

HIGH BICKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of Virtual Parish Council Meeting, Wednesday 9 December 2020 7.30 pm

Present: Chris McWhirter (Chairman) Councillors: Charmaine Coxon, Roger Keen, Bob Boothby, Jenny Baker (Clerk) County Councillor Andrew Saywell, District Councillors, Rosemary Lock and Michael Clarke
2 Members of the public – Mr Franklin Spencer, prospective new Parish Councillor, Mr David Halpin, representing the CPT.

The Chairman thanked everyone for joining the virtual meeting and invited the County and District Councillors to give their updates to the meeting.

County Councillor – Andrew Saywell

Coronavirus

- Stats – As of 9th December DCC area of Devon now up to 8,846 coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic.
- Since the 7th December that is a weekly increase of 540 infections.
- By way of comparison... in Torridge there were 61 new infections in the last 7 days, North Devon 65 in the last 7 days, West Devon 49 cases in the last 7 days.
- Infections countywide have fallen back to where they were mid/late October, before the second lockdown. BUT, infections in the over 80s have increased.

Looking at Torridge

Torridge weekly infection rates had risen to 101 people per 100,000 as of the seven days to 2nd December, higher than our neighbouring Districts. However as of the 4th December it has fallen to 80.6

I know this has been concerning and at my request, the Director of Public Health has carried out the following analysis of the Torridge data and what has been going on.

In the last 14 days in Torridge there has been one care home outbreak (*not* in Torrington Rural) with 8 cases, and then a mixture of cases in a handful of settings, with 2's and 3's – agricultural, schools, and North Devon District Hospital. Aside from this, Torridge has only 10 settings that have had cases in the last 7 days, and each setting has had 1 case each.

A 'setting' is the Public Health Team's description for a specific site e.g. care home, workplace, school, prison, military base, etc.

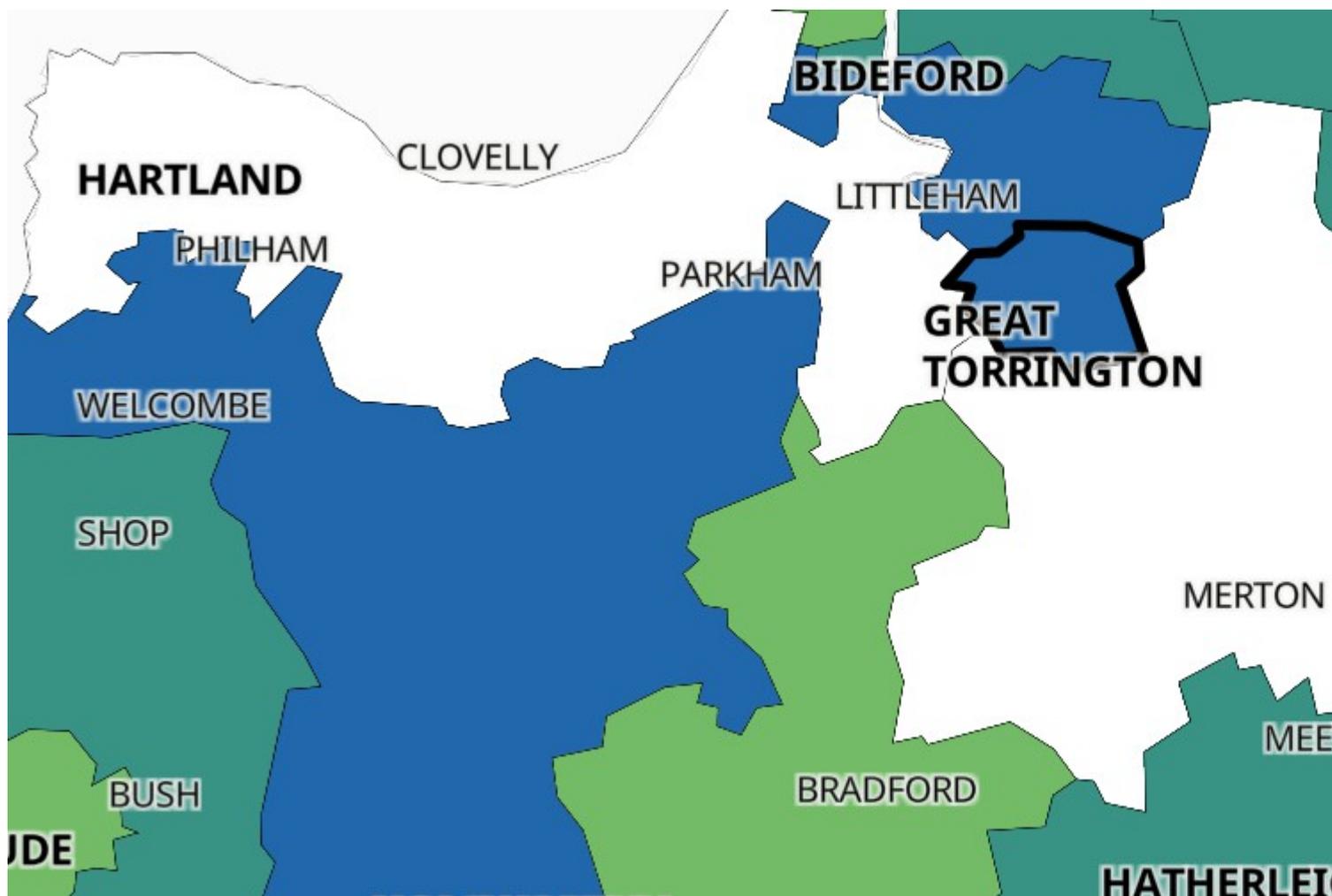
Like the other districts as well as regionally and nationally, Torridge appears to have peaked during mid-November and has been reducing since then. Age groups over the last 7 days across Torridge seem to be fairly mixed. In terms of trends, those in older age groups had an uplift in cases in the last week, however this data is very volatile and sensitive to change as the numbers are very small. Increase in the 80+ population are a reflection of the cases identified in care homes through routine testing.

