

Minutes of the meeting of **BRIDPORT TOWN COUNCIL** held at the Town Hall on Tuesday 24 September 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT Cllr Anne Rickard – Town Mayor (in the Chair)

Cllr	Nigel Amor	Ann Langridge
	Ian Bark	Patrick Mooney
	Jonathan Bourbon	Nigel Rawlings
	Sarah Carney	Dave Rickard
	Rob Casey	Bev Thornton
	Kelvin Clayton	Sarah Williams
	Andrew Holdridge	Steve Williams
	Julian Jones	David Worthington
	Anna Killick	

ALSO PRESENT 22 members of the public, 1 member of the press, Cllr Steve Robinson (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Dorset Council), Sarah Sewell (Dorset Council), Andrew Billany (Dorset Council), Adam Fitzgerald (Dorset Council), Chris Best (Care Dorset), Paul Fuszard (Finance and Office Manager) and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

PUBLIC FORUM

The Public Forum opened with a discussion about care provision in Bridport.

Cllr Steve Robinson, Sarah Sewell, Andrew Billany, Adam Fitzgerald, and Chris Best presented on behalf of Dorset Council and Care Dorset, providing a summary of the reasons for the closure of Sidney Gale House and plans for its replacement with a Rehabilitation and Recovery Centre, projected to be operational from January 2028. The presentation further set out plans for an Extra Care housing development at Flood Lane/Fisherman's Arms, up to the point of contract mobilisation in Autumn 2025. Updates were also provided on challenges faced in care provision, including transport, recruitment and retention, and interaction with hospitals.

Phil Lathey, a former Mayor of Bridport and town councillor, expressed his distress at the inaction and general lack of care provision for Bridport residents, in regard to not only Sidney Gale House, but day centres and the like in the area. He called on the Town Council to hold Dorset Council to account. Cllr Robinson apologised on behalf of Dorset Council and set out plans to address the concerns raised.

A member of the public, whose husband suffered with dementia and had been receiving excellent care from the Sidney Gale House staff, expressed deep disappointment at the closure of the facility and the way it had been handled. She set out the adverse effect on her husband of moving away from Bridport to a care facility elsewhere, and the difficulties that would, by extension, arise for family members who needed to drive to continue to visit. Cllr Robinson apologised and said it was humbling to hear of the experience. He explained that Sidney Gale House was unsafe. Chris Best apologised further for Care Dorset and acknowledged that not everything had been handled as it should.

Jim Tigg, a resident of Bridport, said the plans for Extra Care and other housing at the Fisherman's Arms site were unclear. Adam Fitzgerald and Andrew Billany advised that there would be housing beyond the Extra Care housing provision, including affordable housing, but that flexibility was needed in order to work with a developer.

Councillors and members of the public discussed the presentation as follows:

- A pressing need for respite care and dementia care provision in Bridport.
- Concerns that Dorset Council's original proposals for Flood Lane and Fisherman's Arms appeared to have proved unaffordable, leading to delays in care provision.
- A desire for further discussions about affordable housing provision, and a willingness from Dorset Council to schedule an informal meeting with town councillors.
- A need for key worker housing.
- The funding available for Extra Care housing, reported by Dorset Council attendees as being £18m for the scheme as a whole.
- A recognition by Dorset Council of a history of 'less than success' in care provision, and a willingness to redouble efforts.
- Deep concerns for the experience of the member of the public who had spoken earlier about the impact on her husband.
- The need to consider wider infrastructure provision when developing services in support of an increasing and more elderly population, with significant health needs.

The Mayor thanked all present for their input to the discussion.

The Open Public Forum followed. A member of the public spoke in support of a motion tabled with the agenda on housing need, and welcomed a cross-party consensus by the proposer and seconder. There was a housing emergency in Bridport affecting young people in particular, with many having to leave the area, and this in turn affected the sustainability of the community more generally. Social housing for rent was needed and the motion highlighted a need for action, and accorded with the Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment to the provision of affordable housing.

Local resident Jim Tigg reported on the work of a working group set up by Bridport Local Area Partnership to look at housing need. It was chaired by Paul Overall, and Mr Tigg was speaking on his behalf. Terms of reference had been agreed and the group's work would include consolidation of evidence and liaison with stakeholders. The work would complement that of others and the challenge was to resource it. On a personal note, Mr Tigg added his support for the motion on housing need.

Glenn Crawford, also a local resident, spoke about his support for a primary residence planning restriction on new homes. He reflected on evidence and local opinion, suggesting a significant detrimental local impact from holiday and second homes on the available housing stock. A previous attempt to include a policy in the Neighbourhood Plan had been deemed not to provide sufficient supporting evidence and had been deferred, pending a review of the Plan. This review was approaching and resources were needed to develop a policy acceptable to the plan

inspector. It would only affect new build houses and therefore would not diminish the tourism economy, but would increase housing supply from new homes. He urged the Town Council to pursue the idea.

