

Northam Town Council – Minutes of the Full Council meeting held 19th March 2025 at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber, Windmill Lane, Northam.

Present: Cllrs Bach, Edwards, Hames, Himan, Hodson, Horrocks, Leather, Lo-Vel, Newman-McKie, Singh, Tait (Mayor) and Whittaker.

In attendance: Guy Langton (Town Clerk & RFO); Cllr D McGeough (County Councillor); Rev Harris; Mr A Kittow (CEO Libraries Unlimited) and one member of the public.

The Council heard from Mr Kittow, the CEO of Libraries Unlimited, the charity that ran the library service in Devon and Torbay, with two branches in the Northam parish – Fore Street, Northam and The Quay, Appledore. Library Unlimited's greatest concerns regarding its operational future were regarding funding, explaining that both currently and with regard to Local Government reorganisation, Devon Country Council and Torbay Unitary Authority and the successor Unitary Authorities would be facing hard financial choices. Libraries Unlimited remained hopeful of extending its contract to provide the service, which was for 10 years to 2026.

The majority of Library users were under 10 and over 50, though those in the years between did access library services at school/college (for teenagers) and issues of digital/e-books. The service also operated a literacy scheme with schools. Self-service issue points were well used in Northam Library, as were the PC sessions and the community made use of the free WiFi offered outside the library's opening times.

Libraries Unlimited had been maintaining its operations by accessing its reserves. Mr Kittow ended by asking the Town Council if it could consider what it may do if one or both of the branches in its Parish were to close.

Cllr Singh entered the meeting at this point (6:40pm)

Cllr Hames asked how the Service was addressing the challenges of getting children to read.

Mr Kittow described the Service's work with Primary and Secondary schools, saying that Devon had comparatively good access rates for children at its libraries.

Cllr Newman-McKie asked how the Service could continue to engage with older children?

Mr Kittow described that despite teenagers not accessing libraries as they did when they were children, some do volunteer and the Service is developing more interactive, online platforms and programmes, such as 'BookTok'.

Cllr Whittaker asked how much the branches in Northam and Appledore cost to run annually.

Mr Kittow would provide the figures to the Town Clerk after the meeting but thought the Northam Branch would cost approximately £60,000 per year.

Cllr Singh asked why there was no branch in Westward Ho!.

Mr Kittow explained that given the financial constraints, Libraries Unlimited were more likely to need to close branches, or significantly reduce the opening hours, rather than increase the number of branches.

Cllr Whittaker suggested that working with other community groups, such as the Churches, could assist with space, if there are problems in the future.

Mr Kittow agreed, the Service was already working with Friends Groups and similar bodies.

The meeting was interrupted at this point by a fire drill (7:00 to 7:05pm), after which Rev Harris and Mr Kittow left the meeting.

2504/728 Apologies

Cllrs Bell and Roscoe, and tendered their apologies, the reasons for which were approved by the Council.

- 2504/729 To agree the agenda as published.**
It was **resolved** to bring the Council's consideration of the Northam Neighbourhood Plan forward to follow Public Participation and with that amendment, agree the agenda as published.
Proposed Cllr Hames, Seconded Cllr Hodson (all in favour)
- 2504/730 To receive any dispensations and disclosable pecuniary or other interests.**
Members were reminded that all interests must be declared prior to the item being discussed.
- 2504/731 Mayor's Announcements**
The Mayor made no announcements.
- 2504/732 To confirm as a correct record and sign the minutes of the Full Town Council Meeting held on 19th March 2025**
It was **resolved** to approve the minutes, with a typographical error amended. They would be signed by the Mayor at a later date.
Proposed: Cllr Bach, Seconded: Cllr Hodson (majority in favour, 2 abstained – not present at meeting)
- 2504/733 To receive and adopt the minutes and resolutions of Committees and Sub-Committees**
- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| • Finance | 12th March 2025 |
| • Planning and Development | 13th March 2025 |
| • Parks and Recreation | 29th January 2025 |
| • Environment and Maintenance | 6th February 2025 |
- The minutes were received and adopted.
- 2504/734 Public Participation**
The member of the public addressed the Council, voicing her support for the Northam Neighbourhood Plan, with which she was involved until moving out of the Parish. She commended the Plan to the Council and considered it ready to be submitted for external examination.
- 2504/735 To consider submitting the Northam Neighbourhood Plan to Torridge District Council for examination**
It was **resolved** to submit the Northam Neighbourhood Plan, its appendices and supporting documents to the District Council for external examination.
Proposed: Cllr Hames, Seconded: Cllr Bach (all in favour)
Action point: Submit the Northam Neighbourhood Plan, its appendices and supporting documents to the District Council.
- 2504/736 To receive a written report (if any) from Devon & Cornwall Constabulary**
No report had been received from the Constabulary. The Council noted its concern that with 44 offences recorded in the Northam/Appledore/Orchard Hill beat code and 39 in the Westward Ho! beat code from 1st January to 28th February 2025, members of the Force were not attending its meetings to provide a report and receive the Council's feedback and concerns.
- 2504/737 To receive a written report (if any) from Devon County Councillor**
Cllr McGeough thanked the Council for its engagement with him over the past four years, as the County Council election was scheduled for 1st May 2025. He also submitted a written report, which was taken as read.

