

CULMSTOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council held on 12th February 2025 at 7pm in Culmstock Village Hall

Present: Cllrs. Mrs L Jones (Chairman), Mrs J Zebedee, Dr C Bass, C Kay, Sarah Leppard, J Bartlett, Mrs R Balchin, Mrs J Saunders and the Clerk.

16. Democratic Period: None.
17. Apologies: MDDC Cllrs. S Clist and Natasha Bradshaw, DCC Cllr. R Radford.
18. Declarations of Interest: None.
19. The Connecting the Culm Project (CTC): Flood Cameras - The Senior Culm Catchment Officer was present to give details of funding available via CTC for cameras to monitor flooding. The cameras provide still footage at regular intervals which can assist during flood events and help the community to plan journeys. A free community app shows up-to-date camera footage. CTC would fund the monthly SIM cost until 31/3/27 after which the Parish Council would be responsible - the cost is currently £25 per month. There is also limited funding for a small number of flood gates for properties which flood regularly together with funding for some puddle pumps to key members of the community, which can be used to empty flooded properties when required.
Dr. Cllr. Bass will draft information for the Culmstock News magazine and social media page to see if there is interest in the cameras. Those councillors that are aware of properties that flood regularly will endeavour to make direct contact with the relevant property owners regarding funding of possible flood gates.
20. The Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 15/01/25 were approved and duly signed by the Chairman.
21. Matters Arising: None.
22. **Planning and Planning Correspondence/Information.**
 - 22.1 Applications considered:
-24/01815/HOUSE Erection of carport, garage and workshop for ancillary use. Lower Mead Barn, Culmstock. EX15 3LA. No objections.
 - 22.2 Results from Mid Devon District Council.
-24/01676/CLU Certificate of Lawfulness for the existing use of 5 caravans (1, 2, 3, 4 and 6) in breach of condition 4, occupation by bona fide gypsies of Planning Permission 07/00300/FULL for a period in excess of 10 years. Permission Granted.
 - 22.3 For information as submitted by the contractor - acknowledgement of application received:
25/00046/CLP - Certificate of lawfulness for the installation of 2 twin Petanque Pistes. Location: Land at NGR 310107 114317 (Culmstock Community Garden) Hunters Hill, Culmstock.
 - 22.4 Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan Consultation: Details circulated to all; Dr. Cllr. Bass to draft a response for submission.
 - 22.5 Consultation: Mid Devon Call for Sites 2025. Details circulated to all, Cllr. Dr Bass reported on the consultation which was noted - the district council is launching a new Call for Sites from 06/02 to 14/03/25 to help to understand the most recent information on available sites across the district and to help inform the development of the Local Plan. The consultation provides individuals and organisations with the opportunity to suggest sites considered to have the potential to be developed for housing, economic or other uses. The last Call for Sites was held in 2021. Conclusions will be published in a 'Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment' (HELAA) which will include the sites from the 2021 and the 2025 process. The HELAA will form part of the evidence base for a new Local Plan for Mid Devon. Submissions may be made online. The Parish Council agreed not to suggest any sites at this stage. *Note: closing date 14/03, any further information or updates can be reported at the next meeting.*
 - 22.6 Any other Planning Matters: None.

23. Reports.

23.1 The Chairman/Vice-Chairman: None.

23.2 The Clerk. (i) DALC - Report on smaller councils meeting: The Clerk & Cllr. Mrs J Zebedee reported on a recent online meeting regarding Devolution - many councils are concerned as to how they will be affected if there is to be a Unitary Authority; further news is awaited. DALC is looking to promote the value of the sector and councils were asked to compile a statement providing information of what work they are doing in their communities together with their aspirations; details will be submitted as prepared by Cllr. Mrs Zebedee with assistance from the Clerk. *It was noted that up-to-date information had just been received confirming that the DCC elections will go ahead in May 2025.* (ii) DALC – Nominations for Royal Garden Party: It was agreed query if the P3 Co-ordinator could be put forward. If this is not permitted Cllr. Dr Bass will be put forward.

23.3 P3/Footpaths and/or Access: Report circulated to all - the annual survey forms have been submitted and work is underway on the grant for the new financial year. FP10-fallen tree cleared from hedge gap, the entrance at Old Beat seems to have a local drainage problem. FP38-cleared way through part fallen tree. FP2-adjusted gate at start of footpath. FP21-usual ditch/culvert clearance in lanes, also the Craddock road gratings. FP2A- debris clearance for drainage. BW34-adjusted bridle gate, check and lubricated padlock for main gate. Branches cut away from fallen tree. FP3-repairs to finger post sign, and general clearance.

