

HIGH BICKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

Mrs Jenny Baker, Homewell Cottage, High Bickington, UMBERLEIGH. Devon EX37 9AY

Tel: 01769 560628 e-mail: highbickingtonpc@hotmail.co.uk

Website: www.highbickingtonparishcouncil.co.uk

Minutes of Virtual Parish Council Meeting, Wednesday 10 March 2021 7.30 pm

Present: Chris McWhirter (Chairman) Councillors: Charmaine Coxon, Adam Bunting, Bob Boothby, Franklin Spencer, Jenny Baker (Clerk) County Councillor Andrew Saywell,

Apologies: District Councillor Michael Clarke, PSCO Sandra Brown

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting and asked Councillor Andrew Saywell to give his report:

County Councillor – Andrew Saywell

Coronavirus

Stats – As of 10th March the DCC area of Devon now up to 19,540 coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic.

- Since the 5th March that is a weekly increase of 171 infections.
- By way of comparison... in Torridge there were 7 new infections in the last 7 days, North Devon 11 in the last 7 days, West Devon 6 cases in the last 7 days.
- There are over 20,000 tests a week being carried out in the County.
- In all 18 Parishes within Torrington Rural there were 3 new infections in the seven days up to 5th March recorded in Great Torrington, with 0-2 cases in the rest of Torrington Rural. When there are fewer than 3 infections the Government does not show the data to protect individuals' identities.

Infection cases continue to fall in Devon, though the rate of decline has now slowed, but overall our infection rate per 100,000 remains very low (22.4), compared with the national England average of 61. **In Torridge our infection rate is just 10.3.**

Locally, we are continuing to do well in keeping our infection rates down. With the roll-out of the vaccine and the roadmap out of lockdown we will hopefully see a return to normality later this year, but until then it does remain vital that we keep up our efforts to follow the guidance of staying at home and if and when we are out and about to follow the 'hands, face, space' guidance.

While numbers are so low it doesn't take much, a few cases in a couple of workplaces, for the figures to go in the wrong direction and to see a high percentage increase, so keeping to the rules is still very important. We are still seeing some small, localised outbreaks in some workplaces in Devon and it is too early to say yet impact the 'unlocking' will have with the return of schools, premises re-opening etc.

Community Testing

Community Testing for coronavirus is being rolled out across Devon, with testing facilities now in Barnstaple, Okehampton (Tuesday & Friday only), Tiverton, and Exeter. According to the Director of Public Health, Testing will be a cornerstone of our transition back to normality.

Plans are afoot to have a mobile testing facility to cover Torrington, Holsworthy, Hartland and Bradworthy later this month, though exact dates to be determined. The aim is to have testing as accessible as it can be.

Community testing will help to find individuals who have COVID-19 but do not have symptoms and need to isolate and who may inadvertently be spreading the virus. A positive or negative result will not remove the need to follow existing COVID measures socially and in the workplace.

Rapid lateral flow tests will be used, which will provide a result within thirty minutes. This will not be a substitute for the national coronavirus testing – **if you are symptomatic, people should book a free NHS test via the GOV.UK website or by calling 119. Do not use community testing.**

When this is up and running locally, or if people would like to use the Barnstaple site, please use devon.cc/testing to book a test.

COVID Vaccinations

The roll out of the vaccine in Devon and in Torrington Rural continues to go well.

- **445,074 people in Devon received their first vaccine dose** between 8th December – 14th February
- **Latest estimate is 95% of over 65s in Devon have received their first dose.**
- The NHS in Devon are focusing on people aged 60 and over, and those who are clinically vulnerable.
- Plans are now being made to roll out second doses for care home residents and staff, and to start first doses for over 50s.
- Torrington's GP Surgeries now administering vaccines locally
- Vaccinations of inpatients at the North Devon District Hospital is also taking place.
- **Even when you have been vaccinated, you must still continue to follow the COVID-19 safety rules – stay at home as much as possible and remember hands, face, space.**
- The NHS is also looking at mobile roll out for more isolated rural communities.

This remains a huge logistical exercise, very much dependent upon the speed and rate of vaccine supplies. Please wait for the NHS to contact you when it is your turn. The roll out is getting more localised, those who cannot travel far should be able to get their jab administered locally.

DCC Budget

The main work over January and February at the County Council has been the budget setting process. The Budget was approved at Full Council on the 18th February with more cash for vulnerable adults and children, health and potholes.

