

PRESENT:

North Ward:

Councillor D Bushby
Councillor P S Christie
Councillor T Johns
Councillor D McGeough

South Ward:

Councillor S Inch
Councillor Mrs S Langford
Councillor P Lawrence

West Ward:

Councillor Mrs K Corfe
Councillor C Hawkins
Councillor D Ratcliff

East Ward:

Councillor J Craigie
Councillor Mrs R M Craigie
Councillor Mrs J Gubb (Town Mayor)
Councillor Mrs L Hellyer
Councillor J A McKenzie

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs H Blackburn (Town Clerk)
Mr R Coombes (Deputy Town Clerk)
Ms K Harrison (Bideford Archive)
Inspector E Seear (Torridge Sector)
5 x Member of the Public

109. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor J Herron (North Ward – Personal).

Councillor Mrs Corfe indicated that many of the public members had attended specifically for Agenda Item 14.

Members considered the opportunity for discussion and amending the Order of Business to allow for Item 14. to be considered earlier.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Corfe, seconded by Councillor McGeough,

RESOLVED: That the Order of Business be changed with Item 14 brought forward to be considered after Item 6.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0, Abstention: 2)

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

Councillor P Christie declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 18 (Trustee, Bridge Trust).

111. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION OF 15 MINUTES DURATION

A member of the Public, referring to Item 14, spoke of the opportunity that the working yard offered with the provision of competitively priced, temporary outside space. With so many in need they believed the Notice of Motion to be a waste of time. Bideford is a working

town, not everything is picturesque.

112. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 December 2023 were approved as a correct record.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0, Abstention: 2)

113. ACCOUNTS

It was proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the List of Payments be approved.

(Vote – For: 15, Against: 0)

114. BIDEFORD ARCHIVE – PRESENTATION

a. The Mayor welcomed Mrs Kate Harrison, Chairman of the Bideford and District Community Archive, to the Meeting and invited her to address the Council.

She thanked the Members for allowing her to address them advising that she had three points to make:

1. Re Introduce the Archive.
2. Issue an invitation to visit the Offices (Monday – Wednesday mornings, preferably Tuesdays or Wednesday), currently housed above the Northam Town Council offices in Windmill Lane.
3. Advise on what is needed for the Archive to continue.

She spoke about the proliferation of provincial newspapers, with the Bideford Gazette (one of the first), published in 1855 following the removal of stamp duty first imposed in 1712, after a campaign against the “tax on knowledge.”

In 1983, the then Bideford Town Council, in partnership with the Manpower Services Commission set up the District Community Archive, creating an organisation to protect Newspapers, as a resource. There were employment opportunities for two years and then, from 1985, the Archive has continued with over ninety volunteers (now regularly with twenty or more).

The Northam offices are the third home since its inception.

Mrs Harrison stated that the Archive / Collection is the Community’s.

The local papers contain the whole world of the generations of people living in this area from 200 years ago; they are a major social history resource that can contribute so much to people’s sense of self and place. Today, the volunteers have read upwards of 26,000 pages indexed the names and stories which have been categorised into 630 categories and every story can easily be found either by following the name or the subject of the story.

The newspapers are available for the general public to use together with the experience, knowledge and friendliness of said volunteers. Not just relevant to locals, many enquiries are about the history of properties. She noted that nineteenth century newspapers were printed on a higher quality paper than those of the twentieth century.

The Archive have worked with the British Library, digitalising the Gazette from 1919 to 1991, allowing for the access of stories, although not currently online.

The website has 4,000 visits regularly each month, with the Facebook platform linked, the reach is extended.

Included with the document there is photograph storage, there are 7,000 scanned with access through the website; they record how change has been wrought over time.

The Archive has a number of booklets and are currently republishing “Bideford Black,” providing in depth accessible history relevant to the area.

In promoting accessibility and help with individual project research, with a less formal straitjacketed approach, they encourage visits and engage in speaking to local groups.

Mrs Harrison expressed gratitude for the funding support that has been received and used for running costs, rent / utilities / website maintenance.

She intimated that the Council can be proud of the resource that was started in 1983 and is still going strong.

b. The Mayor thanked Ms Harrison for her excellent presentation.

115. NOTICE OF MOTION

Submission by Councillor Mrs Langford.

"I request that Bideford Town Council write to Torrridge District Council expressing our serious concern about the unattractive condition alongside New Road on the approach to Bideford from Torrington. The yard full of old boats, cars and scrap represents both a health hazard and an absolute eyesore for local residents and anyone approaching or leaving our town in that direction. Please can Torrridge District Council take some immediate action to improve the situation and let us know what is being done."

