

MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
OF BUCKLAND BREWER PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 24th JUNE 2021 AT 7:00pm
AT BUCKLAND BREWER METHODIST CHAPEL

Members Present: Mrs Barbara Babb, Miss Rosie Beer, Mr Andrew Hewitt, Mr George Heywood, Mr Richard Hooper, Mr Jim Lowe, Mr Trevor Mills, Mr Frits Takken and Mr David Watson

Also in attendance: Ian Rowland and Daniel Summer (Torridge Planning), Martin Rich (Devon Communities Together [via Zoom]), Lewis Clarke (North Devon Journal) and 16 members of the public including 4 attending via Zoom

Parish Clerk: Mr P Blosse

KEY: Actions are shown in bold blue type Decisions are shown in bold red type
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For this meeting, a Zoom link was offered to anyone other than parish councillors who wished to observe or take part in the meeting. The meeting was also streamed live via the Buckland Brewer Methodist Church You Tube and Facebook channels and can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJZAJNCRUds>

417. Apologies for Absence None

418. Declarations of Interest None

419. Public Participation None

420. Neighbourhood Plan: Andrew Hewitt gave a brief introduction to why a special meeting had been called to consider whether the Parish should pursue the option of developing a Neighbourhood Plan

- a. Presentation by Ian Rowland (Torridge Planning)** Ian started by saying that this would be a big undertaking and the work involved was not to be underestimated. The option to create Neighbourhood Plans had been introduced by the Localism Act of 2011 with the intention of tackling the centralism inherent in planning matters by putting control into the hands of the community. In reality, he felt, this had not worked as well as it might. A Plan could not be used simply to say ‘no’ to new developments. He thought that Buckland Brewer had already embraced much of the spirit of a Neighbourhood Plan with its Settlement Plan, some of which had been embedded in the current District Plan. He recognised that some developments had been permitted despite not being in the Settlement Plan. Ian said that there were related issues to consider, including:
1. The Parish Council being a qualifying body
 2. Considering the need for a Neighbourhood Development Order and/or Community Right to Build Orders

3. The need to comply with the Strategic Plan

Six town and parish councils in Torridge have so far applied to develop Neighbourhood Plans: Bideford, Bradworthy, Great Torrington, Northam, Welcombe and Winkleigh. Only Great Torrington and Winkleigh have so far developed their plans and recently taken them to the referendum stage. It has taken them 7 and over 4 years respectively for each of them to reach this stage since their initial applications.

Neighbourhood Plans are used alongside the District Plan when considering planning applications. Unlike our Settlement Plan, it would be harder to approve an application if it went against a policy in the Neighbourhood Plan (and vice-versa).

Ian said that this process was about having a vision. A plan can include areas of land for development and other areas for protection, and could include social facilities and environmental and other factors.

The steps required are as follows:

1. Apply to Torridge to nominate a neighbourhood area (13 week consultation period but this can be 'rubber-stamped' if it matches the parish boundary. Approval qualifies the Parish Council to continue.
2. Formulation of the Plan – consider its scope
 - a. Must comply with the National Planning Framework
 - b. Must achieve sustainable development
 - c. Must be in general agreement with the Local Plan
 - d. Must be in line with strategies for key towns
 - e. Must comply with EU (and its successors) regulation (e.g. protecting habitats)
3. Support with evidence
4. Engage with the community (will ultimately have to be approved by a referendum)
5. Statutory Body Consultations (e.g. Devon County, Historic England, Torridge Council, neighbouring parishes etc.)
6. Review feedback and edit as necessary
7. Submit to Torridge Council with statutory documentation, who then:
 - a. Consult with the community
 - b. Pass to Independent Examiner who will decide if the plan needs 'tidying up'
 - c. Decide whether it can be approved for referendum (within 5 weeks of the independent report)
 - d. Arrange for referendum (approval decided on a Yes/No vote with a simple majority) If successful, it must be adopted by Torridge Council.

Everything relating to item 7 in this list is organised and paid for by Torridge Council.

Torridge has a statutory duty to support the process, make data and maps available and attend meetings.

Basic grants of up to £10,000 are available to help with the cost of the project, and further grants can also be sought for establishing design codes, promoting affordable houses for sale and other specific matters, taking the total potential available to £28,000. Ian advised searching out information online and from councils that have developed their own plans. He especially praised the Winkleigh plan.