23.4 Hillmoor Common: Cllr. Sarah Leppard reported on plans for several trees for the area; approximate cost in the region of a few hundred pounds.

23.5 Highways: Damage to the bridge will be reported to Highways. The flood wall along The Strand is in need of repair; Dr. Cllr. Bass will forward photographs to the Clerk to send to the Environment Agency.

23.6 Culmstock Cemetery: Enquiries will be made with MDDC regarding a brown bin for the cemetery.

23.7 Any other reports including reports from DCC & MDDC Councillors: DCC Cllr Radford provided a written report which was circulated to all, details include - DCC is in the process of trying to produce a balanced budget. Cllr. Radford set out some information in relation to the finances of DCC. To enable the authority to set a balanced budget, savings, alternative funding and additional income of £21.7 million have been identified. The government's calculations for the Provisional Settlement assume an increase in Core Spending Power from £794 million in 2024/25 to £831 million in 2025/26 – an increase of 4.66% assuming the full increase in council tax is agreed locally. Excluding council tax the core funding increase is below inflation forecasts at 2.05%, resulting in what is effectively a real terms cut in grant support, placing greater reliance on council tax to fund increasing costs and demand for local services. The Core Spending Power increase at 4.66% means Devon has the lowest increase out of all 21 county councils in England, and is well below the 6% average increase of all local authorities in England. County Councils in England may increase council tax by up to 4.99% in 2025/26, including 2% for adult social care responsibilities, without a referendum. The actual tax increase for the authority will be determined by the county council this month. The current draft budget estimates for 2025/26 assume the authority will maximise this flexibility and increase the tax rate by 4.99% for next financial year, subject to formal recommendation by Cabinet and decision by council this month. Note: a 4.99% increase in the county council's tax rate is estimated to raise additional council tax income in 2025/26 of approximately £27.2 million including £10.9 million (2%) for Adult Social Care. Integrated Adult Social Care and Children and Young People's Futures combined continue to deliver 79% of total net costs in the services which equates to £620.775m of the overall total of £784.092m. During the year ahead, the council will continue to make savings by reducing costs, maximising the value of commissioned services and streamlining staff structures. It is inevitable that changes will have an impact on some of the vital services for which the council is responsible. The Strategic Leadership Team remains wholly committed to advising and supporting the council so that it can set a budget for 2025/26 that is in the best interests of the people of Devon. *DCC Cllr. Radford reported that he will not be standing as Conservative candidate in the upcoming county elections this May.* (ii) MDDC Cllr. Natasha Bradshaw had provided similar details as circulated regarding the "call for sites" consultation. Ward councillors will provide further information as necessary.

24. Culmstock Play Area and Pavilion.

24.1 Petanque piste - the Clerk reported that the contractor submitted an application for a Certificate of Lawfulness in January 2025 (as 22.3). A decision is awaited from the district council before works can commence.

24.2 Improvements to the site: (i) Table Tennis Table - Cllr. Sarah Leppard reported on the cost of a table tennis table at £355 plus delivery if purchased after April which was agreed. The Clerk will make enquiries regarding the cost of installation and the base. (ii) Monkey bars - as 26.6

Culmstock Play Area and Pavilion continued:

