



Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council

Minutes, number 309 of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 4th February 2025, at 7.30 pm at Meldon village hall, Meldon, Okehampton

Councillors Present -

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

Also present Cllr George Dexter and Emily Young Parish Clerk

Cllr Cooper opened the meeting at 7.30pm.

1. Members of the Public – None.

2. Declarations of Interest – None.

3. Apologies – Received and accepted from Cllr B Wood, Cllr J Heard and Cllr S Norris.

4. Approval of Minutes of previous meeting held on 14th January 2025

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

5. Matters arising - To ensure the tasks assigned at the previous meeting have been completed – Clerk – has arranged delivery of free landmark tree (with Cllr Cooper), arranged governance meeting, obtained permission from Highways re new salt bin at Southcott, obtain latest info from Oke Commoners secretary for BtB, changed the meeting room, submitted precept, followed up with White Wood Management on OTP, updated grant form, and will go out to tender on grass cutting. Cllr Cooper – has contacted army camp Cllr Norris – has updated grant form.

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 Ref – 0063/25/HHO - Maddaford Retreat, Thorndon Cross, EX20 4NE

Householder application for proposed rear extension – **Councillors support this application. Proposed by Cllr Ewen, seconded by Cllr P Heard, agreed by all.**

6.1.2 Ref – 3815/24/OPA – Land adjacent to Baldwin Drive, Radford Way, Okehampton

Outline planning application with some matters reserved for a mix of residential housing and associated infrastructure, to include affordable housing – **Deferred to next meeting and Clerk asked to arrange a site visit in the meantime.**

6.2 Planning decisions – To note:

6.2.1 Ref – 3300/24/ARC – Development site at SX603 961

Application for approval of details reserved by condition 18 (Highways works) to planning consent 2731/15/OPA

Discharge of conditions not approved – Noted.

6.2.2 Ref – 3795/24/NMM – Non-material minor amendment to planning consent 1887/21/FUL to amend the wording of conditions 2,6 & 8

Non material minor amendment GRANTED – Noted.

7. DCC and WDBC – Cllr G Dexter – 4th Feb 2025

Strengthening Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities

Under the current system, complaints can be made against councillors which are dealt with, in our case by West Borough Council. There has been a significant number of these over the last few years. While these can absorb a great deal of legal officer time, the sanctions against people found to be in breach of standards amount to making an apology or being asked to do training. There is a widespread feeling that the system and penalties need to be strengthened.

The consultation from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government which closes on 26th February and can be accessed on-line at <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-standards-and-conduct/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework/>

It seeks views on introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension. Specific proposals being consulted upon for legislative change include:

- The introduction of a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England - a requirement that all principal authorities convene formal standards committees to make decisions on code of conduct breaches, and publish the outcomes of all formal investigations
- the introduction of the power for all local authorities (including combined authorities) to suspend councillors or mayors found in serious breach of their code of conduct and, as appropriate, interim suspension for the most serious and complex cases that may involve police investigations
- a new category of disqualification for gross misconduct and those subject to a sanction of suspension more than once in a 5-year period
- a role for a national body to deal with appeals

In addition, the consultation seeks views on how to empower victims affected by councillor misconduct to come forward and what additional support would be appropriate to consider.

£3m grant for Dartmoor focused nature and heritage partnership

The Dartmoor Dynamic Landscapes partnership* has been awarded funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to take forward a major programme of work to restore nature, protect and enhance Dartmoor's cultural heritage and enrich people's understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.

(Dartmoor Dynamic Landscapes comprises:

Dartmoor National Park Authority, the Woodland Trust, Sustrans, the RSPB, Dartmoor Hill Farm Project, Emergency Exit Arts & Flock South West, the Environment Agency, Shallowford Trust, Dartmoor Headwaters Project, South West Water for the South West Peatland Partnership and the Westcountry Rivers Trust.)

Revenue Budget

WDBC is forecasting an underspend of £429k this year, which is about £300k better than previous forecasts. This is due to a significant increase in investment income due to higher than budgeted interest rates. £300k of this is to be put into an earmarked reserve for reinvestment into the Council Plan for next year.

As previously reported, while there will be a balanced budget for 2025/26, the forecast for the next year will be a £1.6m overspend.

Community Grants

WDBC supports communities by providing funding to some of our key partners within the voluntary sector by providing grant funding to a number of voluntary sector organisations for a number of years. It is proposed that during 2025 WDBC will carry out a comprehensive review of those partnerships to ensure that it continues to allocate its funding in ways that maximise the impact for our residents. To enable us to carry out the review, the current funding has been extended for a period of 12 months to 31st March 2026 for the following organisations.

- Citizens Advice - £42,900
- West Devon CVS - £5,100
- Okehampton & District Community Transport – £6,533
- Tavistock Ring and Ride - £6,533
- OCRA - £4,000
- Young Devon - £2,000.

