**Alverdiscott and Huntshaw Parish Council**

**Clerk: Alan Matthewman**

**26 Fairways View, High Bickington EX37 9BZ**

**01769 560740 07720 301854**

***Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting***

***Thursday 16th January 2025 at 7.30 pm in***

***The Village Hall, Alverdiscott***

# Members of the public are encouraged to attend.

# Members Attending: Cllrs. Graham White (Chairman), Carolyn Lewis, Jim White, Helen Bolton, Paul Matthews, Gill Ross.

Applicant Member: Andy Reed

Councillor Thomas Elliott (Torridge DC); Councillor Linda Hellyer (Devon CC)

Council Clerk: Alan Matthewman. One member of the public.

**1: The Chair declared the meeting open**

**2: Apologies for absence** – to receive and accept any apologies for absence. Apology received from Cllr Bernard Hardwicke: Councillor Rosemary Lock (TDC)

**3: Declarations of Interest –** to receive any Personal and/or Prejudicial interests from Councillors regarding matters due to be discussed.

**4: Appointment of Co-opted Councillor:** The Chair invited Andy Reed to make a short presentation outlining his personal career history and reasons for wishing to join the council. Following his presentation the Chair proposed that he be invited to join the council, seconded by Cllr Jim White and approved unanimously. The clerk agreed to forward the formal application to join and declaration of interest forms to Cllr elect Reed. It was agreed that he would be formally inducted onto the Council at the next meeting in March .

The Chair moved the suspension of standing orders to receive reports and comments from non-members of the council.

# **5: To receive information from District and County Councillors**.

1: Cllr. Linda Hellyer(Devon CC): Cllr Hellyer confirmed that she had forwarded a written report which the clerk stated he would circulate a copy with the minutes. The proposal by Government to change the status of councils to unitary authorities was currently occupying most of the council’s agenda. This might lead to the cancellation of the elections in May as a result of the time pressures being proposed.

The chair raised the issue of uncut hedges which Councillor Hellyer had raised with DCC Highways. They had stated that DCC highways did not cut hedges unless they owned the land, which they did not in these cases. They had also asserted that a well existed in the area and custom and practice said that where a well existed, then the parish council had responsibility for land maintenance. Councillors had no knowledge of the existence of such a well. They had also stated that they would not continue to maintain ditch maintenance and the responsibility would revert to the landowners involved. This raised concerns over potential costs if liability falls on the council

Another issue had arisen regarding the maintenance of grit bins and there had been problems with failure to refill. The clerk asked a question regarding the legal liability of those spreading grit on public roads. No-one could give a considered view on this matter. Councillor Hellyer recommended that, before the next winter season, council do an audit of the position and status of all grit bins and forward that to TDC so that a maintenance programme could be agreed.ellyer rercpommended that the council undertake a review of the location and status of all such bins and provide that, wirhgthy.

Signage regarding HGVs using Gammaton Road was also raised and Cllr Hellyer was doing her best to correct the situation. The conclusion was that the traffic situation to the solar farm was totally out of control, not helped by the solar farm management routinely denying responsibility. The TDC enforcement officer had failed to respond or in certain cases had stated that they would not take enforcement action due to the costs involved. The clerk and members were asked to copy all requests to our TDC Ward members with these references being noted on the letters to Grant McGill.

2: Cllr Thomas Elliott (TDC). Councillor Elliott reported that he thought the HGV incident at Gammaton Cross was under police investigator but it was thought that this action had not been proceeded with. Councillor Elliott asked if his reports had been received. There seemed to be some uncertainty over the receipt, particularly asking for an input regarding housing strategy. The clerk was asked to circulate the copy he had received at High Bickington. The increased build requirement under the latest planning goals was relatively contained compared to other districts in Devon and elsewhere.

The outstanding enforcement issues at Stains Trailers, Sunrise Barn / Sunset Farm and one other planning issue which seem to not garnering any attention from TDC. Councillor Elliott agreed to follow up on the issues if the information was sent to him.

**6: Any other matters appearing in the agenda and raised by members of the public** No further issues raised.

The chair moved to restore compliance with Standing Orders and return to the Council Meeting Proper **.**

**7:** **Urgent Matters at the discretion of the Chair**

Concern at the increased use of Alverdiscott Road and lanes around Guscott by HGV’s.

Concern at the inappropriate use of local roads by vehicles servicing the solar farm development.

Concern at problems regarding maintenance of hedges and ditches and the lack of response from Devon Count Highways.

