

PRESENT:

North Ward:

Councillor P S Christie
Councillor D Bushby
Councillor D McGeough
Councillor K Bines
Councillor K Hind

South Ward:

Councillor S Inch
Councillor Ms R Clarke
Councillor P Lawrence

West Ward:

Councillor A T Inch
Councillor C Hawkins
Councillor M Taylor

East Ward:

Councillor J Craigie
Councillor Mrs J Gubb
Councillor J Hellyer
Councillor Mrs L Hellyer
Councillor J A McKenzie

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P Swan (Town Clerk)
Mr R D Coombes (Deputy Town Clerk)
Mrs L Dixon-Chatfield (Town Clerk's Assistant)
Rt Hon Sir G Cox KC (Torridge & West Devon MP)
Councillor J Wilton-Love (Devon County Council)
3 x Members of the Public

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

N/A.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Councillor Christie declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 17. (Member, Bideford Bridge Trust.). Councillor Mrs Gubb declared an interest in Item 5. (Spouse is the Seasonal Worker).

45. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION

A member of the Public provided an update on the campaign to extend the Tarka Rail line to include Bideford through the work of ACE Rail - Atlantic Coast to Exeter Railway.

The transcript of their briefing is attached and forms part of these Minutes.

46. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 June 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record.

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

47. ACCOUNTS

To approve the payments listed.

It was proposed by Councillor S Inch, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the List of Payments be approved.

48. PRESENTATION BY THE POLICE

- a. The Mayor welcomed Inspector Ewan Seear (Bideford Police Station) to the Meeting.
- b. The Inspector thanked the Members and spoke about statistics and comparison figures.

In the last year Crime in the Centre of Bideford had gone up by 4.5%. Largely retail theft and repeat offenders; two offenders have been sentenced to jail.

Anti-Social Behaviour was up by 4.2% (East-the-Water 1.9%). The inclement weather has had a dampening effect on the levels of crime.

He spoke of the Victoria Park Encampments, the noise of social media yet only two officially recorded (adult) crime cases and alluded to the partnership of TDC and the Police in handling influx of Travellers.

Inspector Seear highlighted the difficulties faced by the authorities given that often vehicles represented accommodation for families including young children.

In the future the Police will seek to improve the guidance and information provision at “ground level,” with dissemination to Parish and Town Councils.

He indicated that the County Lines drugs initiatives had changed with “hubs” such as Exeter and Bristol providing for a more localised operation where individuals would prey upon the more vulnerable to facilitate sales and distribution.

(Councillor Taylor joined the Meeting.)

The Police attend Events, resource allowing; there was no trouble at the Bike Show.

- c. The Mayor led Members raising points and questions that included:

- No provision of dedicated camp led to occupation of central park and riverside facility.
- No tolerant zone – an omission.
- Breakdown in communications – many councillors contacted many times.
- o Joint visit by TDC and Police Officers leading to press release on a Sunday. Communication could and should have been better.
- Gallery where children ran amok received no response from either 101 or 999 calls.
- o Responses priorities: Threat, risk and harm; Gallery Event did not hit the threshold.
- Travellers’ visit appears to be annual event.
- o Three distinct groups arrived this term. It is seasonal and should be planned / prepared for.
- Victoria Park and the environs entrances have been reenforced although, in effect, there is nothing the authorities can do to stop the, albeit temporary, occupation by the Travelling Community.
- TDC have made an offer of a central “front of office” base in Jubilee Square, to the Police. It would be a good opportunity.
- Police awareness of drug use / exchange in central areas.
- o Hierarchical low level leads to similarly low level theft and anti-social behaviour.

- d. The Mayor thanked Inspector Seear for his report and contribution.

49. DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL (COUNCILLOR) REPORT

- a. The Mayor welcomed Councillor Wilton-Love to the Meeting whose written report had been received by Members, prior to the Meeting and is attached forming part of these Minutes.

- b. Councillor Wilton-Love enthused about a visit to the Network Operations Control Centre and his determination to help the locality, once Chapter 8 trained, to personally address “non-safety” defects blighting the roads. Using his own equipment and van he also hoped to raise money for the North Devon Hospice.

