



Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council

Minutes, number 312 of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 1st April 2025, at 7.30 pm at Meldon village hall, Meldon, Okehampton

Councillors Present -

M Cooper - Chair
P Heard
J Heard
S Norris
J Goffey
B Wood

Also present Cllr George Dexter and Emily Young Parish Clerk

Cllr Cooper opened the meeting at 7.34pm

Members of the Public – There were no members of the public present

2. Declarations of Interest – None

3. Apologies – Received and accepted from Cllr M Littlejohns.

4. Approval of Minutes of previous meeting held on 4th March 2025

The minutes were approved as being an accurate record and were signed by Cllr Cooper. Proposed by Cllr S Norris, seconded by Cllr P Heard. Agreed by all.

5. Matters arising - To ensure the tasks assigned at the previous meeting have been completed – Clerk –

0480/25/NMM Clerk asked to query Grass cutting Clerk asked to contact the two existing contractors for their prices for next two years. Grant feedback form. Clerk to add to website and then all Cllrs to test. Clerk to re-circulate wood signs to be made. 20's plenty campaign – OTC N.Plan Clerk asked to ask OTC which areas in Hamlets they wish to look at.. 2025 Meeting dates May – December 2025 inclusive – Clerk to book including August although Clerk will be on annual leave. **Cllr Littlejohns** - Arrange tidy up wood under viaduct area. **Cllr Cooper** - collect archive papers. **Cllr Ewen** – Check and top up all salt bins (if needed)

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

6.1 Ref – 0548/25/FUL – Meldon garage, Tavistock Road – Extend existing garage

<https://westdevon.planning-register.co.uk/Planning/Display/0548/25/FUL?cuuid=B567B1DB-81AB-470A-8C51-DA6ECAAF0BEB> Proposed to support by Cllr P Heard, seconded by Cllr Goffey agreed by all.

6.1 Planning decisions – To note:

6.1.1 Ref – 0572/25/ARC - Manor House Hotel, Okehampton, EX20 4NA- Approved.

<https://westdevon.planning-register.co.uk/Planning/Display/0572/25/ARC> Noted.

6.1.2 Ref – 0063/25/HHO – Approved. Maddaford Retreat Thorndon Cross EX20 4NE

<https://westdevon.planning-register.co.uk/Planning/Display/0063/25/HHO> Noted.

6.2 Planning withdrawn – To note:

6.2.1 Ref – 0084/25/ARC – Persimmon Homes - Site Address: Land Opposite Industrial Estate, Exeter Road, Okehampton <https://westdevon.planning-register.co.uk/Planning/Display/0084/25/ARC> **Noted.**

7. DCC and WDBC –

Cllr George Dexter – report 1st April 2025

English Devolution White Paper

The reorganisation proposals for Devon were submitted by the District and Borough Councils, Plymouth and Devon by the 21st March as required by government. The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote back on the 24th March stating “.... my department will provide feedback on your interim plans. You can expect to receive this in the week commencing 28 April. My officials will also schedule meetings with you to discuss the feedback and any further support we can offer in May. My department will continue to be available throughout this process to discuss your plans for local government reform and devolution. I encourage you to draw upon them as you continue to develop your proposals. [...] I look forward to receiving your final submission in November. I will then thoroughly consider the final proposals before deciding on how to proceed.”

Planning and Infrastructure Bill

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government sent a letter to all local authority leaders in England on 12th March about the implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework. She reiterated that the reforms will cover 3 main areas of particular interest to local government.

“Improving certainty and decision-making in the planning system.

Unlocking land and securing public value for large scale investment

Introducing effective new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning”

There will also be a reform to the statutory consultee system.

“Alongside the Bill, the government has also taken action this week to reform the statutory consultee system.

Statutory consultees play an important role, providing expert advice and information on significant environmental, transport, safety, and heritage issues to ensure good planning decision-making. [...] It is essential that statutory consultees look to provide practical, pragmatic advice and expertise which is focussed on what is necessary to make development acceptable.”

The Minister confirmed the “...limiting the scope of statutory consultees to where advice is strictly necessary; reminding local planning authorities that they are able to proceed with a decision where advice is not provided on time if they have sufficient information to do so”.