So all in all, numbers are small (less than 10 cases per day), there isn't really any dominant situations (albeit 8 cases in the care home). The peak for Torridge was also lower than other areas and therefore the reduction post-peak may not seem as great when comparing to other areas.

With such small numbers, it only takes an outbreak or two and the infection rate per 100,000 will rocket up. In the Parish of Great Torrington, according to the 'MSOA' map, the infection rate there is 100.3 per 100,000 in the 7 days to 2nd December. But the number of infections in Great Torrington parish is just six cases. An increase of 1 (or 20%) in the previous week. On the 3rd December, Great Torrington's infection rate fell to 83.6. On the 4th December it increased to 117.1! However we are still only talking of 7 cases in the previous 7 days from the 4th.

The latest daily infection data for Torridge is showing new infections in low single figures, with just 1 new infection announced today. If that trend continues I would expect to see our District wide infection rate to fall substantially.

In High Bickington, the Parish is part of the 'Winkleigh and High Bickington MSOA' (the rest of my County Council division less Langtree and Frithelstock), and the good news is there have been fewer than 3 cases, which officially means the virus is suppressed locally. See the picture below:



Lastly, the DCC Public Health Team are hoping that the numbers in the over 80's start to fall, they are seeing falling numbers in hospitals and the rest of the population which is a good sign. We just need to get through the impact of the Christmas bubbles now...

Tier 2

I know it is disappointing for Devon not to be in Tier 1, however the first review will be on the 16th December and it remains vital we do all that we can to keep our infection rates down.

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If we want to get into Tier 1, then it is even more vital now **that we all stick to the basic public health guidelines and maintain social distance, wash our hands regularly and wear face coverings where required** so we can get cases down and get into Tier 1.

The County Council is mindful of the impact this has on the hospitality sector and is lobbying hard for tailored support for our hard-hit hospitality industry.

However, it is good that shops and local businesses have been able to re-open again. This weekend I was in Torrington Town Centre where it was both busy, but also there was again good observance of the public health guidelines. If we continue to follow the basics, we should get our infection rates down.

More guidance on the Tiers can be found online here - <https://www.devonnewscentre.info/dont-fear-the-tiers-new-travel-and-pub-rules-for-the-south-west-explained/>

County Council Budget

- Work has started on next year's budget. Further details to be announced, council tax is likely to increase as the Government has re-introduced the Adult Social Care precept.

