

## CULMSTOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Parish Council held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2025 at 7pm in Culmstock Village Hall

**Present:** Cllrs. Mrs J Zebedee (Acting Chairman), C Kay, Sarah Leppard, Mrs R Balchin, T Platel, Dr C Bass, MDDC & DCC Cllr. Simon Clist, the Clerk and one member of the public. Due to apologies received from the Chairman, the vice chairman took the meeting.

**108. Democratic Period:** None.

**109. Apologies:** Cllrs. Miss Lizzie Jones, James Bartlett & MDDC Cllr. Natasha Bradshaw.

**110. Declarations of Interest:** None.

**111.** The Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 09/07/2025 were approved and duly signed by the acting Chairman.

**112. Matters Arising:** DCC Cllr. Clist will report regarding 20mph schemes at a future meeting.

**113. Planning and Planning Correspondence/Information.**

**113.1** Applications considered:

-25/01217/HOUSE Erection of a single storey rear extension to replace existing conservatory.

13 Great Close, Culmstock. EX15 3HQ. No objections.

**113.2** Results from Mid Devon District Council:

-25/00609/FULL - Erection of an agricultural field shelter and storage shed. Land at NGR 308334 114080 (Spiceland) Cullompton. Approved.

**113.3** For Information only:

-25/01078/PNAG - Prior Notification for the erection of an agricultural storage building. Land at NGR 310556 114952 Dalwood Farm, Culmstock.

-25/01056/PNAG - Prior Notification for the erection of an agricultural storage building and associated hardstanding. Land at NGR 309840 115593 (Bramble Hedge) Culmstock.

**113.4** MDDC Tree Preservation Order 24/00011/TPO (The Paddocks, Blackwater Rd, Culmstock). Confirmation of approval dated 19/08/2025.

**113.5** Any other Planning Matters. (i) The Clerk recently attended a planning session at MDDC for which slides and a recording have been made available to all.

(ii) Cllr. Dr Bass and MDDC Cllr. Clist reported that they had attended the hearing on 12/08/25 in respect of the appeal re: application 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 & traveller family (Revised Scheme) South Fork, Culmstock, EX15 3HW. Appeal Reference APP/Y1138/W/25/3365163. A decision is awaited.

(iii) Possible Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish - Cllrs. Dr Bass, Platel and the Clerk will shortly attend a Neighbourhood Planning Workshop hosted by Devon Communities Together. Polden Planning will be asked to provide a presentation to the Parish Council as soon as possible.

**114. Reports.**

**114.1** The Chairman/Vice-Chairman: None.

**114.2** The Clerk: (i) Details of upcoming meetings – Cllrs. Kay, Dr Bass and the Clerk will attend the MDDC State of District Debate. The Clerk will attend the Devon Association of Local Councils AGM and conference.

(ii) Flood gates - the Clerk reminded councillors of a small amount of funding that may be available via The National Landscape/Connecting the Culm for a few eligible properties. (iii) Church wall. - the Clerk has made contact with MDDC following concern over the church wall in The Cleeve area which has become very unstable and is in poor repair most of the way around the Cleeve - following the recent downpours some rocks have fallen into the road. MDDC has responded to say that "it is aware and is endeavouring to secure procurement of remedial works. In the interim period the wall is monitored for loose stone and these are placed back behind the wall in the churchyard for future use". MDDC may have to cordon the area off for safety in the interim.

**114.3** P3/Footpaths and/or Access: (i) A report had been received from the P3 Footpath Co-ordinator. FP9-the lane from Burgess Cottage has been strimmed. The contractor has replaced two stiles with self-closing gates and the adjoining fence has been rebuilt. FP4-strimmed and trimmed lane and hedge, adjusted gate. River to Hemyock Road. FP38-cleared vegetation from lane, Blackwater to Pitt Farm. FP1A-strimmed permissive path and to the beacon hut. FP36-Strimmed path from Windwhistle Cottage to the Somerset boundary & into Somerset.

