Floor system' and the Council will receive a Floor Payment of £611,136. So, while this is very helpful, this floor payment has merely offset the loss of the Rural Services Delivery Grant of £0.6m

The Council will also receive a small allocation from the Recovery Grant (this is the £600m funding stream nationally being distributed on the basis of deprivation indices combined with council tax raising ability). WDBC will receive a Recovery Grant allocation of £63,214. We were expecting a Nil allocation so slightly better news.

'Core Spending Power' (made up of Government Grants, Council Tax, Business Rates and Revenue Support Grant) has remained the same. It is only the assumed increase in council tax for 2025-26 which is bringing the Core spending power up to a zero year on year increase.

**Employers National Insurance**

There has been no confirmation of the amount of grant the Council will receive for compensation for the increased employers' national insurance payments. This will not be confirmed until February. It has been confirmed that Towns and Parish Councils are outside of the scope of the compensation grant for employers NI.

### **English Devolution White Paper**

The English Devolution White Paper has added complexity to the process. WDBC will in all probability cease to exist over the medium term. The White Paper has been debated by the County and all the Devon District Councils. It proposes that the whole of England should have mayors (each covering a population of about 1.5 million, and Unitary Authorities with a minimum population of about 500,000). Devon County Council has requested that it should absorb the district councils and be the Unitary Authority. This would mean that this year's County Council elections would be postponed while the new authority would be set up. Exeter City council also wishes to be a Unitary authority, and the district councils are pressing for a more considered approach. WDBC debated the White Paper on 6<sup>th</sup> January and passed a motion while, while agreeing with devolution, also wished for a more considered approach. The Minister will hopefully respond to all such requests by the end of the month.

The abolition of districts including WDBC will undoubtedly place a greater burden on Parish and Town Councils to represent their local communities.

### **Cllr T Leech's January report**

#### **Parcel 3 Link Road, footpaths etc:**

These issues are now within a planning application to make a variation to the S106 agreements for this area.

#### **Kellands Lane blockage:**

The WD Head of Planning and our deputy Executive Director have visited the area, and I was informed before Christmas that WD planners now have plans to resolve this situation in the new year.

#### **Parcel 4a footpath / Crediton Road concerns:**

The footpath situation has also been inspected by our planners, but, as yet, no bright ideas are coming forward as to how to resolve this one.

#### **Exeter Road Persimmons site:**

I note that this issue is still on the books of the WD Enforcement team.

#### **Forthglade odors:**

I had a concerned resident tell me that there were smells coming from the site one evening last month. I informed our Environmental Health Department, and they were going to deal direct with the person concerned, and to check with Forthglade as to what they were doing on that particular evening. Seems the smell was a very pungent fishy smell.

#### **Persimmons Crediton Road site:**

As ever, I have not had any new information as to the progress or otherwise of the additional piece of play equipment. I have however been given a contact for the developer, who has agreed to try to chase this up, but to date, no progress.

#### **St James Primary School playing field:**

The playing field areas have now been lowered and grass is now growing. However, I have had a report from one of the residents at the bottom of the main playing pitch, that in recent storms, their garden was flooded out due to the runoff water from the pitch. It has never happened before, so the drainage arrangements need to be looked at. The WD Enforcement Team are now involved, and I assume they will keep me up to date with what they intend to do to resolve this situation.

#### **Changes in planning (NPPF)**

West Devon has spent a lot of time trying to come to terms with what the Government intentions are, and even after taking legal advice, the situation is still not crystal clear. It is however certain that due to the changes in how our housing numbers are calculated, that parts of our existing JLP is now out of date, and our five year land supply has literally

overnight turned into a 2.5 year land supply, which like so many other authorities over the country, will put us at risk when it comes to unplanned development.

#### **National Devolution:**

The alterations to the NPPF and the proposals for Devolution could well be linked, which will cause issues in the years to come. The Devon Districts along with WD have put together a strong response to the government, which only allowed for a very short lead in time for us to make decisions on how we would like to see local devolution handled. This meant that senior leaders and staff had to work over the Christmas break to meet the 10<sup>th</sup> of January deadline.

There are a number of choices that can be made, but it would appear that DCC want to go for a Devon wide Unitary, but Plymouth and Exeter want to individually to go it alone, which if allowed by the Government, would leave little left for a financially viable Devon Unitary Authority. The larger strategic option that would have to be run by a mayor, would have to cover Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth and Torbay to make the numbers work.

There are far more questions than answers now to be able to provide a real report on how things might go, so hopefully, a full report will be forthcoming from all concerned within the next couple of months.

I believe that DCC have decided that they want to delay this year's elections so that they can concentrate on Devolution, but all of the Devon Districts plus WD are against this proposal, as it can't be justified and is not good for our democracy or indeed for residents who may wish to see changes now. This will all have to be agreed by the Secretary of State before any plans can be made.