Schools and Support for Parents/Children/Families

- Despite the lockdown there has been a good return to School with the attendance figures for schools in Devon earlier this month at 90% (higher than the national average).
- The Government have awarded DCC more than £2 million to support vulnerable people, children and families over Winter.
- School Holiday Activities and Food Programme will be expanded covering Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021.
- Councils will distribute the funds rather than Schools as they are best placed to directly help the hardest hit families and individuals, as well as provide food for children who need it over the holiday.
- Local Authorities will receive the ring fenced funding at the beginning of December.
- If a child already receives free school meals, they will automatically qualify for the holiday vouchers scheme. They don't need to apply again.
- Parents and carers of children currently receiving free school meals will be sent letters and emails during the week commencing Monday 7 December with information about how to access their vouchers.
- If a child doesn't currently receive free school meals but may now be eligible due to a change in their family's circumstances, please help us ensure they can access this holiday voucher support over Christmas by encouraging them to [apply online via our website as soon as possible](#). This is the quickest and easiest way for their eligibility to be assessed and they will get an instant decision. Alternatively, they can call our education helpline on 0345 155 1019. To ensure that they receive the free school meal holiday vouchers for this Christmas period, they must apply by Friday 18 December 2020.
- Please point anyone with enquiries to our [dedicated web pages about the new scheme](#).

Care Home Visits

- Devon will be taking part in the national pilot which will allow friends and family to visit loved ones in care homes.
- A small number of care homes in Devon are taking part in the trial which involves regular testing of one family member or friend per resident so that, when combined with other infection-control measures such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), they can visit their loved one indoors and without a screen, while reducing the risk to care home residents, staff and other visitors.

North Devon Link Road Upgrade

- The Government has confirmed it is awarding DCC £60 million to upgrade the North Devon Link Road between South Molton and Barnstaple.
- Sections of the road will be widened to provide better overtaking opportunities and improve journey time reliability, and eight junctions will be upgraded to improve safety.
- Junction improvements also include improvements to Westleigh Junction, Haywood Rd Roundabout and Buckleigh Junction on the A39 in Bideford.

Highways

- Along with the Chairman and Clerk I attended the 'Doing What Matters' meeting with the Neighbourhood Highways Officer. Although there are outstanding issues to resolve in the Parish, I thought the feedback from the Parish was constructive and helpful.

Torrington and Winkleigh Work Hubs

- DCC will be providing funding for a new 'Work Hub' in Torrington, and a second Hub in Winkleigh, which are designed to provide an office like environment for home workers and start up businesses. Torridge DC have applied for the funding to DCC and the bids look to have been successful.
- As we come out of the pandemic 'working from home' will I think be more common and these Hubs will be a valuable economic asset for our area.

Happy Christmas!

Can I thank the Parish Council and all residents of High Bickington for everything you have done and are doing during the pandemic to keep our communities safe. I wish you all a Happy, but above all Healthy Christmas.

As ever, please don't hesitate to contact me if there are any County issues you'd like me to look into.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Saywell for his detailed briefing. Councillor Lock had a question regarding the locations for the Coronavirus vaccine injections but at this time the information is not available for Torridge.

District Councillor Rosemary Lock

Advised the meeting that Planning has never been as busy as it is at present. Additional staff have been recruited but the volume of applications has meant searches are taking longer than usual.

District Councillor Michael Clarke

In April the number of homeless cases in Torridge was 160 but this number has increased to 200 in December. The main reason for this is that the six month moratorium on evictions has now come to an end and landlords are now able to evict people who for whatever reason are unable to make their rent payments. It is very important that if you know of anyone in this situation that you advise them not to leave their home before speaking to someone. Once a person or family have left their home they will be classed as having made themselves homeless and the housing support team will not legally be able to help them. Options are available and Councillor Clarke wanted to stress that they can contact him direct if they wish and he can then put them in touch with the correct people to speak to. He would of course keep any details confidential. In most cases the housing support team will negotiate with the landlord a payment plan to enable the tenant to remain in their home.

Councillor Clarke advised that he will be cooking again over Christmas at the 'Freedom Centre' helping to prepare Christmas meals which this year will be available in take-out boxes.

Police Report

PCSO Sandra Brown sent her apologies and provided the below report by email:

Police Report:

Incident Closing Category	Number of Incidents 11/11/20 to 07/12/20
Anti Social Behaviour	1
Crime Recorded	0
Public Safety	2
Transport	3
Total	6

The Chairman invited David Halpin to update the Parish Council on CPT matters.

