



BRADNINCH TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES

**The Guildhall
Bradninch
Exeter, Devon**

Minutes of the Bradninch Town Council Meeting
Monday 11th December 2023, 7pm, The Guildhall, Bradninch

DRAFT MINUTES subject to amendment.

Present: Cllr S Crawford (Chair), Cllr E Ottery (Vice Chair), Cllr P Andrews, Cllr S Birley, Cllr J Blythe, Cllr P Chambers, Cllr R Lawson, Cllr S Glendinning, Cllr L Mottram, Cllr L Taylor, and Cllr I Wild.

In attendance: Mrs A Marshall, Clerk, and 4 member of the public.

Standing Orders suspended.

Public Open Session: A member of the public provided an update on the new Bradninch Circular Walks booklet, the printing of which is being sponsored by the Town Council. 12 walks had been included and the original 2 books had been condensed to a single 32-page booklet. The booklets would be on sale at the local SPAR by January end, priced at £1 each. Information on individual walks can be found on the Council's website. The resident was thanked by the Chairman for his work on this project.

Council Representative on the Town Trust: Anne Porteous reported that improvements to the Guildhall were ongoing. The installation of a lift is the current priority as this would make the Guildhall accessible to all. In the meantime, a replacement stair lift is being looked into as the current lift is not fit for purpose. Funding continues to be raised locally by way of cream teas, raffles, room hire, coffee mornings and stall holder contributions for example. Larger sums will be needed for the improvements. The new lift is expected to cost in the region of £100,000, work on securing this will commence shortly.

Emergency Plan: The Guildhall will be open to 'first responders' in the event of a town emergency. The grant funded electrical work to support a generator has been completed. Thanks go to Sue Eakers and Jim Porteous for work carried out on the Emergency Plan, and to the Council for overseeing the electrical work funding.

Guildhall running costs: Heat and light costs have increased to over £10,000 this year, general running costs are likely to exceed hire income by around £6,000. Thankfully, a new energy deal has just been secured which will, going forward, reduce costs substantially. To increase income, the Council Chamber has been let out on week days and the Town Trust is working on a multi-year business plan to secure the Guildhall's future. The temporary decision to suspend the appointment of a Business Clerk will also save on costs, duties will be covered by Trustees.

New Town Trust Trustees: Four new Trustees have been appointed over the past year which has injected new enthusiasm and which has brought forward ideas on how to modernise in general. New policies are being put together and the financial systems are being updated. Improved processes for carrying out day-to-day tasks, such as maintenance on the properties owned by the Trust, have been introduced. A Facebook page has been created and a new website is pending. It is hoped that this focus will encourage closer engagement with the community and provide clarity on what the Town Trust does.

Trustee vacancies: Anyone interested in becoming a Town Trust Trustee is encouraged to find out more by contacting bradninchtt@gmail.com

General news: The Guildhall Management Committee no longer exists, a new group is being considered to help organise community events such as quiz and film nights at the Guildhall.

Thanks go to Town Councillor Ross Lawson for arranging the Guildhall's Christmas Tree this year. The Trustees look forward to welcoming members of the community to the Guildhall over the festive period.

Long standing Trustee, Jane Webber, recently decided to step down from the Trustee role after many years of dedication and hard work. The Trustees thank Jane for all her input over the years.

The Chairman thanked Anne for her report and, on behalf of the Town Council, thanked Jane Webber for all her help and support over the many years whilst in the role of Town Council Representative on the Town Trust. Jane is wished all the best for the future.

Police Matters: The Clerk had enquired about the Proceeds of Crime Funding Scheme which, if relevant, could fill the new roundabout funding shortfall. It was noted that, as the existing roundabout was currently working again, the installation of the new roundabout had been postponed. Funding donated to the new roundabout project would be ring-fenced. Cllr L Taylor reported that local Police Officer PC Legg had temporarily been seconded to Tiverton.

News from Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council: Various updates had been circulated from C/Cllr John Berry. A report from D/Cllr Luke Taylor was pending.

Town Mayor: The Mayor's monthly report was pending.

Standing Orders resumed.

23/124 Apologies for absence: Accepted from Cllr M Taylor, illness.

23/125 Declarations of Interest relating to items on this agenda: Cllr Chambers declared an interest in Town Trust items due to being a Town Trust Trustee.

23/126 Confirmation of Minutes: It was RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the Full Council meeting of 13th November 2023, the Planning Committee meeting of 20th November 2023, the Finance Committee Budget meeting of 29th November 2023 as a correct records.