#### **WD resolution:**

##### **RESOLVED**

Following the publication of the Devolution White Paper, and subsequent statements by the Leader of Devon County Council, West Devon Borough Council does not support the creation of one Unitary Council for Devon, including Torbay.

Devon and Torbay are diverse and made up of over 970,000 residents across urban, suburban, and rural areas. Any reform of local government in Devon and Torbay should follow a period of proper consultation with residents, businesses, elected representatives and stakeholders. Looking at the evidence, all councils should decide collectively what is best for Devon and Torbay. A single Unitary Council for Devon and Torbay risks diminishing local representation with decision-making that is remote from the communities it serves.

West Devon Borough Council does not support postponing the county council elections scheduled for May 2025. The government has indicated that this will only happen in priority areas that have clear and agreed plans. This is not the case in Devon and Torbay and in consequence this area cannot be in the first phase of these reforms. West Devon Borough Council recognises that the Government's White Paper sets a clear direction of travel. It is proposed that all Devon and Torbay councils work collaboratively to agree how best to respond. Any changes must be carefully considered, transparent, and inclusive, SLT ensuring that residents and businesses are fully engaged in shaping the future governance of Devon and Torbay.

The objective must be to get this right for our residents, businesses and staff. That cannot be achieved if rushed decisions have not been given the serious consideration they deserve. In that light, the Council notes that the Government's proposals about Social Care are not taking effect until 2028. As such, this Council strongly opposes the Government's current proposals, as set out in its White Paper, which would result in the abolition or merger of WDBC without full consultation and support by residents. We note the following:

- The Government has no mandate for abolishing district/borough councils as this were not included in the Labour election manifesto.
- There is little evidence that merging rural councils will result in financial savings as many unitary councils are in debt or suffering financial difficulties.
- Devon CC has a budget of £1.837bn in 2024-25, an increase of £127m compared to a year earlier. The total budget of WDBC is minor in comparison.
- Any merger that abolishes WDBC will reduce democratic representation and move decision making away from local people.

Therefore, while we welcome the stated Government objectives of devolving power to regions and local communities, and getting councils back on their feet with long-term settlements, the proposed plan for a unitary council will not achieve this but instead will:

- Divert resources and funds to restructuring at a time when services are already stretched.
- Lead to a reduction in the quality of services where WDBC currently operates, such as leisure centres, public toilets, waste collection, sustainable communities, planning and local housing, environmental protection, parks and open spaces, etc - due to inevitable financial pressures on any future Unitary Council; and
- Lead to a reduction of local democracy, fewer public representatives and less support for local people who need it.

Therefore, the Council:

1. mandates the Leader to write to the Government on its behalf outlining our enthusiasm for genuine devolution alongside this

Council's concerns, including the required pace for change, with all related correspondence being copied to the wider membership (i.e. all Council Members) for their information and reference only.

2. supports the joint statement issued by the leaders of the eight district councils throughout Devon that includes opposing:

- (a) a Single Unitary Council Solution for Devon; and
  - (b) the postponement of the County Council elections in May 2025.
- and

3. will widely consult with its residents, businesses, community organisations, neighbouring district councils and town and parish councils to help shape an appropriate plan for re-organisation.

**8. Beating the bounds & VE day** – Cllr Cooper to speak to Crispin at the camp and report back next meeting. Clerk to chase up the Secretary for Okehampton Commoners Association.

**9. To receive reports from meetings and events attended by Parish Council representatives – none.**

**10. Finance –**

**10.1 Accounts for payment –**

E Young wages for December	£675.13
E Young travel	£15.30
E Young expenses	£10.00
HMRC	£0.00
Meldon hall hire 14 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2025	£25.00
Oakland tree services (storm damage work)	£1350.00
Eagle plant hire (StOC work)	£138.06
Mole Avon c/o Phil	£341.67
WesternWeb Annual renewal of web space (with SSL Certificate for secure connection) and content management licence	£96.00
GX Accounts Processing of payroll for the quarter ended 5 Jan 2025	£63.00
White Wood Management	£1659.12
SLCC branch AGM and lunch additional charge	£6.55
Newbridge stone	£494.78
West Country Grounds Maintenance	£673.20
Maria Cooper – volunteers pasties (2 days)	£120.00
Ravenquest Matt Parkins volunteer and storm work	£550.00
D.J Heard – Granulite quarry fencing repairs	£668.64

**Resolved accounts be paid, proposed by Cllr Ewen, seconded by Cllr Goffey agreed by all.**

**10.2 Credits received –**

To note interest earned 09/12/24	£50.90
Aggregate industries	£298.44

**10.3 Request for spending** – New office printer (Circa£60) or print head (£140 + £45). **Proposed by Cllr Norris to get the new printer, seconded by Cllr Littlejohns, agreed by all.**

**10.4 Finance correspondence – Meldon village hall 2025 rates** –Proposed by Cllr Norris to use the smaller hall at £20.00 per meeting each month, excluding the annual parish meeting in April. Seconded by Cllr Ewen. Agreed by all.

