

## CULMSTOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at 7pm in Culmstock Village Hall

**Present:** Cllrs. Mrs L Jones (Chairman), Mrs J Zebedee, Dr C Bass, C Kay, Sarah Leppard, T Platel, MDDC Cllrs. Natasha Bradshaw and S Clist and the Clerk. One member of the public was present to address the council in the Democratic period. The Volunteer Footpath Warden was present for part of the meeting.

1. Democratic Period: A member of the public was present to speak to the council regarding a possible trail running event over and around Culmstock Beacon on behalf of Taunton Athletic Club. Councillors were supportive of the idea in principle but suggested consideration should be given to timing of the event in view of the nesting season and parking would need to be considered.
2. Apologies: Cllrs. Mrs J Saunders, J Bartlett & DCC Cllr. R Radford.
3. Declarations of Interest: None.
4. The Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 11/12/24 were approved and duly signed by the Chairman.
5. Matters Arising: None.
6. **Planning and Planning Correspondence/Information.**
  - 6.1 Applications to be considered: None received.
  - 6.2 Results from Mid Devon District Council.

24/00848/FULL Change of use of agricultural land to allow the siting of 1 mobile home and associated works for the use of gypsy and traveller family (Revised Scheme). South Fork, Culmstock, EX15 3HW. Refused - The proposed change of use is considered to harm the character and appearance of the area, including the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, resulting in the application being contrary to Policies S1, S9, DM1, DM7 and DM27 of the Mid Devon Local Plan (2013-2033), Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework and the aims of Paragraph 85 (A1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended). Whilst the benefits of the scheme have also been given weight, with no individual matter being afforded more weight than the best interests of the family, the cumulative impact of the harm to the character of the area, harm to the National Landscape and departure from the Mid Devon Local Plan are considered to outweigh the benefits of the application.

24/01770/PNAG Prior Notification for the erection of a steel portal framed agricultural building. Land & Buildings at NGR 310435 113020 Osmonds Farm, Culmstock. No Objection – Prior Approval Not Required.

24/01590/PNCOU Prior notification for the change of use of an agricultural building to 1 dwelling under Class Q. Barn at NGR 309830 113193 Culmstock. Application withdrawn.
  - 6.3 Any other Planning Matters: None.
7. **Reports.**
  - 7.1 The Chairman/Vice-Chairman: None.
  - 7.2 The Clerk: Following communication received from South Western Ambulance Trust the Clerk has registered interest for a defibrillator awareness session to take place in the autumn. Devon Communities Together is looking to host a session on resilience locally in the spring.
  - 7.3 P3/Footpaths and/or Access: (i) A report had been circulated to all, details include - the annual survey and finance forms have been received. FP40: re-installed the finger post beside the M5 bridge. FP9: drainage channel cleared across gateway to allotments field which will direct the water/slurry into ditch instead of footpath for a while. FP3 & 3A: cleared some fallen trees from the path and ditch and replaced some faded/broken way markers. FP21: cleared culvert of debris, and the drains on the Craddock Road. FP37: fitted new pin to self-closing spring on kissing gate. (ii) Other matters - an article will be put into The Culmstock News shortly regarding assistance with the footpaths due to the co-ordinator and volunteer warden considering a handover in the future. The Parish Council considered that a contractor may need to be instructed for works in the future which would incur extra costs - it is understood that a number of other Parishes operate in this way. The Parish Council is extremely grateful to the P3 Co-ordinator and the Volunteer Footpath Warden for the work undertaken in the Parish. *The Volunteer Footpath Warden and the member of the public left the meeting.*
  - 7.4 Hillmoor Common: Cllr. Sarah Leppard will look into the purchase of trees for the area.

- 7.5** Highways. (i) Following a request from a local business for signage on the A38 the Clerk will pass the details on to the NHO to liaise. (ii) Any other matters: None.
- 7.6** Any other reports including reports from DCC & MDDC Councillors. (i) DCC Cllr. Ray Radford had sent a report which was circulated to all: Just before Christmas government announced the English Devolution White Paper in respect of plans for local government reorganisation which proposes a new council structure (unitary) for Devon. A unitary authority would take on the responsibilities of the county and district councils which would cease to exist. It is understood that...*the intention is to formally invite unitary proposals from all councils in two-tier areas, and small neighbouring unitary councils in January 2025. The white paper mentions that new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas, this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more. There may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including on devolution. Final decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.* Local elections planned for May 2025 may be postponed. There will be more money to provide care for Devon's vulnerable adults and children in the county council's target budget for 2025/26. New figures show a proposed 8.2 per cent increase in the revenue budget for adult services with a 5.5 per cent rise in children's services and 3.4 per cent extra for climate change, environment and transport. Reductions in other departmental spending means an overall rise of 5.9 per cent in the budget for next year with a total spend of over £784.1 million. Cabinet will discuss the details in advance of the full council debating the budget in February. (ii) *The District Councillors gave their report before item 11.8.* MDDC Cllrs. Natasha Bradshaw and Simon Clist - The Climate Strategy & Action Plan and the Biodiversity Duty Action Plan have gone through MDDC. Green Enterprise Grants is launching soon for SMEs £500-£5k. Leisure centres are approaching carbon neutral. Grand Western Canal & review of conservation areas is due soon. \$106 grants – there is a new governance board. Details were given on the White Paper on English Devolution which includes a clear direction of travel towards unitary authorities. This would mean re-organisation of local government. Discussions are taking place amongst Devon County Council, Exeter City Council and the District Councils. Devon District Councils have issued a joint statement confirming their support for genuine devolution of powers from Whitehall to local government and their commitment to work collaboratively, However they do not believe the creation of one unitary council for Devon is in the county's best interests. It is hoped there will be thorough consideration of options and proper engagement with residents over how re-organisation could affect services such as planning, housing, highways, social care, education, recycling, leisure centres and the role of Parish and Town Councils.
- It was discussed that that Devolution will mean more responsibility for Parish Councils which will undoubtedly result in significant financial implications.*
- 8. Culmstock Play Area and Pavilion.**
- 8.1** Petanque piste: (i) Update from R&R Services including price for CLU application and to discuss if an access path is required - an estimated cost of £400 was given with relation to planning fees. It was agreed that an access path is not required at this stage. (ii) To discuss timescale - it is hoped that works will start ASAP following determination of the planning application. The toilet will be booked for the start date.
- 8.2** Improvements to the site: (i) Pump Track - councillors agreed to move forward with plans for a Pump Track on site; the Clerk will liaise with MDDC initially regarding the transfer of \$106 funds allocated towards the original Collier's bridge project.
- 8.3** Any other matters. Cllr. Sarah Leppard will look into details of a Table Tennis Table. Further quotations are awaited for monkey bars. The possibility of extending the site will be explored.
- 9. Update on Proposal for Community Orchard** - as the landowner the district council has confirmed that it will need to carry out a consultation process with the Parish. The status of Village Greens needs investigating. Cllrs. Mrs Zebedee, Platel will assist together with help from the Upper Culm Ward Councillors.
- 10. The Connecting the Culm Project - Flood Cameras:** Following the previous meeting it was agreed to invite the Senior Culm Catchment Officer to the next meeting to provide information on the possible installation of cameras to monitor flooding.