Councillor Mrs Langford explained that she had received representation from a number of residents from within (her) the Ward area. Despite contacting TDC several times her best response was that the issue was complicated; both Councillors Bushby and Christie had been involved, also. She would like it to look better; the Residents similarly would like improvements made for it to be a more pleasant place to be.

Councillor Mrs Langford reiterated the concerns and complaints had been received by her.

Councillor Bushby in wholeheartedly agreeing seconded the Motion, alluded to numerous complaints from businesses, residents, visitors about the eyesore. He indicated, on the left-hand side as you leave Bideford, one is presented with cylinders of all varieties, scrap cars and boats, plastic covered structures, intimating potential health and fire hazards; people have even lived there.

It was noted in early 2022 that land had been extended / encroached onto TDC territory where trees had been taken down, fencing pushed and Gabion Baskets introduced to shore up the river; without recourse to the appropriate instrument.

Councillor Bushby indicated that clearing the site would be a colossal task and not small in cost. He observed part of the TDC difficulties lay in establishing who the Site owners are.

Councillor Christie indicated that complaints stretched back thirty years or more. He had raised concerns with the Planning Officers on four occasions. Again, ownership and the serving of enforcement orders were cited although Planning Permission for the Site for 144 flats had been received; this, he believed, would enable an enforcement order to be served on the local agent.

Councillor Mrs Corfe felt, given no action had been taken by TDC to date, there clearly were no health and safety issues.

She listed other areas around Bideford that were open and should cause concern for public safety. The New Road site is secure, attention should be given to the other open sites.

Councillor Bushby intimated that there is a national shortage of "Enforcement Officers," which impacts upon TDC; they haven't sufficient capacity. He would though, engage with the Head of Communities and Place tomorrow.

Councillor Mrs Langford clarified that the area(s) of concern were alongside both sides of New Road.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded and

RESOLVED: That Standing Orders are suspended in order to allow members of the public to address the Council.

(Vote - For: 15, Against: 0)

One member indicated ownership of the Yard, ninety per cent of which is used as storage, there had been TDC officer attendance with no environmental issues identified. Charities used the facility; boat repairs were carried out along with restoration works.

A further member, who had previously spoken in the Public Participation item, reiterated the benefits of cheap, temporary rent, outside working space where other industrial estate offers were simply cost prohibitive. The working environment added character.

RETURN TO STANDING ORDERS

Proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the Meeting return to Standing Orders.

(Vote – For: 15, Against: 0)

Councillor Mrs Corfe suggested that the Fire Service are engaged to check that it is safe and that the Council / owners work together to make the areas aesthetically pleasing.

Councillor Mrs Langford whilst appreciative of the Public attendance reinforced that the area is an eyesore and (the issue) needs to go to TDC.

Councillor J Craigie spoke of a balance between the Landlord and Community; any environmental issues need to be addressed. He wondered if the Tourism Committee could engage to encourage work with everyone concerned, in search of a win win and not a win loss.

Councillor Bushby was adamant in declaring that no public money should be expended; to clear the Site would cost tens of thousands of pounds.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Langford, seconded by Councillor Bushby and

RESOLVED: That the Motion is supported.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0, Abstention: 2)

(Councillor Christie left the Meeting.)

116. PRESENTATION BY THE POLICE SERVICE

a. The Chairman invited Inspector Seear, to address the Council.

b. Inspector Seear thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Council.

Points included:

- Acquisitive crime has increased on a national and local level.
- Uplift in recruitment of junior younger PCs, in the face of early / retirement of experienced more senior officers, broadly engaged locally on the ground.
- o Paucity of sergeants and inspectors.
- Identification, arrest, charging and incarceration of young gangland leaders has seen progress in (reduction of) youth related (“nasty”) crime.
- Decrease in retail crime, where three offenders had been responsible for sixty crimes, had seen one outlet’s losses of £2,000 a month reduced to £200.
- Desire / aspiration for wider social care solutions, where the Police work with other agencies providing for day centres, supported housing accommodation, help with drug and alcohol addiction.
- Drive for the marking / recording (of serial numbers) / photographs of valuable items in the face of rural (farm) theft to safeguard / enhance recovery.

c. Inspector Seear invited questions.

