

THORVERTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of Thorverton Parish Council held at the Memorial Hall, Silver St, Thorverton on Tuesday 9th January 2024 at 7pm.

PRESENT

Cllr Andrew Foster (Chairman)
Cllr Andy Price (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Stuart Crang
Cllr John Hodge
Cllr Colin Marshall
Cllr Graham Sims
Cllr Bryanna Uglow
Cllr Shirley Nightingale

ABSENT

Cllr Claire Heaven-Roberts

IN ATTENDANCE: 2 members of the public, C/Cllr Margaret Squires
Jim Roberts (Clerk and RFO)

1. Public Open Session

A member of the public criticised the Council complaining that a Freedom of Information request submitted by someone he represented in August (and chased-up in December) was still to be answered. He considered Council is in breach of the FoI Act and the next step is to take the breach to the Information Commissioner's Office.

He also said a complaint about conduct had been submitted on the 10th December to which there has been no response, and that the minutes of meetings do not include this correspondence. The next step would be to go back to the Monitoring Officer at MDDC. He complained that the Parish Council 'continues to adopt [an] adversarial & non-compliant approach'. This, he said, may need to be referred to MDDC and the Local Government Ombudsman.

He offered that his client would be willing to meet to resolve this matter with the Chairman and 2 other Councillors (one of each side's choosing).

A second speaker asked about the plans for the Affordable Housing project in the village. Cllr Uglow explained that a consultant was being asked for expert advice on setting up a Community Land Trust in Thorverton, how partnerships with future organisations will work and the pros & cons of the various methods/structures open to the working group. More residents had joined the working group to help with the crucial decisions that need to be made with the Community on board and a website has been commissioned and constructed.

The funding for the expenses of the housing project was questioned. The Chairman explained that all costs so far have been met with a grant from MDDC.

He also advised, when questioned, that the item on the agenda doesn't refer to a planning application but rather a potential site plan.

This speaker also asked why there had been no progress with the new cemetery. The Chairman explained that the Council shared his frustration as the purchase had been agreed but was being conveyed by solicitors who were instructed over a year ago. The clerk regularly chases our solicitor to no avail thus far.

[Two members of the public left at 7:24pm]

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

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3. Apologies

Cllr Heaven-Roberts sent apologies as she is unwell.

4 Confirmation of Minutes

Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of Tuesday 12th December 2023 as a true record and the Chairman duly signed them.

5 External Reports

5.1 Devon County Council

C/Cllr Squires apologised for not making more meetings but access had been difficult. She reported that budgets for 2024-25 are being prepared, but some good news is the new money coming from central Government for new roads and C/Cllr Squires is being as fair as possible with the repairs she puts forward for consideration.

DCC needs new foster carers for the 900 children in its care and some are with agencies who are more expensive. Please let your residents know about this and anyone interested would be welcome to come forward.

The Chairman advised that Thorverton now has a Road Warden and training is being organised. C/Cllr Squires reminded the Council that the Risk Assessments need to be completed for all work and the laid-down procedures followed..

5.2 Mid Devon District Council

D/Cllr Roberts could not attend but submitted his report prior to the meeting as follows:

Firstly, can I take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy New Year and I look forward to working with you in 2024 in achieving your objectives and supporting moving the village forward.

My apologies for not being able to attend the meeting in person on this occasion but I forward a brief report to update you on the District Councils activities since we last met taking into account the holiday period since we last met.

3 Rivers Development

A working group of councillors from the Scrutiny Committee submitted its lessons learnt report to the Cabinet and the committee, it will now go on to the next full council meeting for debate and adoption.

MDDC Budget

The council have agreed the 2024/2025 budget and as part of the discussions, officers reported the current financial position and confirmed that a total of £1.685M of operational savings have been identified and implemented leaving a further £165K to find by the end of the current financial year. It was also confirmed that the savings have not impacted on current front line services. Councillors congratulated the team on their achievement to date and their commitment in delivering on their responsibilities despite the huge financial pressures affecting all local government organisations at this time.

