

Burlescombe Parish Council

DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting of Burlescombe Parish Council
on Monday 6 January 2025 at Westleigh URC

Present: Councillors Box, Downing, Forward (Chair), McDonald, Smith and Walker together with MDDC Councillor Westcott. The Acting Parish Clerk, Mrs McGeever was also present.

Councillor Forward opened the meeting at 7pm and welcomed everyone.

The meeting room had been set out to facilitate the filming of the meeting and two members of the public were present to carry out this activity.

06012025/1 Apologies

Apologies had been received from MDDC Councillor Lock and DCC Councillor Radford.

The Clerk advised that since ten parishioners had requested that MDDC call an election to fill the single vacancy on the Parish Council, Notices of Election would be issued until a candidate came forward to fill the vacancy. If two or more candidates came forward this would result in a contested election.

The election contest in June had cost the parish just over £5000 whilst uncontested elections generally cost around £125.00.

06012025/2 Declarations of Interest/Dispensations

There were no declarations of interests or dispensations requested with regard to the business on the agenda.

06012025/3 Minutes of Previous meetings

The minutes of the meeting on 2 December 2024 had been circulated to all councillors and published on the website.

Councillor Downing proposed and Councillor Smith seconded the proposal that the minutes were a true record of meeting. All present at that meeting were in favour of the proposal. The Chair initialled and signed the minutes of 2 December 2024.

06012025/4 Public Participation

The following items were raised:

- A request for DCC Highways to update on actions taken or plans to take action following a previous report from BPC on the state of the roads, including the refilling of grit bins.
- Traffic volumes and parking in Burlescombe, as well as the issue opposite the road to Tiverton Parkway (in the parish of Sampford Peverell)
- Flooding in Burlescombe, affecting homes and fields, caused by debris being left in the ditches of the canal following the clearing of banks. Blocked drains.
- Water coming down from the Ayshford pub area.
- The call of a Parish Meeting.

The Chair advised that all points had been noted and would be followed up.

06012025/5 Matters arising from the last minutes

Litter pick

Councillor Downing advised that she had undertaken some litter picking over the festive period.

The Chair noted that an update on the laptop and the retrieval of deleted information, emails and the promised USB stick backing up the website would be given under Item 7 and that DCC Highways would be covered under Item 9.

06012025/6 To consider and approve adopting core documents in line with NALC model documents
The Chair advised this item was being moved to the February agenda.

The Chair noted that items are routinely added to the following Parish Council meeting agenda but that, due to prioritising and workload, some items may need to be moved again to a later meeting. Items would stay on the agenda until they were resolved to give transparency to the community on the work being undertaken.

The role of a Parish Councillor was a voluntary role and carried out alongside existing workloads and, therefore, all tasks were done on a best endeavours basis and the Acting Parish Clerk's hours.

The approval of core documents was a matter of best endeavours and time available.

Action: Clerk to prepare further documentation for the February meeting.

For this meeting, Item 10 would follow after Item 15 as discussions would be relevant to the budget and precept.

06012025/7 To receive a report from the Chair
Councillor Training

Councillors would complete their first piece of training on Monday, 3 February 2025 and it was being held alongside Sampford Peverell Parish Council to reduce costs. It would also provide an opportunity to meet neighbouring councillors.

Action: The Acting Parish Clerk to advise details of other training available to councillors including on planning.

The Chair noted that that parish councillors were members of the community with different skills who volunteered and needed to be trained on the specifics of the role.

Appointment of a Clerk

The Chair asked the community to recognise that the Acting Parish Clerk had been asked by Mid Devon District Council to clerk one meeting in May 2024 and had continued to clerk for the Parish Council whilst a Clerk was appointed. Due to difficult circumstances, the Parish Council had so far been unable to recompense the Acting Parish Clerk for her time.

On behalf of Burlescombe Parish, the Chair asked that the Acting Parish Clerk's efforts were formally noted.

The Chair asked for the agenda item to be amended to include the role of Responsible Financial Officer and noted that the Acting Parish Clerk had re-enrolled the Parish Council in HMRC's PAYE scheme. The HMRC enrolment had ceased in October 2022. It was noted that all Clerks/RFOs should be paid through the HMRC PAYE scheme.

The Acting Parish Clerk confirmed that no applications had been received for the role.

Councillor Walker advised that she had carried out a job evaluation utilising information available from the National Association of Local Councils and had concluded that the current role was under graded. Full details of this evaluation will be shared with the meeting pack.

The Acting Parish Clerk advised that once the legacy issues had been dealt with the number of clerking hours required would be 20. This would be dependent on status quo being maintained.