Questions / points included:

- Meeting with the local supermarket managers had revealed annual theft from stores of a quarter of a million pounds. One Town Centre outlet alone had lost £45,000.00.
- o Combat initiatives led by Sergeant Clarke (OPERATION LITTLE PORT) to be commended but fight against (the) crime must continue.
- Drop in funding saw the loss of the Open Access Hub on the High Street; Harbour is small but very good.
- There is a great(er) need.
- o Inspector Seear intimated that he could draw funding that could help facilitate with the voluntary works and would liaise with Councillor Mrs Corfe.
- East-the-Water needs the Youth Club to be restored. Young people with nowhere to go engage in irritating / infuriating low level crime. There is a need for youth services provision.
- o Police have limited resource but willing to engage / provide support for younger people. Members of the Public encouraged to contact the Police; space to be created for neighbourhood policing with “boots on the ground,” provision.
- Horrific incidence of Hate Crime, including racist abuse, where gentleman had to move from premises in run up to Christmas.
- o Inspector Seear confirmed that Hate Crime is very serious. There is work to do, to engage with the Community. The Police have to be much more reactive – they are often too late; there is potential for more night time policing.

d. The Chairman thanked Inspector Seear for addressing the Council.

117. DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL (COUNCILLOR) REPORT

Members had received a report, from Councillor Mrs Hellyer, which is attached and forms part of these Minutes.

a. Councillor Mrs Hellyer spoke about the Budget that provide for savings of £75 million (County Treasury has saved £50 million); there is potential for 10% more monetary provision from Central Government.

Seventy three per cent of the Budget addresses vulnerable adults and children's services, which represents 3% of the population.

The Budget (balanced – by law) is to be agreed at the February Meeting; there are no spare monies.

- Bideford Library will open this year (end of summer).
- The Children's Centre is safe.
- The Youth Club is staying.
- The (Bideford) Link Service will continue.
- The Street Lights on Barnstaple Road will be commissioned by the end of February 2023.

b. Members addressed points and questions that included:

- Request for coordinated approach from North Devon / Torridge Devon County Councillors in addressing roads that resemble Beirut during the Lebanese Conflicts.
 - o Rural Parishes concerns similarly occupied by pot holes and drains; planned works have been postponed.
 - o County engaged in addressing 500 pot holes and gritting works a day.
 - o It is essential that reports of highway issued continue to be submitted.
 - o Manteo Way scheduled for works by the end of April 2023.
- Potential for dynamic Maintenance Team, with DCC funding and resource provision, to address pot holes in the Town, make temporary repairs. Could this be engineered, DCC provide grit / rock salt to the Team?
 - o There is a road warden scheme – website provides detail.
 - There are restrictions – cannot operate on main roads, only minor.
- Promised Traffic Order for Mill Street needs to be put in place, vehicle parking / access is very bad.
 - o The Traffic Order is legal, however, there are continuing signage / lighting issues.
 - o Devon has 8,000 miles of highways with 4,000 miles of tarmac.
 - o There is a shortage of road (maintenance) staff.
- Poor (corrective) maintenance simply leads to further deterioration; the roads are very dangerous and life threatening.
- Standing water, drains that are blocked and full of water subsequently lead to breaking up of road surfaces through subsequent cold weather impact.
 - o Despite DCC having four "Dragon Patchers," (they can dry out potholes using flames before the material is laid) machines that repair roads quickly to a good standard with reduced traffic disruption, only one can be deployed to North Devon and even that is limited to spring, summer and early autumn.
 - Use of ash to fill holes was a common effective practise in days of yore.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Mrs Hellyer for her contribution including her (DCC) report.

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

a. The Mayor invited Members to support the Civic (Burns) Charitable Function to be held in the Royal Hotel on 24 February 2023.

b. The Town Clerk advised that the shortlisted candidates would be interviewed for her (Town Clerk's) position on Wednesday, 25 January 2023.

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

The Chairman of the SF&GP Committee highlighted that Minute Nos 85. and 88. (Precept and renewal of the Full Council Resolution for the application for a Public Works Loan Body loan of £500,000 given the recent increase in interest rates) were recommendations.

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 January 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0)

120. PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 January 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0)

121. MARKET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 January 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0, Abstention: 1)

122. MARKET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEMBER RESIGNATION

Members received the resignation from the Market Management Committee of Councillor Herron.

Proposed by Councillor Mrs Gubb, seconded by Councillor McKenzie and

RESOLVED: That Councillor Inch is elected member of the Market Management Committee.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0, Abstention: 1)

(Councillor Ratcliff left the Meeting.)

123. TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL – UPDATE

Councillor Bushby advised:

- Have been successful in levelling up bid of £15.6 million for Waste Management Centre that will aim to replicate the Brynsworthy Recycling operation.
- There has been a decrease in the numbers requesting housing help. The Sully House Emergency Accommodation initiative should be in open by the end of March 2023.
- A funding bid has been made to enhance Victoria Park.

124. BRIDGE TRUST

Councillor Mrs Gubb gave detail on income, Estate expenditure, Grants: individual, student and group.

The business of the meeting having been completed, the Mayor thanked the members for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 8.30 pm.