2504/738 To receive reports (if any) from Torridge District Members

Cllrs Whittaker, Lo-Vel and Bach had submitted written reports, which were taken as read.

Cllr McGeough and Mr Eastman (Honorary Alderman) left the meeting at this point (7.25pm)

2504/739 To receive an update regarding Local Government Reorganisation

The Town Clerk copied the information available on the Devon Association of Local Council's 'Knowledge Bank' regarding Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution, noting that site was being updated as matters emerge and meetings/briefings occur. A precis is copied below.

Following the launch of the Devolution White Paper on 16th December 2024, DALC has been working hard to engage with our members on this topic, and to provide support and updates where we can.

We will endeavour to keep our members up to date on what we know about devolution as matters in Devon progress. Local government reorganisation (LGR) is being required by government in order to achieve the kind of Devolution deal they want to see. Updates will be circulated in our e-bulletin, and on our website.

At the moment, we have no information about what reorganisation might look like in Devon. The Leaders of Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council are working together to explore the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

The Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (CCA) – the governance needed for devolved decision-making powers and funding to flow from Whitehall to local decision-makers in Devon and Torbay – is now official.

2504/740 To consider the action point update

The action points were noted as follows:

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| 10 th April 2024 Request for a free car parking day at Churchfields for the 200 th Anniversary of the RNLI Appledore station. (minute 2404/907) | The District Council Officer responded saying: <i>On balance I cannot approve free parking on the day requested. The potential detrimental impacts are far too great, and I do not believe the suggested benefits for the event outweigh them.</i> <i>Torridge District Council remains supportive of the RNLI and the celebration of their connection to Appledore, and I am more than happy to see if there are other that we can assist in making the event a success.</i> COMPLETE |
| 20 th November 2024 Re-engage with Surfers Against Sewage Plastic Free Campaigns (minutes 2407/192 and 2411/416) | The Town Clerk, Community Engagement Officer, Cllrs Bach, Hames and Lo-Vel all attended the meetings arranged for the 27 th November 2024. The Northam Burrows Rangers both apologised in advance. The meeting was positive, with both the Council and SAS agreeing to share information so the Plastic Free Communities could restart. Prior to the meeting, the Town Clerk spoke to Mr Cross, who had been very supportive in the past and had arranged to speak again and plan for 2025 in the new year. ONGOING |
| 20 th November 2024 (minute 2411/413) | Drop kerbs. Quotations received and relevant Devon County Council officer contacted. ONGOING |
| 20 th November 2024 (minute 2411/418) | Town Clerk to prepare a report into the costs of the three options for future work at the pavilion. This work has been overtaken by urgent work required at Northam Hall. ONGOING |
| 18 th December 2024 (minute 2412/494) | Prepare a lease for the rental of Blue Light Hall and pass the matter to the Finance committee. ONGOING |
| 18 th December 2024 (minute 2412/498) | Request an exemption from parking charges at Windmill Lane on weekdays for Northam TC members. Request made, response awaited. ONGOING |