The upcoming changes to local government, which were currently not available in any detail, could mean Parish Councils taking on more responsibility. In such circumstances, an experienced clerk would be invaluable.

The recent survey had shown that “partnering with local authorities” was the topic that came out as mattering most to community members who replied. An experienced and well-connected Clerk would be crucial to delivering this.

The role of Responsible Financial Officer was to ensure that the correct management of public money and the subsequent annual internal and external audits.

Councillor Forward proposed that Councillor Walker’s recommendation that the pay grade be increased to between £15.84-£17.29 for a four-hour week be adopted. This was seconded by Councillor Box and unanimously agreed.

The advert would be updated and re-advertised. It was anticipated that this would not require a rise in the precept.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to carry out this work and report to the next meeting

Website / emails

Two emails received from a community member enquiring about availability online of policies that have been agreed and the Chair noted that these will be added in due course along with the historic minutes that were available.

A review of the website content would be added to next agenda.

Action: Clerk

The Acting Parish Clerk advised that no USB stick containing the back-up of the previous website had been received.

The Chair advised concerns had been raised by community members relating to the previous website provider and any potential breach of contract given that the management fee had been paid to March 2025. This concern had also been raised at the caretaker meeting on 25th June 2024.

The way forward would be discussed under item 10 as there were financial implications.

The Acting Parish Clerk advised that it was unlikely that any information taken off and/or deleted from the Parish Council laptop in the period 14-17 June could be retrieved.

The Parish Council would need to consider what the intention was when deleting files from the computer as well as deleting all emails/email boxes. The Parish Council was also investigating what the process should have been for the correct handover of all existing Parish Council information and correspondence - what actually happened and what effect these actions have had on the effective running of the new Parish Council, together with the cost implications.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to prepare a report on the deletion of historic Clerk emails, deletion of councillor in boxes, deletion of files from council laptop and the handover from previous Parish Council to the caretaker Parish Council.

The Chair noted that the election of a new Parish Council did not take place until the end of June 2024.

Emails from residents

The Chair advised an email had been received from a parishioner regarding the Emergency Plan. There had also been comments on Facebook.

The Acting Parish Clerk confirmed that no details were available on the laptop with regard to any previous emergency plan. It was possible that Devon Communities Together held a copy.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to contact DCT

Councillor McDonald advised that he had considerable experience in emergency management.

Action: Parish Council to propose at the next meeting that Councillor McDonald take the lead in emergency planning. The Acting Parish Clerk would provide a copy of the current DCT Emergency Plan template. The Emergency Plan was a community project and funding was available for meetings and equipment.

The Emergency Plan was a significant piece of work which would take time and would need to be prioritised against other council activity.

The Parish Council was not, nor ever would be, an emergency service and if members of the community have a genuine emergency, they should always contact the relevant service directly.

Bus stops

It was RESOLVED that this item would be removed from agenda until such times as a response was received.

06012025/8 To consider the Parish Council's response to the following planning applications and receive decision notices:

Planning applications:

The Chair asked that consideration be given to how planning applications were notified to Parish Councillors.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to report at the next meeting on the notification process

A planning guide on the Parish Council website would be beneficial.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to advise

The Parish Council noted that additional correspondence had been received from the Planning Officer relating to the Ayshford Arms and this would be discussed at next parish meeting.

24/01690/FULL

Proposal: Replacement of fire damaged building (Use Class E)

Location: The Old Well Uffculme Cullompton

Site Vicinity Grid Ref: 305655 / 113960

Parish: Burlescombe 06

The Parish Council RESOLVED that it was supportive of this application in light of the economic and social value this business brings to the parish.

24/01683/FULL

Proposal: Siting of 2 mobile homes including; storage shed; parking areas; septic tank and soakaway

Location: Land at NGR 308600 116920 (Corbett) Burlescombe

Site Vicinity Grid Ref: 308578 / 116869

Parish: Burlescombe 06

The Parish Council RESOLVED that it had no objections to this application but would make the comment that landscaping/tree planting should take place.

24/01740/PNCOU

Proposal: Prior notification for the change of use of redundant agricultural building to 3 dwellings under class Q

Location: Land and Buildings at NGR 307702 116591 Higher Reed Farm Burlescombe

Site Vicinity Grid Ref: 307702 / 116591

Parish: Burlescombe 06

The Parish Council considered the documentation on the planning portal together with the concerns of residents and, whilst not having an objection in principle RESOLVED to raise the following points:

- There is no comment from Highways and given the location and the potential lack of visual splay for vehicles entering or leaving the premises, this could be useful to review. Road safety has been raised as a concern by residents.
- adequate drainage should be in place to ensure there is no surface water/flooding issues resulting from the development.
- provision of adequate natural light and suitable ventilation should be ensured

Decision notices:

24/01313/LBC – APPROVED – 19 December 2024

Proposal: Listed Building Consent for the retention of internal and external alterations to the outbuilding

Location: Rocknell Manor Farm Westleigh Tiverton Devon

06012025/9 Highways Matters/Footpaths

The Chair noted that the survey had indicated that Highway Matters were high on the community's agenda.