Housing Options Plan

As part of an annual review, MDDC's housing plans were revived and subjected to an independent audit with the report coming before councillors at our last meeting. The report presented an encouraging picture with most of the agreed objectives being achieved and the remaining objectives on plan to deliver by the end of the financial year.

MDDC Councillors Fees

Councillors at the last meeting voted to hold their fees at the current level for another 12 months when they will be reviewed again. Council employees have accepted a recommended pay award increase of 6.7% to end of 2024/2025 financial year.

Rhys Roberts

5.3 Saturday Market

No Saturday Market since the last meeting.

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6 Projects

6.1 Affordable Housing

The Chairman reported that a meeting is imminent with the leader of the Beer CLT project for advice. TAHG has expanded to include many more people in the village, a few of whom are keen to get very involved. The website has been completed but can't go live until important decisions have been made.

7 Recreation Ground

7.1 Financial Report for December

Nil spend.

The clerk will make contact with the new company re mower service.

The Rec Trust annual meeting needs to be organised, it has not been held since Sept 2020. The next meeting will be in May as an explicitly separate meeting.

The gales have blown some dead wood down and loosened limbs on trees. The clerk will pursue the Tree Survey.

7.2 Play Equipment

Council was disappointed to note that the Valencia funding has fallen through, especially given the efforts the working party put into the bid. New possibilities for funding are being identified.

Council noted the receipt of a grant from the Police and the clerk will write a letter of thanks to the Constabulary for the grant.

C/Cllr Squires offered to help with a contribution from her Locality Budget should any funds be forthcoming from DCC's budget-setting process for 2024-25.

8 Grounds Maintenance

Handyman work for the month:

- Pollarding trees when weather permits
- Pavement between Court Barton and the other houses in Silver St. The clerk will email the Neighbourhood Highways Officer (and copy C/Cllr Squires) as the pavement that is gradually being lost is part of the Highway.

9 Planning & Consultations

9.1 23/01899/CAT Thorverton Pre-School Tulip tree crown reduction

Council **RESOLVED** to make no comment on this application.

[C/Cllr Squires left the meeting at 8:02pm]

9.2 Peninsula Transport Regional Strategy Consultation - 5th Feb

Council noted the consultation to which individuals will respond as they see fit.

9.3 MDDC Review of Rural Services Consultation –1st March.

Council noted the consultation to which individuals will respond as they see fit.

10 Correspondence

10.1 Mid-Devon Mobility Request

The Grant Giving Working Group reviewed this request and advised that a donation of £200 should be made. Council **RESOLVED** to donate £200 to this organisation.

10.2 Devon Community Resilience Forum

Conference on March 22nd 2024.

Cllr Hodge will attend the conference should his diary permit.

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11 2024/25 Budget

11.1 Council reviewed the budget line-by-line considering how the various obligations and projects could be financially achieved at the least cost.

Council **RESOLVED** to reduce the build up of reserves for Elections (£500) and EV Charging Points (£1000) to nil and increase the annual amount reserved for Play Area Equipment from £1,000 to £2,500.

Cllr Hodge abstained from the vote on this resolution.

Council recognised that not enough was being set aside for the Play Area equipment in the long term, that the clerk's CiLCA training would be valuable, but incur additional expenditure next year and that all suppliers would inevitably be raising their charges due to inflation of their costs. Council considered that an increase in the precept was inevitable, but this would be kept to £7.09 per year (58p per month) for Band D households. This equates to a 17% rise on the 2023-24 annual charge for each household.

Council was reluctant to increase the precept but it follows a reduction to the annual charge three years ago and only small rises since. Council was conscious of the requirement, like all local authorities, to set a viable budget. See appendix.