**11. Finance.**

**11.1** A report was given and the balance was noted as at 31/12/24 - £58,559.15. Credits received: 11/12 - £57 and 13/12 - £200 in respect of cemetery fees. Direct Debits taken: 06/12 - £117.97, 23/12 - £109.63 to Nest.

**11.2** Payments were approved:

- Chq 2014 £ 902.67 Clerk - salary & expenses.
- Chq 2015 £ 160.24 Parish warden - salary & expenses.
- Chq 2016 £ 21.94 SMA Services. Payroll provider.
- Chq 2017 £ 67.64 HMRC. Quarterly payment.
- Chq 2018 £ 42.00 Devon Association of Local Councils. Webinar re: Clerk.
- Chq 2019 £ 858.43 Countrywide Grounds Maintenance Ltd. Maintenance Contract.
- Chq 2020 £ 156.00 MDDC. Emptying of bin on bridge. (26 empties, July - Dec 2024)
- Chq 2021 £ 201.60 MDDC. Play Area Inspections. (Jan to June 2025).
- Chq 2022 £ 90.00 Kentisbeare Village Hall. Annual storage fee.
- Chq 2023 £ 67.60 Computerlink (Leicester) Ltd. Printer cartridges.

*Note: A typing error - cheque numbers 2021 and 2022 differ from the agenda; correct as above.*

**11.3** Maintenance Contract renewal - update: The Clerk reported that it is expected that three estimates will be received.

**11.4** A quotation for £460 from T K Play Ltd., for maintenance at the play park following the annual inspection was agreed.

**11.5** A quotation from T K Play Ltd., for double and single monkey bars had been received. Further quotations will be obtained.

**11.6** To consider grants and subscriptions to the various groups and organisations for inclusion within the precept figure: It was agreed to continue as in previous years regarding subscriptions and grants for the various groups and organisations.

**11.7** Review of salaries and expenses: The Council went into Part 2 for a review of salaries and expenses.

*Mid Devon District Councillors gave their report here, see minute 7.6 (ii).*

**11.8** Precept 2025/2026: To agree a figure for the Parish precept. Following an informal meeting with the Clerk, the Chairman and Cllr. Dr Bass and circulation of suggested figures to cover financial needs for the coming year, a report was given. After a full discussion it was resolved to set the precept at £61,500. It was noted that the increase on the Band D equivalent was £30pa.

The precept figure includes annual grants for Culmstock Village Hall and Culmstock Beacon of Lights (Christmas lights) and subscriptions as in previous years. Funds were included for improvements at the Parish playing field which it is considered are required - major projects such as a pump track and purchase/replacement of new equipment which has not taken place for in excess of several years. The Parish Council would also like to explore options for a feasibility study with reference to the re-opening of public access along the Culm Valley Light Railway route. An amount will be held as general reserve as required.

Councillors were unanimous in their decision to set the precept at £61,500; proposed by Cllr. Dr Bass and seconded by Cllr. Miss Jones. As in previous years, MDDC will deduct the subscription for DALC.

**11.9** Any other financial matters: Cllr. Sarah Leppard will bring the cost of trees for Hillmoor Common to a future meeting. The Clerk is awaiting information as to when the lease for the defibrillator is due for renewal.

**12. Culmstock Beacon.** (i) Proposed run/race event - following the Democratic Period further details are awaited and the Parish Council will assist where necessary; it is expected the village hall may be booked for registration and prize giving. (ii) Any other matters: None.

**13. Culmstock Cemetery:** None.

**14. Correspondence & Any Consultations.** Various generic emails. Clerks and Councils Direct. Email of thanks from Torridge, North, Mid & West Devon Citizens Advice.

**15. Items for information, future agenda items, and future meeting dates.** Future Meeting Dates: 12/02/25.