The Chair also noted the state of the A38 from the Burlescombe turning to Junction 27. Councillor McDonald advised that no works could take place until works on the M5 were complete as the A38 was the designated diversion route.

White lines at the railway bridge and school

Councillor McDonald advised that the white lines at the railway bridge were in hand and Devon County Council and Aggregate Industries were progressing matters.

The Acting Parish Clerk was in contact the Neighbouring Highways Officer regarding the white lines at the school.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk

Dip at Whiteball

The Acting Parish Clerk continued to be in contact with the Neighbouring Highways Officer and the dip on the A38 at Whiteball has been put forward for patching and it had been approved, it was now on a list awaiting completion.

Welcome to Devon sign

The Clerk had been in contact with the Neighbouring Highways Officer and it was unlikely that funding would be available for its replacement as it was not a safety defect. The sign was located in the parish of Holcombe Rogus.

Potholes

All potholes should be reported on DCC's website as this was the quickest method to get results and the more a pothole was reported the higher up the list it would go.

Water on the hill road

The Neighbourhood Highways Officer was investigating the drains.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to follow up in light of the freezing conditions.

Road Warden Scheme

The Parish Council was now signed up to the scheme and Councillor McDonald had completed the initial online training and Chapter 8 training was being organised by the Acting Parish Clerk.

Funding was available for Personal Protective Equipment.

Road Warden Scheme [Road Warden Scheme - Communities](#)

Snow Warden Scheme

The Parish Council was now signed up to the scheme and Councillor McDonald had completed the online training.

The Salt Bins had also been checked and those requiring filling had been reported. Parishioners could utilise the salt provided it was spread on public roads. It was not to be used on private driveways.

Snow Warden Scheme [Snow Warden Scheme - Communities](#)

P3 Scheme (Footpaths)

Councillor Smith advised that P3 forms had been received, the survey of footpaths required to secure the available funding had begun, and that the submission would take place before the deadline of 28 March.

Additionally, she had inspected and cleaned the board by the railway bridge in Burlescombe and would install a new map, once supplied by DCC, who are currently having an issue with their plotter printer.

Parish Paths Partnership Scheme [Parish Paths Partnership scheme - Public Rights of Way](#)

Speed limits

Councillor McDonald advised that there was a process to having the speed limit reduced and the Acting Parish Clerk advised that applications were generally invited in March of each year and were assessed on a points system with those applications scoring highest being considered.

Evidence was important and this could come from a Community Speedwatch Scheme.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to provide information to Councillor McDonald.

Community SpeedWatch [Community Speedwatch The Scheme](#)

Parking at top of Hensons Drive, Westleigh

Councillor McDonald advised that parking was a key issue in the village but obstruction was subjective and provided that a vehicle was taxed and roadworthy, it could not be moved. Rules did apply to parking on pavements and alongside drop curbs and parking issues should be reported to Devon County Council.

Double yellow lines were an option but it was a long process with applications being accepted in the summer of 2025 and taking about two years. Support had to be given by both the DCC Councillor and the NHO for the parish.

The Acting Parish Clerk would investigate if there were any areas that might provide for off-road parking.

06022025/10 Financial matters:

Update of obtaining access to the bank account

The Parish Council had finally gained access to its bank accounts on Thursday 2nd January 2025.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to prepare a report into why it took so long to get access to the bank account for review at the next meeting

Lloyds Bank had upheld the complaint lodged and paid compensation of £60.

Action: Contact Lloyds Bank/Financial Ombudsman as the time taken has impeded the proper running of the council and the compensation does not reflect the time taken to resolve the matter and the risk to public funds.

It has also impeded the Parish Council's ability to prepare budgets and precept calculations.

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A review of banking procedures and interest rates would be placed on the agenda of the next meeting.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk

Addition of two signatories to the bank account

This item had been resolved at the previous meeting.

Update on financial situation and invoices for payment

The Acting Parish Clerk had prepared spreadsheets from the cash book to be able to look at four years accounts.

The bank statements and transactions had been downloaded and circulated to Parish Councillors on Sunday, 5 January and bank reconciliations had been prepared to cover each month of the current financial year.

