

MINUTES of the BRADNINCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Monday 15th April 2024, 7.30pm, The Guildhall, Bradninch

Present: 21 members of the public including Town Councillors Ian Wild, Luke Taylor (also Mid Devon District Councillor), Maggie Taylor, Emily Ottery, Steve Birley, Paul Andrews, Jenny Blythe, Phil Chambers, Lucy Mottram and Devon County Councillor John Berry. Town Clerk, Alison Marshall.

1. Apologies for absence: Town Councillor Simon Glendinning, Katrina Jones (Bowling Club).

2. Confirmation of the Annual Parish Meeting Minutes of 2023: it was RESOLVED to sign off the 2023 minutes as a correct record. (I Wild, M Taylor).

3. Mayor's report and Police report: Cllr Simon Crawford, Mayor, presented his report -

As I step down as the chair of the Bradninch town council, it is with great pleasure and honour that I present to you the Annual Mayor's Report for the year 2023/24. As the Town Mayor, I have had the privilege of serving this wonderful community, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you some of the highlights and challenges of the past year.

Highlights:

Community Engagement: Our community has come together in remarkable ways this year. From volunteer efforts to support local initiatives, such as the Bradninch Together and Catch 77 charities, to the successful organisation of various events and activities: the Town Fair in September, and the Christmas and Twelfth Night celebrations were a particular highlight for me.

We had reciprocal visits to and from Landunvez, with the twinning committee having found a new vigour in developing and maintaining the friendship. We also hope to have a visit from the Mayor of Downingtown, Pennsylvania later this year.

We were able to support the publication of the Bradninch Circular walks book, and we have also seen the formation of the new squirrels section for the 1st Bradninch Scout Group.

My chosen charity this year was the Duchy Preschool and Playgroup and it has been a pleasure to work with the team in raising much needed funds to help them continue to provide such a wonderful service to the town. It is my hope that the local groups within Bradninch continue to inspire others to get involved.

Improvements: This year the Town Council has made significant progress in improving and upgrading the council website and the finance and accounting systems. We have adopted and implemented a new and much improved Emergency Plan for the town, and we have also provided defibrillator training courses for the community.

We have started some rewilding projects to encourage biodiversity in the town and we are in the process of developing a weed control policy that omits the use of glyphosates, whilst keeping the town's weeds under control.

Environmental Initiatives: Our commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship remains steadfast. We have representation from Sustainable Bradninch on the council and we continue to work towards a greener more sustainable future for Bradninch.

Challenges:

Financial Constraints: Like many councils, we have faced financial challenges this year. Balancing the budget while ensuring we can provide the essential services has been a priority, and we continue to explore ways to manage our finances effectively.

Floods: September saw a deluge of rain which caused some localised flooding in the town. It was fantastic to see the community step in to help those affected.

Wetlands: The management and maintenance of the Wetlands at Charwell Meadow continues to be difficult. It is a lot of work for a small group of volunteers, and we invite ideas as to how we, as a community, can better support the management of the space.

Financial Overview:

Despite the challenges we have faced, I am pleased to report that our financial position remains stable. The full finance report will follow as the next item for discussion, but I would like to extend my gratitude to our finance committee for their hard work and diligence in managing our finances.

Thanks and Gratitude:

In closing, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the residents of Bradninch for your continued support and cooperation. It has been a privilege to serve as your Mayor, and chair of the town council. I am grateful for the trust you have placed in me. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the members of the Town Council, council staff, volunteers, and community organisations for their tireless efforts in making Bradninch such a wonderful place to live. Finally, as I handover the robe and chains of office, I would like to welcome (and I look forward to supporting) Emily Ottery as our new Town Mayor for her second term.

There was no Police report.

4. Finance - Bradninch Town Council 2023/24: The following report was prepared by Councillor Simon Glendinning, Chairman of the Town Council's Finance Committee, and presented by the Mayor -

The Council sets a budget each year to cover essential running costs such as administration, amenities, staffing costs and areas for which the council has responsibilities such as the allotments and burial grounds. It also, as part of its budget setting process, allows for funds to provide annual grants to local groups and funding towards community events.