23/127 Finance:

a) Bank balance: Noted as being £49,692.72 as at November 30th 2023.

b) Free funds: Estimated to be £2,342 as at November 30th 2023.

c) Training: RESOLVED to book and pay for training for Cllr Crawford (DALC 'how to conduct meetings' £36.00 incl VAT), and the Clerk (SLCC 'Churchyard and Cemetery safety' £30 plus VAT). Cllr Crawford declared an interest in this item.

d) Payments and receipts: Standing Orders suspended. Ground maintenance contractor Darren Luxton-Keough was invited to join the meeting to discuss the R&R Services weed spraying invoice. Darren explained that the clumps of grass along West End Road had not been killed off by recent spraying due to the weakness of the non-glyphosate spray that the Council insisted on using. The weeds, however, had been killed off as required by the contract, and so payment of the invoice was requested. Alternative and more effective non-glyphosate sprays were being looked into by R&R Services for future use. It was noted that non-glyphosate weed spray was up to 4 times more expensive than ordinary spray. Consideration with regards to other methods of weed removal took place. Cllr L Taylor confirmed that the Council's decision to use non-glyphosate weed spray had been made due to requests from residents, even though such spray would not effectively kill grass. RESOLVED to pay the R&R Services invoice as the work had been completed and as the issue was with the non-glyphosate weed spray not being strong enough to kill clumps of grass. RESOLVED to put the matter of exploring alternative weed sprays on the February 2024 agenda and to invite the public to comment or attend the meeting. Standing Orders resumed.

RESOLVED to make all payments listed for December 2023 and the receipts for November 2023 were noted.

RESOLVED to pay Christmas tree/Christmas lights related invoices on receipt, up to the budgeted amount.

23/128 Budget and Precept 2024/2025: Cllr Ottery relayed a request from the pre-school, with regards to funding, and asked for this to be taken into account prior to setting the budget and precept figures. Following discussion, it was agreed to invite a member of the pre-school to the January meeting to discuss a donation which, if approved, could be taken from reserves. Cllr L Taylor declared an interest due to a family member being manager of the pre-school. Cllr Chambers proposed that any 'free funds' at year end (31/03/2024) be transferred to general reserves and that the recommended budget and precept figures, as presented by the Finance Committee, be approved unamended. This was RESOLVED (10 in favour and 1 abstention) and would raise the local precept by 11% to £61,500 for the 2024/2025 financial year. The increase would equate to £8.26 a year, or 16 pence per week, for an equivalent local band D property. The Mayor agreed to write and publish a statement with regards to why the increase was necessary. Cllr Andrews asked for future rent income to be raised significantly. It was confirmed that the MDDC Council Tax rise would be capped at 2.99%.

23/129 Communications:

a) Charwell Wetlands management – an email from a resident advised that she was stepping back from overseeing the Wetlands project. RESOLVED that the matter would be taken forward by the Recreation and Amenities Committee. Clerk to thank the resident for all her past input.

- b) Wild flower seeds – Cllr Mottram advised that Sustainable Bradninch would be applying for Council grant funding.
- c) MDDC – Assets of Community Value (ACV). MDDC had confirmed the renewal of the Castle Hotel ACV for a further 5 years. Unfortunately, the renewal for the Olde White Lion Inn had been rejected, mainly due to recent lack of community activity at the venue. A future application could be considered.
- d) Flood defence for Hen Street – grant funding of £1,392. had been agreed by the Devon Emergency Resilience Fund (DCRF) for the purchase of FloodSax to help with flood defence in Hen Street. RESOLVED that the Clerk would purchase the items upon receipt of the grant funding, in January. Resident Sue Eakers was thanked for her work on this project.
- e) MDDC State of the District Debate 2024 - Cllr L Taylor reported that the meeting would take place at the end of March 2024 and invited a member of the Council to attend.
- f) Refreshment van outside the Guildhall - Several residents had queried the red van selling coffee parked outside the Guildhall on charity coffee morning days which, they felt, could be impacting on charity fund raising. Cllr Birley reported that the recent Poppy Day coffee morning had sold 34 fewer cups of coffee than last year. It was acknowledged that both outlets sell very different types of coffee. Anyone wanting to take this matter forward should contact the Town Trust or the owner of the coffee van. Cllr Chambers agreed to share this information with the Town Trust.

