

Update on the Duchy of Cornwall withdrawing from Bradninch:

Taken from the Bradninch Town Council's draft meeting minutes of 11th May 2026:

a) Assets of Community Value applications – completed for the allotment site, football field and nature reserve and circulated. RESOLVED to submit them to MDDC once some minor amendments had been made. D/Cllr L Taylor would follow the applications through MDDC, due to the urgency of the situation, on behalf of Bradninch.

b) Cemetery Lane - Cllr Chambers reported that Cemetery Lane was owned by the Duchy and that the Town Council and Cemetery Lane residents were liable to pay towards the road's upkeep. He registered an interest in this matter due to living on Cemetery Lane. It was suggested that the Town Council might look to take ownership of the road. Ownership of the road leading to Parklands would be looked into.

c) Valuations - Council had been advised that Sworders would be carrying out valuations on Duchy land in the area. Cllr Blythe advised that some farmers rented additional parcels of land from the Duchy and that these would not be shown within farm boundaries at the Land Registry.

d) Mel Stride MP – following communications with the Duchy on behalf of Bradninch residents, a local meeting with Mathew Morris, Head of Rural for the Duchy, had been called for June 5th. The details remain pending and would be published once known as this was expected to be a public meeting.

e) Duchy Legal Working Group – the following recommendations were RESOLVED -

- i) Research legal ramifications of the Town Council purchasing community assets.
- ii) Research and request details of land and roads owned by the Duchy in Bradninch.
- iii) Research and request details of properties owned by the Duchy in Bradninch.
- iv) Research the timings for the sale of Duchy land and properties in Bradninch.

RESOLVED that legal questions can be submitted to DALC through delegated authority to the Clerk.

f) Funding for the purchase of community assets – it had been resolved at the recent Annual Parish Meeting to set up a community asset fund raising plan, managed by the Council, to accept one off donations and regular subscriptions. A resident had suggested this idea and had kindly volunteered to support with the project and create a leaflet for distribution. RESOLVED to wait for more information about the proposed purchases prior to moving forward with this project as an alternative option to purchasing the sites would be to continue renting them.

Taken from the draft minutes of the Bradninch Annual Parish Meeting held in April 2026:

The Duchy of Cornwall 'withdrawing' from Bradninch: The Chairman explained that the Council had first heard about this matter towards the end of March from residents and social media. It had not been told about the plans officially until an email response had been received following an enquiry from the Clerk which stated 'The Duchy of Cornwall is 'withdrawing' from Bradninch'. The Council had immediately published a statement to inform residents of the confirmation and called for the Duchy to provide more information. A meeting was arranged by Leigh Rix, Duchy Representative, at short notice to which the Clerk and Chairman attended on 1st April. The situation was discussed and many questions were asked on behalf of residents. A further statement was published by the Council following the meeting to keep residents updated. The Council had passed on all information known to date to the public, and would continue to do so.

Whilst very little is still known about the way forward, the Council is committed to retaining the community assets that it currently leases from the Duchy for the use of the community, the football field, allotment site and nature reserve (Charwell Wetlands). The Council has been advised that it will be given the option to purchase these three sites and that they cannot be 'gifted' as was requested. The Council are currently arranging for these sites to receive Assets of Community Value status through Mid Devon District Council with the aim of reducing their values. Devon Air Ambulance Trust has been advised of the situation as it uses the football field. The Council has sought legal advice has been sought from Devon Association of Local Councils. Working Groups had been set up, involving members of the public and Councillors, to assist in documentation with regards to the purchase of the sites. Anyone interested in joining in are very welcome and should contact the Clerk for information.

Regarding valuations on the land, it had been suggested by the Duchy that the football field would be sold at agricultural value and that the allotment and nature reserve would be sold at 'red book' price although 'gifting', or reducing the values to a nominal fee, had been requested by the Council.

To pay for any purchases the Council would need to raise funds through donations, Crowdfunding, loans and other sources. Councils can borrow funds through the Public Works Loan Board which offers large sums at a low rates over a long term. Loan repayments would, however, need to be covered through precept (Council Tax) and rents.

A separate legal working group has also been set up, again involving members of the public and councillors, to look into whether the Duchy actually has the right to sell, and to oversee legal areas. Anyone interested in joining this group can find out more from the Clerk. Cllr Wild said that it was vitally important that the land in question be retained for the use of the community.

The Chairman would reply to a letter he had recently received from Prince William's office confirming the Prince's commitment to the town. He would voice the Council's disappointment on hearing the announcement and how badly the situation was being handled.

The Chairman finished by inviting members of the public to get in touch with the Council with any concerns, or should they wish to become part of a working group. He confirmed that the Town Council was committed to doing all it could on behalf of residents on this matter.

Town Councillor Phil Chambers explained that 'red book value' is a method of valuing put together by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors with the intention that the valuations would stand up in Court as being fair.

It was confirmed by the Chairman that the Duchy had advised that it could not provide the Council with any personal information with regards to Duchy tenants. Tenants were invited to give their contact details to the Town Council so that they could be kept informed of any updates. Tenants were also invited to join working groups and to give permission to the Duchy to enable information to be released to the Town Council.

Anyone wanting to write to Prince William or the Duchy on this matter was encouraged to do so. It was noted that the Prince of Wales and the Duchy of Cornwall's offices are separate.

It was confirmed that the Town Council had been told by the Duchy that the sale was taking place in order to fund other areas of interest.

Resident Simon Tytherleigh proposed that a Community Assets Fund be set up to accept donations, subscriptions and legacies from within the community. The funds would, hopefully, raise significant

funds towards the purchase of the community areas. The Town Council would be best situated to hold and manage the funds. If funds raised were not used towards the purchase of the community assets, it could be used for other areas that would benefit the town and its residents. This proposal was seconded by Rev Olly Mears and RESOLVED by those present. This matter would be taken forward to the May Town Council meeting.

Bradninch Together offered to set up an open forum for folks to get together to discuss the Duchy matter and this was encouraged.

Concerns were raised about how much the assets would cost and what would happen if they were not purchased for the community as they could be sold for development. It was reported that the Duchy had advised that, if the Town Council was to secure purchase of the assets, clauses would be applied stating that development could not take place on the land.

The Clerk confirmed that the Charwell Wetland lease expires in 2037 and that the Bithywind Allotments and Football Field leases expire in 2030.

It was suggested that the whole Duchy matter should be put in the hands of the press although it was thought that being confrontational would not be beneficial. It was noted that some or all Duchy tenants have confidentiality clauses within their leases stopping them from speaking out about the situation in public. Mr Palmer and Cllr Chambers had both written to The Times and Sunday Times newspapers about the matter. Cllr Chambers may also contact the i newspaper. It was thought that Bradninch was not the only town that the Duchy were withdrawing from but no details were to hand.

End.