The Council receives its income from several sources, rental from allotment holders, burial fees, rental for the land leased to the sports clubs and grant funding for specific expenditure. The balance is covered by the Town's Precept. In the year 2023/24 (1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024), the Council finished the year with a surplus of income above expenditure of just over £6,000. This was in part due to a number of expenses expected in March not being received, (utilities at the Recreation Ground and grounds maintenance work) and some expenses being lower than budgeted, for example work on the Town Council's new website. The Council were also able to reclaim just over £2,500 of VAT from its expenses and received higher than budgeted interest on its reserve funds. This surplus will be transferred to general reserves which is held as a contingency fund set aside for emergencies or to meet unexpected costs. The Council also holds a reserves balance for earmarked projects, these reserves combined at the end of the financial year were just over £34,700.

Finance - Bradninch Youth Centre Trust 2023: The Mayor presented the Trust's balance sheet.

5. District and County Councillor reports:

a) Mid Devon District Councillor Luke Taylor presented a report covering the past year and said that there had been lots of changes and challenges at MDDC. He had been honoured to be the leader of MDDC for the past year and was pleased that a fully balanced budget had been supported unanimously. Council tax has gone up by the maximum allowed, necessary to balance the books and due to the drop in Government funding.

- MDDC has voted for a 200% council tax increase for 2nd homes/holiday homes in Devon.
- MDDC has voted to ring fence the funds towards affordable housing for local people.
- The 3 Rivers development has been closed down with assets transferred to MDDC, there were large losses.
- 'Bin it 123' has been successful across Mid Devon and the impact has been positive with recycling figures making Mid Devon one of the top 10 districts in the Country.
- Leisure centres at Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton have current issues with travellers, eviction procedures are ongoing. The electricity across the leisure sites is 'green' with solar power increasing efficiency.
- Devolution continues to give local councils more power and more funds from Government.
- The State of the District Debate involved local councillors and discussion on how all councils can work better together. Thanks to Cllrs Crawford and Mottram for attending on behalf of Bradninch Town Council.
- Ultra energy efficient property projects for the homeless, with a huge waiting list, are ongoing.
- Care leavers – help stops for those reaching the age of 18 who have been in care. Leavers can fall into crime and drugs and MDDC is giving free council tax provision and leisure services to these people, to the age of 25, to help them become more sufficient and, as a result, get jobs.
- The vote on poverty premium at MDDC was unanimous, the poorest people with less income are more impacted with the cost of living crises and can end up with higher costs. Lower cost foods have gone up more, pro-rata, which has also disadvantaged these people. Proper regulation has been called for.
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections will take place in May. Identification is required to vote.
- Mid Devon celebrated 50 years last year!

Questions:

Q. Voter ID, what is allowed?

A. The Government has issued a list of acceptable ID documents – see the MDDC website – and MDDC can provide a letter confirming identification if required. It was confirmed that out of date pass ports are still acceptable as ID.

b) Devon County Councillor John Berry presented a report covering the past year and said that the budget has been tough but has been balanced. Adult care and children in care expenses have rocketed and cut backs elsewhere have resulted. The everyday budget has risen to 743 million, up from 698 million, being a 6.9% increase. It was concerning that children, young people and adult care budgets need to be so high due to increased demand, not helped by the Covid years. Help is ongoing generally to people who have suffered with Covid. Government funds are being distributed into the community.