Key points:

1. £37m extra cash injection into vital services, including an additional £21.7m for Adult Care and Health, and £11.4m for Children's Services.
2. For Highways there will be an injection of extra revenue into the service including £600,000 for potholes and a new £100,000 fund for Town and Parishes to enhance street features.
3. An additional £600,000 into the Hardship Fund, to be distributed to the District Councils, to help people badly affected by the pandemic who may have been made redundant but are not yet receiving universal credit or benefit support.
4. The total overall revenue budget will be in excess of £578m.
5. To help pay for these increases, Council Tax will unfortunately have to rise – up 1.99% for general services and 3% dedicated solely to Adult Social Care. This will equate to an extra £1.38 a week for an average Band D household.
6. I know Council Tax rises are never welcome... but this will mean we both maintain vital services and can endeavour to improve them.

7. The backdrop to the budget is one of huge uncertainty and risk – we do not know how long the pandemic will continue for or what the longer term impact on the economy, public health and demand for services will be.

Highways

I have had several trips to High Bickington lately to report potholes on the B3217, Kingford Hill and Pound Lane. During my last visit I saw crews out working on the B3217 but as ever, I know there are still more potholes to fix. Anecdotally they are starting to catch up on the backlog but there is still a lot to do...

The 'permanent' Ice signs that have appeared are in fact temporary and will be removed at the end of the Winter Service. They have been erected due to the ongoing drainage issues which, although Highways are planning to address them, it was unlikely to be solved by the end of the Winter so hence here and in other locations these signs have been put up to warn motorists. They should be removed in time for the summer...

Support for Families over Easter – Holiday Activities and Food Programme

Devon County Council has been awarded £1.69 million from the Department for Education to provide Holiday Activities and Food for children aged 5-16 on benefit related Free School Meals.

DCC are starting this process for the Easter Holidays and would welcome applications from Torrington Rural if they can demonstrate it is for the eligible children on Free School Meals.

The timescale for the HAF is 4 hours per day for 4 days over the Easter Holidays, which includes a nutritious hot meal, if you would like to contact the relevant officer, Melissa Filby 01392 383000 or email at melissa.filby@devon.gov.uk, she would be happy to discuss your project and if it fits the HAF criteria.

The scheme will be run across all of Devon for the summer holidays.

As ever, if there are any issues you'd like me to look into please get in touch.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Saywell for his report and commented that the repair undertaken on the pot hole in Pound Lane had already started to break up and as this is the second time a repair has been undertaken is this a good use of Council money. The Chairman expressed his disappointment that having participated in meetings with the Highways Team to identify the key issues in the Parish with roads and having identified Pound Lane as a key route for the village residents that the road continues to be in a poor state of repair.

Councillor Saywell agreed that doing the repairs during the bad weather is not ideal but the Highways Team have a responsibility to carry out a repair once a problem is identified to them to mitigate the risk. It has been identified that drainage work needs to be carried out on the road and as soon as the weather conditions allow the work will be done. With regard to the Parish consultations with regard to road repairs he felt that it was a worthwhile exercise and the benefits would be seen in time.

The Chairman also expressed his concern that the cost of installing the ice signs on the B3217 for a temporary period, was a waste of Council money and the money would be better spent on fixing the drainage issues. Councillor Saywell advised that the whole approach to these issues is risk mitigation and as soon as the Highways team are able they will start work on the drainage problems.

Councillor Roger Keen asked when the repairs to the B377 near the Umberleigh Garage would be undertaken. Councillor Saywell will investigate and report back.

Police Report - PCSO Sandra Brown – was unable to attend due to annual leave and provided the following report:

No crimes recorded in the past month 2 transport incidents reported.

Before opening the formal meeting, the Chairman wanted to congratulate Councillor Roger Keen on having completed 30 years of service as a Parish Councillor. Earlier in the day Councillor Keen had been given a card with messages from the current Chairman and Parish Councillors plus messages from previous holders of the post of Chairman, Peter Tucker, Peter Worrall and Myc Rigglesford. The Chairman announced to Councillor Keen that the Parish Councillors have contributed to the purchase of a Copper Beech tree to recognise his outstanding contribution to the Parish Council and his community over the 30 years and as soon as the weather permits he would meet with Roger and Peter Tucker who has kindly agreed a spot for the planting of the tree on his land near the public footpath.

Councillor Keen thanked everyone for their kind comments and for the gift and he hoped to be able to continue on the Council for some time but perhaps not another 30 years as had been suggested.

The Chairman then reported to the meeting that he had received a resignation letter from Councillor Charmain Coxon. The letter explained that due to other commitments it was no longer possible for Councillor Charmaine Coxon to continue as a Parish Councillor. Councillor Coxon explained that at times it was difficult for Councillors to achieve everything they set out to do but was proud of what had been achieved over her years of service. The Chairman advised he was disappointed at her decision but understood and reluctantly accepted the resignation to take effect from the 1st April. He thanked Councillor Coxon for her support and contribution to the Council and felt certain that during her time as a Councillor she had contributed a great deal to the community and that many residents would be very grateful for the work she had done.

