

## THORVERTON PARISH COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of the Meeting of Thorverton Parish Council held at the Memorial Hall, Silver St, Thorverton on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025 at 7pm.

### PRESENT

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

### ABSENT

None

### IN ATTENDANCE:

10 members of the public  
C/Cllr Margaret Squires, D/Cllr Rhys Roberts,  
Jim Roberts (Clerk and RFO)

### 1 Declarations of Interest

The Chairman is a member of the Thorverton Community Land Trust Board on which Cllr Uglow is the Parish Council's nominated Board member. The clerk is also a member of TCLT Board.

Cllr Hodge declared he was a member of the TCLT.

Cllr Uglow is also the nominated Councillor on the Thorverton Memorial Hall committee.

### 2 Apologies

None.

### 3 Minutes

Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

Cllrs Sims abstained and Cllr Shelton voted against this resolution saying that a delicate situation could be inflamed. The Chairman duly signed the minutes.

Cllr Sims advised that his phone had been hacked and it was currently being repaired.

The suspicious activity was based on a WhatsApp message received regarding the Parish Council's bank account. Council discussed the details and would address the problem once the bank could be contacted and in the light of advice Cllr Sims received from the company repairing his phone.

### 4 Public Open Session

The first speaker explained plans for the planting of wildflowers in the verge near the Glebe. The area planted would be the same as last year. The speaker hoped to extend the range of plants to allow for a longer period of flowering using varieties that flower across the spring, summer & autumn. The Council asked what may be needed to help and the speaker advised that more seeds would need to be bought.

The second speaker offered to help with Thorverton-in-Bloom. She wanted to make Thorverton more colourful but didn't think a competition would be effective as it would be unfair to those with fewer resources. She suggested the Council sponsors troughs and planters around the village for extra colour and to encourage others to get involved. If any form of competition was involved an external judge should be used.

*[One member of the public left at 7:18pm]*

The third speaker objected to the length of time the minutes had taken to be produced for January. Council explained that an unprecedented number of changes to the minutes had been proposed by Cllrs present which had taken time to sort out. The minutes were now available and approved.

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Chair  
Initials

The fourth speaker asked if the Council was prepared to get involved in trying to stop the large number of rooks taking over the village. He was confident that there are two more discrete rookeries developing which could lead to a large number of rooks causing a public nuisance.

*[One member of the public left at 7:23pm – 8]*

The fifth speaker spoke of mixed message about the new cemetery and the ringfenced funds in the Parish Council's reserves. The speaker asserted that the planning permission application should be got on with and the order placed for the fencing. The planning permission was granted ages ago and please could the Parish Council get on with things.

Council stated that there shouldn't be any confusion as the reserves for the cemetery were £27,422 as published in the accounts on the website and in minutes of various meetings. This amount had recently be reduced by almost £10,000 as payment for the land, searches and conveyancing had been made to the solicitors. Cllr Hodge had been attempting to clarify the situation with planning permission with MDDC since December without success. The fourth speaker urged the Council to go to MDDC to sort it out. It is the Council's understanding that this would not be effective.

## **5 Reports To receive reports from:**

### **5.1 County Cllr Squires**

C/Cllr Squires reported:

The Local Government Review (LGR) was continuing and DCC felt that it made sense to postpone the elections due this May but the Government had not allowed this.

The Government settlement for finance for County Councils is reducing, a £10m grant for rural services has been diverted to deprived areas in urban settings. An example of the high expense for rural areas was the £49m that school transport costs DCC. A balanced budget will be set on 20<sup>th</sup> February.

Council advised that it was promoting use of the Report-a-Problem webpage with Cllrs giving examples of individual successes. Council asked C/Cllr Squires to pass on its thanks to the DCC team responsible for footpaths maintenance.

*[C/Cllr Squires left at 7:36 to attend another Parish Council meeting]*

### **5.2 District Cllr Roberts**

D/Cllr Roberts reported as follows:

The LGR proposals need to be ready by the end of March and finalised for sign-off at the end of November. Exeter is determined to be a unitary Council by expanding into MDDC, EDDC & NDDC. D/Cllr Roberts is concerned that such an authority would concentrate focus and budgets on the urban centres. The DCC elections will go ahead and the County Council will cease to exist in 2027.

Representatives of Parishes and Community Engagement have been invited to meet a MDDC Cabinet member to bring out all issues.

The MDDC 2025-26 budget is going to full Council next week with a 3% Council Tax increase, more for businesses, The cost of all activities (leisure centres etc) will be going up, some by 10%. The budget will be balanced despite the reduction in funds from government.