- DCC is looking to go digital and a restructure is currently taking place with staff and buildings as more people are working from home. This is a cost cutting process.
- The relief road work is moving forward and improvements to the M5 junction, with a cycle path and footpath, will be seen at the junction south of the current M5 junction. There is now a waiting period while the Government considers proposals. The new railway station should be delivered in 2025. There are no plans to move the service station due to costs.
- Highways received an extra 6.6 million last year for pot hole repairs and more will come this year. There is research going on to look into different compounds to fill potholes more effectively, extra service teams have been taken on to improve output. Please report any pot holes on the DCC website 'report a problem' page or by phone.
- Funds for struggling households – an additional 5 million has been granted by the Government towards energy and food costs. Details are pending and will be uploaded to the DCC website a.s.a.p.
- Hen Street – a drain has been unblocked at the bottom of the street but work is ongoing to also get the blocked drain further up the road unblocked.
- Locality funding – last year several local Bradninch organisations received donations from this funding. £500 will this year be paid towards the Bradninch speed sign project.

Questions:

Q. Cullompton railway is to be delivered in 2025 but nothing has been done yet?

A. Funds are in place so it is now up to Network Rail. Only the small inter city trains will stop there.

6. Local Highways matters: The Mayor reported that –

- Airband is installing infrastructure for Broadband around Bradninch resulting in roads being closed for short periods which can cause issues.
- Baulk Bridge, on the way to Cullompton over the M5, is being replaced due to being passed its useful life. The impact on Bradninch is that the bridge will be closed for several weeks which could mean that traffic will go through Bradninch and cause possible gridlock. The Town Council is making representation on several matters. It has today been heard that the Environment Agency has objected to the work being done and so the closure has been postponed.
- Hele Flood Alleviation Scheme – Network Rail has confirmed that work will not be starting this year due to funding issues.

7. Community Group reports:

a) Town Trust – Anthony Richards, Chairman, reported on the calendar year 2023/2024

The Trustees are pleased to present the accounts of Bradninch Town Trust including the Parochial Charities to the end of December 2023, together with this summary report of activities.

It was a year of substantial changing of the guard. During the year we said goodbye and many thanks to retiring Trustees for their many years of voluntary service - Martin White, Martyn Myhill, Jenny Richards and Jane Webber And The Trust said hello to - Anthony Richards, Sally Livsey and Jim Buxton.

.....Phil Chambers is now the only trustee with more than two years' service, as Ron and Anne have not quite made that milestone and Nigel Coveney ended his term of office last month.

At the end of last year I was elected as Chair of the Trust and my performance in the role will be evaluated in June to see how it's working. I'm very grateful to the previous Chair Jane Webber for her many years of sterling work and I am enjoying finding out how the cap fits.

At the start of 2023, with the increase in energy costs and the continuing effect of Covid on bookings, we expected The Guildhall account for 2023 to have an overspend of around £10,000. In the event we managed to end with an overspend of about £4,300. We were able to cover that using general Town Trust funds. Energy costs reduced late in 2023 and we should be in a much better position in 2024. Other Trust accounts for 2023 are all looking healthy.

The Guildhall Management Committee which previously oversaw the smooth functioning of this building disbanded during Covid. Trustees have taken on the roles of the Management Committee and with the significant concern over finances early in the year, we also resolved to share the duties of the Clerk between ourselves and not employ someone. As a small team we are using this opportunity to streamline some administrative activities, such as document storage, policy development, and migrating to an online financial management tool, as well as developing a strategic plan for the future. We aspire to employ a Business Clerk again later in 2024. We are also looking at the idea of pulling together an "Events team" who to promote and run events in The Guildhall, so please speak up if you're interested in being part of this.

Recently appointed Trustees have spent time familiarising themselves with their duties and the resources which exist in the network of the trusts that exist under the umbrella of "The Town Trust". We are in the process of working with The Charity Commission to migrate one such Trust "Bradninch Town Trust" to a new form of organisation, a Charitably Incorporated Organisation, in order to simplify matters and provide protection to Trustees. The objectives of The Trust will remain unchanged.

Developments to the Guildhall have been planned for some time. During 2023, funds were raised to commission working drawings from the outline plans which gained planning permission a few years ago. Trustees decided to prioritise lift access to the upper floors and instructed Mike Bamforth to progress these aspects of the development. Complications around the details of the lift positioning and satisfying recent regulations for a listed building have meant that these drawings have gone through a number of versions. As of this month we believe we have a viable plan and soon we will have detailed drawings from which to cost the works and seek funds for turning them into a building. We estimate something in the region of £60-£90k will be needed for the installation of the lift and the ancillary work around it.