11.2 Council **RESOLVED** to set the precept for 2024-25 at £20,259.

12 Finance

12.1 Bank balance

Not available as statements are not being received. The clerk will pursue the bank with vigour as the statements are needed for budgeting and audit.

12.2 Payments

Council **RESOLVED** to make the following payments:

12.2.1	Grounds Maintenance	December inv BF20230299	£	264.50
12.2.2	Newlands Training Ltd	Pesticide training for contractor	£	312.00
12.2.3	MDDC Play Area Inspection	Invoice 20036968	£	100.80
12.2.4	GX Accountancy	Payroll services, (inv 5295)	£	54.00
12.2.5	Middlemarch Community Led Housing CIC	Inv 0055	£	300.00
12.2.6	HMRC	Clerk PAYE for qtr to Dec 2023	£	309.00
12.2.7	J P Roberts	Clerk pay for Dec	£	425.69
	Reimbursements	Printer ink & USB stick	£	34.00
			£	459.69

13 Business at the Chairman's Discretion

13.1 Council discussed tonight's Open Forum (item 1) and there will be an agenda item at the next meeting for the issues that are Parish Council matters.

14 Next Meeting

Tuesday 13th February 2024

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9:38pm .

Signed Date

Cllr Andrew Foster, Chairman

Appendix – Agreed Budget for 2024-25

Thorverton Parish Council Budget 2024-25

Item	2023-24		2024-25		Notes
	Budget	Full Year Fcast	Budget		
Payments					
Clerks salary	£ 6,540	£ 6,800	£ 7,500		
Administration	£ 2,310	£ 1,150	£ 1,500		Room hire, stationery, website etc.
Prsh Mntnce - cntrctr	£ 3,350	£ 2,500	£ 3,000		Dead Trees
Prsh Mntnce - matrls	£ 1,000	£ 1,700	£ 2,000		Gardening, watercourses, open spaces
Recreation Ground	£ 250	£ 850	£ 1,250		Trees, seats, inspections, repairs/garden
Allotments	£ 200	£ 250	£ 250		Maintenance
Grant Giving	£ 1,000	£ 1,250	£ 1,250		
Insurance	£ 600	£ 746	£ 1,000		
Annual Subs	£ 350	£ 520	£ 500		ICO, SLCC, DALC
Legal fees	£ -	£ -	£ 500		
Training	£ 250	£ 150	£ 750		CILCA
Garage rental	£ 600	£ 480	£ -		
New Cemetery	£ -	£ -	£ -		
Archaeological Dig	£ -	£ -	£ -		
Elections	£ -	£ 500	£ -		
New tool store	£ -	£ -			
New Play Equipment	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	£ 2,500		
Charging Points	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	£ -		
General Reserves	£ 1,000	£ -	£ -		
Defib donation					
Total	£ 19,450	£ 18,896	£ 22,000		
Income					
Allotment rent	£ 290	£ 260	£ 280		
Garage rent	£ 700	£ 700	£ 700		
Wayleave	£ 41	£ 41	£ 41		
Bank interest	£ 5	£ 60	£ 50		
Sale of mower/trailer	£ 500	£ 200	£ -		
CIL	£ -		£ -		
Grant Funding credits	£ -		£ -		
Any other income	£ -	£ 1,732	£ -		
VAT reclaim	£ 850	£ 850	£ 400		
Precept	£ 17,426	£ 17,763			
Total	£ 19,812	£ 21,606	£ 1,471		
Net Expenditure			£ 20,529		
Reserves					
New Cemetery Funding			£ 27,422		
Defibrillator Funding			£ -		
Night Landing Site Funding			£ 1,068		
Covid Funding			£ -		
Play Equipment Funding			£ 7,000		
Tool Store Funding			£ -		
Elections			£ 2,000		
Allotment Deposits			£ 515		
Arch. Dig Interp Board			£ 1,500		
Charging Points			£ 2,000		
Ringfenced reserves			£ 41,505		

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