Cllr Sims asked about the recent traffic accident near the cricket pitch and D/Cllr Roberts understands that the Police are taking no action.

A member of the public asked about the call for sites. D/Cllr Roberts replied that all areas of the country were affected and the call for sites allows landowners to put forward sites for new building. No guarantee of future purchase or development is made.

### **5.3 Saturday Market**

#### **5.3.1 Mud in School Lane at the end of The Glebe footpath**

This ongoing problem will be referred to C/Cllr Squires as the Neighbourhood Highways Officer had a suggestion to help with the drainage that he had forwarded to the relevant department. Council fears a spring has come

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Initials

through.

**5.3.2. Please could the road warden look at/repair two potholes towards the top end of Jericho street.**

The volunteer Roadwarden has been advised of these potholes. Repairs can only be made when the surface is bone dry.

**5.3.3. WI - parishioner very concerned that the WI is under threat of closure? Can the PC help/aware.**

Council will need to know more about this matter. A speaker said that Thorverton WI would be suspended for 3 years from March. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

**5.3.4. Request for a spring village tidy up as they would like to help.**

Council asked Cllr Marshall to organise the TU days for Spring and autumn

**5.3.5. Allotments - no rent renewal notice has been received they understood that this would be received in December. ? Any vacant plots.**

Renewals have now been sent and rents are being received. There are no vacant lots at present and 4 names on the waiting list.

**5.3.6. Brown bin licence - the Leigh garden team have not received the second bin licence?**

Urgently needed – clerk trying to sort as a 3<sup>rd</sup> bill had been received in the space of 12 months for the current single bin.

**5.3.7. Has the council received any notification who owns the hedge by the old flour mill yet.**

The clerk will report this problem with the fence between the mill and the river on the DCC Report-a-Problem website.

## **6 Correspondence**

**6.1 Various emails from correspondent one (details in the additional information)**

In reply to the email Council asked the clerk to make the following points:

The Cllr vacancy has been advertised.

The cemetery land is in the process of being purchased and the money has been sent.

This item is only on the agenda if a decision is needed or money is requested.

Winter Warmth is continuing and the spend is only at £200 out of the £600

The Emergency Plan has been finalised and will be uploaded to the website and will be sent to MDDC. Cllr Shelton will send it on to the relevant person.

Christmas Trees – Council notes that a reply has been sent by the clerk that they consider covers this issue.

The TCLT has sent funds to the Parish Council to cover payments made and committed before its inception and the £77.94 paid after TCLT was formed.

The Council is reviewing 3 policies later at this meeting.

Allotment requests have been issued. *[One member of the public left at 7:18pm – 7]*  
*[The Chairman suspended standing orders to ask a member of the public about the new cemetery.]*

The cemetery group member confirmed that the plan is only to use it for a cemetery  
*[The Chairman reinstated standing orders]*

Council is happy to share the correspondence from the BBC and it will be put on the website. Council confirmed that the clerk's comments represent its position.

**6.2 Various emails from correspondent two (details in the additional information)**

In reply to the email Council asked the clerk to make the following points:

**1<sup>st</sup> email**

The planning permission for the new cemetery expired in mid-2024. The Planning Permission has lapsed because the development hadn't started.

This was because the Council didn't own, and still don't, own the land.

Extensions to Planning Permission are not permitted

The amount raised by increasing the Precept was approximately £30,000 beginning 2009 and ending 2015

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Chair  
Initials

The cemetery is on the agenda when decisions are needed or spending needs authorising.

The Cemetery Working Group have taken positive steps and the land is being purchased Council will not provide copies due to the confidential nature and risks of scams and other foul play. Anyone is welcome to exercise their rights to inspect all documents as explained each year when the Annual Governance and Accountability Returns are completed. There is also a lot of detail on the Council's website.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> email**

There is no certificate for General Power of Competence (GPOC) but the council doesn't currently have the GPOC.

The Clerk does not hold a financial qualification that relates to Parish Council finances but has attended courses covering finance matters.

The expenditure related to Affordable Housing was not a loan, it was an enabling grant that was at risk and has now been repaid. It was expenditure that was thought to benefit more than one person in the Parish (as opposed to everybody in the Parish) using the powers under s137 of the 1972 Local Government Act.

A List of Cllrs will be sent, there are currently no co-opted cllrs.

The Council would not provide bank statements to anyone but anyone can exercise their rights to inspect any document under the AGAR procedures. All the amounts and payees are already recorded in the agenda and minutes of the meetings, all of which are still available on the Parish Council's website.

Council has always been entirely confident that any expenditure on Aff Hsg would be met from a grant from MDDC as was regularly explained in meetings and in updates for Focus. Over 90% of the funds was committed by PC before TCLT existed.