The Town Clerk read a statement provided by a member of the public who was present, but did not wish to speak: There was a need for housing for single working people, who were paying high private rents, Council Tax, and energy bills on minimum rates of pay. Most had to pay child maintenance in addition. This group of people seemed to be left out and explained an increase in the number of homeless adults.

A member of the public spoke in favour of social housing provision, and urged a new outlook from a new council. Councils had been largely reactive to developers, although the Tanyard and Dibdin Close were examples of proactivity in housing, that should be considered when looking at social housing. The cost of housing benefit would reduce if more social housing was provided, with a consequent reduction in Council Tax costs for all; it was in everyone's interests to pursue this.

The Mayor thanked all present for their contributions.

26. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Bridget Bolwell and Dave Bolwell.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

28. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor (Chairman).

29. STANDING ORDER 4(k)(vi)

There were no questions pursuant to standing order 4(k)(vi).

30. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

(a) PLANNING COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 2 September 2024 were presented by the Committee Chairman, Councillor Ian Bark.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 2 September 2024 be received.

(b) PLANNING COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 23 September 2024 were presented by the Committee Chairman, Councillor Ian Bark.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 23 September 2024 be received and adopted.

(c) **FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 9 September 2024 were presented by the Committee Chairman, Councillor Paddy Mooney.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 2 September 2024 be received and adopted, and that the recommendations therein be approved, as set out below: -

(Minute 26) FINANCIAL ESTIMATES 2024/25 – 1ST REVISION

RESOLVED: that the 1st revision of the estimates for the year 2024/25 be approved.

(Minute 27) BUDGET PLANNING 2025/26 (the agenda stated 2024/25)

RESOLVED: that the membership of the Budget Working Group shall be

- (i) Cllrs Ian Bark, Andrew Holdridge, Ann Langridge, Paddy Mooney and Sarah Williams, and
- (ii) Cllr Anna Killick, as appointed at this Full Council meeting.

(d) **ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Social Wellbeing Committee held on 4 September 2024 were presented by the Committee Chairman, Councillor Kelvin Clayton.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Social Wellbeing Committee held on 4 September 2024 be received and adopted.

31. MOTION PROPOSED BY COUNCILLOR ANNA KILLICK

A motion was proposed by Cllr Anna Killick and seconded by Cllr Kelvin Clayton, as follows: -

The Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan's Housing Need Assessment 2019 identified the number and type of housing needed to meet the needs of local people. However, the prevailing national and local models of housing provision have consistently failed to meet these needs.

The Neighbourhood Plan showed Bridport to be demographically unbalanced. The CPRE has highlighted that Dorset's median age and proportion of over 65s is one of the highest in England, fuelled by inward migration. Meanwhile, there remains an acute shortage of social housing and private rentals and over 4000 on the Dorset Council Housing Needs Register.

Proposals for the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) show no signs of resolving the flaws that perpetuate the affordable housing crisis and, instead, further reduce the powers of local planning authorities to be proactive in bringing about developments of one and two bedroom dwellings for social rent that are so desperately needed by local residents.

Secure, warm and dry housing is a basic human need. If, as councillors, we fail to address this need we are seriously failing our local residents.

Therefore, Bridport Town Council commits to:

- helping to develop and support local Community Land Trusts to build social housing, such as is currently being achieved by the Dorchester Town Council-backed CLT, which has just secured planning permission for 15 two bed flats in Dorchester in partnership with housing associations.
- open a continuing dialogue with Magna and other local housing associations to help with the delivery of social housing and support of residents
- help to identify and propose potential sites for new, solely, social housing developments
- include in the Neighbourhood Plan a provision of primary residence requirement for new homes

And Bridport Town Council calls upon Dorset Council to:

- Lobby central government, and to work in partnership with other local planning authorities to campaign for, greater devolved planning powers that allow them to develop a Local Plan that meets the needs of local residents rather than facilitating the growth of profits for national development companies. These powers should allow the local planning authority to be proactive in determining the type, scale and location of any new development rather than being forced to react to plans put forward by developers.
- Commit to over half of the building of new homes over the next five years to be social or affordable housing for rent and shared ownership.
- Dedicate revenue received from doubling second home council tax to a specific social housing fund.
- Develop a policy that urgently brings about the building of social housing for rent, beginning with land owned by Dorset Council. These developments could either be directly developed by the council or delivered by using and adapting the successful methods currently being used by other local authorities, for instance by:
 - creating a formal working partnership with local housing associations (e.g. Magna).
 - creating a Dorset Council Development Corporation and/or exploring partnering with Somerset Council's existing Development Corporation to share resources and expertise.
 - investigating grant funding from Homes England, and new not-for-profit and public/private partnerships.

