

BUCKLAND FILLEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes.

Community Day Centre, West Heanton

Thursday 3rd September 2026, 7.30pm

Present, Cllr Bond (Chair) Cllr Nethacott (Vice Chair) Cllr Salter, Cllr Davis, Cllr Bolsdon.
District Cllr Wheatley, Selina Woollacott (Clark)

1. **Apologies.** County Cllr Cottle-Hunkin.

2. **Declarations of interest, Councillors to declare any interests in matters on the agenda.** None.

3. **Open Session for members of the public to speak.**

3.1) **Discussion of matters raised by members of the public.** No members of the public present.

4. Reports

4.1) **Report from District Councillor.** Report given by Cllr Wheatley.

Helping Farmers. We shall be submitting a Notice of Motion - Supporting our farmers for the next Full Council Meeting affected by the Blue Tongue outbreak threatening sheep and cattle which is causing a heavy emotional and burden for Torridge Farmers including our Ward of Shebbear and Langtree affecting Breeding programmes, farm incomes and the rural economy. Sheep have been dying and can affect cattle as well. Farmers have been facing livestock losses, increased vet bills, and bio security.

We will be calling upon DEFRA (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to urgently provide financial and practical support for farmers affected by Bluetongue. We will be looking at the possibilities of emergency funding from the Council as well.

Fortunately we have had some rain though more required to help raise our reservoir levels.

Royal Devon University Health Care NHS Foundation Trust as of 11th August 2026 who run North Devon District Hospital (NDDH) had temporarily closed the maternity unit at North Devon Hospital stating it is due to staff shortages, departures, maternity leave, sickness, absence, and difficulties securing locum doctors. The very good news is that the Trust has recruited some staff and with the help of Ian Roome mp, Devon County Council and others working together that the Maternity Unit now has a provisional reopening date of 29th September 2026. So far more than 50 babies who would normally have been born in Barnstaple have been delivered in Exeter. The Trust has stated the reopening remains dependent on meeting staffing and safety requirements.

FULL COUNCIL. At last month's Full Council Meeting after receiving a presentation from the Director of Finance (S151 Officer) we discussed and recommended the draft financial outturn report 2025/26 to confirm recommendations for the utilisation of the surplus. After discussions, the wording of the report under climate change implications to allow for leisure and planned maintenance could fund further energy and reduction schemes thus reducing carbon emissions. Voted for - 24 against -9 and 2 abstentions. Additionally, the recommendation in the report was approved for removing the £400k allocation towards LGR. This was carried just with FOR - 15 , AGAINST -9 and 2 Abstentions.

Community Regeneration Partnership Funding Reallocation was presented by the Director of Communities and Place to confirm the reassignment of £ 600,000 funding from the MHCLG(Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) within the existing funded portfolio.

Torridge Place Board recommendations-

Appledore Maritime Centres - £160,000

Bideford Pannier Market. - £274,337

Community Health and Well- being Hub - £45,393

Westward Housing Energy Efficiency Programme - £120,270

Remove Cleave Wood and Hatchmoor borrowing for consideration

After much debate and considerations, it was agreed under the climate change implications in the report the wording was amended to installation of solar and energy reduction measures for Westward Housing energy efficiency program. Voted for -28, 1 against and no abstentions.

We also considered the Torridge Place Board for additional funding to be provided as above : AMIC Bideford, Pannier Market, Westward Housing, Community Health and Wellbeing Hub from the Community Regeneration Partnership or provision for an alternative funding settlement with TDC capital projects being updated.

Voted FOR - 27 Against O, Abstentions -4.

Pleased to announce that the Notice of Motion from Cllr Leather regarding foster carers with 61 households approximately in the Torridge area forgo their share of the council tax levied on foster carers homes in a show of support . Typical band D property in Bideford is £2652.43 of which TDC share of that is 8p in the pound would cost TDC approximately £12,941.76. This was voted for unanimously by Council.

4.2) Report from County Councillor. This was sent to all Councillors prior to the meeting and summarised at the meeting. Report sent in from Cllr Cottle-Hunkin.