The expenditure has now been paid by TCLT now that it has received the grant.

The TCLT is now standalone and does not require additional funds from the Parish Council.

Conflicts of interests exist on any Parish Council and have to be managed. The Chairman has been heavily involved in the TCLT and met many third parties and holding both roles helps both organisations.

D/Cllr Roberts added that as part of the approval process for grants MDDC looked at the processes for communication between the PC and, via the TCLT, with the community.

MDDC saw the co-operation as a powerful tool to help award the grants.

*[One member of the public left at 8:45pm – 6]*

#### **Third email**

Some delay in reply was due to the clerk being on holiday.

There has been no contact with the Council from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

The TPC minutes are now displayed and are kept on the website for several years.

Please direct all Thorverton Community Land Trust (TCLT) matters including questions 1-7 to the TCLT itself.

As far as the MDDC grants are concerned Council was copied in to the clerk's reply to you and fully agrees with it.

#### **Copy of email to MDDC Monitoring Officer**

Council takes significant exception to this email and utterly refutes any and all allegations of misappropriation of funds.

#### **Fourth email**

Council declined to respond to this email.

#### **Fifth email**

Council refers to the previous answers given that fully explain the nature of the enabling grant funding to the Council's own working group and the repayment of Affordable Housing expenditure by the TCLT. Council is not at all embarrassed to have done what it has done. These at-risk grants have been repaid as was fully expected.

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### **6.3 Various emails from correspondent three (details in the additional information)**

In reply to the email Council asked the clerk to make the following points:

Confirm that there hasn't been a loan as explained to the previous correspondent ie it was expenditure to create a CLT. The expectation that this would be reimbursed from MDDC via a grant as has now happened.

MDDC have been fully aware throughout the process.

Council only ever got to the stage of investigating the powers that might be available to so that the Parish Council would be able to help the Aff Hsg project and then decided not to proceed with this option.

Council believes that the clerk has covered the points made about interests and expenditure adequately in his earlier reply.

Chairman being in both organisations (TPC & TCLT) helps both organisations.

No ringfenced reserves have been used to assist our Affordable Housing working group.

Council apologises for not declaring interests and the processes have been improved.

Council has many powers to use and will consider adding these details to the expenditure in future.

#### **Third email**

Amendments to the minutes as advised have been made and the minutes have now been agreed.

### **6.4 Correspondent Three Email re PC involvement with TCLT (details in the additional information)**

In reply to the email Council asked the clerk to make the following points:

No additional hours were asked for or granted to the clerk.

Council recognises that the absence of Declarations was an error, now processes have been improved.

Council considers the joint arrangements are beneficial to the PC as well as TCLT. The conflict of interest is being embraced.

The Cllrs do not consider that they have a vested interest in the project. Council believes it is still trying to do that. Confirm that the £27,422 was in place although nearly £10,000 has recently been spent to but the land and pay for conveyancing.

Council did not have any criticisms to the clerk's reply.

*[Four members of the public left at 9:26pm]*

### **6.5 Email from correspondent four re Waste Bin at Leigh Gardens & 20mph limit**

Leigh gardens bin

Council debated if there was a total of how many bins a community is permitted based on populations or number of properties etc.

Council believes the bin outside Leigh Gardens was moved to the Millenium Green.

*[Chairman suspended Standing Orders]*

D/Cllr Roberts had requested a second bin but was told the one bin was not 100% used making a second unnecessary.

*[Chairman reinstated Standing Orders]*

Cllr Marshall will review the number of bins.

Speed limit

A 20mph speed limit was sought from DCC in 2022 when bids were invited. 100 applications were made but funds could only support 6 and Thorverton was unsuccessful. Further a PCSO advised it would not be legally enforced.

Speed limits in the village will be useful on the subject

## **7 Projects**

### **7.1 Thorverton in Bloom**

Cllr Shelton will help with the plans for Thorverton in Bloom. There is an opportunity to buy plants from the weekly vegetable supplier who visits the village. Hopefully an estimate of costs can be provided. Council discussed the areas of the parish that might be interested.

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Chair  
Initials

## **7.2 Wildflower verges**

Dealt with in para 4 above.

*[One member of the public left at 9:41pm]*

## **7.3 New Cemetery incl 4 proposed resolutions & quote for drawings etc**

*[Chairman suspended Standing Orders]*

A member of the Cemetery Working Group advised that the Working Group would like four resolutions made as listed in the additional information.

### **7.3.1 Planning Application**

Council **RESOLVED** to re-submit the original planning application exactly as it originally was submitted without waiting until completion of the sale.