He believed that the process for managing the road network was flawed and had been involved in positive discussions with DCC having looked at different authorities and their practises.

He spoke of a road resurfacing project – hybrid patches – that been received favourably during trials; it has the potential to offer great savings.

Whilst having been critical of the Highway Operation he was very positive for the future.

- c. Members addressed points and questions that included:

- Lack of investment on the roads has led to the breaking up of the surface; whole stretches need complete resurfacing. Simple “surface dressing” is dangerous.
- o Reactive service is poor in face of proactive works.
- Frustration at pot hole work leaving other “obvious” work that could be attended to.
- o Evidently “best way of attending to safety defects.”

- Empathy regarding the County Councillors reported experience of HATOC meetings / outcomes.
- Continuing concern over the Northam Road / Raleigh Hill (blind parking) dangers and belief that extended double yellow lines would improve the situation.

d. The Mayor thanked Councillor Wilton-Love for his report and contribution.

50. PRESENTATION FROM THE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR TORRIDGE AND WEST DEVON – RT HON SIR GEOFFREY COX KC

The Mayor welcomed Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox KC to the Meeting.

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox KC thanked the Mayor for the honour and privilege to address the Town Council.

He indicated that he had attended to make a plea and exhortation echoing Sir Peter Mills 1964 Maiden speech who had wanted to see the regeneration, catch up, modernised amenities and facilities for the Town of Bideford. In sharing that passion, he stated the Council had an unprecedented opportunity to benefit from the Levelling Up Partnership (in addition to the Appledore Clean Marine Innovation Centre).

He spoke of identifying projects that could be developed suggesting educational and entrepreneurial. A steering committee including members of the Government would consider bids based on what an area needs.

Twenty authorities, including Torridge, have been identified that can seek to draw upon the £400 million fund.

He stressed the need to identify priorities that could be presented by Spring 2024. Throughout his Presentation Sir Geoffrey Cox stressed the need for speed, by submitting promptly applications would be considered ahead of those yet to apply allowing for an earlier response / success.

Communities, Towns and Parishes need to be part of the process identifying the priorities; what would the Town Council want that to benefit the Town / area? He referenced the Tarka Rail Line and indicated that it was not necessarily money that should solely be considered. He explained that a change of fishing regulations allowed Grimsby to solve a problem of landing fish.

Another example was the potential to suspend Business Rates (for three years), perhaps in specific zones i.e. main shopping thoroughfares, in a bid to revive Town Centres, encouraging independent retailers to return.

He intimated that he had spoken to Holsworthy Town Council and would address both Greater Torrington and Northam Town Councils, also.

Sir Geoffrey Cox KC advised that a Working Party should be put in place.

Whilst consideration could be given to the Town centre, he alluded to those behind the SS Fresh Spring Project who would like to develop a Marine Heritage Centre and spoke of conversations regarding the return of the Kathleen and May.

Noting the Marine Heritage and the revival of the Appledore Shipyard he ventured improvements to the Bideford Quay.

The Town Council will need to deliver a coherent plan.

The Steering Committee of Government Officials are looking for all community involvement leading to all community benefit. He offered possible improvement zones again, waiver of business rates, grants to improve building – grants bespoke to Bideford; an opportunity to allow Councils and authorities to invest in social and community infrastructure.

The Mayor invited Members to address points and questions that included:

- Match funding?
 - o No.
- Spend by date?
 - o No.
- Address Steering Committee of Government Officials before submission?
 - o Yes, approach can be made.
- Lack of social housing impacts upon labour mobility leading to staff issues.
- Poor housing quality is an issue for locals; monies could be used to secure housing.

Sir Geoffrey Cox KC believed the Council must be engaged, form a Working Party of the Council, identify priorities in Council, agree common ground. “Memorandum,” to be written by Spring next year. Anything can be considered; Grimsby engaged in bridge repairs, Blackpool housing development with provision for key workers.