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| 18 th December 2024 (minute 2412/499) | The member of the public planning a podcast project had not contacted the Town Clerk. COMPLETE. |
| 22 nd January 2025 (minute 2501/551) | An email was drafted asking the Head of Legal Services at TDC for their opinion of the 1978 minute indicating the land was owned by Northam Town Council and responded saying that a transfer of ownership form, signed by both parties, would be required to identify ownership. ONGOING |
| 19 th February 2025 (minute 2502/613) | <p>i. Replace the whole set of maintenance equipment with electric models and purchase sufficient batteries and chargers, and QUOTATION RECEIVED AND BEING REVIEWED</p> <p>ii. That the committee resolves to purchase a petrol powered ‘two-wheel tractor’ and three attachments – a weed ripper, a brush and collector set and a rotary mower, and ORDER PLACED</p> <p>iii. That the committee resolve to replace the DFSK with a new ORCA, equipped with a cage tipper body and a towbar. ORDER PLACED</p> <p>iv. That in all cases, the Council seek to reduce the cost by effective negotiation and offering the Council’s current equipment and truck in part-exchange. ONGOING</p> <p>v. That the spending (approximately £59,000) be allocated to the cost centres, for replacing a Truck and larger Council machinery (combined total of £43,250 in 2025-26), with any shortfall being identified from the Council’s end of year carry-forward including unspent funds from the climate emergency budget or earmarked reserves. ONGOING</p> |
| 19 th February 2025 (Minute 2502/615) | Submit an application for the land at Knapp House to be an asset of community value. Application submitted. Response from the District Council expected by 28 th March 2025. COMPLETE |

Cllr Hodson reported that the seasonal youth employment event planned with TTVS, to be held at Bideford College, would not now be going ahead. Feedback from employers approached by TTVS was that the event would be better timed in late winter or early spring.

Action point: Town Clerk to make contact with TTVS in the autumn to start planning an event for 2026.

2504/741

Clerk’s report – Finance Committee April 2025

At 31st March 2025 (or according to the last available statement balance), the Council’s balances were:

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Nationwide (Business 95-day saver) | £94,065.15 | interest rate is 3.9% |
| Cambridge & Counties Bank (31-day) | £94,710.99 | interest rate is 3.49% |
| Cambridge Building Society | £5,027.04 | interest rate is 2.2% |
| Petty Cash | £13.45 | |
| Coop Bank (current account) | £133,593.43 | no interest |
| Hinkley & Rugby Building Society | £5000.00 | interest rate is 2.2% |
| Total cash in hand | £332,410.06 | |

Note: at 14.04.2025 the Council’s main current account had an available balance of £80,425.05, monthly spend is in the region of £45,000. The Council receives its precept in two instalments from the collecting authority, on the last Mondays in April and September annually.

Payments: The Council made 119 payments in March 2025, totalling £46,016.08 (exVAT). A full list of these was presented to the Finance committee. There were 33 payments of £100 or more (exVAT). These include:

- £23,838.70 in payroll and associated costs
- £11,845.00 for the complete replacement of the Maintenance Equipment with electrically powered variants.
- £969.30 monthly charge for the Council's general insurance
- £950.00 to value the Council buildings
- £800.83 for play area inspection training (IR)
- £796.31 for 2 May Poles (covered by a grant from the County Councillor)
- £621.167 for gas to heat Northam Hall
- £455.00 to clean the CP Toilet
- £450.00 to remove asbestos from Northam Hall
- £428.49 monthly room rental at the Town Hall
- £400.00 to clean Northam Hall in December
- £356.60 in copier fees and charges
- £310.90 to service alarms and CCTV
- £284.70 monthly IT contract
- £250.00 to remove a dangerous tree at Wren Close
- £237.00 1st Aid Training (Maintenance Team)
- £185.02 late invoice for work to festive lighting at Westward Ho!
- £1,000.02 for franking for Northam Burrows Charity (6 direct debits of £166.67)
- £151.00 Asbestos Awareness training
- £150.00 Repair to display cabinet (Men's Shed)
- £140.00 for SLCC training for IR
- £140.00 for SLCC training for TT
- £114.00 water bill (Northam Hall)
- £113.04 Truck and mower fuel
- £110.26 for plasterboard at Northam Hall
- £102.01 for high security padlocks for containers

Receipts: In March 2025, the Council received 79 payments, totalling £9,673.84, including £590.78 in bank interest.

Tennis courts: The gross volume of sales 1st January 2024 to 31st March 2025 is £5,855. After fees, the Council has received £5,452.32. The LTA expect the Council to earmark approximately £3,600 per year for 15 years (index linked) to meet the costs of court maintenance and refurbishment. The Council is approximately £1,850 over the target, in this extended year (1st January 2024 to 31st March 25). In due course, a payment of £425.28 will be made to the Council's Cambridge Building Society account, where this earmark is held.

