



DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Buckland Brewer Parish Council Annual Parish Meeting Held on Thursday 25th April 2023 Buckland Brewer Methodist Chapel

Councillors Present: Philip Ainsworth, Kathryn Cann, Sally Cole, George Heywood, Richard Hooper, Jane Lowe, Trevor Mills, Hen Staveley-Brown and David Watson

Also in attendance: Councillor James Morrish; Councillor Phil Pennington; 11 members of the public

Parish Clerk: Jo Miles

As previous Vice-Chair, Richard Hooper opened the meeting and initiated the formalities.

Signing of Declarations of Acceptance of Office by all Parish Councillors

Forms were completed by all councillors to mark the start of a new 4-year term of office.

Election of the new Chair and Vice Chair

Chair: Richard Hooper was nominated by George Heywood and seconded by Jane Lowe

Vice Chair: George Heywood was nominated by Jane Lowe and seconded by Richard Hooper

The Council voted unanimously to elect Richard Hooper as Chair and George Heywood as Vice Chair

Introduction and Review of 2022-23

Richard Hooper welcomed everyone and provided a summary of the previous year:

Chair's Report: Key Events & Expenditure 2022-23

There are several milestones and events that warrant special mention from the last council year, during what was an exceptional year for the country.

There was a huge celebration for the Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, marking 70 years as the reigning monarch. Buckland Brewer came out in force to mark the event; the Jubilee tea was incredible. The Parish Council was glad to provide and light a beacon during a well-attended playing field event (thanks to the PFA) and to present commemorative mugs to the children of the parish in conjunction with Cllr Bob Hicks.

Sadly, we came all together again to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth II. For most of us, the Queen had always been our monarch and it was very moving to see how much she had meant to so many people.

Recently we witnessed the Coronation of King Charles III and it was lovely to see Buckland Brewer unite once again to celebrate this historic event thanks to the collaborative efforts of many of our



organisations and numerous volunteers. Mugs were sponsored by the Parish Council as before and given free to children under 12.

New benches and adult fitness equipment were installed in the amenity field in 2022. The Parish Council received a large grant from TDC for the latter, so the actual cost to Buckland Brewer was minimal. The Parish Council sponsored the fireworks for the Bonfire event in November and this was another community event that was very well attended.

Overall, the cost of running the Council is significant and Councillors are very mindful that money must be spent prudently. Buckland Brewer is very lucky to have assets that generate some annual income, such as fields and allotments. They have helped to keep the PC's proportion of council tax relatively flat for the last two years despite increasing costs, particularly relating to administration. However, this cannot be guaranteed if inflation and general expenses continue to rise.

On a more positive note, a substantial sum of money has been awarded annually in the form of grants to numerous organisations that benefit parishioners of all ages in many ways. Last year was no different. The Council recognises that these clubs and societies connect our community and are often crucial to wellbeing and social interaction.

Chair's Report: Parish Council 2023-24

Turning to the current council year, we have a brand-new Parish Council as the election in May marked the beginning of a new four-year term of office. Some councillors have been a part of Buckland Brewer Parish Council for many years and we are extremely pleased to retain their service and their experience. Others are councillors for the first time and we are very grateful that they have stepped forward to take on this huge commitment and responsibility, especially as councillors do not get paid.

The Parish Council is formally meeting for the first time tonight. We are looking forward to a very productive period in office and we are committed to ongoing improvement. There will undoubtedly be some changes to the way we do things, especially as different ideas are shared and implemented, but there is an excellent foundation to build upon thanks to those that have gone before.

Special tribute must be paid to the Councillors and Parish Clerk that stepped down this year. Collectively they have given decades of service to Buckland Brewer and we are incredibly grateful for all that they delivered during their time in office: Barbara Babb, Rosie Beer, Andrew Hewitt, Jim Lowe, Frits Takken and Pat Blossie (Clerk).

It has been an unprecedented year for construction work within the Parish. Whilst this has undoubtedly caused some upset and challenging times for many parishioners, we look forward to welcoming many new people into the Parish and we hope that they will really enjoy living here and want to take part in the many community activities available.

On that note, the Parish Council would like to pay tribute to the numerous other volunteers that keep Buckland Brewer's organisations and facilities running. We are a thriving parish because of their commitment and drive and we are so fortunate to have the opportunity to join bowls, badminton,

brewing, gardening, WI, keep-fit and skittles clubs on our doorstep, to name just a few options available. To also have playing fields, a modern well-equipped hall, a shop, a pub and two churches is exceptional when compared to so many parishes.

The new Parish Council will be assessing current priorities and agreeing associated roles and responsibilities over the next few weeks and this will be shared in due course. One key area that all Councillors are already keen to work upon, is to improve communications and engagement within the community. Ideas to help achieve that will be very welcome.

Chair, Buckland Brewer Parish Council

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Guest Speaker - Councillor James Morrish, Devon County Council

“A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A LOCAL BOY”

James is a farmer’s son, originally from Powlers Piece near Holsworthy, and his family has farmed for generations. He went to school in Torrington and continues to farm in the area. Having been heavily involved in local Young Farmers Association activities in his youth he progressed to being the YFA National Chairman, representing tens of thousands of his peers. A particularly memorable AGM in Blackpool stood out for him, as Blackpool had been completely unprepared for thousands of very thirsty young farmers!

He paid tribute to farmers as they maintain the country’s green spaces and really don’t get the acknowledgement they deserve. The countryside and green open spaces are the main reason people want to visit counties like Devon and this is all thanks to the farming community. James also highlighted how stressful being a farmer can be and shared some of the work he had done for charities that focus on supporting the farming community. He was particularly involved in Rural Stress, a charity that was initiated due to the very high rate of suicide and depression amongst farmers and the lack of external support available at the time. It continued for many years and helped during very challenging times, including Foot & Mouth and BSE emergencies.