Cllr Killick spoke in support of the motion, setting out the adverse impact of the housing crisis and calling for a more positive approach by both Bridport Town Council and Dorset Council.

Cllr Clayton said it was good to hear support for the motion during the Public Forum and that it would be surprising if there was significant disagreement over housing need.

Members discussed the motion, including:

- The rationale for a prescriptive proportion of social or affordable housing as set out at bullet point 6 of the motion.
- Examples of council house building programmes elsewhere, including in Barking & Dagenham and Bristol.
- Some concerns about a lack of recognition of Town Council efforts to date, and the motion's major focus on social rented housing as the main solution.
- A need for an updated Housing Needs Assessment.
- A concern that actions proposed in the motion were unrealistic and 'sloganising'.
- Actions by Dorset Council to influence national policy, and to develop a new Local Plan and Housing Strategy.
- The potential for better use of land locally for housing provision.
- The importance of housing associations in delivering housing quickly.
- A concern that the motion did not go far enough, and that the council's five-year plan should be agreed prior to setting the motion as policy.
- Concerns that the issue of housing need was being politicised unnecessarily and that cross-party consensus was essential.
- A suggestion that the collaborative approach taken to the Climate Emergency Action would provide a good model for Town Council action.
- A desire for more proactive effort, rather than waiting for the new government to deliver, and for more success than had been achieved locally by community land trusts.
- Disappointment among some councillors that there had not been more discussion prior to the tabling of a motion, and that further collaborative work should be carried out to achieve a consensual wording.

The meeting paused at 9.11pm for a comfort break and resumed at 9.13pm. Further discussions followed regarding the detailed wording of the motion and two friendly amendments were considered and approved, as follows: -

RESOLVED: that

- (i) bullet point 6 be deleted; and
- (ii) at bullet point 4, the word "include" be replaced by the words "commit to consider including".

The substantive motion as amended was then put to a vote, and **fell**, with voting being five in favour, twelve against, and one abstention.

32. REPORTS

Dorset Police: None received

Dorset Council Members: Cllr Sarah Williams welcomed good work being carried out by the new administration.

Town Council Wards: For Central Ward, Cllr Sarah Williams reported on work by local businessman Roy Gregory to display posters in empty town centre premises advertising St Michael's Trading Estate.

33. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2023/2024

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3929, advising that the external auditor's reports for Bridport Town Council and the former Bothenhampton & Walditch Parish Council had been received and highlighted no matters of legal or regulatory concern. A similar report had already been received and approved by Finance & General Purposes Committee for the former Bradpole Parish Council, and no such report was expected for the former Allington Parish Council, as a certificate of exemption had been submitted.

RESOLVED: that the external auditor's report and certificate for 2023/24, for both the former Bothenhampton & Walditch Parish Council, and Bridport Town Council, be approved.

RESOLVED: that it be noted that no report is expected for the former Allington Parish Council.

34. DORSET COUNCIL SURVEY

Councillors considered ENCL: 3929, a draft response to a survey published by Dorset Council in respect of its proposed corporate plan.

RESOLVED: that the response to the survey be approved as tabled.

Cllr Sarah Williams requested that her abstention be noted for the minutes.

35. REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

At the request of committees, members considered nominations for representatives to outside bodies. Following discussion it was

RESOLVED: that the following Town Council appointments be made:

- (i) Allington Hill & Cooper's Wood & Field Community Group: Cllr Jonathan Bourbon, with Cllr Bev Thornton as a reserve.
- (ii) Magna Housing: Cllr Paddy Mooney, with Cllr Sarah Carney as a reserve, unless Magna Housing is willing to have two representatives in which case both shall be main representatives.
- (iii) Precision Football Arena: Cllr Rob Casey.
- (iv) Pymore Village Management Company: Cllr Bev Thornton.
- (v) National Highways: Cllr Andy Holdridge.

36. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

RESOLVED: that the subject of the open public forum at the next full council meeting shall be Social Housing, including representation from Dorset Council.

37. COMMUNICATIONS

Consideration was given to the Town Mayor's engagements, ENCL: 3931.

The Leader of the Council reported that all Service Level Agreement discussions had been completed. The supported groups were valued for their work, but the council had also faced some challenging decisions.

The meeting closed at 9:45pm.

The next meeting of Bridport Town Council will be held on 26 November 2024