## 10.5 RFO report/Bank reconciliation – Cllr Littlejohns to approve (and to sign last months' approved RFO)

### Period ending 8 January 2025

Prepared by Emily Young, Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Date 08/01/2025

#### Balance per bank statements as at 8 January 2025

	£	£	
Current account (Treasurers)		810.02	<b>Current Account (36901368)</b>
Deposit account (BB Inst online)		64,346.96	<b>Savings Account (38166660)</b>
		<b>65,156.98</b>	
<b>Less: any unpresented cheques</b>		0	0.00
<b>Add: any unbanked money</b>		0	0
<b>Net bank balances as at 8 January 2025</b>		<b>65,156.98</b>	

The net balances reconcile to the Cash Book (receipts and payments account) for the year, as follows:

#### Cashbook

Opening Balance		<b>66,871.00</b>	
Add: Receipts in the Year		349.34	(up to 24/12/24)
Less: Payments in the Year		2,063.36	(Include VAT - up to 10/12/24)
		<b>65,156.98</b>	
<b>Closing balance per cash book (receipts and payments book) as at 8 January 2025 (must equal net bank balances above)</b>		<b>65,156.98</b>	0.00 Difference

It was proposed by Cllr Norris to approve the bank reconciliation, seconded by Cllr Goffey, agreed by all. Cllr Littlejohns signed and dated both documents.

### 10.6 Budget 2025-2026 – to set budget for coming year (see previously circulated sheet) –

To agree budget for 2025/26 year. After discussions, agreed to set budget at total of £42995 proposed by Cllr M Littlejohns, seconded by Cllr P Heard, all in favour.

To agree precept for 2025/26 of £43,000 equating to a Band D equivalent of £50.53 (a total rise of £2.61, 5.34%), proposed by Cllr M Littlejohns, seconded by Cllr P Heard, all in favour.

### 10.7 Grant applications –

**10.7.1 Who let the Dads out Okehampton - £350.00 requested** – Proposed by Cllr Littlejohns to grant £200.00, Seconded by Cllr Goffey. Agreed by all. Clerk to check on payment details.

**10.8 Grant form addition(s)** (Clerk) – To add email address, payment details and terms and conditions to ensure the money is only used for specified purpose (or returned). Resolved by Cllr Littlejohns, seconded by Cllr Goffey agreed by all. Cllr Norris to add a feedback form on the website.

## 11. Environmental issues

**11.1 Granulite quarry** – completed and closed.

**11.2 Odours East of Okehampton – to receive an update** – Cllrs haven't received report, but Cllr T Leech has. To be monitored.

**12. Open Spaces**

**12.1** To receive update from Working Group to include footpath Meldon Woods viaduct up to cycle route and A30 fence (also see item 13.3). **Cllr Littlejohns to meet DCC to discuss painting underpass, to also show footpath under viaduct.**

**12.2** To answer questions from White Wood Management on Old Town Park WMP 1783033(email circulated) **Clerk to feedback that “yes” the Cllrs want to keep it as a local nature reserve. To also ask White Wood Management to action Natural England and the Woodland Trust in terms of ownership and to upload Byelaws onto website\noticeboard.**

**12.3** To note new TPO Ref: **TPO1110** Date: 13/12/2024 Site: Land at Higher Hilltown, Northlew Road, Okehampton, EX20 1SN – **Noted.**

**13. Highways**

**13.1** Snow warden \ salt bins – **update Cllr Ewen and P Heard – They will check on current stocks.**

**13.2** Exeter Road replacement bus shelter – **Noted and closed.**

**13.3** Damaged fence by A30. Reported to Highways England (again 08.01.25) **Ref: FMS6950731 Monitor.**

**14. Economic Development Projects**

**14.1 Okehampton BID**– to receive an update – **No updates.**

**14.2 Regeneration project** update – **Meeting due.**

**15. Okehampton interchange station** – Noted Clerk to add letter to website

**16. Okehampton United Charity converting to Okehampton Foundation (CIO)** – Noted.

**17. Heritage watch scheme** – see public section.

**18. Community governance review meeting** – Clerk to arrange for a Wednesday.

**19. To confirm date of next meeting** – Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2025 at 7.30pm Meldon village hall – **Noted.**

**PART TWO – Proposed by Cllr Norris, seconded by Cllr Ewen, agreed by all.**

Items which may be taken in the absence of the press and public. The Council is recommended to pass the following resolution:- ‘Resolved that under section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items as they involve the likely disclosure of sensitive and confidential information.’

**20. To note current WDBC Enforcement case list and information.**

**21. Lease of easements, Solicitor & Clerk’s notes** – 20 December 2024 completed.

**22. Potential Pathway Link in Parcel 2** – waiting to hear who will pay for it?

**The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.15 pm**

Signed ..... Date .....

Minutes 308/6