*Reports continued:*

FP12-some trimming of overhanging trees, to prevent fence damage, strimmed part of rail track. FP21-clearing culvert beside Craddock Road and some pre-storm clearing of drains beside the Craddock Road.

The stile on the boundary with Uffculme is broken & efforts will be made to replace it. Landowner's permission required to change to gate. DCC has awarded an annual P3 grant of £1950 which has just been received.

(i) England Ecosystem Survey - Following communication from Natural England it was agreed for permission to be given for access to an area on the beacon for the England Ecosystem Survey which is being conducted between April 2026 to March 2027. The survey is an England-wide survey of plants, habitats, soils, and landscapes. It's a large-scale and pioneering project run by Natural England, collecting information that will help government and other organisations make better informed environmental decisions.

- 114.4** Highways. (i) Report on meeting with Parish Lengths man - Cllr. Mrs Zebedee reported on an estimate received for £78 to clear the drains and kerb stone along a stretch by the river; agreed under finance. (ii) Arrangements will be made for a meeting with the Neighbourhood Highways Officer as last year to discuss various matters that require attention. (iii) It is expected that a camera attached to the 30mph sign facing up Hunters Hill is a traffic survey, as carried out by WSP - which could be traffic count data and potentially speed. (iv) Water on the road has been reported in Silver Street which could be as a result of a leaking water main. Cllr. Kay will contact South West Water.

- 114.5** Blackdown Hills Parishes Network: Cllr. Dr Bass reported that the steering group will shortly be meeting the National Landscape team prior to them starting to review and revise the Blackdown Hills Design Guide. The BHPN steering group will meet on 02/10. The Rural Broadband Consultation summary report has recently been launched - details circulated.

- 114.6** Culmstock Cemetery: Cllr. Mrs Zebedee will assess the bier house to determine if any remedial works are required. It is expected that some paintwork may be required. A quotation for edging the pathways has been obtained (see finance).

- 114.7** Any other reports including reports from DCC & MDDC Councillors. (i) Cllr. Clist gave a report as DCC and MDDC Councillor: Recycling rates remain high and we remain amongst the top nationwide. The Exmoor National Park Management Plan has been adopted. The garden waste contract has been renewed. There is a new pothole policy in place.

**115. Culmstock Play Area and Pavilion.**

- 115.1** Update on Thunderbox all access toilet installation and arrangements for cleaning - the Clerk will meet with the handyman and others to look at a secure storage cupboard. Following continuing anti-social behaviour a notice will be put into the next issue of the Culmstock News. It was agreed for cleaning to be undertaken twice a week via the village hall; charge to be included with the hall hire fee invoice.
- 115.2** Update on works required on site: The Clerk will meet with the handyman to look at minor works required.
- 115.3** Any other matters including update on petanque pistes: The string needs fixing. It appears that metal detecting has been taking place on site - this is not permitted and a notice will be put into the Culmstock News. A vehicle has been parked on the verge outside of the play area for some time.

**116. Finance.**

- 116.1** Finance report & to note the balances: To note the bank balance as at 29/08/25 - £35,924.44. Direct Debits taken: Nest 07/08 £125.47, Lloyds Bank service charge 18/07 & 18/08- £4.25, Pennon Water Services 08/08 - £25.24.

- 116.2** To resolve to make payments:

1. £ 929.93 Clerk - salary & expenses.
2. £ 191.00 Parish warden - salary & expenses.
3. £ 48.24 SMA Services. Payroll provider.
4. £ 932.42 Countrywide Grounds Maintenance Ltd. Grounds Maintenance Contract.
5. £ 81.60 Eagle Plant. Portable toilet hire.
6. £ 300.00 N Page. Parish footpath work (P3 funds).
7. £ 378.00 PKF Littlejohn LLP. External audit fee.
8. £ 48.00 Vision ICT Ltd. Hosting of 2 emails.