- 24.3** MDDC Quarterly Inspection: The Inspector has highlighted a few minor items for repair which are not considered safety defects; *Clerk to take forward with contractor as required.*
- 24.4** Compost Toilet. (i) Certificate of Lawfulness (CLU) - the Clerk reported on verbal and email communication with the district council. It was most likely that this would be permitted development under Part 12, Class A of the GPDO subject to the size of the toilet and the Parish Council owning the land. This is based on the information available currently and an application for a CLU could be submitted for a legal view. *The Parish Council considered that it was not necessary to submit an application for a compost toilet.* (ii) Cllr. Sarah Leppard reported on options and it was agreed to make further enquiries with Thunderbox as a local company and report at the next meeting. The Clerk will make enquiries with the insurance company.
- 24.5** Any other matters: None.
- 25. Blackdown Hills Parishes Network (BHPN) – update regarding membership:** Dr. Cllr Bass reported on the BHPN which was formed in 2011 to represent and act for the benefit of the Parishes wholly or partly within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape (BHNL). The BHPN is keen to improve contact with Parish Councils and Meetings and recent changes have been implemented to simplify how the BHPN works resulting in the abolishing of the membership fee. The network is inviting Parishes just outside of the National Landscape to join the BHPN and from 01/01/25 the network assumes that all of those with a full or partial footprint within the BHNL are members of the network unless otherwise informed. It is hoped that councils will give a minimum membership fee of £25, more where possible depending upon previous commitment and available funds. Information was given on steering group meetings which will be bi-monthly alternating between on-line and physical meetings. The AGM will continue to be held in person with an occasional second general meeting annually. *The Parish Council agreed to continue as in previous years with a membership fee of £150 (see 26.2).* Cllrs. Dr. Bass, Miss L Jones, C Kay and the Clerk will endeavour to attend the AGM as in previous years.
- 26. Finance.**
- 26.1** Finance report & to note the balances: The bank balance was noted as at 31/01/25 as £51,353.92. Credits received: 05/02 - £600 in respect of cemetery fees. Direct Debits taken: Nest - 05/02 £115.58.
- 26.2** Payments were resolved:
- Chq 2024 £ 966.65 Clerk - salary & expenses.
 - Chq 2025 £ 186.07 Parish warden - salary & expenses.
 - Chq 2026 £ 21.94 SMA Services. Payroll provider.
 - Chq 2027 £ 63.45 R Lock. P3 Expenses - volunteer footpath warden.
 - Chq 2028 £ 151.00 The Carly Press. Printing re: Culmstock News summary minutes.
 - Chq 2029 £ 858.43 Countrywide Grounds Maintenance Ltd. Maintenance Contract.
 - Chq 2030 £ 150.00 Blackdown Hills Parishes Network. Subscription.
 - Chq 2031 £ 552.00 T K Play Ltd. Play area maintenance.
- 26.3** South Western Ambulance Service (SWAST) - renewal of defibrillator lease: It was agreed to renew the combined three year lease with Hemyock and Clayhidon Parish Councils - cost to be confirmed, it is expected that this will be in the region of £1300.
- 26.4** Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) 2024/25 (i) Confirmation of Internal Auditor 2024/25 - it was agreed to instruct S Aldworth as in previous years. (ii) The Clerk has revised a Statement of Internal Control and Risk Management Policy which will be circulated to all. (iii) Cllr. Mrs R Balchin will assist the Clerk with quarterly checks.
- 26.5** Annual Review of Fixed Asset Register: Deferred to March meeting due to recent purchase orders.
- 26.6** Quotations for monkey bars - the Clerk has requested a further quotation which is still awaited.
- 26.7** Any other financial matters: None.
- 27. The future of The Culmstock News:** Cllr. Dr. Bass reported that the editor is looking to resign but will stay in post until a replacement is found. Following a discussion with reference to the running costs it was agreed that the magazine is of great benefit to the community and the Parish Council will support financially if required. *Cllr. Dr Bass and Mrs Zebedee to report at a future meeting.*

28. MDDC Resilience.

28.1 Community Risk Register: Information from the MDDC Resilience Officer to say that there is a National Risk register held by Central Government and a Community Risk Register held by the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Resilience Forum but that there is no form of Local Risk Register. One of the main outputs of the register would be a more proactive response to engagement where MDDC could better target the specific risks that matter to communities across the district.

Town and Parishes Councils have been asked to review the draft document together with the risks and the scores and to provide information on any additional risks.

The following risks were agreed (i) The volume and speed of traffic through the village, particularly at school drop off and pick up times and the dangers for pedestrians walking through the village; in particular when walking over Culmstock Bridge and especially when heavy vehicles are in transit.

(ii) Untreated sewage leaking across footpath 12 into the River Culm - as previously reported by Cllr. Dr Bass to the relevant organisations. *Cllr. Dr. Bass will provide full details for the Clerk to send to MDDC.*

28.2 BT digital voice events & mobile phone not spots: Request from MDDC Resilience Officer for information from communities of areas which are “not spots” (i.e. no internal house mobile signal) and the areas affected when we go fully digital - so that the district council is aware of these locations and the added risk. It was discussed that most of the Parish had a problem with signal.

29. Correspondence & Any Consultations: Correspondence - Family Farms and IHT; a Discussion Paper circulated to Parishes within the Blackdown Hills - *agreed for Cllr. J Bartlett to review and suggest comments at the next meeting.*

Clerks and Councils Direct. Email of thanks following recent donations from Churches Housing and Action Team and Citizens Advice Torridge, North, Mid & West Devon. Various generic emails (circulated to all).

Consultations: Fire service consultation- Automatic Fire Alarms - noted.

30. Items for information, future agenda items, and future meeting dates. Future Meeting Dates: 12/03/25. 09/04/23, 14/05/25.