

Frithestock Parish Council

Clerk and RFO: Alan Matthewman
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**Draft Minutes of the meeting of
Frithestock Parish Council
Held at Frithestock Village Hall at 1900 hours
on 15th November 2023**

**Present: Cllrs C Stevens (in the Chair), E Hunkin, M Thomas
Cllr Andrew Saywell (Devon CC), Cllr Pennington (Torrige DC),
Alan Matthewman - Clerk**

**Members of the public: Prospective Co-optees: Messrs Bob Lewis-Basson,
Sam Wood, John Burrill**

In accordance with The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, members of the public are welcome to attend.

AGENDA

1. Public Participation

Members of the public are permitted to make representations, ask questions and give evidence in respect of any item of business relating to the Parish Council. A question asked by a member of the public during this period shall not require a response or debate at the meeting.

Cllr Stevens opened by welcoming the new clerk, Alan Matthewman, to his first meeting of the council.

Consideration was given to the suggestion by a member of the public that an audio player be used at future meetings which was agreed on a trial basis. The same member queried the minutes being amended late. The clerk stated that this was a result of the late awareness of items due to a lack of any information from the outgoing clerk. This would not happen again. The same gentleman pointed out, that as the council were trustees of the Village Hall, that a revaluation of the hall had indicated a rise in insurance valuation from c £440,000 to around £950,000 and he was concerned at the potential increase in the insurance fee which would result. The decision had been taken to pay an interim £100 to cover up to the renewal date. Finally, he reminded councillors that there had been confusion over the payment of support to churches. It was now clear that this was allowed and so the support given by the council could be continued.

2. Reports from Outside Bodies

a) To receive a report from Devon County Councillor A Saywell.

The Chairman invited Cllr Saywell to give his report: He said that he would welcome the opportunity to dial into the meeting when he was unable to be here in person.

Devolution of Powers to Devon: Final agreement seemed near with the likelihood that an annual sum of £66 million would be granted to Devon to cover agreed items.

Budget: Current projected deficit is £13.6 million arising from children's social cost. Confident the deficit would be addressed successfully.

Mobile Libraries: The decision to close this facility has been confirmed effective end February 2024 with the intention to replace them with a mix of expanded community libraries, digital resources and local delivery from the library stocks.

Community Fund: Additional £15,000 provided for library running costs.

Highways: Dragon Patcher time has been allocated to Frithelstock for 2024. There being no questions Cllr Saywell excused himself and left the meeting.

b) To receive report from Torrridge District Councillor, P Pennington.

The Chair invited Cllr Phil Pennington to give his report from Torrridge District Council. Concentration in Torrridge was work on the new Strategic Plan for Torrridge and North Devon, and the development of short-term emergency housing in Bideford and other centres in Torrridge. Whilst not yet sufficient to meet demand, the developments would certainly help reduce the costs of overnight and short-term emergency needs in the District.

c) To receive report from Police. No substantial reports received.

d) To receive report concerning kerb damage outside the old Methodist Chapel.

The damage had been reported and action was being taken.

3: To consider the co-option of a new members of the council accordance with Applications received and circulated from Bob Lewis-Basson, John Burrill and Sam Wood.

The presentation was led by John Burrill who stated that his attention had been grabbed by the steep rise in council tax rates in recent years and also by the lack of clear and comprehensive information on the finances which, as an accountant, he was keen to help improve.

Bob Lewis-Basson stated that they had moved to the Area from Reading, he had served on the boards of several charities and had wide IT experience.

Sam Wood stated that he and his wife were local to the Torrridge area and looked forward to contributing to the community.

After a short discussion it was proposed by Cllr Stevens, seconded by Cllr Hunkin that all the candidates be approved as co-opted members of Frithelstock Parish Council. **Resolved Unanimously.**

The candidates were invited to rejoin the meeting and they all signed the acceptance of office form. Copies of the Declaration of Interest Forms were given to them by the clerk and they were asked to return them duly completed before the end of the year.

4: Apologies for absence

Apology had been received from Adrian Hardwick who was not well. The clerk had confirmed that the meeting was quorate with the three existing members present, now joined by the three new members.

5: Declarations of interest

To receive any Declarations of interest and DPI's. Members are reminded that all interests must be declared at the beginning of the meeting and prior to the item being discussed. None declared.

6: Minutes

To approve and sign as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2023. Because of the challenges experienced at the meeting in June and objections to the minutes which were made in September, the previous minutes had never been signed. **Proposed by Cllr Stevens, Seconded by Cllr Hunkin** that the Chair sign those meetings as a true record with the caveat regarding the objection. Agreed unanimously by the three members present at the meeting.