Council Tax Discounts and Premiums 2025/26

The Hub Committee has recommended to full council that:

- a) to adopt, with effect from 1 April 2025, the following Council Tax discounts:

- (i) The discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties is 100% for a maximum period of one month;
 - (ii) The discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties for one month to one year is zero;
 - (iii) The discount for properties which require major repair work to render them habitable is 50% for a maximum period of 12 months; and
 - (iv) The discount for unoccupied furnished properties (second homes) is zero.
- (b) to adopt, with effect from 1 April 2025, the following Council Tax Premiums:
- (i) An empty homes premium of an additional 100% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least one year and less than five years;
 - (ii) An empty homes premium of an additional 200% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least five years and less than ten years;
 - (iii) An empty homes premium of an additional 300% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least ten years;
 - (v) A second homes premium of 100% is levied on unoccupied furnished properties.

Cllr T Leech February 2025 report:

Parcel 3 Link Road, footpaths etc:

The new footpath between Parcel 3 and 4b has steps in it that our planners are asking for a ramp to be included to help wheelchair users and others with mobility problems. They are awaiting an answer from the developer.

Parcel 4a Footpath:

Although I was told that the steps down to Crediton Road were temporary, I am now told that this was agreed and is part of the planning permission. I have pointed out that there are no road markings or fixed signs to warn of pedestrians crossing and no street lights after dark. Discussions are ongoing about making this a safer crossing in the future, especially once Parcel 3b is completed.

Footpath from the Broom Park Area:

It would appear that the original proposal to have a footpath from this area down to the new roundabout will not happen, but there are still discussions going on about a possible extension to the existing footpath up through the play area in the Persimmon development. This would make getting to the school and into town a bit safer but not help those who want to just visit the proposed new shop at the bottom of the Parcel 2 development, and the dangerous access down the bank will only get worse.

Kellands Lane blockage:

A lot of work has been done over the last few weeks to sort out the complications that have arisen due to different planning applications and S 106 agreements, and I am told that our planners are now nearing a solution to this problem. Unfortunately, I thought we were getting close to opening this road at least five years ago, so I am keeping my fingers well and truly crossed.

Crediton Road footpath concerns:

Funding as well as some plans for this footpath have now been made available, but there is still a lot of work needed before we can have any idea of a start date for this footpath. So far, it will only run from the new roundabout up to St James Primary School. Additional funding and agreements will still be required to take it up to the Chichacotte road.

Exeter Road Persimmons site:

I have had a local resident complaining about the dangers of coming off this new estate, but as last month, I note that this issue is still in the books of the WD Enforcement team.

Forthglade odors:

I have had a report from the WD Environment Health team to say that they have investigated the smells that have been reported. It seems that the factory does on occasion cook fish, which is news to me, and that the smell that was reported has come from the factory. WD EH are engaging with the management of Forthglade to see how they can stop this smell leaving the site. There is a condition that states that no smells should be able to go past the perimeter of the site. EH have said that Forthglade are always very willing to help in any way they can. Please see the response below.

We have established that on the day fish smells could be smelt at the business centre, 5th December 2024, Forthglade were cooking fish. We contacted them with regards this incident and asked them to investigate the cause. As a result, the next occasion they cooked fish the manager himself, did a site walk around and detected a faint odour, but not on this occasion beyond the site perimeter. As a result, they will now increase the dose of their masking odour chemicals on the

day's they cook fish. We have also asked them to confirm that filtration systems are being maintained and that they continue to apply good housekeeping, such as keeping all doors etc closed. They continue to conduct daily odour checks and we will look at those records when we next visit.

Persimmons Crediton Road site: Additional play equipment.

Although I have had a discussion with our WD officers again, and was promised that enforcement would get involved, nothing has been forthcoming. Let's see what happens next month.

St James Primary School playing field: Flooding of neighbouring properties.

I have not been informed of any action from our WD Enforcement team on this matter yet.

Changes in planning (NPPF) WD members have had training in what the changes in the NPPF will mean when it comes to dealing with planning applications now. There are still a lot of unknowns and there is a new Infrastructure Act coming this spring, which may provide a bit more clarity on this subject, but the main issues revolve around the absence of a five-year land supply, caused by the changes in how this is calculated, and the 'Tilt' in favour of developments. Luckily, our existing policies like development in the open countryside and sustainability are still viable and still provide some defence against unplanned development.

Devolution:

The proposals from the government have certainly created a lot of debate, confusion and bad feelings amongst the Local Authorities across the country. Some decisions from the government should have been made public by now and might well be by the time you read this, but whatever they say, it will inevitably create a lot of work for our already overstretched officers and arguably could well see a weakening of public engagement as well as democracy.