Proposed Hyperscale Data Centre and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS):

Many of you will already be aware of the proposals by Xlinks for a hyperscale AI data centre and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) on farmland in Great Torrington. From the information we have heard and seen so far, I believe the proposals are entirely inappropriate for our area. The development would remove around 850 acres of productive farmland within the UNESCO North Devon Biosphere Reserve and would directly affect a landscape that includes two listed farmhouses. The visual impact would be immense, with structures visible for many miles across the surrounding countryside. I would like to pay tribute to the tremendous work being undertaken by the local Action Group, whose volunteers have dedicated countless hours to research the scheme. No Devon Data Centre — Protect Great Torrington farmland Through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted to Torridge District Council, they have uncovered a significant amount of information that has helped reveal the true scale of what is being proposed. Much of the information released relates to pre-application discussions between the developer and the council; documents that are usually viewed as commercially confidential have been released publicly through FOI. What these documents reveal is deeply concerning. The most striking issue is the sheer scale of the proposal. Two of the largest data centre buildings would each have a footprint of approximately 22 ACRES! To put that into perspective, each building could accommodate the equivalent footprint of 18 Exeter Cathedrals and would be 40m tall. This is not a modest rural development or even a large industrial estate. It would be a monstrous industrial complex unlike anything currently seen in the region. Questions also remain over water usage. Xlinks has publicly stated that the facility would be self-sufficient in water. However, documents obtained through FOI appear to tell a different story. They indicate that in an extreme dry year (sound familiar?!), annual water demand could be as high as 2.9 BILLION LITRES. Given the increasingly frequent periods of drought and pressure on water resources, residents are rightly asking how such demand could ever be considered sustainable... What is also concerning is that whilst Xlinks has told the press that the proposals being circulated are out of date, the documents released under FOI show these same designs were submitted to the council as recently as April 2026. This scheme is being described as one of the largest AI data centre developments and battery storage facilities anywhere in the world. I simply do not believe that the North Devon countryside should be sacrificed for an industrial development of this magnitude. I will continue to challenge these plans and support the community right to have its voice heard. If, like me, you believe this proposal should not proceed, I encourage you to support the campaign and sign the Parliamentary petition to get it debated in Westminster:

[://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/776949](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/776949)

Bluetongue Outbreak: The Bluetongue outbreak has been devastating for many livestock farmers across Devon and beyond, myself included. Whilst the disease poses no risk to human health or food safety, the impact on farming families, animal welfare and rural businesses has been profound. Bluetongue: latest situation - [GOV.UK](https://gov.uk) There are many lessons to be learned from this outbreak, and I believe some very difficult questions need to be asked. Most concerning, here in Devon where the outbreak started, the virus was present and confirmed and yet farmers were left in the dark and were not alerted by Defra. That is quite simply inept and represents a failure by the very government body whose responsibility it is to protect animal health, safeguard welfare and provide confidence to the farming community. The availability of vaccine has also been a major issue. Many farmers who wanted to urgently protect their livestock found they were unable to access the vaccine due to the high demand and lack of vaccine in the country. At the same time, test results are taking weeks to come back, creating uncertainty and making it incredibly difficult to track exactly how quickly and where the virus is spreading. What has perhaps caused the greatest frustration is the lack of meaningful support. Farmers have faced substantial veterinary, medicine and vaccination bills, animal losses and carcass disposal costs. Behind the financial impact lies an enormous emotional burden. Watching your animals suffer,

nursing them and seeing more and more animals with new symptoms day after day is extremely tough. Dealing with uncertainty and carrying the weight of additional financial pressures has taken a significant toll on the mental wellbeing of many farming families. Despite this, there has been no support from Government to help those affected at all. I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to the Farming Community Network (FCN), whose volunteers continue to do an incredible job supporting farming families through what has been an exceptionally difficult period. Farming Community Network - Farming Community Network I would also like to thank the wider local community, veterinary professionals and neighbours who have been so supportive. Looking ahead, I am now calling on our local MPs and the Government to work with industry, farmers, scientists and animal health experts to develop a funded, coordinated national Bluetongue strategy to ensure that this never happens again. Bluetongue BTV-3: Call for a National Plan - Farming Solutions Ltd At present, the main message we hear from DEFRA is they are ‘monitoring the situation’. That’s not good enough. Our farmers feed the nation, care for our countryside and underpin our rural economy. They deserve better than delayed communication, inadequate preparedness and a Government that appears content merely to observe events as they unfold. Suspension of Birth Services at **North Devon District Hospital**: The suspension of births at North Devon District Hospital should never have been allowed to happen. Earlier this month, the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust was heavily scrutinised by Devon County Council’s Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee, where serious concerns were raised about how the situation had been allowed to develop. The Leader of Devon County Council described the closure as a “catastrophic failure of senior management”, reflecting the frustration, anger and anxiety felt by many residents across North Devon and Torridge. Throughout the scrutiny process, we highlighted the very real risks associated with expecting mothers having to make lengthy journeys whilst in labour- up to two hours in some cases. What makes this situation even more disappointing is that local people were repeatedly assured that the merger of services between Barnstaple and Exeter would make health services more resilient. It certainly doesn’t feel like it right now. I would like to acknowledge the considerable efforts of Ian Roome MP, who has been working tirelessly alongside families, healthcare professionals and local representatives to ensure that pressure continues to be applied to restore services as quickly as possible. The Trust has now indicated that it is hoping to reopen birthing services in Barnstaple by the end of September, and we sincerely hope that timeline can be achieved. However, restoring the service is only part of the challenge. There must also be a full and transparent review of how this situation arose and what safeguards are needed to prevent it from happening again. ‘This can never happen again’ – MP demands maternity answers This issue goes beyond maternity services alone. It raises wider questions about the resilience and fragility of healthcare provision across North Devon District Hospital. If a core service such as maternity can be lost so suddenly, residents are right to ask what pressures may exist elsewhere within the hospital and wider NHS system. Rural communities deserve the same access to safe, high-quality healthcare as those living in cities and larger towns. Just because we live in a rural part of Devon does not mean we should be expected to accept reduced access to essential health services.