The Council has sold 89 annual membership passes, a small number of which have already been renewed. The revenue from the sale of membership was £3,115 (before fees) 1st January 2024 to 31st March 2025.

Petty Cash: A screen shot of the petty cash cashbook is presented overleaf showing the items on which the Council has spent petty cash. The aim of the Town Clerk is to maintain a level of £100 or thereabouts in the account, £90 has been withdrawn on the 1st April 2025 to maintain that level.

| Petty Cash | | 2024-25 | Name: Northam TC Petty Cash | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|---------------|----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------------|--------|
| Details | | | | | Income | | | Expenditure | | | | | | Balance at start of FY | |
| Date | Transaction | Description | Ref | Scribe No | Petty Cash Withdrawal | Carry forward | Total in | VAT | Events | Milk etc | Maintenance | Office expenses | Total out | £ | 136.47 |
| 5.3.25 | 126 | Cash top up | PCR24-25.10 | | 50.00 | | 50.00 | | | | | | 0.00 | 100.15 | |
| 4.3.25 | 127 | Milk | PC24-25.113 | | | | 0.00 | | | 2.78 | | | 2.78 | 97.37 | |
| 6.3.25 | 128 | Milk | PC24-25.114 | | | | 0.00 | | | 0.95 | | | 0.95 | 96.42 | |
| 11.3.25 | 129 | Milk | PC24-25.115 | | | | 0.00 | | | 1.35 | | | 1.35 | 95.07 | |
| 12.3.25 | 130 | Sugar | PC24-25.116 | | | | 0.00 | | | 1.19 | | | 1.19 | 93.88 | |
| 18.3.25 | 131 | Milk | PC24-25.117 | | | | 0.00 | | | 1.39 | | | 1.39 | 92.49 | |
| 19.3.25 | 132 | Milk, sugar, coffee | PC24-25.118 | | | | 0.00 | | | 4.74 | | | 4.74 | 87.75 | |
| 20.3.25 | 133 | Orange and Apple Juice (Grants / AEM) | PC24-25.119 | | | | 0.00 | | | 36.90 | | | 36.90 | 50.85 | |
| 24.3.25 | 134 | Cylinder & Mortice | PC24-25.120 | | | | 0.00 | 5.83 | | 29.17 | | | 35.00 | 15.85 | |
| 24.3.25 | 135 | Milk | PC24-25.121 | | | | 0.00 | | | 1.20 | | | 1.20 | 14.65 | |
| 31.3.25 | 136 | Milk | PC24-25.122 | | | | 0.00 | | | 1.20 | | | 1.20 | 13.45 | |
| Number of transactions | 136 | TOTALS | | | 710.00 | | 710.00 | 34.39 | 310.97 | 249.04 | 106.07 | 132.55 | 833.02 | -123.02 | |
| budgetted figures (12 month) | | | | | - | | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | | |
| variance (to date) | | | | | 710.00 | | 710.00 | - | -310.97 | -249.04 | - | 106.07 | - 132.55 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Variance | | £ 136.47 | 13.45 | | |

Action points:

Review the gas usage at Northam Hall, compared with previous year(s).

Publicise the Annual Tennis Passes, both renewals and for new users.

2504/742

To note the results of the elections in the Northam Orchard Hill and Appledore Wards of the Town Council and consider any appointments to the Planning & Development committee.

Northam Orchard Hill ward:

Jonathan (Jon) Horrocks had been elected to the Council, representing Northam Orchard Hill ward. He had been invited to attend this as his first meeting (there being insufficient time for a summons) and having signed the acceptance of office, had taken his seat.

It was resolved to appoint Cllr Horrocks to the Planning & Development committee, which had vacant seats and met the following evening.

Proposed: Cllr Bach, Seconded: Cllr Tait (all in favour)

Appledore ward:

Jeremy Bell had been elected to the Council, representing Appledore ward. He had been invited to attend this as his first meeting (there being insufficient time for a summons) but was unable to attend. He had signed the acceptance of office.

It was noted that Kerry O'Rourke has been elected to the Appledore ward of Torridge District Council.

Action point: invite Cllr O'Rourke to this Council's Full Council meetings (and other meetings and events as appropriate).