In the meantime we will be replacing the stairlift with a new and safe version. May 10th has been provisionally agreed with installers and the only possible obstacle to that is if objections are made to MDDC concerning our plans to carry out work on a listed building.

In 2023, properties owned by The Parochial Charities were inspected, and maintenance and development work costing almost £10,000 was commissioned, including the installation of fire alarm systems in the residential properties. Small gifts were made at Christmas to local beneficiaries and at the end of the year, Parochial Charities finances showed a surplus over the year of £3,700, thanks in great part to some generous local legacies.

In the early months of the current year we have set up a library resource in this room catering for residents young and old, and we have created a website. I'm pleased to say it is about to go online at www.bradninchtt.org.uk. It's a simple site, giving basic information to be expanded as time goes by. We will upload policies, reports and other documents such as hire rates to this site which will be able to be downloaded by visitors.

We are grateful to Terry our caretaker who works particularly flexible hours to keep The Guildhall clean and give a hospitable welcome and set-up for the groups that use it.

If you are interested in joining The Trust we would welcome your interest in this – as would Bradninch Town Council who have representative places to fill. We have undertaken a skills audit to be clear about the gaps we would like to fill. If you might consider joining us please talk to any one of the Trustees..

Questions:

Q. Do you have the stair lift funds?

A. Yes, just waiting for MDDC planning to agree the application then the new lift will be installed. May 10th is the provisional date.

The Mayor congratulated the Town Trust for solving a lot of issues over the past year and for moving the Trust forward so positively.

Contact Phil Chambers for a copy of the Town Trust finance documents.

b) Sustainable Bradninch – Lucy Mottram reported that the Repair Café has been going for 5 years now and that savings of approximately .68 of a ton of waste had been made in the past year and that 1.33 tons of carbon dioxide had been saved. The Community fridge and community food shed had saved 112 tons of carbon dioxide from foods being used from measurements of food being donated. The food is free to anyone wanting to use it.

A team of 30 volunteers, covering a variety of jobs, were thanked at the SB AGM with a pizza night.

Finance is positive with £7,000 in the bank to support projects in the community such as the Baptist Church with its energy bills and the Scouts. Funds from the Town Council will go towards bulbs for the Churchyard and wildlife signs. Questions:

Q. Is the food shed available to everyone?

A. Yes, everyone is encouraged to use it, the food there is good only for a day or two.

c) Bradninch Together – Sophie West reported on behalf of Bradninch Together and said that BradTog began life in 2020 as an informal community group; and was incorporated as a Community Interest Company in 2021. Its broad purpose is to support and develop community activity in our town. In 2023 we welcomed Jim Porteous as a Director of the Company, alongside Kate Beith, Sue Eakers, Sally Livsey, Anthony Richards and Sophie West. We're grateful to the Council for its support – in particular, in 2023, for a grant towards administration costs and funding to provide the Circus Workshop at the Town Fair.

A copy of our Annual Report for 2023 can be found at <https://bradtog.org.uk> – and there are some hard copies available this evening. To summarise current activity:

BradAid

The BradAid Hardship fund was set up in April 2020 to offer modest grants to members of the community in need of immediate help to meet essential costs. It has relied entirely on donations made from within our community. In September 2023, the decision was made to suspend BradAid due to lack of available funds. There remains a small balance in the pot; and the BradTog infrastructure would enable its reopening should funds become available in the future. Since 2020, BradAid has made a total of 241 grants, equating to £12,037, to local residents. Thank you to all of the individuals and community groups who have donated to BradAid – we know it has supported many people during tough times, and helped them to feel that they belong to a caring community.