David Halpin – CPT Representative

The CPT meeting follows the Parish Council and the meeting will be next week. The CPT have arranged for the flats to be redecorated on the outside in the Spring hopefully when the weather has improved. After the last meeting the CPT worked on a questionnaire to be sent out to homes in High Bickington and five neighbouring parishes to see what interest there is for rental of workshops. CPT do not know yet if they will qualify for funding towards work hubs and a meeting has been arranged for next week to meet with representatives from Torrridge to discuss the plans for the development of workshops and possibility of splitting into work hubs if there is demand. The planning already exists for the workshops, expiring next year. The questionnaire will seek to find out if there is demand for rental of traditional workshop space, smaller work hubs or short term office space rental. CPT are not sure if there is value in offering an hourly rate as this would be difficult to manage and administer.

The Chairman said it would be very useful to know the level of interest for work hub type space and office space rental on a short term basis and this option should be included in the questionnaire. Councillor Bob Boothby remembered that some time ago there was discussion about using space in the main Community Centre for short term office rental and wondered if this was still an option. David confirmed that there is currently a room on the second floor which was earmarked for a changing room if the field became a sports field but as this is unlikely to happen this room could possibly be made into office space for short term hire. This would in fact be easier to manage by the existing admin support.

The Chairman confirmed that Councillor Franklin Spencer has agreed to join the board of the CPT and would in future be able to report to the Parish Council Meetings updates from the CPT. This meant that David would not be required to attend future Parish Council Meetings but of course would be welcome to do so if he wishes. The Chairman thanked David for his input and confirmed that he and Councillor Bob Boothby would meet with him at the workshops for the discussions with Torrridge District Council next week.

The formal meeting was convened at 7.57 pm.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Deputy Chairman Adam Bunting who was unable to attend due to a last minute work commitment.

2. Co-option of new Councillor – Captain Herbert Franklin Spencer, OBE

The Chairman thanked Franklin for putting himself forward to become a Councillor and proposed that he be co-opted to the Council, this was seconded by Roger Keen. The acceptance of role has been received.

The Chairman confirmed that Councillor Spencer would become the Council's representative on the CPT Board and would then give a regular report at the Parish Council Meetings.

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

4. Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on the 11 November, 2020 Councillors confirmed minutes had been read and accepted. Chairman will sign the minutes.

5. Matters arising from the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on the 11 October 2020 No other matters raised.

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

7. Barton Meadow Play Area - The Chairman confirmed that in the absence of Deputy Chairman Adam Bunting there was nothing to report, he was made aware by email that the quotation from TK Play for repairs to equipment was still outstanding.

8. Maintenance

(a) **Highways** – The Chairman reported that he and the Clerk had participated in a virtual meeting with County Councillor Andrew Saywell, Mr Darryl Jagger and Mr Nick Bowles from Devon County Council Highways Department. This meeting was requested following a face-to-face meeting that took place last year on the subject of a 'doing what matters trial' being conducted. The aim of the trial was to speak to the various Parish Councils and find out what their priorities were with regard to road repairs in their particular Parish. Following the meeting a plan was submitted to the Parish Council giving each road a priority number. The first thing Darryl advised during the call was that things had been delayed because of lack of budget and other issues. He did not blame Coronavirus but lack of resources and the time it takes to get works agreed has a big impact on what they can achieve. The Chairman explained that he was disappointed when he saw the findings from the study which showed that the priorities 1 and 2 for High Bickington were not actually roads discussed at their face to face meeting and it appeared that in fact the only road with a 1 priority for High Bickington was the A377 and although he understood that the repairs to the A377 between Weirmarsh and Kingford are necessary it is not necessarily the highest priority for residents of High Bickington. The Chairman agrees that Darryl Jagger is very keen and has good ideas but he also feels the works on the 377 should be on a different project plan. The Chairman also expressed his concern when he heard a contract had been awarded to Skanska for 5 years which meant that Darryl's team are obligated to put work their way and although this might not be the best option for some of the roads they have to follow this route. During the discussion, Darryl and Nick did agree that they would look at the priorities identified as 5, 6 & 7 on the map and see if there is anyway these can be dealt with sooner rather than later. It was also discussed that drainage is one of the major problems with the smaller roads causing the potholes and that it would help if local land owners could help maintain the drains where water runs from the public highway onto private land. The Chairman said that in order to gain the trust of the local landowners it would help if Devon Highways kept their side of the deal and could give evidence of a time frame for work to be carried out.

- (b) **Footpaths and Byways** - Councillor Roger Keen advised he would be conducting his annual inspection at the end of the month. Following previous discussion regarding the use of the Bridleway by cyclists and confirmation that this is permitted, the Chairman reported that one local farmer had spoken to him about having seen cyclists on a footpath on his land. Cycling is not permitted on public footpaths. The farmer concerned did speak to cyclists at the time and there there has not been a recurrence.