- Division of £400 million amongst 20 “partners.”
 - o Monies allocated on a case-by-case basis.
- Who prepares the submission.
 - o Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities officials have been in touch with TDC.

Sir Geoffrey Cox KC indicated that other “partners” included Bolton and Rotherham conurbations that better suited the criteria given the largely spread out rural nature of Torridge; he would seek greater parity during the consideration process.

- Impact of potential Business Rate exemption.

- o Monies would not be withdrawn from the local funds.

Sir Geoffrey Cox KC reemphasised that time was of the essence and whilst Spring 2024 was the target he should like to see earlier submission / preparation – December 2023. The Council must speak with one voice, encourage TDC and alight upon several critical initiatives.

The initial draw down will boost the economy within the local area.

He encouraged the Council to write formally to invite the process to be set and feedback on priorities.

The Mayor thanked both the Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox KC for his presentation.

(Councillor McGeough left the Meeting.)

51. COMMUNICATION BROUGHT FORWARD ON THE DIRECTION OF THE MAYOR

The Mayor advised Members that when a response is requested by the Office that they do so in a timely manner.

52. STAFFING, FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 July 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 15, Against: 0)

53. MARKET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 July 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0, Abstention: 1)

54. PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 and 26 July 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 15, Against:0)

55. TOURISM COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 July 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 15, Against:0)

56. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO SERVE ON THE FOLLOWING COMMITTEES / WORKING GROUPS

a. Decarbonisation and Environment Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Craigie, seconded, and

RESOLVED: That Councillor K Bines fill the vacant position on the Decarbonisation and Environment Committee.

(Vote – For: 15, Against:0)

b. Emergency Planning Working Group

It was proposed by Councillor McKenzie, seconded,

RESOLVED: That Councillor K Hind fill the vacant position on the Emergency Planning Working Group.

(Vote – For: 15, Against:0)

c. Snow Warden – North Ward

RESOLVED: That Councillor K Hind assumes the role of North Ward Snow Warden.

(Vote – For: 15, Against:0)

d. Bideford Bridge Trust

Deferred.

e. Notice of Election of Sub-Committee substitutes

57. NOTICE OF MOTION

Submission by Councillor A T Inch.

“To reinstate the Decarbonisation and Environment Committee to meet once a month to be able to complete this Council’s promise to become Carbon Zero by 2030.”

Councillor Inch indicated the need to regularise the Meeting of the Committee believing that it was important for the Council to address its stated desire to meet Net Zero by 2030. He noted that both the Devon and Torridge District Councils had targeted 2050 for Net Zero and believed it would be a “feather in the cap,” for Bideford Town Council to precede them (by twenty years).

Councillor Taylor seconded the Motion.

Councillor Hind suggested a broad approach by looking at Bideford as a community and not restrict the scope.

The Chairman and Councillor Craigie indicated that the Council was restricted through funding difficulties and budget limitations on capital expenditure. They indicated a number of areas and projects that had been engaged upon.

Councillor Craigie confirmed Members always had the opportunity to contribute agenda items and noted past Working Groups had been formed with the remit to meet on a regular and not scheduled basis.

It was proposed by Councillor A T Inch, seconded,

RESOLVED: That the Motion was not supported.

(Vote – For: 4, Abstention: 2, Against: 9)

58. TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL – UPDATE

Councillor Bushby advised:

- a. Grants for shop front schemes have now been made and improvements should be seen in the near future.
 - b. Victoria Park has been secured following recent unauthorised encampment.
 - c. Relocation site for the recycling fleet has been agreed.
 - d. Revised plans for the Operational Services Centre (formerly Environment Centre) will include vehicles workshops.
 - e. TDC have resolved that they wish to work with NDC on the new Local Plan and await their response.
 - f. Senior Officers have met with Senior Civil Servants from the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities to discuss the Levelling Up Partnership for Torridge. The current timeline (as prescribed by the Department) is that the formal partnership will commence in March 2024. Data is being gathered to support any interventions for the District.
 - g. Sully House and the three housing pods on site will be open for business towards the end of September.
- TDC have approved a proposal to deliver further Housing pods on the garage site at Pynes Lane / High View.
- h. Operational Services are making arrangement for the clearance of the alley off the Manor car park. Will work with DCC to explore gates / securing the alley and provision for restricted access.
 - i. TDC have agreed to fund the creation of a Police Counter / drop in point at the former Harbour Office in Jubilee Square (soon to be vacated by the Town Council) through use of the Shared Prosperity Funding.
 - j. CCTV improvement, planned for Jubilee Square, imminent.
 - k. Councillor Brenton has joined the Harbour Board; a deputy Harbour Master has been appointed.
- l. The SS Freshspring Trust have approached the Council to request that TDC support the designation of Bideford as a Heritage Port – this is under consideration.
- m. The Victoria Park Play area renovation has gone to tender.
 - n. TDC will not support the request from Bideford Town Council to remove the large but healthy trees at Chudleigh Fort.

Further general discussion points included:

- Whether ND Council have Trespass Site.
- TDC officers are engaged in future plans for the former Library.

- Local Neighbourhood Plan must be driven by “outside” Council – general public, residents and businesses.
- Future (Joint) Local Plan must plan to secure railway line connection; the case has to be made.

59. BRIDGE TRUST

Councillor Christie briefed Members on the income, expenditure, charitable donations and grants figures.

The business of the meeting having been concluded the Mayor thanked the members for their attendance at the meeting which concluded at 8.45 pm.

BIDEFORD TOWN COUNCIL - Accounts for approval at the Town Council Meeting - 3 August 2023

NO			VAT	NET	TOTAL
1	S/O8	Gingerweb Ltd		140.00	140.00
2	S/O8	Linear	8.24	41.2	49.44
3	S/O8	Acorn	64.98	324.9	389.88
4	S/O8	Tamar Trading	2.16	10.78	12.94
5	DD	Bethish Gas	4.18	83.44	87.62
6	DD	Clarity Copiers Ltd	16.51	82.55	99.06
			<u>96.07</u>	<u>682.87</u>	<u>778.94</u>
		Bank Balances at 31 Jul 23		15,193.95	
		Bank Balances at 31 Jul 23		475,000.00	
		- Current Account			
		- Deposit Account			

Minute Number 45. ACE Rail, Bideford to Barnstaple Link Briefing.

Bideford Town Council from Tim Steer (ACE Rail campaign lead)

Good evening, Councillors, ladies and gentlemen. I last had the pleasure of addressing you on the subject of restoring rail connectivity for Bideford and Torridge in my presentation on Thursday 20th January last year. That was when this campaign was in its infancy, since when it has matured and been formally adopted by the Tarka Rail Association both as the Community Rail Partnership and Rail User Group for the existing line, and as the primary advocate for its extension into Torridge at Bideford. Its success so far has been recognised last year and this in Railfuture’s annual national Awards, first for Best New Group (Gold), and then for Best Campaigner (joint Gold), Best Campaign (Bronze) and Best Social Media (Gold).

Thanks to funding from the Association, from Railfuture’s Fighting Fund, and from GWR’s Customer and Community Improvement Fund, an independent specialist adviser was commissioned by the TRA to produce an Initial Business Case for what we’ve named the Torridge and North Devon Connectivity Programme. While the Association’s officers are still reflecting in full on the very recently received IBC (as we call it, for short) I am here at your Mayor’s request to share with you an initial summary of some of the report’s key findings and recommendations.

For sound strategic planning purposes, the Torridge and North Devon Connectivity Programme – which is a comprehensive package of short, medium and long-term measures – has to take a roundly 20-year forward view. That happens broadly to coincide with our target of October 2040, as the 75th anniversary of the last scheduled passenger train services for Bideford, as in our judgement a realistically deliverable target by which time we are aiming to have restored such mainline services. The Programme’s strapline is ‘*Better lives through better journeys*’ as our underlying purpose is transformational socio-economic and environmental outcomes for Torridge and North Devon communities.