*Finance continued:*

- 116.3** To note the payments made under delegation over the summer recess totalling £8089.89.
1. £ 946.56 Clerk - salary & expenses.
  2. £ 207.70 Parish warden - salary & expenses.
  3. £ 2,256.81 AJG Gallagher. Parish Council insurance renewal.
  4. £ 932.42 Countrywide Grounds Maintenance Ltd. Grounds Maintenance Contract.
  5. £ 403.20 MDDC. Play Area inspections annual fee - first payment, 6 months (50% of total fee) includes annual inspection fee.
  6. £ 193.20 Eagle Plant. Portable toilet hire.
  7. £ 3,150.00 Thunderbox Collective Ltd. Final invoice, installation of compost toilet.
- 116.4** Estimate from C Houghton to clear drain and kerb stone alongside river: Cllr. Mrs Zebedee previously reported (see 114.4) following a site visit and an estimate of £78 was agreed.
- 116.5** Countrywide Grounds Maintenance Ltd., quotations for work in cemetery (i) A quotation of £280.50 was agreed for edging the pathways. (ii) One quotation had been received for removal of the roadside hedge and replanting. It was agreed to obtain one more quotation from an alternative supplier.
- 116.6** NALC Salary Scales – notification of standard increase in the NALC salary scales from 01/04/25; applied.
- 116.7** Uffculme Allotment Association - rent subsidy. Ref minutes 89.4 and 102.5 (ii) following contact with the Allotment Association it was reconsidered and agreed to cover the cost of 50% of two plots for anyone affected within this financial year only; it is understood that only two parishioners are affected this year.
- 116.8** Any other financial matters: (i) Notification of conclusion of audit just received; notices to be displayed as required for 14 days. (ii) See Finance 116.2, approval of two additional invoices as expected payments: PKF Littlejohn LLP - £378 and Vision ICT - £48.
- 117. Parish Bins:** Update on possible relocation of The Cleeve bin - it was agreed for the Clerk to contact MDDC to query if the bin could be fixed on the churchyard side of the road by the lych gate where it has been placed temporarily.
- 118. Hillmoor Common.**
- 118.1** Management Plan: (i) Cllr. Dr Bass recommended that an organisation such as Devon Wildlife Trust review the original management plan - agreed. DCC/MDDC Cllr. Clist will assist as Hemyock are in contact. A biodiversity survey could be undertaken to inform of the changes and advise on future management. (ii) Cllr. Platel reported on registering the land under a possessory title - payment can be arranged at the next meeting.
- 119. Possible Community Orchard:** Cllr. Mrs Zebedee reported on communication received from MDDC regarding the process of investigation work and the cost of the work into whether planting an orchard was valid on a village green status - and that this is the responsibility of the Parish. MDDC Cllr. Clist agreed to assist by liaising with the relevant department at MDDC.
- 120. Copper Beech Tree at Culmstock Village Hall:** Cllrs. Mrs Zebedee and Dr Bass reported that arrangements will be made for the tree to be inspected by a professional ASAP due to it displaying signs of fungal disease. Any works that are necessary will be covered by the Parish Council.
- 121. Correspondence & Any Consultations:**
- Correspondence: Communication received from a parishioner regarding power failures - a parishioner had made contact to advise of 16 short power cuts this year and that over 70 such outages had been endured since October 2020. The parishioner has made a formal complaint to National Grid and requested that the Parish Council raise the complaint should it have any meetings or communication with National Grid.
- Consultations: MDDC - Animal Welfare Licensing Policy. Noted  
<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/business/licensing/animals/>.
- 122. Items for information, future agenda items, and future meeting dates.** Next meeting - 08/10/25.
- Items for information: Cllr. Sarah Leppard reported that Culmstock Primary School is celebrating its 150th year next year - to be placed on the next agenda. Cllr. Sarah Leppard reported on the idea of a youth council and will gauge interest via a future issue of The Culmstock News.