The minutes for the meeting on 7th September were approved unanimously.

7: Matters Arising: To consider any matters arising from the minutes not dealt with in the current agenda.

The matter regarding the complaints about the previous financial payments on clerk's pension/ Agreed that would be part of a pre-Agar process.

8: Appointment of Clerk / RFO

To note that Alan Matthewman, contact details shown at the head of this Agenda, was appointed as clerk/RFO to Frithelstock Parish Council with effect from 1st October 2023.

The Chair asks the council to approve the appointment retrospectively. **Approved**

9 Planning Issues

No planning items had been received since the previous meeting.

10: Matters Concerning the Playing Field

i) To receive and consider the playing field safety report

No major repair issues with most low-level actions undertaken by volunteers. Much of the equipment was reaching end of life. Complaint regarding fact that tables should be secured the ground which would make the layout very inflexible. There were also issues with the fact that the son of the previous chair was employed by the company doing the survey and repairs and that interest had never been declared. The clerk confirmed that it should have been and suggested that alternative quotations for the work should be sought.

ii) To receive further information and consider actions on hardstanding for benches at the Playing Field.

Residents were very much opposed to concrete hardstanding and it was agreed that alternative options be considered, if necessary by appointing another safety consultant (RoSPA was suggested) to do the next annual survey. Movement of tables should be left to discussion with new grass cutting contractor.

11: Road Warden Scheme

To receive update on Road Warden Scheme including whether the Parish Council want to sign up to scheme given there is currently no Chapter 8 Training available. (Road Warden Agreement attached for Cllrs).

The clerk drew attention to the potential costs involved and it was decided to take no further action at this time.

12: Website

Item requested by Cllr Stevens. To discuss present website and consider any actions therefrom. Cllr Stevens expressed the view that there was an urgent need to review the way the website worked and its clarity and ease of access, He undertook to discuss with the creator how the system might be improved and bring back to the council proposals, hopefully by the next meeting.

13: Grass Cutting 2024

To consider bids received for the contract for 2024-25 and decide on further action.

The council considered the options relating to the different areas needing maintenance and, subject to a good level of confidence in whoever was contracted, it was decided that:

- i) a target level or frequency of cutting be agreed for each area, and
- ii) a price per cut for each are be agreed to enable the activity to be varied depending on the rate of growth.

14: Payments and Receipts to date

To approve Payment and Receipts and agree draft precept proposal for 2024-25

The clerk circulated a schedule of payments to date and a copy of the draft budget for next year. The revenue schedule included only one precept receipt the balance having been received but not incorporated. The clerk pointed out that, not having accessed the banking information had been unable to complete the accounts information and that needed to be sorted by the end of the year latest.

However, there was enough data available to have enabled him to produce a first draft budget and precept for 2024-5 based on unchanged activity level, of about £9500. After a brief discussion it was decided that our initial precept demand to be pitched at £10,000, an increase on current year of c. 5%. A final decision would be taken at the January meeting.

15 To consider the Torridge DC Draft Strategic Plan and authorise the Clerk to report back to TDC on those views.

The clerk reported on the reaction of High Bickington which identified very closely with those of the Frithelstock councillors. Agreed, in view of the time constraints, that the clerk would submit a response to Cllr Stevens for approval and then send that document, if approved to TDC before the deadline

16 Councillors' Reports and Items for Future Agenda

None at this time.

Part B. Exclusion of Press and Public for the following item

That the following item under Section 1(2) of the public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item as it involved likely disclosure of confidential information

17 To note and consider the implications on cost of the National Pay Award agreed with effect from April 1st 2023.

Non members having left, members agreed to meet the statutory entitlement of the previous clerk due under the terms of the national settlement. The members also agreed to uplift the pay of the new clerk by £1 per hour being exactly in line with the agreement.

18 It was disclosed that the departure of the previous Chairman and Clerk meant that the Council had no current members on the bank mandate meaning that no payments could be made. It was proposed by Cllr Stevens, seconded by Cllr Hunkin that the following be created signatories by a new mandate to be agreed with HSBC as soon as possible.

Alan Matthewman (Parish Clerk)
Councillor Chris Stevens
Councillor Hunkin

And that payments should require any two signatories

The meeting was declared closed at 21:40.

Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 17th January 2024

23005

Councillor Chris Stevens (Chair)
Frithelstock Parish Council

Signed as a true record by Chairman_____

17th January 2024

DRAFT