It’s worth reminding ourselves that we are not about trying to re-create a 19th-century railway, taking out the much-loved Tarka Trail in the process. We are of necessity building a brand new high-performing 21st-century railway fit for the next 100 years and more, through an area and in an era unrecognisable from when the railway first reached Bideford almost 170 years ago – when Queen Victoria was only 18 years into her long reign! Even in those days the railway needed an Act of Parliament to authorise its construction, and in one of life’s curious coincidences tomorrow 4th August will mark the exact 170th anniversary of when the Bideford Extension Railway secured its legal powers! Today we shall need a Development Consent Order, which will be overseen by the Planning Inspectorate, an executive agency of the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities.

While project development work to beat, not just meet, that October 2040 target must start as soon as the next stage of a Department for Transport-compliant Strategic Outline Business Case can be funded, there are other urgently-required steps to improve Bideford’s access to the existing rail network which should be capable of delivering benefits for Greater Bideford (by which we include Appledore, Northam, East the Water and Westward Ho!) and its wider Torridge catchment within months, not years. There are other no-less urgently-required steps to improve the capacity and performance of that existing railway, too.

We have seen the success of dedicated bus links, timed to connect with trains at Barnstaple station, linking Lynton & Lynmouth (pop. 1,400) and more recently Ilfracombe (pop. 9,200). These mirror the success of three such links into Dartmoor Line trains at Okehampton station, connecting first with Tavistock (pop. 12,675) when the line re-opened in November 2021 and more recently with Bude-Stratton (pop. 10,589) and Launceston (pop. 8,428). Those dedicated bus links are in effect extensions of the train service – a virtual railway – and the same is seen as a very early priority for Greater Bideford (pop. 31,134); one recent non-stop trial run from Bideford Quay via the A39 and the newly installed Old Torrington Road gate to Barnstaple station was achieved inside 20 minutes. Funding, marketing, competition rules, would all have to be worked on, but those other examples should inspire and motivate for a practical early win for Torridge.

It's no secret that while the existing Barnstaple-Exeter line continues to break all known records for passenger journeys carried – the number of journeys to late-July this calendar year compared with the same period in 2019 is 11.5% ahead, despite infrastructure and workforce disruptions – its peak-time capacity and general performance leave a very great deal to be desired. Our focus is on what can be achieved within the known and stable framework of GWR's current contract which expires in June 2028, as feeding more passengers into the line from Greater Bideford via dedicated bus links could further worsen the already sub-standard current travel experiences.

GWR's Managing Director Mark Hopwood CBE, who has already visited the TRA twice since last December, has very clear ideas – which the TRA shares and supports – of what near-term infrastructure upgrades are required to deliver a train service which meets passengers' expectations, just as soon as he can secure funds and spending authority in what is now a business micro-managed by the Department for Transport through annual business plans. Given the geography of the line, much of that work and investment would not even be in North Devon but in Mid-Devon. The prospect of a third and final round of the Levelling-Up Fund may afford an opportunity for Mid-Devon District Council to seek such funding.

Probably the top priority is to modernise the train control system so that drivers do not have to manually exchange tokens at Crediton and Eggesford, and staff do not have to operate the level crossings at those stations. This would make the services more punctual and trim several minutes off journey-times. Another early priority is to return platform 2 at Barnstaple station to operational use, so that for example an extra train can be stored overnight ready for the next day's service and occasional rail tours, bringing hundreds of visitors to the area, can be stabled.

Project development work to secure our long-term goal must now include a detailed engineering study of route options between Bideford and Barnstaple, with the specific purpose of defining a preferred route to which the coming new Joint Local Plan can give legally protected status, to guard against potentially prejudicial developments. Will the new fast rail link be coastal or inland, heavy or light rail? We will only be able to answer this by further funded studies. Will the new route navigate under, over or beside the active travel Tarka trail? This again needs further studies. Bideford is now recognised as the largest conurbation in the Southwest without rail meaning the transport issue needs immediate, intermediate and long-term solutions.