Bradninch and Hele Emergency Plan

The new Emergency Plan for our parish was formally adopted by the Town Council in October 2023. The Community Response Team includes representatives from the Council and Bradninch Together; and the BradTog volunteer network is included in the plan as a group of people who could be mobilised to offer coordinated support during an emergency. There are currently over 90 people on the list; and we are aware that there may be folk interested in joining who weren't part of the initial BradTog effort in 2020. We're also keen to have some more Coordinators to oversee volunteers in the different areas or 'zones' of the parish. If you're interested in either of these opportunities, do speak to one of the Directors.

Bradninch Town Fair

The 2023 Town Fair took place on 16th September, coordinated by an informal Steering Group. Thank you to everybody who helped the event to happen, notably the Cricket Club, Scout Group and the Town Council. Many local groups ran stalls and activities on the day; and events included the Bradninch Bolt Fun Run and Walk, the Bradninch Produce Show and Scarecrow Competition, the Bradninch Wildlife Photography Competition, a Community Picnic, an Artisan Market Space, a Circus Skills workshop, apple pressing and a performance from the Red Barrows.

The 2024 Fair takes place on Saturday 21st September, and will welcome back some familiar events and introduce some new ones. The Fair is a real grass-roots community event: anything can happen, provided folk are willing to make it happen! If you're part of a group that would like to run a stall or activity, you have an idea for some new event or activity or would like to be part of the set-up and take-down team, do chat to me; and spread the word!

The BradTog Umbrella

We're keen to use our learning and networks to help others in the community to realise their ideas and bring community projects to life. As such, we welcome approaches from individuals and groups for their community projects and ideas to sit under the BradTog umbrella. By connecting with us, projects can benefit from the provision of a legal structure, informal advice, a connection to BradTog's profile and network and access to its communications platforms. It's expected that projects supported by BradTog will be driven by those who bring them forward. We've recently been pleased to welcome the Twelfth Night event under our umbrella.
<https://bradtog.org.uk> chair@bradtog.org.uk / secretary@bradtog.org.uk

d) Bradninch Bowling Club – a report had been received from Katrina Jones for the Bowling Club covering 2023/24 as follows -

We had a very enjoyable and successful Centenary year. We received many comments about how friendly we are and how excellent our green is. Our Green keeping team are a credit to our club and have worked tirelessly over the winter to get the green ready for this season which opened on 13th April. Thanks to a couple of dry days we're able to have our first roll up. We hope our numbers will increase from last year as we held an Open Day with some attendees hoping to join this year.

e) Bradninch Football Club - a report had been received from the David Carpenter as follows -
2023/24 Season

This season has been extremely successful with the most teams and players registered in recent years. One negative was the lack of interest we were able to raise for a women's team, having to pull the team from the league due to insufficient players being registered.

We've applied for and been successful in grants applications totaling some £1500 including one from the town council for which we'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you, Thank you. These grants have been spent on new equipment, goals, coaching courses & some minor club house repairs/improvements.

We have a grant of pending from Devon FA for car park/access improvements to be spent before August 2024, and a grant payable over 6 years from the football foundation of pitch improvements to both the smaller youth pitches and the large 11v11 pitch. The award of this grant has been successful, but not yet been drawn on.

Each year it costs around £25,000 to run the football club with a similar amount brought in via subs, grants, sponsorships, and donations. Our biggest expense is to Mid Devon Leasure for the hire of the Cullompton Astro, we are looking at ways of mitigating this cost as much as possible, but it is almost unavoidable with training during the winter unable to happen at the football field.

Bradninch Rocks 2023 was unfortunately a wash out, however we were able to put on a cracking night at the Castle pub, with some fantastic effort in organising at very last minute, meaning we broke even, but did lose out on any profit the event usually generates.

Bradninch Rocks 2024 is planned for July 20th and we're hoping that the weather gods will be kind on us and we'll be able to raise a substantial amount of money to help run the club for the next year.

As a club we recently planned and held a successful Easter Bingo event here in the Guildhall for the wider community and it was great to see it so well supported. We're hoping to replicate something similar in the run up to Christmas.

The club is run by a core committee of 4, with the help of the wider coaching staff.