2024/5 Accounts

WDBC is projected to have an underspend of ££507,000 due mostly to higher than anticipated interest rates. As a result, a further £100,000 of that underspend for 2024/25 will be transferred to the Recovery Plan and Corporate Strategy Earmarked Reserve, for reinvestment back into the delivery of the Council Plan in addition to the £300,000 previously approved by the Council.

Public Space Protection Order - Alcohol

The Tavistock and Okehampton Public Space Protection Order 2024 was approved by the Council, subject to clarification being made in the Order to ‘aggressive’ begging.

This ‘clarification’ was the result of a vigorous debate, with members being very concerned about ‘penalising’ people who were already vulnerable and in need of support. Once the amendment is made the officers will circulate the final version to members.

Follow up on Last month’s Public Views and Questions

I followed up with both the groups of the public who spoke at the last Parish Council meeting.

1. Development behind Baldwin Drive.

I carried out a site visit and met residents to discuss their concerns about the proposed development, along with Councillor Goffey. I understand that Parish Council members also visited on separate occasions.

2. The need for a crossing on Crediton Road opposite the school.

I met with the couple who made a statement to the Parish Council concerning their concerns for safety of the children due to dangers when crossing Crediton Road. I am continuing to work with them and the residents of Romansfield and surrounding areas to improve road safety.

Cllr Tony Leech April report

As we are now in the period running up to an election, I will need to try my best not to say anything out of order in this report.

Parcel 4b footpaths - No further information on this yet.

Parcel 4a Footpath - As above, no updates on this.

Crediton Road footpath - I understand that the legal work for this is well underway, and funding has been agreed. I guess that planning applications, as well as planning the actual work will take some time, so no timetable has been forthcoming, but at least we now know that the footpath is now a viable project.

Kellands Lane blockage - The WD Legal department are now working on this issue and hope to have some answers for me soon.

Exeter Road Persimmons site - Still no update on this issue. The Enforcement Officer for our area is still on long-term leave of absence.

Forthglade odors - No further issues to my knowledge.

Persimmons Crediton Road site: Additional play equipment - WD has had discussions about this again with the developer but without anything happening, so this will now become something else for our legal department.

St James Primary School playing field: Flooding of neighbouring properties - I understand that there has been some work on the drainage on site going on, but nothing has come back from our enforcement team yet.

Unitary issues - WD and most of the other districts have now sent their priority scheme for Unitary splits to the Government and we now wait for the outcome. However, Devon has put forward 9 different options. The WDBC view is it that the combining of South Hams, Teignbridge and West Devon and Torbay, and a Unitary including East, Mid and North Devon alongside Torridge District and the City of Exeter, would be a workable solution. This is based on the edict from Government that ALL unitary areas must follow the existing district / borough boundaries.

It is hoped that Government will make some comment on what has gone in, but there are no plans to do so, so I guess that we are still very much in the dark of what the outcome maybe.

Meet the WD Environmental Health Lead Officer

I thought that it might be good for members to see some of what WD Officers are involved with. Environmental Health is the Cinderella part of WD and does not get the recognition they deserve. Should any of the sections within EH get it wrong, it could be serious for not only the Council, but for our community at large.

My job is to head up a brilliant team who are responsible for a hugely diverse number of the Councils' functions in relation to Environmental Health (EH) and Licensing. This includes food safety, health and safety, environmental protection – dealing with noise, dust and odour for example, private sector housing – anything from damp and mould to energy efficiency grants, an excellent Disabled Facilities Grant team and a very busy and effective Licensing team.

I am also the nominated Competent Person for Health and Safety at both Councils and responsible for Emergency Planning and Business Continuity.

Environmental Health and Licensing is a real team effort, and I have huge respect for the team who are dealing directly with our customers and some really challenging issues daily. There are so many subjects that we cover and so much amazing work that is done it is difficult to cover them all. Our team mantra is to protect and improve the health of our residents and visitors.

Although now becoming a more distant memory, I had the opportunity to lead the Councils' response to the COVID pandemic. The number of challenges that the pandemic presented on a professional level was huge and these had to be managed along with the personal challenges and changes that we all faced at the time.