All items dealt with above under section 5

**8. Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday 16th November 2024**

Proposed by Cllr G White, seconded by Cllr J White, the minutes were unanimously approved as a correct record.

**9: Matters arising from the Minutes of that Parish Council Meeting:** None recorded

**10: Finance:**

To confirm current budget spend for year to March 2025 – Insurance bill now received at a level below the previous estimate. Total estimated costs now £6100 for the year, Current bank balance Credit of £7774 after paying the insurance.

To note the possible impact of second home tax changes on council tax revenues the parish- no significant change envisaged. The clerk was asked to confirm the process with TDC finance.

To confirm statement of accounts and the bank reconciliation data to end October – presented and confirmed.

To approve payments likely to be made before the next council meeting in January 2025 and the final proposals on budget and precept for 2025-26. The tax base had increased by 0.72% and the precept for 2024/5 was £6400. After some discussion concern was expressed as to whether a new Internal Auditor might be required as one councillor noted that the existing auditor was understood to be reluctant to continue. The Chair agreed to call her and ask regarding her intentions.

The provision for the road warden scheme was increased by £500.

A decision was proposed by Chairman G White to make a final demand for the precept for 2025-26 to be presented to TDC before 20th January 2025 of £ 7,280, an increase in the Band D band of £ 4.27 per annum (an increase to £7000 precept representing an increase of 10%, or £ 2.90on Band D was also considered). **It was decided to make the precept demand at £7280, proposed by Cllr G White, seconded by Cllr J White and carried with one vote against.**

**11. Planning**

**`** To receive and comment on new planning applications and any decisions reached on prior applications since the last meeting. There had been very little activity over the Christmas period.

**1: Receive and note updates to X-Link project development.** Project had entered to planning stage with no formal notifications as yet received.

**2: To receive and ratify the Planning Committee report tabled by Cllr J. White**

File posted on website

**12: Correspondence: Matters all covered above**

**Date of next meeting, 7:30pm, Thursday 20th March 2025 at Huntshaw Hall**

**Councillor Graham White**

**Chairman**

**05-02-2025**

**Report for Alverdiscott and Huntshaw Parish Council from County Cllr. Linda Hellyer**

**January 2025**

There were not any meetings over the Christmas and New year period. However, everything is underway again. Last week, on Thursday 9th January we had an extra Devon County Council (DCC) meeting to discuss Devolution.

You may remember that DCC and Torbay council had been given permission by the previous government to pursue becoming a Combined County Authority (CCA) without a mayor. This was confirmed by the present government and will come into being in Mid- February. That gives the new CCA has more devolved powers over things like housing, transport, and adult education. It receives money from central government and has more control over how it is spent.

However, it is all about to change. The present government has mandated that it wants to have larger unitary authorities of at least 500,000 people, with an elected Mayor.

**Local Government Reorganisation**

The English Devolution White Paper was published just before Christmas.

The extract from the ministers letter probably gives some explanation as to where we are heading as residents in a two tier area.

*Local government reorganisation My intention is to formally invite unitary proposals in January 2025 from all councils in two-tier areas, and small neighbouring unitary councils. In this invitation, I will set out further detail on the criteria I will consider when taking decisions on the proposals that are submitted to Government. I intend to ask for interim plans by March 2025. As set out in the White Paper, new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas, this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more. However, there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including on devolution. Final decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. We will ask you to work with other councils in your area to develop unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area, rather than developing competing proposals.*

**Statement from Linda.**

Following publication of the Governments Devolution White paper, considerable change is going to happen in Local Government in Devon.

At the Dcc meeting we had two options.

1. Do nothing and the government will impose changes.
2. Engage with government to get the best result for the residents of Devon.

I believe that engagement with the government is the best option.

While I may not agree with all the government’s proposals, I need to do everything I can to ensure that the changes will make local government sustainable for the long term and able to withstand shocks like the pandemic and the world financial crisis. At the heart of all this must be a stronger voice to inform the government of the issues my residents in Bideford East Division, and the residents in the wider area of Devon face.

You will see below, an extract from a message our Chief executive sent out after the meeting to update the staff. Rather than reinvent the wheel, I have included it below.