Local Government Reorganisation, Significant Changes Ahead for Devon: One of the biggest changes affecting local services over the coming years is the Government decision to reorganise local government across Devon. From April 2028, the current two-tier system of local government will come to an end. This means that Devon County Council and the District councils will be replaced by new unitary authorities, with a single council responsible for delivering all local government services in its area. To help residents understand these changes, the eleven Devon councils have worked together to launch a new website called “Future Devon”, which provides the latest information on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), explains why the changes are happening and outlines what residents can expect over the coming years. Local Government Reorganisation in Devon - Future Devon Whilst the structure of local government is changing, services will continue to be delivered throughout the transition period. There is a significant amount of work taking place behind the scenes to ensure a smooth handover and minimise disruption for residents. This is the most significant reform of local government in Devon for decades, and I will continue to keep you informed as plans develop and further details emerge. Here is most recent info from our cabinet member for LGR Cllr Paul Arnott: Devon County Council will consider proceeding with a Judicial Review (JR) of LGR in Devon at its Cabinet meeting on 9 th Sept 2026. It has already submitted its draft arguments to the government, which were meant to be answered two weeks ago, delayed by MHCLG till 4 th September. The JR can only argue for flaws in the processes during the government’s conduct of this matter. On the 9 th , DCC Cabinet will decide if its own arguments about the process are worth pursuing in the light of government’s proposed counter arguments, It is

anticipated that all districts bar Exeter would write in support of the JR if submitted formally. Meanwhile, an immense pan-Devon collaborative process to prepare for the proposed new unitaries in May 2027 and Vesting Day in April 2028 is being led by a Senior Responsible Officer appointed by government, Donna Manson the CE of DCC. Each CE of the district councils has a leadership role working to her on an identified workstream. It is estimated that LGR is creating at least 30% more work for council officers at the moment, who are also having to maintain business as usual, with very little extra government funding. At DCC a Scrutiny Committee meets regularly to discuss and scrutinise these processes as they unfold. The response letters from all Devon Councils to the proposed warding arrangements for the new unitaries were completed on time. They were given three weeks and four days to submit to MHCLG's warding proposals, a process which would usually take 18 months. This flows from the government's decision to give the Boundaries Commission no formal role at this stage, meaning that a number of glaring errors may not be corrected for five years. Discussions with the government on this are ongoing. A letter has been sent co-signed by the leaders of Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Councils to the government indicating a readiness to have a Devon Strategic Mayoral Authority for the 1.25 million people in Devon. It is understood that Cornwall may be offered a bespoke non-mayoral agreement. An indicative response from government is likely within a few weeks

5. Approve Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on the 2nd July 2026. Minutes were sent to all Councillors prior to the meeting. All Councillors agreed the Minutes are an accurate record of the meeting. Cllr Bond signed the Minutes.

6. Urgent matters raised by the Chairperson which are not included in the agenda. None.

7. Clerk's Report. Declaration of Interest Form. Asset Checking. Grit Bin and Grit bin checking. Data Centre and BESS Torrington.

Declaration of Interest Forms. All Councillors have completed the forms.

Asset Checking. All the assets have been checked and no issues.

Grit Bin and Grit Bin checking. I have reported the Grit Bin at Filleighmoor Gate as it seems to have been hit and moved sideways onto the road. I will also do the annual grit bin check this month ready for Winter.