The EH and Licensing team have been working hard on an energy efficiency project called HUG2 that uses Government grant funding to support over 100 properties in the Councils' area to improve their energy efficiency.

These improvements and the financial savings they offer make a real difference to residents' lives. We are the only council in Devon to be leading this work on our own, and we have an effective and experienced project team in place to help deliver our corporate priorities in the future.

We also rely on the support of all the other teams and services within the Councils to be able to help our residents and businesses and deliver the vital services that they need. In my role I am fortunate enough to get involved in most other areas of the Council and enjoy a good working relationship with them. I like that West Devon is a real team effort.

Ian Luscombe

Cllr Lois Samuels Okehampton Division Annual Report March 2025

Putting the budget together for 2025/26 has been the most difficult in those twenty years. Two months before we had to agree the 2025/26 Budget the government announces we would be losing the Rural Services Delivery Grant, which was £10 million. We had to go back and redo our work, much of this through Christmas and New Year. You will see from the table below that the budget has increased by 5.9%, with more funding going into Adult Services, Childrens Services and Highways. We had to increase Council Tax by 4.99%, 2.99% basic and 2% to Adult Social Care. This was a difficult decision in the economic climate, but we must be able to deliver services to Devon's residents.

Adult Services

Adult Services are expecting a Care Quality Commission inspection in the next six months. Customer service data puts Devon's Adult services in the top quartile. We are fortunate in Devon that most of our providers are Good or Outstanding, but it is a constant struggle for providers, getting staff and dealing with rising costs. How the whole system works together including the NHS, is crucial for the long-term sustainability of services.

Children's Services

Children's Services had an Ofsted inspection in October last year and we have not yet received the outcome letter. Our partners tell us Children's Services are improving and we have seen a gradual reduction in the number of children in care. We are investing in small Children's Homes and as a result more children are being placed in Devon. We are also investing in accommodation for Care Leavers. We are seeing a more stable workforce, and our Director of Children's Services said recently, he can see a real improvement.

SEND

Special Educational Needs is the biggest issue the Council faces, like most education authorities across England. We are seeing demand for SEND services continue to grow. Our SEND Transformation Program is making a difference in bringing forward the right services, but the costs are exceeding the money available, and we are still seeing a rise in Education and Health Care Plans. It has been recognised nationally that the SEND System is broken and there have been several influential reports urging government to bring forward plans to overhaul how SEND works. For me we need to see more SEND funding in schools. Mainstream school is the best place for most children with SEND.

Highways

We have seen a slight reduction in potholes this winter. Although we have had a couple of spells of snow it has not been as cold with a hard frost. It is important to report potholes, don't presume others have.

www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem/report-a-pothole/

The roads have been starved of investment for many years and I was pleased with the over £83 million capital investment from government. With the extra funding of £16million from DCC, this takes us to nearly £100 million, which will make a difference. We have been working with the Department of Transport on how they can get data from councils on the effectiveness of this sort of investment, so the recent announcement from government on the requirement to submit data is helpful.

CCA

The inaugural meeting of the Devon & Torbay County Combined Authority took place in Tavistock earlier this month. The CCA is a high-level partnership which covers areas like: Adult Training, Strategic Transport and Housing working with District Councils. This partnership is important going forward as government changes how local and regional government works.

Local Government Reform

DCC are working with the Devon Association of Local Councils and below is some information.

Parish and town councils are the tier of local government closest to the electorate with a range of powers that make a difference to towns, villages across the county. The Civic Agreement between Devon County Council and the Devon Association of Local Councils recognises the critical role of precepting councils, at all tiers of local government, in local service delivery and place-shaping. With a shared commitment to vibrant local governance, both parties aim to foster good relations and collaboration between our organisations, between councils, and the elected members, officers, and communities they represent.

The Government is planning a large-scale programme of local government restructuring in England. It is facilitating local government reorganisation in each of the 21 two tier areas and wants to deliver the process as quickly as possible.