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| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | .  It has been a busy start to 2025 with many national and local meetings taking place in response to the [White Paper on English Devolution](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flinks-1.govdelivery.com%2FCL0%2Fhttps%3A%252F%252Fwww.gov.uk%252Fgovernment%252Fpublications%252Fenglish-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth%252Fenglish-devolution-white-paper%2F1%2F010001944c12006f-6eaf6556-fb66-4df8-9548-0638864bf436-000000%2FwgRV9x8nmfmoQiDDX-6_18I2dv1vJFcakEvuUDbYSlA%3D387&data=05%7C02%7CLinda.hellyer%40devon.gov.uk%7C55e23590e9614e8b244108dd30d17750%7C8da13783cb68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638720398862372377%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=StWkqXEDMar%2BjyblfSYjdfhdiBVw9PfzRDbWsBwOpDA%3D&reserved=0) that I shared with you on the 19 December. Our Council had a Special Meeting today to discuss the paper in full.  Here is a link to the Devon County Council’s English Devolution White Paper [report](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Flinks-1.govdelivery.com%2FCL0%2Fhttps%3A%252F%252Fdemocracy.devon.gov.uk%252Fdocuments%252Fb16184%252FEnglish%252520Devolution%252520White%252520Paper%252520Government%252520Invitation%252520for%252520Local%252520Government%252520Reorganisation%25252009th-Jan-.pdf%253FT%3D9%2F1%2F010001944c12006f-6eaf6556-fb66-4df8-9548-0638864bf436-000000%2FOjGfm7sdrG0nTLRpS-CFQnkVX0GmeQ97KxWq88rv1S0%3D387&data=05%7C02%7CLinda.hellyer%40devon.gov.uk%7C55e23590e9614e8b244108dd30d17750%7C8da13783cb68443fbb4b997f77fd5bfb%7C0%7C0%7C638720398862394863%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=eSevhktM5Q542SSrjxFk7irQ40a1fIv%2Fc4mahBGWCq4%3D&reserved=0) that has been shared at the meeting today. I would advise everyone to read both of these documents as they have significant implications for the Council.  In the national meetings, clarity has been provided by the Government that all Two-Tier Councils will be Unitary, with new structures being in place by 2028.  Devon County Council now finds itself in a mandated position to not continue in its current form.  By Autumn 2025 at the latest, all areas are expected to produce local government reorganisation plans to replace current two-tier arrangements.  The Local Government Minister has stated that 12-month postponements to local council elections due to take place in May 2025 will be considered by Government to help meet their ambitious timeline.  At the Special Full Council meeting today, Members voted and agreed the following recommendations:  a. Support the Leader of the Council to submit a letter of intent to Government committing to the Government’s ambitious programme enabling the Council to Develop plans for local government reorganisation and deliver a Mayoral Strategic Authority.  b. As a consequence of joining this ambitious programme the County Council will make a request to Government to postpone the County Council elections due to take place in May 2025 to provide the capacity on which reorganisation and mayoral devolution can progress at pace in 2025 to ensure the benefits of reorganisation and devolution for the area are realised as quickly as possible.  c. The council will thereafter work at pace to develop full proposals for reorganisation in line with Government guidance which will be issued in January 2025, working with and alongside partners to develop plans for sustainable unitary structures which meet the needs and aspirations of the varied localities within the Devon area, including those of Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay as well as the coastal and market towns and rural areas. | | | |

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The government has mandated that there will be an end to two tier authorities, and as they have a massive majority that will happen.  The feeling at the meeting was that it was better to be part of the process with the government.  The choice was that if we did nothing the changes would be imposed upon us.

The council was obliged to tell the government about the decision by Friday 10th.   The government has set out the timeline- the council has to get somethings organised for the 1st of March, have plans in place by May and detailed plans ready for the 1st September.

It was felt that having the elections in May, that cost £1.5million, would be distracting from this work, remembering that at the same time, the work of the council must continue.   If we have the elections, and that decision is made by central government, we will have a time of purdah, then the election.  About half of the council were due to stand down after many years of service.  There would then be a brand-new council, a period of induction, and the need to draw up some detailed plans in just a few weeks. The government has said it will not hold elections if the council is not going to exist for a full term of office. We should here by the beginning of February, but will for now, assume they are going ahead.

The government has said that elections will not go ahead if the council is not going to exist for its full term. If the elections this year are postponed the next elections would be in May 2026 for the Shadow unitary authority. The county council and the combined County authority will cease to exist. If that happens the district council elections will not take place in 2027 as the district councils will also cease to exist. The elections in May 2027 would be for the new unitary authority.

I spoke at the meeting in favour of the proposals on the agenda.  I felt that it is important that we are part of the conversation with the government.  I understand that Exeter city council wants them to be unitary.  They don’t have enough people, so they would want the rural hinterland all around them. The situation is similar with Plymouth. Plymouth would need to take e.g the South Hams to make the numbers up.