8. Beating the bounds & VE day – new committee for Beating the Bounds with delegated decision making powers LGA1972 S.101(1)(a) - Proposed by Cllr Ewen to create a new committee with delegated decision making powers consisting of Cllr Cooper, Cllr Littlejohns and Cllr P Heard, seconded by Cllr Goffey. Agreed by all.

To meet before next PC meeting. Terms of reference to be agreed and plan of action.

VE day – Clerk asked to write to Duchy reference the beacon planned for VE day.

9. To receive reports from meetings and events attended by Parish Council representatives – Cllr Cooper and Clerk informally met with OTC's Mayor and Clerk.

Cllr Goffey and Clerk attended the DALC devolution white paper meeting. Clerk to prepare asset mapping list and also produce a statement on what OHPC 'do' for their communities and any aspirations. (To be circulated).

10. Finance –

10.1 Accounts for payment –

E Young wages for January	£675.13
E Young travel	£15.30
E Young expenses	£59.98
HMRC	£0.00
Meldon hall hire 4th Feb 2025	£20.00
Parish on-line (mapping system)	£45.00
Nicky Johns granulite quarry litter pick	£135.00

Resolved accounts be paid, proposed by Cllr P Heard, seconded by Cllr Ewen agreed by all.

10.2 Credits received –

To note interest earned 09/01/25	£54.60
To note credit from N Johns (Meldon shed)	£475.00

10.3 Request for spending – none.

10.4 Finance general

10.4.1 Rent review 2026 Granulite shed (Quarry park) – It was proposed by Cllr P Heard to increase the rent for 2026 to £550.00 on the agreement that the litter picking rate remains unchanged. Seconded by Cllr Goffey and agreed by all.

10.5 RFO report/Bank reconciliation – Cllr Littlejohns to approve

Prepared by Emily Young, Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Date 29/01/2025

Balance per bank statements as at 29 January

2025

	£	£	
Current account (Treasurers)		898.57	Current Account (36901368)
Deposit account (BB Inst online)		57,901.56	Savings Account (38166660)
		58,800.13	

Less: any unrepresented cheques 0 0.00

Add: any unbanked money 0 0

Net bank balances as at 29 January 2025 58,800.13

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

Cashbook

Opening Balance	65,156.98	
Add: Receipts in the Year	529.60	(up to 28/01/2025)
Less: Payments in the Year	6,886.45	(Include VAT - up to 15/01/2025)
	58,800.13	

Closing balance per cash book (receipts and payments book) as at 8 January 2025 (must equal net bank balances above) 58,800.13 0.00 Difference

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

10.6 Grant applications –

10.6.1 Who let the Dads our Okehampton – Granted £200.00 14 Jan 2025 10.7.1 but amendment to original request – Cllrs are fine with the amendment now being used for camping activities.

11. Environmental issues

11.1 Odours East of Okehampton – to receive an update – Cllr Leech reported a concern when cooking fish. To be monitored.

12. Open Spaces

12.1 To receive update from Working Group – Under Meldon viaduct some large oak trees have fallen. Cllrs to look to repurpose the wood and tidy up the area.

12.2 OTP White Wood Management – Clerk - Ongoing

12.3 Endurance GB Old Meldon quarry – 2nd March – Clerk to let shed tenant know. Noted by council.

12.4 To note Dartmoor Youth Rangers at Meldon Quarry on Sat the 8th of Feb 10am – 3pm – Noted.

13. Highways

13.1 Snow warden \ salt bins – update Highways – Cllr Ewen to visit all salt bins and replenish where needed. Clerk to check on possible old salt bin and if so will be placed at Southcott.

13.2 Damaged fence by A30. Reported to Highways England (again 08.01.25) Ref: FMS6950731 – No update. Clerk to check.

14. Economic Development Projects

14.1 Okehampton BID– to receive an update – no update.

14.2 Regeneration project to receive an update – no update.

15. Landmark tree – Cllr Cooper to follow up with Cllrs on planting.

16. Annual parish meeting – Invitees suggested. Clerk to follow up. Cllr Littlejohn & Cooper to arrange refreshments.

17. Safety of Lithium-ion batteries – noted.

18. SW Licensing – The Ashbury resort – Southcott – noted.

19. Archive papers – Cllr Ewen to retrieve filing cabinet before next meeting. Cllr Cooper to collect archive papers and liaise with Clerk on archive office. Clerk to arrange collection of papers for cabinet and request invoice for work.

20. Review of Standing Orders – reviewed and proposed for approval by Cllr Goffey, seconded Cllr Littlejohns agreed by all.

21. Community governance review meeting – Ongoing. next meeting to be arranged for March in Tavistock.

22. To confirm date of next meeting – Tuesday 4th March 2025 at 7.30pm Meldon village hall (6.45pm for Beating the Bounds committee).

PART TWO – Proposed by Cllr Cooper, seconded by Cllr P Heard, 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.’

23. To note current WDBC Enforcement case list and information – noted.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.10 pm

Signed Date

Minutes 309/6