On 5 February 2025 the Minister of State for Local Government wrote to the Leaders (including Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council) of all the principal councils in Devon to formally invite proposals for local government reorganisation. He asked for interim plans to be submitted by 21 March 2025 and final proposals by 28 November 2025. If, having considered proposals, the Government decides to implement any of them, the necessary legislation will need to be approved by Parliament and "shadow" unitary councils established.

Proposed new unitary authorities will be required to:

a) have a population of 500,000 or more “as a guiding principle”, with exceptions requiring a clear rationale b) “prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens” c) “show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views” d) “support devolution arrangements” e) “Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment”.

The Minister’s letter says that existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for proposals, but “where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.”

Members of Devon County Council considered a proposed interim plan that sets out a range of options at their meeting on 20 March 2025. It is available on this webpage - Agenda for Council on Thursday, 20th March, 2025, 2.00 pm - Democracy in Devon. Each of the possible patterns for future unitary local government recognises the vital role that town and parish councils play in the communities that they represent.

The new County Council will be elected on 1 May 2025, and it will be for those members to determine which option/s to take forward and in light of Government feedback and clarity on some areas within the guidance.

In developing the proposal over coming months, the County Council will engage town and parish councils and the Devon Association of Local Councils. This will include discussion and exploration of a range of issues including:

Precepting and council tax

Devolving assets and/or services

Neighbourhood planning

Supporting town and parish council in working

The anticipated timetable is currently:

21 March 2025: Submission of interim plan to Government.

April/May 2025: Further development and collaborative work on options and feedback from Government on interim plan.

June to November 2025: Work and engagement of key partners (eg NHS, national parks authorities, police) on full proposal/s for single local government structure across Devon and submission to Government by 28 November 2025.

December 2025 – March 2026: Ministerial decision on the best option for single local government structure across Devon.

March 2026 - March 2027: Government consultation on any proposal. Parliamentary legislation. Transition planning and implementation.

April 2027: Elections to shadow unitary council/s.

April 2028: Vesting of unitary council/s.

This timetable is speculative and likely to change.

The County Council and DALC will work jointly over coming months to develop a proposal/s that would enable a new unitary structure to engage and empower local communities. Alongside thinking about the future structure of local government in Devon, the County Council also wants to further develop its relationships with local councils and communities and explore opportunities to develop local services and assets.

DNPA

I continue to be a Member of Dartmoor National Park Authority, which is very challenging. As I write this report DEFRA has not yet announced the grant for National Parks and we don’t know if it will be flat cash or a cut. DNPA continues to deliver its role through Lottery funding and other one-off grants, but revenue funding to run DNPA is very difficult. This is an issue that will have to be addressed in the coming years.

Locality Budget

The Locality Budget is closed as we have the County Council elections on the 1st of May. It should be open again by the end of May 2025.

County Election

This will be my last Annual report for the Okehampton Division as I will be standing in the division that I live which is Hatherleigh & Chagford on the 1st of May. It has been an honour and a privilege to be the County Councillor for you. Thank you for all your help and support. I’m pleased that Neil Jory is standing for the Okehampton Division. He is an experienced Councillor, who lives and works in the Division.

8. Beating the bounds & VE day – Cllr Cooper gave a summary of the previous meeting. Cllr P Heard asked for ideas at the end of the walk. Risk assessment to be done. Oke Links and OkeTimes to be contacted. Cllr Cooper to speak to supermarkets for donations. Next meeting 6th May at 7pm.

VE day – nothing new to report.

9. To receive reports from meetings and events attended by Parish Council representatives –

Cllr Goffey attended the recent BID meeting at Forthglade. The attendance numbers were quite low possibly because it was during the day. Cllr Goffey has copies of the BID business plan which Cllr Cooper asked for a copy of.

10. Finance –

10.1 Accounts for payment –

E Young wages for March	£666.53
E Young travel	£33.30
E Young expenses	£10.00
HMRC	£8.60
Meldon hall hire 1 st April 2025- Inv 250395	£20.00
Meldon hall hire 15 th April 2025 – Inv 250396	£30.00
Matt Parkins – Meldon woods and OTP – Inv RQ2508	£250.00
Devon Communities Together Membership	£50.00
GX Accounts quarterly payroll fee	£74.90

Resolved accounts be paid, proposed by Cllr B Wood, seconded by Cllr A Ewen agreed by all.

