

Minutes of the Council Meeting held 08/01/26, 19:00 at Witheridge Parish Hall**PRESENT:**

Cllr Harvey

Chairman

Cllr Fox

Cllr Northam

Cllr Richardson

Cllr Smith

In Attendance:2 Members of the public
Parish Clerk

"Minutes of proceedings of a council and of its committees must be kept. They are intended to be formal records of official acts and decisions, not reports, still less verbatim reports of speeches..." Local Council Administration.

1. To receive the following Reports (strictly maximum 15 minutes – long reports should be submitted in advance to allow circulation to councillors prior to the meeting– submitted reports will be appended to meeting minutes):-

1.1. County and District.

1.2. Police Advocate update.

<https://devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/councillor-advocate-scheme>

<https://www.police.uk/pu/your-area/devon-and-cornwall-police/south-molton/>

1.3. Parish Groups with Council Representatives.

None.

2. Public Session (maximum 3 mins per subject overall max. 15 minutes).

(Please note in accordance with Council Standing Order 3(h) a question shall not give rise to a debate or require an immediate response).

Following representations made:-

- Hedge cuttings left on the pavement following cutting of Willow Rise NPOS hedge. Reported to District Cllr Jones by Cllr Northam.
- Recycling left by NDC. Reported to District Cllr Jones by Cllr Northam.
- Parish Litter Pick required.

Council Session – No public participation

3. To Approve Apologies for Absence.

RESOLVED: Apologies approved from Cllrs Cunningham and Dorow.

Apologies noted from District Cllr Jones.

[Chairman reported to the clerk Cllr Bibby left a voicemail apology received after the meeting].

4. Minutes.

4.1. 04/12/25. To sign if approved, minutes of the Council.

RESOLVED: Cllr Fox proposed, Cllr Northam seconded and all were in favour approval.

5. To consider Code of Conduct Matters:-

5.1. Written councillor dispensation requests arising.

None.

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5.2. Declarations of Interests.

(Code of Conduct available on website under Finance & Policy*).

Agenda	Councillor	Reason	Dispensation
7.6	Cllr Northam	Chairman of Witheridge in Bloom	n/a

5.3. To consider any application(s) Co-Option to fill councillor vacancy.

None.

6. To consider the following Planning & Licensing Matters.

6.1. Planning applications.

See report appended.

6.2. Planning applications received following agenda publication.

See report appended.

6.3. Enforcement Issues Arising.

None.

7. To consider the following Finance & Policy matters:-

7.1. Finance update circulated to councillors' for review.

RESOLVED: Cllr Richardson proposed, Cllr Fox seconded and all were in favour to note 05/01/26 Report and Bank Reconciliation including online banking payments raised reviewed with no issues.

7.2. Sanction payment schedule appended & instruct signatories.

RESOLVED: Cllr Richardson proposed, Cllr Harvey seconded and all were in favour settlement accounts 7.2.1 through 7.2.14, **clerk to setup online payments, Chairman and Cllr Smith to authorise.**

7.3. Acquisition of NDC land adjacent to Adventure Playground (redundant allotment land).

See District Cllr report appended.

Cllrs reviewed the Land Registry Title No. DN413524 noting clarifications required in respect of referenced path/lane/parking area maintenance obligations.

Cllrs discussed additional matters that required consideration in the decision making process as to whether to proceed:-

- Land contamination report.
- Insurance.
- Management and Funding of the landscaping and ongoing maintenance costs.

7.4. Financial Year 2026/27 – Review NDC Band D calculations and Finalise Precept.

The Chairman reported the Band D costing represented just under a 4% increase.

RESOLVED: Cllr Smith proposed, Cllr Northam seconded and all were in favour no change to the agreed precept of £50000. **Clerk to action.**

The Chairman reported DALC newsletter dated 08/01/26 reported the government had published its Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27 to 2028/29. The settlement and consultation include core proposals from the previously published written ministerial policy statement that **parish and town councils should be exempt (this time over a whole three-year period) from referendum principles on excessive council tax increases.**

7.5. Note Charity Commission - Annual Return yr ending 250331.

Noted.

7.6. Further Grant/Donation requests.

RESOLVED: Cllr Northam proposed, Cllr Harvey seconded and all were in favour a donation of £50 to Citizens Advice. **Clerk to action.**

Cllr Northam left for the next item.

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RESOLVED: Cllr Fox proposed, Cllr Smith seconded and all were in favour a further grant of £100 to Witheridge In Bloom. **Clerk to action.**

Cllr Northam returned.

7.7. 2026 Grounds Maintenance Costings.

Cllrs considered completed schedule from current contractor.

RESOLVED: Cllr Richardson proposed, Cllr Northam seconded and all were in favour accepting the revised costings. **Clerk to action.**

8. To consider the following Property/Environment matters:-

8.1. Highways, Drainage & Public Rights of Ways Issues.

<https://devon.roadworks.org/> | <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>

Highways issues should be reported online and specific issues addressed to Cllr Hopley.