9. Matters raised by the Chairman:

- (a) An estimate for the layout, design and print of 500 copies of the High Bickington Business Directory has been received from Design by Pie of £395.00. All Councillors present confirmed their agreement to accept the quotation. A notice will appear in the next Ramblings to ask new businesses in the area to send their details for inclusion in the Directory to the Clerk and the Clerk will start to contact existing advertisers to check their current entry and notify her of any changes necessary. Deadline for submission of details will be the 1st March with the aim of producing a new directory by 2nd quarter 2021.
- (b) Dates for 2021 Parish Council Meetings circulated and agreed.

Wednesday 13 th January	Wednesday 14 th July
Wednesday 10 th February	Wednesday 11 th August
Wednesday 10 th March	September (no meeting)
Wednesday 14 th April	Wednesday 13 th October
Wednesday 12 th May (AGM)	Wednesday 10 th November
Wednesday 9 th June	Wednesday 8 th December

- (c) The Chairman confirmed the Clerk had met with the PC Geek to discuss the requirements for the new Parish Council Website and it was agreed that it should be possible to set up a site keeping costs as close as possible to the original quotation received the only variance to this might be a couple of additional hours of set up and any additional time that might be required to train the Clerk to use the site. In order to proceed The PC Geek requested a £200 deposit which would enable him to set up a new domain and commence some background work which can then be viewed by the Councillors. The Councillors present confirmed they were happy to proceed along these lines.

10. General Finance

(a) Barclays current a/c statement as at 30 November		£27,909.54
Less cheques not cleared:		
100902 H.B. Football Club	£200.00	
100905 Pyncombe Foundation	£125.00	
100906 Wm Dodds & Joshua Tucker Trust	£150.00	
100908 James Brown Tree Care	£120.00	
100909 J Baker Sal. & Exp. October 2020	£341.48	
		£26,973.06
Cheques to be issued:		
100910 J Baker Sal. & Exp. November 2020	£342.36	
100911 The PC Geek (Deposit)	£200.00	
	<u>£542.36</u>	<u>£26,430.70</u>

- (b) Draft budget circulated to all Council members for their review. The Clerk advised that the precept information for 2021/22 is expected 14/12/20 and the Council have received communication from the Torridge Finance Department to say that as their revenue has been reduced this year they anticipate an increase in Council Tax. The Parish Council are also advised that in order to maintain their current level of funding they will need to apply for an increase in precept. The Chairman asked all Councillors present if they would be agreeable to an increase in precept in line with inflation. All Councillors confirmed they would accept this. The Clerk will circulate the actual precept information as soon as it is received and a final decision on the amount of precept to be requested will be made at the January 2021 meeting.

11. Planning - New Applications

1/1068/2020/FUL

Forest Park Lodges, High Bickington EX37 9BN
Erection of five holiday lodges

Application details and drawings had been circulated to all Councillors prior to the meeting. Comments were made about the size of the site and whether it was in fact exceeding its original planning approval. It was decided that as the new lodges are going to be built on the site of an existing building which was demolished and the overall size of the site was not going to be increased they are happy to approve the application. A vote was taken, three Councillors voted to approve the application, one Councillor needed more time to review the drawings and has subsequently confirmed they approve the application.

Status Previous Applications:

1/0797/2020/REM

Reserved matters application for appearance, landscaping, layout and scale of 5 no. dwellings pursuant to application 1/0552/2017/OUT
Land at Town Farm, North Road, High Bickington
Parish Council: Approved
TDC: Granted

1/0643/2020/FUL

Change of use from an ancillary annexe to a separate residential dwelling
The Shippen, Weirmarsh Farm, High Bickington
PC Decision: Approved
TDC: Pending

12. **Correspondence:** Posters have been received about the launch of a public consultation on the Devon Carbon Plan. Details of how the public can respond will be published on the High Bickington Website and on Facebook.
13. **Items for information -** The Chairman asked if any of the Councillors had come up with any ideas on how to recruit more Councillors. It was decided that more notices should be placed around the village on the various notice boards. Councillor Franklin Spencer suggested that the reluctance on the part of individuals to join the Council may be their lack of understanding of what the role involves. If anyone is interested in joining the Council they should be encouraged to attend one or two of the meetings to gain first hand knowledge of what the Council do.

The Chairman closed the meeting by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas. Next meeting 13 January 2021.