10.2 Credits received –

To note interest earned 10/03/25	£43.69
Endurance GB 04/03/2025	£250.00

10.3 Request for spending

10.3.1 Grass cutting contractors – **contract value £1951.45/2 years** – Following the proven high quality and ability of the existing grass contractors it was proposed by Cllr Wood to keep them both for a further two years. Seconded by Cllr Ewen, agreed by all.

10.4 Finance general

10.4.1 To note invoice from Lloyds Bank £4.25 monthly fee – **noted.**

10.4.2 Year end statement – **Circulated and proposed by Cllr Wood to be approved. Seconded by Cllr Norris agreed by all. Cllr Cooper signed the year end bank reconciliation.**

10.4.3 Q4 budget monitoring report – **Clerk to prepare for May meeting.**

10.4.4 To note PKF Littlejohn confirmed as external auditor. Deadline for audit submission 31 July 2025. **Noted.**

10.5 Grants – None.

10.6 RFO report/Bank reconciliation – Cllr Littlejohns to approve

Prepared by Emily Young, Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer – Dated 26/03/2025

Period ending 26 March 2025

Balance per bank statements as at 26 March 2025

	£	£	
Current account (Treasurers)		528.24	Current Account (36901368)
Deposit account (BB Inst online)		56,996.60	Savings Account (38166660)
		57,524.84	
Less: any unpresented cheques	0	0.00	
Add: any unbanked money	0	0	
Net bank balances as at 26 March 2025		57,524.84	

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

Cashbook

Opening Balance	58,895.55	
Add: Receipts in the Year	293.69	(up to 10/03/2025)
Less: Payments in the Year	1,664.40	(Include VAT - up to 18/03/2025)
	57,524.84	
Closing balance per cash book (receipts and payments book) as at 26 March 2025 (must equal net bank balances above)	57,524.84	0.00 Difference

It was proposed by Cllr Norris to approve the bank reconciliation, seconded by Cllr Wood, agreed by all. Cllr Cooper signed and dated the document (in Cllr Littlejohns absence).

11. Environmental issues

11.1 Odours East of Okehampton – to receive an update –To be monitored.

12. Open Spaces

12.1 To receive update from Working Group – Bluebell signs have been put up by Cllr J Heard. More signs needed. Cllr J Heard to arrange an extra 6 signs up to a maximum budget of £100.00. Proposed by Cllr Goffey, seconded by Cllr Wood, agreed by all.

12.2 OTP White Wood Management – Clerk to contact Okehampton historical society and OTC to enquire about byelaws.

12.3 STOC coppicing at Meldon woods and OTP –Update on work circulated. Cllr Norris said 60 new dormouse boxes have been installed in OTP.

13. Highways

13.1 Damaged fence by A30. Reported to Highways England (again 08.01.25) **Ref: FMS6950731 – no update.**

13.2 St James crossing – Faulty wigwag inspected on Monday. Clerk awaiting response from Highways.

14. Economic Development Projects

14.1 Okehampton BID– to receive an update – **See item 9 above.**

14.2 Regeneration project to receive an update – **No meeting.**

15. Annual parish meeting – format – **Agenda format agreed.**

16. Neighbourhood plan & OTC (letter circulated) – **No issues.**

17. Community governance meeting – Cllr Cooper gave a summary of the meeting at WDBC. Next steps: Clerk has chased for comms plan and costings. Clerk to send across asset list for change in boundary. Next meeting expected June 2025.

18. Okehampton castle – Cllr Goffey has been told that English Heritage are to close Okehampton Castle. Clerk asked to write to EH to clarify the situation, copying OTC.

19. Local government reorganisation – nothing agreed.

20. National planning guidance – nothing completely clear. Cllr Goffey expressed concerns for Hamlets with no neighbourhood plan.

21. To confirm date of next meeting – Tuesday 15th April 2025 at 7.30pm Meldon village hall for the annual parish meeting.

PART TWO - Proposed by Cllr Wood, 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.'

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

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.37 pm

Signed Date

Minutes 312/7