The Acting Parish Clerk advised that the following invoices required payment:

Westleigh URC	11.31
Westleigh URC	300.00
Westleigh URC	14.00
Burlescombe VH (JD)	10.00
SJM Tree Services	480.00
Burlescombe VH	25.00
Westleigh URC	38.50
Westleigh URC	21.00
Parish Online	300.00
Burlescombe	30.00
N Page	360.00
Community First (Clerk)	309.96
MDDC - Grass	1768.22
MDDC - Election	5118.84
St Mary's Church	500.00

The Acting Parish Clerk had paid the insurance premium in December.

Councillor Forward proposed, Councillor Walker seconded and the Parish Council unanimously agreed that the above listed invoices should be paid as soon as possible and before any changes were made to the bank mandate.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk

It was felt prudent to reconcile the actual bank transactions to both the cash book and the cheque book to verify the correctness of the accounts prepared from by the Acting Parish Clerk from the cash book.

Action: Councillor Walker volunteered to undertake this task.

It was also felt prudent to review both the contract with Countrywide for ground maintenance and the insurance policy. Best practice recommended that this be carried out on a 3 yearly basis.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk

It was noted that the parish had wished the previous Parish Council take over Westleigh Play Park from Mid Devon District Council and the current Parish Council was moving this process forward. The Acting Parish Clerk had also contacted Aggregate Industries regarding the donation towards Westleigh Play Park which did not appear in the bank transactions. Aggregate Industries were checking their records.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to monitor

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Request for grant funding from CHAT

Bring forward to the next meeting.

Consideration of the budget and precept

The Acting Parish Clerk had prepared a budget based on the three previous years and the current year's projected figures on which to base the precept.

The budget took into account the following principles:

1. A Parish Council had to meet its statutory obligations and all costs associated with those obligations
2. Best practice called for a General Fund equal to a year's precept
3. Earmarked reserves were put in place for such items as elections

When viewing the previous year, it was evident that expenditure had more or less equalled income at a figure between £13-£14000. The General Fund held in the bank represented a sum of £8500 and there were no earmarked reserves for items such as elections.

Despite expenditure in the region of £13-14000, the precept had been set at a lower figure of £11-12000 with no earmarked reserves, this meant that the election costs incurred in 2024 would need to be paid from the General Fund.

The Clerk had prepared a number of budget options based on a range from best case scenario to worst case scenario. An example, would be that the current Notice of Election results in an uncontested election costing around £125 or it results in a contested election costing around £5000.

The recent calling of a Parish Meeting by six electors, as well as indications that a poll could be requested at such a meeting was highlighted as a financial risk. The Council would be obliged by law to pay for the costs of any meetings and any resulting polls, and there is no limit on how many might take place. It was also noted that, while Parish Meetings have a smaller cost, polls cost on average between £5,000 and £8,000, but that the results are not legally binding.

It was noted that current legislation only requires ten people, or one-third of electors present at a Parish Meeting, whichever is less, to request a poll. So, for example, in a Parish Meeting with only six people in attendance, a poll could be called by as few as two people.

The government has proposed to reform to the relevant legislation, but no changes have yet taken place. Councillor Smith reported that the consultation documentation highlights the issues associated with the low number of electors required to call a poll. It states that it has *"led to a number of instances where polls have been called by individuals exploiting the trigger threshold to vexatiously or inappropriately pursue particular personal agendas which are not shared by a majority of other local people ... such abuse can have large financial consequences for parish councils and tax payers."*

Councillor Smith raised the potential to work with stakeholders including DCC, MDDC, DALC, NALC and our MP to highlight how this legislation in its current form is harmful. She also stated the possibility of instigating a campaign to shine further light on these issues via the press.

Councillor Forward highlighted the importance of welcoming input from the community and that the Council offers a variety of free ways in which parishioners can share their views, including via councillors' published email addresses, the BPC website, Parish Council meetings, informal drop-in sessions and attendance at local events. She also highlighted that parishioners who are dissatisfied are able to bring issues to the attention of MDDC's Monitoring Officer.

Whilst the Parish Council had no wish to discourage residents from exercising their democratic rights, it was only prudent to provide parishioners with the potential costs involved given that such costs were covered by the Parish Council through the precept.

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When considering this year's precept, the Parish Council would have to include the potential costs relating to further elections and Parish Polls.

A single Parish Council vacancy could, for example, if not election was called be covered by the co-option procedures at no cost to parishioners.

The Parish Council RESOLVED to decide the precept at a separate meeting having published budget figures on the website prior to that meeting. There were time constraints relating to the date precepts had to be submitted to Mid Devon District Council.