RESOLVED: Cllr Northam proposed, Cllr Smith seconded and all were in favour acceptance MDDC revised trade waste collection terms. **Clerk to action.**

8.2. DCC Annual Parish Paths Survey 2026.

Clerk to re-agenda.

8.3. Public Toilet Building.

8.3.1. Tenant proposed change in services provided update (Vice-Chairman).

Cllrs consider a written update provided by Cllr Cunningham.

RESOLVED: Cllr Richardson proposed, Cllr Smith seconded and all were in favour writing to tenant acknowledging communication updates with Cllr Cunningham and request tenant to arrange their sublease in accordance with the council's solicitors advise dated 01/09/25 and for it to be sent to the council's solicitors for review on behalf of the parish council. **Clerk to action.**

8.3.2. CCTV.

Noted.

RESOLVED: Cllr Northam proposed, Cllr Richardson seconded and all were in favour no further action as provision of CCTV on the public toilet building was not considered feasible.

8.3.3. Wallgate – Service Report.

Noted.

8.4. Playgrounds.

8.4.1. Parish Hall Playground.

8.4.1.1. Lease Update.

The Chairman reported the Parish Hall Committee's Designated Advisor report had had been produced as required by the Charity Commission.

8.4.1.2. Bennock Fencing railings update.

Cllrs considered the clerk's report 02/01/26 detailing issues with the latest installation works. It was agreed to await an update from the contractor on their progress before further response. **Clerk to action.**

8.4.2. Adventure Playground.

8.4.2.1. BMX Track Restorations Update.

See District Cllr report appended.

8.4.2.2. Skatepark Tender Update.

Clerk to re-agenda.

8.4.2.3. Skateramp Repairs Update.

None. **Clerk to re-agenda.**

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8.4.3. NPOS Transfer Update.

None. Clerk to re-agenda.

8.4.4. Note PI Co. 2026 Inspection Orders Acknowledgement.

Noted.

8.4.5. Wicksteed Annual Playgrounds Inspection Report.

Further investigation into the handle and foot rest fixings rotation was required along with any risk assessment associated with neighbouring overhead lines passing in proximity to the playgrounds. **Clerk to action.**

Inspector to be advised Adventure Playground signage had been relocated as per previous report. **Clerk to action.**

8.5. Medical Centre Defibrillator Installation update.

Clerk to follow-up insurer for responses to queries raised with them.

8.6. Parish Council Section 106 Working Group Update.

None.

8.7. 2025 Christmas celebrations review (Chairman).

Clerk to re-agenda.

9. Correspondence / Consultations Received for consideration:-

9.1. Resident representations concerning parish hall Kick Wall/ASB.

Chairman to pass to Parish Hall Committee.

9.2. SW Heritage Trust - donation thanks.

Noted.

9.3. Cumbria Clock Company – Service Charge Increase.

Noted.

10. Dates of Next meetings recommended:-

10.1. Parish Council - 05/02/26 – agenda deadline noon 23/01/26.

Noted.

10.2. Consider Rescheduling 2nd July Meeting to 9th July.

Approved. **Clerk to action.**

10.3. Agenda Items for consideration by the next meeting.

Meeting closed 21:00

WITHERIDGE PARISH COUNCIL

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Planning

Application No.	Description
81167	Single storey extension at 38 Willow Rise Witheridge Tiverton Devon EX16 8FD Grid Ref: 280654; 113839 RECOMMENDATIONS: No objections
81228	Notice of an application to modify a planning Obligation under regulation 3 of the T & C P (modification & discharge of planning obligations) Regulations 1992 in respect of planning permission 73742 at Land South of Broomhouse Park Witheridge Devon EX16 8FD Grid Ref: 280364; 113978 RECOMMENDATIONS: No comment

Payments

Item	Ref	Payee	Purpose	£
7.2.1.	OB	S Sandland	Toilet Management & Cleaning Contract - Dec	220.00
7.2.2.	OB	Wicksteed Leisure Ltd	Annual Playgrounds Inspection *307	369.36
7.2.3.	CC	Giffgaff	Council Mobile – Chairman *862	6.00
7.2.4.	CC	ICO	Data Protection Fee Renewal *45c	52.00
** Staff Salaries & Expenses - Dec **				
7.2.5.		Redacted under GDPR	Total:-	1321.08
7.2.6.				
7.2.7.				
7.2.8.				
7.2.9.				
To Ratify:-				
7.2.10.	CC	Microsoft	Office 365 Annual Fee *655	84.99
7.2.11.	CC	Source for Business	Public Toilet Building Water & Sewerage Charges *122	235.16
7.2.12.	CC	Giffgaff	Council Mobile – Chairman *319	6.00
7.2.13.	DD	EDF	Public Toilet Building Electricity Charges *018	127.31

Invoices Received after Agenda compilation - To Be Ratified

7.2.14.	OB	Hooper Services Ltd	Christmas Tree delivery/erection/disposal	900.00
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Signed:

Chairman. Dated:

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Agenda Item 1 – Reports

District & County Cllrs.