2504/743 To consider options for the Council's committee structure and calendar

It was **resolved** to retain full Council as a monthly meeting.

Proposed: Cllr Hames, Seconded: Cllr Himan (majority in favour)

It was **resolved** to combine the Finance and Human Resources committees.

Proposed: Cllr Bach, Seconded: Cllr Leather (all in favour)

Cllr Leather **proposed** that all meetings other Full Council and Planning & Development rotate between morning and evening. There was no seconder.

Cllr Hodson **proposed** that the start time of the meetings be brought forward to 5:30pm. Cllr Singh seconded this proposal. There were 4 votes in favour, 7 votes against and 1 abstention. The motion was therefore defeated. The Council would therefore hold all Council and Committee meetings in the evenings, with a 6:30pm start, with the exception of the Northam Burrows Charity Management committee, which would set its own meeting times.

It was **resolved** to hold the 2026 Annual Electors Meeting and the Grants Evening together, in May 2026, at Northam Hall.

Proposed: Cllr Hames, Seconded: Cllr Edwards (all in favour)

It was **resolved** to hold Mayor inauguration on 12th June 2025 in the Council Chamber but to hold it at Northam Hall in future years.

Proposed: Cllr Lo-Vel, Seconded: Cllr Whittaker (majority in favour)

Action points:

Circulate and publish the meeting calendar.

Book Northam Hall as appropriate.

2504/744 To consider investigating the costs and other matters associated with installing CCTV cameras in the following locations: Appledore (Churchfields Car Park), Westward Ho! (park and tennis courts), and Westward Ho! (Nelson Road and Golf Links Road).

It was **resolved** undertaking a detailed review of the financial and operational viability and efficacy of proceeding with CCTV systems at the three locations.

Proposed: Cllr Hodson, Seconded: Cllr Bach (majority in favour)

Action point: schedule the review.

It was **resolved** to extend the meeting by 30 minutes.

Proposed: Cllr Edwards. Seconded: Cllr Bach (all in favour)

2504/745 To receive an update on the nomination of Knapp House grounds as an Asset of Community Value

The Council **noted** that Torridge District Council had rejected the Council's application to define the lands at Knapp House as an Asset of Community Value. The reason for this may be found on that Council's website at the ACV Register at

www.torridge.gov.uk/acv. Briefly, the reason for refusal was because the land was ancillary to Knapp House (Holiday Camp, Caravan Site were considered residential) - the previous use of a site persists until the owner / legal occupant undertakes works to change the use of the site. The regulations stated that land ancillary to a Residence cannot be listed as an Asset of Community Value and of course the previous use of a site persists until the owner / legal occupant undertakes works to change the use of the site. There was no right of appeal against or request to review of a decision to approve or reject an application for a property to be defined as an Asset of Community Value other than from the landowner.

Cllr Hames registered his disappointment with the outcome.

2504/746 To consider renewing the Council's retainer with its appointed legal advisors (Tozers LLP, Exeter), due January 2025

It was **resolved** to continue the retainer at Tozers LLP at a cost of £2,000 (exVAT)/year.

Proposed: Cllr Edwards, Seconded: Cllr Whittaker (all in favour)

Action point: Inform Tozers LLP and meet the cost of the invoice.

2504/747 To consider the Council's Insurance arrangements for 2025-26

It was noted that:

The Council's general insurance was renewed in May 2024 for a three-year term. The revised fee is £13,133.14 for 28th May 2025 to 27th May 2026, an increase from £11,415.55 in 2024-25 This includes an increase in the value of the Council's tools and equipment, reflecting the units purchased this spring and the recently received building valuations.

The Council's motor insurance is due for renewal on the 13th May 2025. Insurance providers in the Local Council sector provide services on a regional basis. The Town Clerk has sought alternative quotes and has been advised that the fleet insurer, ERS, has more favourable terms with the Council's current broker. The renewal premium was £2,335.60.

The Council's engineering maintenance and sudden, unexpected damage insurance is due for renewal on the 28th May 2025. The Clerk notes that insurance providers in the Local Council sector provide services on a regional basis, though further quotations are being sought. The quote from the Council's current insurer is £520.07, an increase from £487.29.

It was **resolved** to approve payment of the insurance premiums as listed.

Proposed: Cllr Leather, Seconded: Cllr Hames (all in favour)

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:50pm.

Signed.....Dated.....