We are a large rural area, with small market and coastal towns.  We have areas of high social deprivation and are an area of low income.   We don’t want Devon divided into separate unitary authorities e.g. around Exeter and Plymouth where there is a rich area and a poor area.  Ourselves and North Devon are quite remote and we don’t want to be the forgotten area that no one cares about.  We need to be part of the negotiations.  Devon county council wants a solution that is right for all the residents of Devon.

The government has left us in no doubt that they are doing away with 2 tier

authorities in order to form unitary authorities with an elected mayor. If the area of the new authority covers the same geographical area of the police and Crime commissioner, or the Chief Fire officer, the mayor will undertake those duties.

The timetable for these changes is the timetable given by central government.

**Other News: -**

Dcc got told just before Christmas that we are to receive and extra £83.6 million from central government for potholes. I was hoping we would get the money now, but it is not until the new financial year 25/26. We need more than £200million to bring our 8,000 plus miles of highway up to standard, but this money will be very welcome. Please continue to report potholes and other highways issues. I want to make sure we get our fair share of that money in our area.

The not so good news that we received from government in December is that Dcc will no longer be receiving the rural services grant of £10million. By law, Dcc has to produce a balanced budget in February for the new financial year, so it was back to the drawing board to find the £10million from elsewhere in the proposed budget.

I have told you before that 80% of our budget goes on adult social care for people of non-pensionable age and our childrens services, particularly education for children with special needs and disabilities (SEND). I will be attending all day meetings at county hall on the 27th and 28th January. These meetings are scrutiny meetings looking at the proposed budget for childrens services and Health and adult care.

**Changes for disposal of upholstered furniture- reminder**

New environmental requirements will mean that from **Sunday December 1** we will only be able to dispose of upholstered furniture at specially designated Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).

It follows the introduction of new requirements from the Environment Agency which require our recycling centres to have segregated facilities to handle Waste Upholstered Domestic Seating (WUDS). WUDS include sofas, sofa beds, armchairs, recliner chairs, upholstered kitchen and dining room chairs, upholstered garden furniture, stools and foot stools, office chairs, futons, bean bags, floor and sofa cushions.

These items contain large quantities of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs or forever chemicals) and other hazardous chemicals in the textiles and foam. These chemicals are often used as fire retardants; they persist in the environment, can accumulate in human and wildlife fatty tissues and can be harmful to health and the environment. All WUDS need to be sent for incineration separately where these chemicals are destroyed.

We are now required by the Environment Agency to ensure that all WUDS are segregated and transported separately from other waste.  This segregation will require additional containers and facilities to be provided at HWRCs. However, due to space constraints, only a limited number of sites in Devon will be able to accept WUDS. This means that the majority of our recycling centres in Devon will not have the facilities to accept these items.

However, the good news is that WUDS can be taken to Bideford and Severn Brethren in Barnstaple–

**Local News:-**

In other news, I have a new neighbourhood highways officer, called Sandra, who started this week. I have not met her yet, as she is doing an induction course, but I look forward to working with her.

I have put HGV’s going via Gammaton Cross on the Highways and traffic orders agenda (HATOC) for Friday 24th January.

Over the last few years I have had much correspondence with DCC and our MP, on behalf of a resident in Huntshaw, about overflowing ditches. Although in the past Dcc have cleaned ditches, their position now is that the ditches are the responsibility of the adjacent landowner.

Regarding hedges where there is no obvious “owner”, the Dcc position is that they do not cut hedges that do not belong to them. The previous local highways officer told me there is a well in the vicinity of the hedges at Guscott, and says that where there is a well, historically the land is the responsibility of the Parish council. However, I would encourage people to still keep reporting overgrown vegetation, as well as potholes, signage, issues with white lines, drainage issues, streetlamps, grit bins etc on the DCC report a problem page.

**The DCC website is very useful for reporting highway problems and the reports go straight to the contractor.** [**Report a problem - Roads and transport**](https://www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem/)

**Alternatively, the highway contact number is 0345 155 1004**

**Online, or via the customer service desk, you can report potholes, overgrown vegetation, street light issues, drainage issues, problems with roads signs and line markings in the road and much more.**

**If it’s a river flooding the environment agency can be contacted on 0345 988 1188**

I am always happy for residents to contact me.

[Linda.hellyer@devon.gov.uk](mailto:Linda.hellyer@devon.gov.uk)

Telephone 07828758360

Planning Report, January 2025