We also need to embed the extension of the Tarka Line to Bideford in the strategic and stable policy framework of Devon County Council's 'Devon Metro' network which has been so conspicuously successful in under-pinning rail developments elsewhere across the county, be they new stations such as Marsh Barton or re-opened lines such as Exeter to Okehampton with Tavistock-Plymouth following. Launched in 2011 as part of the County Council's 15-year Local Transport Plan, both are due for renewal in the near future and it is understood that the Department for Transport will be looking for the new Plans required of all local transport authorities to plan to a 2040 horizon, which very neatly coincides with that of the Torridge and North Devon Connectivity Programme and our own target for re-connecting Torridge to Devon's rail network at Bideford.

There is a real transport issue between Torridge and North Devon, a solution needs to be found that gives the public a sustainable choice! Once the Initial Business Case report has been approved, further work will need to be done on finding the public's right solutions for the district and the report has positively identified that there is a need for more transport investment for the local area. Thank-you for your time and attention this evening.

Minute Number 49. DCC Report.

from County Councillor J Wilton-Love

HATOC:

I have called into question the nature of the HATOC meetings and, indeed, the validity of them. I am of the opinion that they serve little purpose and, as an elected member, I believe we have little to no say in any Highways procedures. Our job, as elected members, seems to be to find ways to placate parishes whilst the civil service looks for reasons to not act on anything and this needs to change.

To cite an example, I put forwards a request for a weight restriction change in East Ball Hill, Hartland at the last HATOC meeting. East Ball Hill is completely unsuitable for HGVs and it keeps being used with damage to property 5 times this year already. I was told it did not need to go to HATOC and the Traffic Engineer said he would deal with it.

So far I have heard nothing back except a whisper that "it may not work" which I have interpreted to mean we are looking for a reason to do nothing to solve this issue. Therefore, I have requested to resubmit the application to the October HATOC and the committee WILL vote on it this time. To use the specious rationale that we should do nothing because something might not work is ridiculous as far as I am concerned. You know what really doesn't solve problems? Doing nothing.

But, I disagree entirely with a weight restriction not working in this location. It needs to be added, it needs much better signage and there is already an HGV diversion in place; there is zero reason for it to be used. Weight restriction and enforcing it would soon stop it being used in the manner it is. You only need to look at the HGV routes in London to see that fines keep people to where they are supposed to go.

I believe this is also in the public interest to know exactly what is happening and to see the battles we have to try and get anything done. It is virtually impossible however I will see if this can be forced through in October now. If it can't then I would call the HATOC meetings a complete waste of time and money and we may as well stop attending.

I believe it is a complete farce in its current format.

Potholes

I have bought myself a van and tools and am looking to do my Chapter 8 training under the Road Warden Scheme. I intend to come and start fixing places myself where we are getting inadequate service. I will be concentrating on the potholes that aren't officially safety defects that we all know need fixing. I also have an industrial strimmer and am exploring how I get authorised to strim verges.

Highways Contractors

On the 3rd of August, I have a meeting at the Network Operations Control Centre. It is my belief that we would get a markedly improved service by assuming Highways back under DCC's control. The current tenders have 2 years left to run and I believe they should not be renewed. Highways needs to come back under DCC's wing where we can assume complete accountability, financial responsibility and ensure parity in working practices.

Looking across the country, it does seem to be the areas that work this model have much better results. Again, placating people with length of roads, weather reports etc is becoming a little tiresome and we need to do things differently. I will make my case and hopefully get the conversation going now. With two years left to run, it is the time to be doing it.

Rural Give Way Marking Project

This project is aiming to remark all the rural Give-Way and Stop markings across the whole of the County. In addition to simply remarking them we are using a more robust product that will improve the life-expectancy and lead to a lower whole life cost and reduced carbon cost.

There are approximately 6,000 rural Give-Way markings that will be treated. For your information there is another 1,500 in our market and coastal towns. The project is estimated to take 4-5 years to complete.

Lining works to include:

To remove existing markings and refresh

- single dashed white lines
- double dashed white lines
- stop lines
- give way triangles
- up to 5 centre lines from the junction

The project will include Stop lines as well as Give-Way markings but only across the rural network.

If Anything Else is Needed

Please contact me in the usual way: jeffreywilton-love@devon.gov.uk or 07513 124089