

PRESENT:

North Ward:

Councillor D Bushby
Councillor K Bines
Councillor K Hind

South Ward:

Councillor Ms R Clarke
Councillor S Inch
Councillor P Lawrence

West Ward:

Councillor C Hawkins
Councillor T Inch
Councillor M Taylor

East Ward

Councillor Mrs J Gubb
Councillor J Hellyer
Councillor J A McKenzie (Town Mayor)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P Swan (Town Clerk)
Mr R Coombes (Deputy Town Clerk)
Councillor J Wilton-Love (DCC)
Mr I Rowland (TDC, Senior Planning Policy Officer)

101. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors J Craigie (East Ward – Foodbank training), Mrs L Hellyer (East Ward – Personal) and P Christie (North Ward – personal).

102. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND ANY REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no Declarations of interest.

103. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION OF 15 MINUTES DURATION

There were no members of the Public present.

104. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 December 2023 were approved as a correct record.

(Vote – For: 8, Against: 0, Abstention: 4)

105. ACCOUNTS

It was proposed by Councillor S Inch, seconded by Councillor Bushby and

RESOLVED: That the List of Payments be approved.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

106. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN PRESENTATION

The Chairman welcomed Mr Ian Rowland, Senior Planning Policy Officer, TDC to the Meeting.

a. Mr Rowland thanked the Chairman and gave detail about himself and his background.

He distinguished between the Local and Neighbourhood Plans noting that the latter, borne out of the Localism Act 2011 does empower the local community / organisations but is not the tool to shape the Community.

North Devon and Torridge District Councils are the responsible authorities for (and currently reviewing) the Local Plan.

Mr Rowland intimated that the Planning Community were looking forward to receiving detail on Central Government reforms.

The Neighbourhood Plan is also different to the Parish Plan, which has no weight nor status where the former does have the Statutory purpose, does make a difference and will be used in decisions going forward.

In approaching the Plan, one has to consider "What do you want for the Area?"

This can include policies and proposals for more focused use, development and protection of land. It can be wide ranging including car parking, housing, green spaces etc.

Mr Rowland indicated that the Town Council were a qualifying body. He spoke about the consultation process, preparation and the responsibilities that lie with the Council. Complying with conditions, being compatible with human rights legislation – equality and diversity.

TDC will provide support and guidance but there are specialists that can be engaged, drawn from the community. Once a plan has been established the Council will have to engage in consultation with the Community; the feedback will provide for the Plan to be finalised. It will then be submitted to TDC (the Authority), who will "takeover," publishing it for further consultation. A qualified examiner will be appointed who will examine the plan against requirements again submitting it to TDC.

If satisfactory there will need to be a referendum (on the Neighbourhood Plan); a vote by the registered electors. If greater than fifty per cent of the turnout support it, TDC are under obligation to use the Plan when making (planning) decisions; it is powerful and has status.

The whole process is complex, though and there is a lot of work involved. There is support and guidance, but it will be proportionate during the process. Support includes grant funding – locality – £10,000.00 – available upon application by 26 January 2024. It is not known but it is expected there will be funding beyond April 2024. If successful there are additional / optional grants – £8,000.00 – for affordable housing initiatives. Again, there is technical support on the provision of assessments including housing needs.

In summary, Mr Rowland reiterated the importance of being organised:

- Professional assistance.
- Grant money use / availability.
- Plan work.

Establishing what is to be achieved consider:

- Is there another, better course of action?
 - o Neighbourhood development officers.
 - o Working with partners.

The Plan is not a tool to block housing. It can shape and have positive impacts – protect green spaces.

He urged engagement with other successful groups – Winkleigh and Great Torrington – in the District; use TDC experience.

Gather evidence which underpins the plan. Engage with the Community / stakeholders.

Finally, he cautioned the burden is arduous; you need to be committed.

b. The Chairman invited Members to raise points and questions that included:

- Positive examples resulting from Winkleigh and Great Torrington Neighbourhood Plan.
 - o Shape character of place.
 - o Did not want SW Development but principles of plan provided for green space – hedgerows – a success for Winkleigh in shaping outcomes.
 - o Majority did want to stop developments which is not possible. This needs to be clearly understood.
 - o Great Torrington Plan not as well developed but elements included protection of South Street car park.
- Timing of Local and Neighbourhood Plans.
 - o ND / TDC three years before start to adopt new Local Plan.
 - o Great Torrington: Nov 2014 – 2021 (adopted).
 - o Winkleigh: Mar 2017 – Aug 2021 (adopted).
 - o Difficult time for Planners with uncertainty in relation to receiving detail on Central Government National Planning Policy reforms.