### **7.3.2 Fencing Contractor**

Council **RESOLVED** to contact the chosen fencing contractor and place the order as soon as the sale is completed.

### **7.3.3 Architect**

Council **RESOLVED** to accept the quotation from the architect.

Clerk reminded the working group that the architect needed to allow space for the archaeological dig interpretation board that was a condition of the National Lottery grant.

### **7.3.4 Cemetery Name**

Council will consider the name as agreement could not be reached.

*[Chairman reinstated Standing Orders]*

*[One member of the public left at 9:52pm]*

## **7.4 Exeter Inn Asset of Community Value**

Council **NOTED** the owner's intention to dispose of the Exeter Inn and understand that the Community Pub Group will be acting on the notice.

*[D/Cllr Roberts left the meeting at 9:56pm]*

## **7.5 Affordable Housing**

There is a very important Open Public Meeting being held on Weds 26<sup>th</sup> Feb and an exhibition from 2pm-5pm on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February. Chair also restated that the funds spent on Affordable Housing have now been reimbursed.

## **7.6 Allotments**

As discussed above new tenants have been allocated the vacant plots and there are 4 names on the waiting list.

## **7.7 School Field Report**

Council **NOTED** the report and thanked the school for keeping the field in good condition.

## **8 Recreation Ground**

### **8.1 Financial Report**

No expenditure in January.

The wet pour repair is needed as discussed at a previous meeting and the steps to the play tunnel may need repair.

### **8.2 Repairs to the Rocker**

Completed and payment is listed below.

### **8.3 Signage**

Council considered that the notice contains useful information and will be needed for each gate. Cllr Price will draft up a notice.

### **8.4 Damage from footballs**

The residents are discussing this with TFC and Council hopes to hear the result of these discussions soon.

### **8.5 Testing of lights for Devon Air Ambulance**

Councillor Price is willing to test the lights as requested by DAA.

## **9 Grounds Maintenance**

### **9.1 Contractor**

Work for the month:

Cut the hedge and clear the drainage etc in School Lane near the footpath to

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the Glebe.  
Dinneford St Leat to be cleaned.  
Grass cutting if required and weather permitting.

## **10 Planning & Consultations**

### **Planning Decision**

**10.1** Council **NOTED** the following decision:

**NO OBJECTION 24/01768/CAT** Reduction to copper beech tree

### **Consultations**

**10.2.1 MDDC Call for Sites** Deadline 14<sup>th</sup> March 2025

Council **NOTED** this as discussed by D/Cllr Roberts.

### **10.2.2 Cadbury Ward Parishes**

Suggestions for 5<sup>th</sup> March meeting agenda and attendees

Chair will attend and asked for Affordable Housing on the agenda. Another topic for discussion is community policing.

### **10.2.3 Community Risk Register**

Council had nothing to add to the document issued by MDDC

## **11 Review of Council Policies**

These items will be postponed to the next meeting.

### **11.1 Handling of Communications Policy**

### **11.2 Standing Orders**

### **11.3 Training Policy**

## **12 Finance**

### **12.1 Bank balance**

Council **NOTED** the following balance (as at 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 2025) £53,654.82 (£37,696.09 + £15,958.73). The clerk advised that the statements had been received for both accounts for the first time in over a year and he was very grateful to the ex-Clerk for her help in this matter.

### **12.2.2 Auditor**

Council **RESOLVED** to appoint the internal auditor.

### **12.3 Payments:**

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

**12.3.1 Ben Fitch** No payment this month as no invoice received

**12.3.2 PKF Littlejohn** AGAR Review Services £ 96.00

**12.3.3 Thorverton WI** Winter warmth expenditure (January) £ 35.80

**12.3.4 Wicksteed** Rocker repair £ 2,040.38

**12.3.5 J P Roberts** - clerk pay (January) £ 456.89

### **12.4 Possible Banking Issue**

Two signatories have received WhatsApp messages regarding the mandate change on the account. This will be reported to NatWest to clarify if the messages are genuine and consider reporting it to Action Line if not.

## **13 Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2025 and agenda items will need to be submitted by Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

## **14 Business at the Chairman's Discretion**

The Chairman plans to reintroduce this item at the next meeting.

The Chairman advised that he was elected Chair 4 years ago when he said he would only Chair for 2 years. Having changed that decision at the election he stayed on. After a significant birthday he had decided to not put himself forward at the Annual Parish Meeting as Chairman thereby rounding off 4

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years as Chairman. He will stay on as a Cllr and support his replacement. Council thanked him for advising them now and thanked him for his efforts.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 10:39pm.

Signed ..... Date .....  
Cllr Andrew Foster, Chairman