Ian said that the most important thing to do is to agree on what it is that the council wants to achieve. It could be that a neighbourhood plan is not the best way to achieve it. Neighbourhood Plans cannot be used simply to prevent plans coming forward. Also, Torridge Council is itself now undertaking a review of its Local Plan which could duplicate some of the effort. He said that it was important to get the community's view early on as this is a community led process, and to be ambitious, dynamic and realistic. It is important to identify what professional support is needed, although Torridge Council will do 'health checks' during the drafting stage.

Finally, it is important to get the governance of the project right, to identify who is preparing the plan, whether or not a working group is to be established, how it would work and to ensure that it is populated with people who are going to stick to the task and see it through.

- b. Presentation by Martin Rich (Devon Communities Together)** Martin explained how his organisation assists with a range of community planning issues and that he was recently involved in the review of Buckland Brewer's Parish Plan. He re-iterated that a neighbourhood plan cannot be used to simply oppose the District Plan and much effort could be saved if this was the council's objective. Devon Communities Together (DCT) offers a 'hand-holding' service, offering advice on how to take the project forward. It would be "quite a challenge" and would depend on involving interested people in the community with appropriate skills. DCT would offer coaching for that team in order for them to understand the processes, limitations and timescales. He recommended a hierarchical approach with the Parish Council working through a Steering Group that engaged with the general community.

The process would start with information events in the community, an impact assessment and questionnaires to tease out people's reactions. A housing needs assessment was likely to be a key element of the questionnaire if one was not already available. Statistics/demographics about the parish would be needed. DCT would assist with analysing the results of

consultations and questionnaires and help to keep the project on track. They could also help to draft the plan, learning from other people's plans.

Martin stressed how important it was to carry the community along with the project as there were too many casualties caused by neighbourhood plan schemes being too detached from the community or just being seen as too much hard work.

DCTs support would be offered through its consultancy service, Catalyst. It's costs should be adequately covered by the basic grant.

c. Question and Answer Session The following questions were put:

- I. *What would be the implication of not having a neighbourhood plan?*
Answer: (Ian Rowland) Decisions would fall back on the Local Plan
- II. *(Richard Hooper) Must we decide now?*
Answer: (Ian Rowland) The Parish Council would need to come to a consensus first.
- III. *(George Heywood) What is the timescale?*
Answer: (Ian Rowland) Entirely up to us. Great Torrington's plan was first applied for in 2014 and Winkleigh's in 2017 and both are now about to have their referendum. The longer it takes, the more it goes off the boil.
- IV. *(Jane Lowe) What happens if legislation changes half way through?*
Answer: (Andrew Hewitt) Unless it is started, nothing will be achieved. There will be opportunities for everyone to be consulted about whether we go forward or not.
- V. *(George Heywood) Are the grants repayable if the scheme is dropped?*
Answer: (Andrew Hewitt) Probably
- VI. *(Jim Lowe) Noted the fact that the Settlement Plan had not prevented some unwanted developments, the lack of infrastructure for further developments, including sewerage, which is already at capacity. Would a neighbourhood plan deliver what we want it to deliver?*
Answer: (Andrew Hewitt) The original Parish Plan seemed like a lot of work but there was little to it in comparison to a neighbourhood plan, which would need far more work.
- VII. *Are there any examples of a neighbourhood plan making a big difference?*
Answer: (Ian Rowland) The plan would be used and listened to. Once the community has decided what it wants, whatever the planning system is at the time, the neighbourhood plan will still feed into it. It does, however, pose many difficult questions and challenges.
- VIII. *(Richard Hooper) If we go ahead, will there be volunteers from the village?*
Answer: (Ian Rowland) This would be essential.

421. Planning:

- a. Application: 1/0519/2021/FUL, The Lodge, Litte Tythecott, Extension to existing agricultural building **Approved unanimously**

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8:15 pm

Dates of Future Meetings:

Fields and Allotments Inspection, Saturday 10th July 2021 (10:00am, Blackhorse Fields Allotments)

Parish Council, Wednesday 14th July 2021 (Buckland Brewer Methodist Chapel, 7:00pm)

Signed as a true record:

Chairman: **Date:**

Appendices:

1. Catalyst: What is Neighbourhood Planning?
2. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Notes on Neighbourhood Planning