Data Centre and BESS site Torrington. This was talked about at my Summer Clerks event. As well as the new Unitary Council. The main message is if signing a petition make sure it is the Government one which will be seen by the Government. Cllr Cottle- Hunkin is sharing it on Facebook. When the public consultation opens people put their thoughts and views on to the consultation.

I will be attending the DALC local conference at Exeter Racecourse on the 7th October as in the afternoon there is a section on local government reorganisation. With Donna Mason Chief Executive of DCC and Stephen Walford Chief Executive of Mid Devon District Council .

8. Finance

8.1) Bank Account Balance and update on accounts.

On the 5th August 2026 the bank account balance was £15,270.47

Outstanding Cheques - £167 Shebbear Youth Club,

Cheques on this Agenda total to £732.40

The account after this evening holds £241.22 of P3 Money. Cheque written for £567+vat for repairing steps and hand rail. Glede to Chalhanger footpath.

Buckland Filleigh does not have a separate reserves account. The recommended amount to have in reserves for a Parish Council is 6- 12 months of Parish Precept. 12 months would be £3,377. To use a round figure we will set aside £3,000.

This leaves a useable balance of £11,129.85

8.2) ICO annual fee £52 All Councillors agreed. Cheque written and signed.

8.3) Invoices to be paid received since the Agenda was published. £567+vat for repairing steps and hand rail. Glede to Chalhanger footpath. Carey Valley Woodland and Estate Management. Councillor agreed, Cheque written and signed.

9. Little Bears Pre School grant. Email from Little Bears Pre School Manager. We are trying to update our role play section. My husband and son are doing a mountain climb to also raise money towards this. We are

looking at building a new stage outside with curtains, for the children to perform and play out their role play with a little more creation behind it. If we could request for a similar amount to last year (£222) to help towards this, that would be great, we do also need a picnic bench, so if we were successful we could maybe buy this. The bench would help the children eat outside in the hotter weather, our building is not made for hot weather and we have no air conditioning, so all summer we were unable to use our indoor building with temperatures reaching too high making it unsafe to use. We used a picnic blanket to have lunch on and maybe the picnic table would be a better choice to use the money if we are successful. Parish Councillors discussed and agreed they would like to grant £600 to the Pre School to buy a recycled plastic picnic bench, not wood as wood will not last on the Pre School site under the trees and will need annual maintenance. Clerk to check with the Pre School that they are happy with this offer and a cheque will be signed at the November meeting. (The Pre School are very happy with this offer)

Councillors would like information from Holsworthy Rural Community Transport as they would like to consider granting funds to the Charity. After Cllr Nethacott had informed the Council of the work the Charity does.

10. Planning.

10.1) 1/0551/2026/FUL Installation of Package Treatment Plan The Stables, Buckland Filleigh, Beaworthy. The Parish Council commented No Objection.

10.2) Planning Decisions. 1/0392/2026/FUL Replacement of existing dwelling and use of adjoining land for Biodiversity Netgain, Elmstock Bungalow, Buckland Filleigh, Beaworthy, Devon. Planning granted.

The above was read out.

11. Footpaths and Roads

11.1) Footpath update. P3 funds. All footpath repairs are up to date. The Parish Council has £241.22 of P3 funds in the account.

11.2) Drainage update. Galmington and Glebe roads. No update on these issues at this time. The clerk is still waiting for an update.

11.3) Bridge. Still needs work completed to it. Clerk to report it again as it is no longer on the system.

11.4) Filleighmoor Gate road. The road has been patched, and the worst of the potholes filled still more work needed on this road. There is a road closure in place for 5th - 11th November for laying duct. We will see how bad the road is after this work has been completed.

11.5) Road Warden Scheme. Cllr Bond has decided he does not want to be a Road Warden and the Parish Council have decided not to look for someone as they do not want to join the scheme.

Cllr Bond is not happy with the way South West Water and Highways are working together. SSW closes a road to do the required work but then it is closed for days and days waiting for Highways to tarmac it. Surely the Tarmac work should happen the day after SSW have finished to get the road open again.

12. AI Policy. The Clerk sent all Councillors the AI Policy prior to the meeting. All Councillors agreed to adopt the policy. The Clerk will put the policy on the website.

13. Correspondence email to Councillors prior to the meeting.

The government announces four new unitary councils for Devon.

14. Matters for inclusion in the next meeting.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 5th November 2026 at 7.30pm. (Meeting date to be discussed) Half Year Accounts. Pre School Cheque. Meeting date discussed due to the turning of the Devil Stone and bonfire night. Next meeting will be Wednesday 4th November 2026

Meeting Closed. 8.24pm

Selina Woollacott, Buckland Filleigh Parish Clerk.
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