- Steve Huxtable – Club Chairman – chair@bradninchfc.co.uk
- David Carpenter – Club Secretary – secretary@bradninchfc.co.uk
- Simon Hawkins – Club Treasurer – treasurer@bradninchfc.co.uk
- Nicole Walland – Club Welfare Officer – welfare@bradninchfc.co.uk

Simon is stepping down at our AGM in July due to work commitments, so we're actively recruiting for this position.

Teams registered in the 2023/24 season.

- 1 under 6's team with 12 players registered.
- 1 under 8's team with 10 players registered.
- 2 under 9's teams with 24 players registered.
- 2 under 10's team with 21 players registered.
- 1 under 12's team with 23 players registered.
- 1 under 13's team with 24 players registered.
- 1 men's team with 43 players registered.
- 1 women's team with 10 players registered.

Total of 10 teams and 167 players registered.

We have 12 Team Managers & Coaches all with a FA level 1 or UEFA B coaching qualification and 26 DBS compliance Parent helpers.

Moving into the 2024/25 season starting in August/September we're looking at having teams across 9 age groups, the exact number will be confirmed during the summer in the preseason.

- Under 5's
- Under 7's
- Under 9's
- Under 10's
- Under 11's
- Under 13's
- Under 14's
- Men's
- Women's

Running a football club is hard work, expensive but very rewarding. We're always looking for community input, ideas and help so if you'd like to be involved, please do get in touch.

f) Bradninch Tennis Club - Firstly, the Club would like to thank the Council for their kind grant of £75 towards a new court net. At the last AGM in January, we saw a new Committee elected; we now have a new Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Juniors Coaching Official.

The Club is continuing with its Juniors' Coaching Programme for the third year, for ages 3-18 yrs. The programme engaged 26 children last year and 2 children won the Pat Dickens Trophy for their exceptional effort and hard work that they put into their coaching. Coaching starts on 15 April and goes through until the end of September. We will also continue to offer the ever-popular 4-week Rusty Racket coaching programme during May/June with the Coach, Nigel Little. We only engage Coaches who are DBS checked and LTA level 3 accredited.

Last year saw 84 members signed up (51 adults and 33 Juniors) and we are trying our best to maintain this level. Wednesday evening club sessions have proved popular over the winter months, and we are hoping to re-open Friday evenings and Sunday mornings again once the weather improves. As a reminder, non-members are allowed to use the court facilities as a guest of a bona fide member, up to a maximum of 3 times in any one season before deciding whether to join or not. The court fee for non-members is £2 per person, per hour.

Our Annual Club Open Day falls on Sunday 21 April 2024 (10am-12pm) when the locks are changed and prospective new members can come along to play for free to see if they enjoy the game and would like to join the club. During the summer we host the Beavers, Cubs and Scouts for a taster session to help introduce the children to tennis.

It's not all about the tennis – it's a place to meet and socialise and last December we went to The Merry Harriers for a club Christmas meal and we have a pizza night planned in late April at The Castle.

g) Bradninch Scouts – John Williams reported that the Squirrels are now doing well with about 18 members. Beavers have 29 members and the Cubs have 34 members. Cub leaders are now in place. Scouts have about 20 members

with me as a leader and 4 helpers. We also have Explorers. The annual census reports 109 children on the books resulting in 109 x membership fees = 6k. We are a Charity and balancing the books is difficult with all the activities that are put on. We have been using reserve funds but these are now being built up again. Any fund raising ideas would be welcomed, or anyone wanting to run a fund raiser would be most welcome. Anyone can sponsor a badge to provide support and funding, any donations are always welcome. Legacies in Wills are also always welcome.

Our District is Tiverton which is now picking up following covid. One of our young leaders is active at District level which is a good achievement. County remains a bit of a mess but the hope is that it will improve going forward. At HQ level, Bear Grills is stepping back from being Head of Scouting after 15 years. He has done a really good job. The replacement is not yet known. The Chief Executive is also stepping down in September.