The formal meeting commenced:

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from District Councillor Michael Clarke and PCSO Sandra Brown.

2. Declarations of Interest - No declarations of interest were received.

3. Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on the 10th February 2021 Councillors confirmed minutes had been read and accepted. Chairman will sign the minutes.

4. Matters arising from the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on the 10 February 2021

At the meeting on the 10th February, County Councillor Rosemary Lock advised she should be able to pay for an additional grit bin for the village to be placed at the top of the road leading to the Community Centre. The Councillors were sent details of grit bins available and the Chairman asked for agreement from the Councillors to proceed with the purchase. The Clerk will contact Councillor Rosemary Lock with the details.

The Allotment Society have contacted the Parish Council to explain that contrary to previous report in the minutes of 10th February they are **not** interested in renting the additional piece of land.

5. Police Matters – refer report above, no other matters raised.

6. Barton Meadow Play Area – Vice Chairman Adam Bunting reported that he had spent some time re-staking and protecting the young hedging plants and that several of the plants are now showing good signs of growth.

A request has been received from a resident for the Council to plant bulbs in the grass bank at the edge of Barton Meadow play area. The Council feel that as it's a children's play area and that as children ride bikes over the bank any bulbs planted would not survive and could lead to the area becoming untidy.

The Chairman reported that despite the intention to remove the multi gym equipment on inspection it appeared not to have deteriorated as much as the recent report indicated and as it is not possible to remove the equipment without digging out the metal legs the equipment has been left in place for the time being. A date for the inspection has been received and the Chairman will arrange to meet the Inspector on site and get an unbiased opinion on the remaining life of the equipment and whether or not it can be economically repaired or whether it does need to be replaced.

The Chairman wanted to thank Councillor Michael Clarke for the grant he had been able to give the Parish Council, £500.00 towards new equipment and the money will be held until a decision is made with regard to new equipment.

7. Maintenance:

- (a) **Highways** – A request has been received to clean the village signs and the zebra crossing. The Handyman has been asked to carry out these tasks. Report also made of damaged direction sign bottom of Nethergrove. Repair request has been sent to Highways Department.
- (b) **Footpaths and Byways** - Councillor Roger Keen wanted to clarify that the new gate required is for the footpath not the bridleway. He has forwarded the request to the Torridge Pathways Co-ordinator who will make contact direct with Peter Tucker to discuss the requirements.

8. CPT Update – Councillor Franklin Spencer

Main topic of discussion has been around the Biomass system and it was agreed to amicably part ways with the current contractor. Three new contractors are being considered and a decision will be made next week. New contractor to provide full annual service, recommission the system and set clear time lines on maintenance schedule. CPT to take back in house the collection of money for heat used. New system to be set up next month. When the system was originally installed it was designed to have it's own janitor but that has never been the case which has lead to some of the problems experienced. The CPT will look at having a janitor to look after the boiler house and deal with call outs.

9. **Matters raised by the Chairman:** Work is progressing on the new website. The Chairman asked the Councillors to provide the biographical information and photographs as soon as possible.

10. General Finance

(a)	Barclays current a/c statement as at 26 February 2021		£25,861.18
	Less cheques not cleared:		
	100902 H.B. Football Club cancelled to be reissued	(£200.00)	
	100916 James Brown	£120.00	£25,741.18
(b)	Cheques to be issued:		
	100918 H.B. Football Club Grant Cheque Reissued	£200.00	
	100919 J Baker Salary & Expenses	£340.56	
	100920 SLCC Annual Membership	£95.00	
		<u>£635.56</u>	<u>£25,105.62</u>

All Councillors accepted current financial position and approved new payments.

11. Planning 1/0251/2021/FUL – North Green, North Road, High Bickington

Alterations to existing dwelling including single storey side extension, demolition and replacement of existing rear extension and garage, loft conversion with dormer window and widening of the existing driveway including partial removal of an adjacent bank.

Two Councillors approved the application but remainder require more time to review the drawings and comments. Deadline for response is the 3rd April.

12. Correspondence – Email Harry Roper, TDC Communications, promoting destinations in the Torridge area when lock-down is over and businesses can resume.

Councillors were asked to consider any local destinations to be promoted and initial thoughts were Libbaton Golf Club and the various accommodation facilities in High Bickington along with the historic St Mary's Church which are able to accommodate visitors from outside the area.

13. Items for information: Recruitment of new Parish Councillors. With the resignation of Councillor Charmaine Coxon it is even more important to try to get new recruits onto the Council. A new notice will be prepared and circulated.

The Chairman closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their participation.

Next Meeting 14th April 2021