James was asked to go to Australia to speak to farmers about the Foot & Mouth crisis and the lessons learnt. At the same time (2003) he was approached to be a councillor and was elected as a Torridge District Councillor when he was 26 years old. TDC had been through a particularly difficult time and significant improvement was needed, so this had been an interesting introduction.

James has taken on lots of different challenges since, including scriptwriter for Caroline Spellman, Chair of the SW Flood Defence Committee and in 2021 he was elected as Devon County Councillor during the middle of the Covid pandemic. He has recently been re-elected as the Pensions and Investments Committee Chair, overseeing c £5bn in pension funds.

Since 2021 James has had major personal health challenges as he contracted sepsis from what first appeared to be an innocuous infection. He was rushed into hospital and was given just hours to live if an operation wasn't carried out immediately - the consultant made him write a will before he operated in case he didn't make it. Thankfully he is in good health now and living a happy life.

One very salutary lesson came out of James's experience while in recovery. He saw just how isolated rural communities are and realised how vulnerable people feel when they are utterly dependent on visitors and professional services coming into their home to help them to wash and dress, change dressings etc.

As a County Councillor, James really wanted to make a difference and is frustrated sometimes that large amounts of time are taken up in meetings. However, he ensures he constantly highlights that areas closest to Exeter get a lot more focus, support, and resources than those further away and champions his area at every opportunity. He has quite a large patch, covering 37 parishes and some parish councils only meet sporadically.

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Councillor Phil Pennington has been a TDC councillor since 2007 and Councillor Bob Hicks since 1999. Phil paid tribute to all the Buckland Brewer parishioners that had stood for election and congratulated the new councillors for being elected. He highlighted that Buckland Brewer had the highest percentage of voters in the area with more than 50% turning out to vote. (BB accounted for around 25% of all votes cast across 12 parishes.)

Phil also made a plea to everyone to support agriculture, as it is an industry that is really struggling again. The focus during any crisis is always the number of animals impacted but the human cost is even greater and many farmers are desperate right now.

Open Forum – Questions were invited on any topic.

Q Where does all the money go for council tax?

A A breakdown is provided to every householder when the council tax bill is sent out each year. This includes a pie chart showing how the money is split. There is some central government funding but it tends to be ring-fenced for specific purposes. Therefore most services must be provided from council tax. DCC receives around 72% of council tax and must deliver so much relating to Government policy, e.g. hospitals, schools and social care. DCC employs c 1500 people, 900 of whom work outside the council offices. The highest % rise in 2023-24 was for policing. Cllr Morrish agreed that a police station is needed within the TDC area.

Q Is it possible to champion road repairs within smaller parishes including Buckland Brewer? Devon has 8000 miles of roads – more than any other county.

A A request has already been submitted to have a dragon patcher within the area for 15 days. The more complaints the more likely that action will be taken. Everyone is urged to report issues personally. Cllr Morrish acknowledged that roads are a hot topic everywhere. DCC has £56m to spend repairing roads in 2023 and 3 workforces will be working constantly within the TDC area for the next 3 months.

Q Is it still the case that potholes must meet a specific criterion to be filled? Some roads are right down to the foundation of the road as the surface is so eroded. Holiday trade is one of the biggest assets for Devon and the infrastructure really lets it down.

A Yes, criteria must be met if filling individual potholes. However, where the dragon patcher is used, it will remove the entire surface to enable more extensive repairs and resurfacing.

Q How are roads prioritised to justify which roads are selected for attention? (Several examples within the parish and surroundings were cited.)

A There is no rational answer. Difficult to justify why some roads are selected for repairs when others nearby are considerably worse. Cllr Morrish suggested contacting Kieran Stanbury, at DCC Highways and inviting him to a future meeting. [Clerk to contact.](#)

Q If DCC is gaining income from development, how can the roads continue to be so neglected, particularly in rural areas? Surely the uplift in revenue DCC receives should be available to pay for the infrastructure?

A Cllr Morrish will speak to Stuart Hughes (Cabinet Member, Highways) 26/5/23 to highlight the issues raised.

Q There has been a request to redirect a parish footpath which has not happened. Parishioner questioned whether Cllr Morrish could take this up at DCC.

A Cllr Hooper responded by clarifying that the redirection of footpath is in a “queue” with around 80 applications ahead of the BB one. None are currently being progressed by DCC and this has been known for some time. The Parish Council will seek to progress a permissive footpath in due course – BBPC has joined the DCC Parish Footpaths Partnership and works closely with DCC.

Q Can BB be put forward for a best kept award?

A BBPC Chair said this could be put onto a future PC agenda if there was interest in pursuing an award.

Q Some hedges have overgrown and pedestrians are not safe on the roads. Questioner felt that some people were able to get away with cutting hedges but DCC prevents others from doing so.

A It wasn't clear what action could be taken.

Q Why are plans persistently approved for housing with insufficient parking spaces for the number and size of cars per household? Existing developments cited as examples.

A Cllr Hicks advised that this type of approval is delegated to local authority planners and they determine what is acceptable or otherwise, within central guidelines. There is a very high employee turnover in this area so the process often lacks continuity and decisions can be inconsistent. He acknowledged the frustration that this may cause but there is no easy solution.

Cllr Hicks raised the subject of Thornhillhead Moor and suggested that he should attend a council meeting to explain all the arrangements and responsibilities relating to this Parish asset. This offer was accepted. [Clerk to contact.](#)

Richard Hooper thanked James Morrish, Robert Hicks and Phil Pennington for attending.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:16pm

Signed as a true record: **Date:**

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