23/130 DCC Highways:

- a) Vehicle Activated Speed Sign (VAS). Further to a review of additional information it was RESOLVED to progress with the purchase of the speed sign.
- b) Townlands steps to ramp. Cllr L Taylor reported that planning permission may be required, work would cost in the region of £15,500 which would need to be Town Council funded, and the required drop kerb was already in place. Due to the costs involved, it was RESOLVED not to take this project forward.
- c) Unauthorised road closures - Airband. Cllr Wild reported that some town roads had recently been closed by Airband, without authority, in order to lay cables. This had caused traffic issues and bus service disruption. Apparently, Airband had inaccurately reported the work as being an emergency. A local DCC Highways Officer had acted without delay to get the roads re-opened. It was RESOLVED to write to DCC Highways stating the Council's disappointment at the way the Airband application had been dealt with, and that it was thought that DCC Highways had failed in due diligence when agreeing the road closures. An investigation would be requested. The efficient intervention of the local DCC Highways Officer would be highlighted.
- d) Fore Street bollard – a resident had reported a broken plastic bollard in Fore Street. RESOLVED that Cllrs Andrews and Crawford would replace the item with the 'spare'.
- e) Town Visitor Board – Cllr Ottery reported that the new MDDC Visitor Board had been installed in front of the Guildhall. She suggested that it might be seen as facing the wrong way and asked for Councillor feedback.
- f) Street light on overnight at the Recreation Ground – RESOLVED to leave the light settings as they currently stand due to continuing safety and security concerns in the area.
- g) Fordishaies Lane/Hen Street – the mud run-off at Weeks Cross and Hen Street was considered further. Cllr Blythe reported that Weeks Cross was being swept regularly and that a digger had been working there today. RESOLVED to review this matter, together with the slurry pit issues, at the next Planning Committee meeting.

23/131 Committees:

- a) Churchyard maintenance – Cllr Wild reported that the agreed additional work had been dealt with except for the removing of ivy from the Yew trees as this was providing food for the bees over winter. The work on the large Oak tree and the water pipe leak had been completed.
- b) Grass cutting – RESOLVED not to authorise any additional grass cutting. To be reviewed monthly.
- c) Solar lights at the Recreation Ground – Cllr Birley reported that the newly fitted solar lights had all been stolen. The matter would be put to the Recreation and Amenities Committee at its next meeting.

23/132 Town Council representatives on the Town Trust: An expression of interest had been received from resident James Buxton. Further to consideration, it was RESOLVED to invite Mr Buxton to fill the vacancy.

23/133 PART 2: RESOLVED to enter into private session due to the sensitive nature of the business to be discussed, see items a) and b) below, and in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, and the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public will be asked to leave the meeting -

a) Town Warden: RESOLVED to form a working group involving Cllrs L Taylor, P Andrews, P Chambers, S Birley and Cllr S Crawford to take this project forward.

b) Standing Orders: RESOLVED to create a vexatious complaints policy. The Clerk would refer to MDDC in order to create a draft document for Council consideration.

23/134 Events, comments, updates (no decision making during this item):

a) Action/Project Register – updated and circulated, b) Planning Committee – a meeting would be called shortly, c) Picnic tables for Townlands Play Park - Cllrs Crawford and Andrews volunteered to help Cllr Birley with installation of the new items over the Christmas period, d) Christmas lights – Cllr L Taylor thanked Cllr Lawson and all those involved in putting up the Christmas lights, and also those who attended the successful lights ‘switch-on’ event, e) Bradninch football pitch – Cllr Mottram reported that 6 species of rare fungi had been found on and around the pitch and asked for Council to support with safeguarding procedures. She had discussed the matter with the Club management. It was agreed to put this item on the next agenda.

23/135 Next Town Council meeting and venue: Monday January 8th 2024, venue to be advised following a discussion about accessibility to the upstairs Council Chamber.

The meeting closed at 21.22 and was followed by a meeting of the Bradninch Youth Centre Trust.

PAYMENTS DECEMBER 2023	£	VAT	RECEIPTS NOVEMBER 2023	£
Staff salaries (net) incl. Clerk backdated pay	2026.63	n/a VAT	Burial income	0
Clerk pension (employer/employee cont.)	582.50	n/a VAT	Allotment income	911.00
HMRC Tax/NI	588.57	n/a VAT	Bank interest	52.27
Clerks expenses (working from home, stationery, postage, mileage)	154.77	Incl VAT	Roundabout donations	500.00
Gardening Services - Town weed spraying	854.86	Incl VAT		
SLCC annual membership	188.00	n/a VAT		
M Leonard reimbursement WD40 (Xmas lights)	6.00	n/a VAT		
DALC – training (S Crawford)	36.00	Incl VAT		
SLCC – training (Clerk)	30.00	Plus VAT		
LK Plumbing – Churchyard tap leak	134.59	Incl VAT		
M Taylor - reimbursement Xmas lights event refreshments – Mayors fund	68.20	n/a VAT		
Christmas Lights 2023 – costs/invoices	Tba	Incl VAT		