The focus for us is on training being up to date, First Aid for example. Thanks go to the Town Council for recent funding. Thanks also go to C/Cllr Berry in advance of future funding. Thank you to all that help with the Scouts, Maggie Taylor, Lucy Mottram, Morris Dancers, Steve Birley, WI, Devon Traffic Control Unit, all sorts of people continue to give their time to help which is appreciated.

We have all sorts going on, foot golf, animation, defibrillator training to name but a few things. Going forward, work with Sustainable Bradninch and the National Trust is planned.

Questions:

Q. The cost for the badges, is £1000 the actual figure required?

A. I will work out the exact figure and let you know.

The Mayor reported that the Scouts had been involved in most events in the town over the past year and that he had been very pleased to be able to support them.

h) Landunvez Twinning Association – Sophie West reported that the Bradninch-Landunvez Twinning Association is a bunch of people of all ages and backgrounds who live in Bradninch, Devon and Landunvez, Brittany, and who share a desire to connect, share experiences and have fun. On the UK side, we're set up as an unincorporated association, with a simple constitution and a small, elected steering group.

This time last year, the future of the Association was uncertain: while our French counterparts were keen to continue the Twinning relationship, UK membership had dwindled following the pandemic and it was uncertain whether there was sufficient energy or drive to continue.

However, in May 2023, a party of seventeen from our town, from ages 4 to 80+, travelled to Landunvez to spend a long weekend with our friends. We stayed with local families and enjoyed communal meals (with entertainment provided by the Bradninch Wurzels, among others!), visits to an artisan soap maker and Pentecost Flower Market, a Reception with the Mayor and Town Council and time to enjoy the stunning coastal scenery. With the Association's Golden Jubilee approaching in 2026, we returned with a renewed desire to make Twinning work; and having built stronger friendships among ourselves, too.

The Association was relaunched in September 2023, and currently has about 27 members. Our focus has shifted, with a greater emphasis on promoting French language and culture in Bradninch, and seeking to involve the wider community in our activities. We were glad to welcome two of our French friends to make crepes at last year's Town Fair; and also enjoyed a Cabaret evening in November, as well as a Skittles social.

We're now preparing in earnest for a visit from 15 of our Landunvez friends from 17th to 20th May this year, to include a visit to the Devon County Show. On Saturday 18th May we'll be at the Cricket Club from about 6.30pm for an informal reception, with entertainment. The bar will be open, and food will be available - all are welcome to come and join the fun – and do let me know if you or your group are interested in contributing to entertainment. On Sunday 19th May in the evening, we'll be upstairs in the Guildhall for a Ceilidh with pasty supper. There are some spare tickets for this event – do let me know if you're interested.

Thank you to the Council for your support with the revival of Twinning. New members are always welcome – and next year we'll be taking another trip across to Landunvez!

Questions:

Q. Will the Bradninch Wurzels be at the Town Fair this year?

A. New members and groups are always welcome.

8. Questions and notifications from the floor: The Mayor invited questions from those present –

1. Cllr Phil Chambers gave thanks to the Mayor for his work over the past year.
2. The Mayor gave thanks to Ross Lawson who had recently resigned from the Town Council due to family and work commitments. As a result, a vacancy for a Town Councillor has now arisen and anyone interested can contact the clerk on clerk@bradningh-tc.gov.uk for more information. There is also a vacancy for a Town Council Representative on the Town Trust, anyone interested is invited to get in touch with the Clerk.
3. Mayors Quiz – this event will take place on Saturday 20th April at the Cricket Club, all are invited.
4. A resident said she was surprised that the Town Council had raised the precept by 11% as other organisations had raised their claims by less. She asked whether this was due to a specific project the Town Council had in mind? The Mayor explained that the 11% increase works out to be only a small annual rise per local household and was required in order to cover the costs of a new Town Warden employee who would assist with town maintenance. It was hoped that this route would save on overall costs in the long run as contractors would not need to be called on so much.

As there were no further questions, the Mayor closed the meeting at 8.51pm and thanked everyone for attending.

DRAFT