District Councillor Update – January 2026:-

Trade Waste Collections for Businesses

Despite my efforts to highlight the impact on local businesses, a decision has been made to end trade waste collections for businesses. I am continuing to explore what can be done to minimise the impact, so please do contact me if you are likely to be affected. I will be disputing changes to the trade waste collections, which will be very damaging for rural businesses.

Local Government Reform in Devon – Update

The Government is considering replacing Devon's current two-tier system with unitary councils, where one authority would provide all local services.

One proposal, put forward by most councils, including North Devon, would create three unitary authorities. The first would cover the west, south, and Torbay area, including West Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams, and Torbay. The second would cover the east, north, and mid-Devon area, including East Devon, Exeter City, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge. Plymouth City Council would remain a standalone unitary authority.

Another proposal suggests four unitary authorities, with expanded city councils for Plymouth, Exeter, and Torbay each forming separate authorities alongside a fourth authority covering the remaining rural and coastal districts.

Supporters say this could simplify decision-making and reduce duplication. I fear it could weaken local voice and identity, and the savings are not certain.

A decision is expected in mid-2026, with elections in May 2027 and the new councils starting in April 2028.

Current District Councillors would likely remain in post until then.

Affordable and Social Housing at Benson Grange

The final affordable and social rent homes at Benson Grange are now being released over the coming weeks. Allison Homes expect to complete work on the site by March, and possibly earlier.

I am pleased that the way homes were allocated was changed to prioritise people with a local connection. This has benefited many local families, and homes are still being offered to those with a local connection.

Shared ownership homes are now also available. These offer another way for local residents to afford a home and get onto the property ladder.

I am also very pleased that Allison Homes and L&G honoured their agreement with the community. Over £30,000 was provided for community projects in addition to the £400,678 of Section 106 funding, which has now been fully paid. We are already seeing the benefits of this investment in the community.

I have also asked that where possible paths can start to be opened up, he is looking at the options.

Old Allotment Land next to the Park at Willow Rise

I have been exploring whether the land next to the new park at Willow Rise could be rented or purchased from the District Council for community use. This appears to be possible, and I am currently reviewing the full details so the Parish Council can consider the options and decide how to move forward.

One suggested use has been a community orchard, but the Parish Council would welcome other ideas and suggestions from residents.

I have asked the council to prepare documentation for the land transfer for the potential Orchard. I have requested all details including covenants, access, utilities ect so that you are in a position to make an informed decision. They are working on this so hopefully we will receive this soon.

Section 106 Community Projects

Additional funding has been agreed for the Parish Hall. An extra £8,000 was used to improve drainage and guttering, completing the insulation and cladding work. This work is now complete and the hall is ready to serve the community for many years to come.

Other projects funded by the Section 106 community fund are currently being worked on. These include improvements to the sports field facilities, plans for a new state-of-the-art skatepark, and the refurbishment and enhancement of the pump track. The pump track project is being supported by Allison Homes and is expected to start soon. Further updates will be shared as these projects develop.

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Andy Cattermole has confirmed that they will undertake the work on the pump trail, even if it means returning to site. They are working on a quote for the full works, this will hopefully be with you soon.

Potholes and Blocked Drains

The wet and cold weather is causing serious damage to our roads. Please report potholes and blocked drains on the Devon County Council website.

If an issue is urgent or not being dealt with, please contact our County Councillor, Richard Hopley, at richard.hopley@devon.gov.uk.

Willow Rise Northern Public Open Space

He has also assured me that the hedge cutting on the amenity land is booked in and he chased this week.

Advocate Report**Cllr Smith reported:-**

1. Targeted activity against drugs is making a difference in Devon and Cornwall.

The fight against drugs is gaining momentum in Devon and Cornwall, and across the South West, through the persistent combined efforts of Police and Crime Commissioners and police forces in unity with vital partners. During another week of coordinated activity called Operation Scorpion to target illegal drugs and child criminal exploitation, more than 100 arrests were made across the South West.

Suspected drug dealers were apprehended, drugs and weapons were seized, along with cash, and vulnerable people, including children, were safeguarded.

Across Devon & Cornwall, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Avon & Somerset, and Wiltshire, the following was achieved:

- 112 people were arrested
- £67,329 cash was seized
- 52kg of cannabis was confiscated, along with 868 cannabis plants
- Three guns were recovered, plus five imitation firearms
- 19 other weapons seized, such as knives, hammers and Tasers
- 48 people were safeguarded, including five children

During the week of action, Devon & Cornwall Police achieved:

- 27 arrests
- 21 people safeguarded, including one child
- £17,465 cash seized
- 308 cannabis plants confiscated
- Two guns seized, plus one imitation firearm
- Six other weapons seized

2. Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Alison Hernandez has announced her decision to step away from party politics and will continue to serve as an Independent, without any political affiliations, for the rest of her term of office.