The Parish Council would convey the date and agenda for the meeting to parishioners through the website, social media and on the noticeboards in line with its statutory obligations.

S106 funding

S106 funding available for Open Spaces would be raised at the next Parish Council meeting.

06012025/11 To receive the report from the Communications Officer

In addition to the report:

Councillor Smith advised of her expertise in conducting research as a part of her professional role for a global research company, including conducting research with large companies, helping them to interpret the results accurately and advising on what action they can take to improve.

It was noted – following questions about the validity of the results – that 105 responses out of 770 electors meant a margin of error of 9%. Councillor Smith stated that while a smaller margin would of course be preferred, this response rate was enough to be considered reliable insight into parishioners' preferences, particularly in relation to their top priorities, which had scores above and beyond the margin of error. It was also noted that many residents who responded (88%) do not regularly attend meetings and therefore the survey offered quantitative and qualitative insight into the views of people who may not otherwise have been heard.

Councillor Smith confirmed that no costs had been incurred in relation to the design, running and analysis of the survey.

It was noted that the insight provided was useful for the Council to understand people's views, and that a similar exercise could be conducted later in the year to add to this.

The Chair thanked Councillor Smith for her hard work.

06012025/12 To receive a report on the Councillor Advocate Scheme/local crime

Councillor McDonald had signed up to the scheme and there were a number of online seminars scheduled which he hoped to attend. The key focus was the Commissioner's police and crime plan for 2025/26.

Councillor Advocate Scheme [Councillor Advocate Scheme – Your voice in policing](#)

06012025/13 To receive a report on the Grand Western Canal Joint Advisory Committee
Appointment of a Parish Councillor(s) as representative(s) on the Joint Advisory Committee
Councillor Forward proposed and Councillor Smith seconded the proposal that Councillor Box take on the role as the Parish Council's representative on the Joint Advisory Committee and this was agreed with one abstention.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to contact JAC

Public Consultation on Area B of the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension.

This runs from 20th November 2024 to 10th January 2025. The link to the online information about the Consultation is; <https://letstalk.middevon.gov.uk/tiveueareabmasterplan>

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Councillor Smith stated that the public consultation had been shared via the Council's social media account, so residents could engage with it.

06012025/14 To receive a report on the Quarries
A letter has been sent to AI about Black Bridge.

Rachel Gilmour, MP, had visited the Westleigh Quarry in December.

The Chair had met Rachel Gilmour, MP, at her Christmas event and it had been felt beneficial to set up a meeting.

Action: Acting Parish Clerk to contact her office to arrange a meeting.

Appointment of a Parish Councillor as the second representative

Councillor Downing advised she was content with sole responsibility at the moment.

06012025/15 To receive a report from the Amenities Working Group
The minutes of the Amenities Working Group will be published on the website.

The Amenities Working Group recommended that Burlescombe Parish Council remove the sticker that has been placed on the bin in Westleigh Play Park prohibiting its use as a dog waste bin.

Councillor Forward proposed and Councillor Smith seconded the proposal that the sticker be removed and this was unanimously agreed.

A watching brief to be kept as to whether there are any issues reported by the community on the use of this bin in the future.

The Clerk advised that it was an MDDC sticker on the bin but they were not able to identify who.

No complaints are known to have previously been received from the community regarding the bin so the recommendation is to return it to its previous use.

Action: Councillor Smith

The handover of the Westleigh Play Park was ongoing and a further quote was awaited for the fencing and once a decision had been made Councillor Radford would be approached for funding.

06012025/16 To receive a report from MDDC Councillors Westcott and Lock
Councillor Westcott highlighted MDDC's concerns about devolution and local government reform, particularly around the impact of postponement of the county council elections scheduled for May 2025 and the timeline not allowing for proper consultation.

Councillor Westcott reiterated her position to take matters to the Scrutiny Committee on behalf of the Parish Council. She also highlighted how South West Water would be attending the Scrutiny Committee in March and that members of the public could attend.

06012025/17 To receive a report from DCC Councillor Ray Radford
No report had been received from Councillor Radford.

06012025/18 Items for next meeting

As given in the minutes of this meeting and

- Delivery of fast fibre
- Annual Parish Meeting/Community Showcase
- Park Wood - The owner of Park Wood would be invited to the Amenities Working Group to discuss the community’s ongoing use of the wood and its upkeep

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- Updating the Burlescombe Parish Risk Register
- Consider the Internal Auditors report – this is an action in the minutes from 25th June when the caretaker council were in session.

06012025/19 Dates of the next Parish Council Meetings

4 February 2025

Councillor Forward closed the meeting at 9.00pm.

Signed _____ **Date:** _____
Chair