The Chairman thanked Mr Rowland for attending the Meeting.

107. DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL (COUNCILLOR) REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Wilton-Love to the Meeting.

a. Councillor Wilton-Love thanked the Chairman and wished those present a Happy New Year.

He spoke about:

- Finance and budgets.
- A39 / Moreton Drive roundabout.
- Reduction in pot hole reporting.
- Special Measures spectre may be avoided.
- Receipt of correspondence relating to Tower Street (Conservation area) and inappropriate lights.
- o Will liaise with Councillor Mrs Hellyer.

b. The Chairman invited Councillor T Inch to raise his concern about the low levels of money spent – £ / child – ratio in comparison with other areas. He urged that the Children Scrutiny Committee should lobby for more finance.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Wilton-Love for attending the Meeting.

108. COMMUNICATION BROUGHT FORWARD ON THE DIRECTION OF THE MAYOR / TOWN CLERK

The Town Clerk updated members on the Maintenance Depot and praised the work of the Maintenance Team's excellent work in support of the Community through their salt deployment in the face of the recent challenging weather conditions.

109. STAFFING, FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES (SF&GP) COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 January 2024 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 10, Against: 1, Abstention: 1)

110. PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

a. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 December 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 0, Abstention: 1)

b. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 January 2024 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 0, Abstention: 1)

111. MARKET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 December 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 6, Against: 3, Abstention: 3)

112. TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 January 2024 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0, Abstention: 0)

113. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Members considered the proposed budgeted costs for the Christmas Lights 2024 including the purchase of new items. Points included:

- Cost.
- General impact upon the Community and attraction to outside visitors.
- o Was there a means to quantify / measure benefit?
- o The Organised Christmas Lights "Switch On" day.
- Reports that some traders benefited where others did not.
- o Potential to expand offer through the Town including the Market.
- The industry involved in installing and removing the Lights in the least favourable weather period.
- Tender process.
- Other areas Council investment benefits the Townspeople and visitors.
- o Limited appetite from Traders to underwrite running costs e.g Hanging Baskets.

It was proposed by Councillor Ms Clarke, seconded by Councillor Bushby and

RESOLVED: That the Contractors Budget request is supported. Future purchases of new lights to be presented to Council in the first instance.

(Vote – For: 9, Against: 2, Abstention: 1)

114. BUDGET AND PRECEPT

Members had considered and resolved upon the Item at Minute Number 109.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was proposed by Councillor J McKenzie, seconded and,

RESOLVED: That the Order of Business be changed with Item 15 to be considered after Item 17.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 1)

115. TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL – UPDATE

Councillor Bushby advised that:

- The play equipment will be installed in the Park week commencing 22 January 2023.
- The Scrap Yard located on New Road is being removed. The Site is planned to be developed. The Agents acting for the owners have been in contact with the Planning Department, TDC.

A deadline had been given in relation to site clearance. Failure to comply will the see a (Town and Country Planning Act 1990) Section 215 notice issued that will require the owner to clear the land.

- The Lane between the two Licensed booking establishments abutting Manor Court car park has again been filled with household detritus. The Officer in charge of Waste and Recycling, TDC has been requested to establish the offenders and once identified, seek to take enforcement action.

116. BRIDGE TRUST

Councillor McKenzie gave detail on income, Estate expenditure, Grants: individual, student, hardship and group.

117. PART II (CLOSED SESSION)

Proposed by Councillor Mckenzie, seconded and

RESOLVED: That in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be discussed, it is advisable, in the public interest, that the public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting; the tenants were instructed to withdraw.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 1)

118. LEVELLING UP WORKING PAPER

Councillor Hind introduced Members to his report, co-written with Councillor Bines, identifying projects within the Town that could benefit from the Levelling Up Fund allocated to Torridge.

He qualified it as a means to help those civil servants, and TDC officers tasked with establishing schemes worthy for consideration in the Levelling Up process.

He spoke in terms of drawing upon the Maritime Heritage, provision of Education facilities, partnerships, the Market, car parking and a rail link.

Costs and benefits had been identified for the Town Centre and stakeholders, including visitors.

Proposed by Councillor Hind, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the Council supports the report and that it is presented to the Levelling Up authorities for consideration.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

119. STAFFING MATTERS – HMRC

The Town Clerk explained that there had been an historical accounting error in relation to staff tax, national insurance and pension contributions.

He provided a report outlining the cost impact and expected HMRC reparations.

A claim has been made against the responsible accounting firm's insurers.

Proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the Council makes good all underpayments. A claim is made against the Accounting Firm's insurers.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

120. RETURN TO STANDING ORDERS

