

Minutes of the meeting of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE of Bridport Town Council held at Mountfield, Bridport on Monday 10 March 2025 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: Cllr: Paddy Mooney

Cllrs: Nigel Amor Ann Langridge
 Rob Casey Nigel Rawlings
 Anna Killick Anne Rickard

Also in attendance: Cllrs Ian Bark (from 7:27pm) and Jonathan Bourbon, Paul Fuszard (Finance & Office Manager), Claire Peters-Way (Property Manager), Daryl Chambers (Town Surveyor) and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

PUBLIC FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

72. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ian Bark (for lateness), Andrew Holdridge and Sarah Williams.

73. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Rob Casey declared an interest in Minute 80, as a Badger Row property neighbour.

Cllr Anna Killick declared an interest in Minute 79 (application A10) as a close friend of the applicant.

74. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 13 January 2025 be confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

75. BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Sub Committee held on 4 March 2025 be received and adopted and the following recommendations be approved:

Minute 32 **Internal Audit Report**
RESOLVED: that recruitment of an internal auditor be considered at agenda item 10 (minute 81 of these minutes).

Minute 33 **Investment Review 2024/25 and Strategy 2025/26**
RESOLVED: that the Review for 2024/25 and Strategy for 2025/26 be approved.

Minute 34 **Asset Register**
RESOLVED: that delegated authority be given to the Town Clerk and Finance & Office Manager to make any final amendments, before being signed by the Chairman of Finance & General Purposes and the Town Clerk.

Minute 36 **Standing Orders and Financial Regulations**

RESOLVED: that a Working Group comprising five councillors be agreed at Full Council on 25 March 2025, to also include consideration of the conflict resolution policy.

76. ENVIRONMENT & SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE

The following recommendations arising from the Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee meeting on 5 March 2025 were considered by the Committee:

Jurassic Amateur Boxing Club – funding contribution up to £5,000.

Members discussed the benefits of the club, the experience of the predecessor club, the relationship with the Youth & Community Centre, possible funding arrangements, and the need for a sustainable business plan.

Cllr Ian Bark arrived at this point (7.27pm)

RESOLVED: that £1,000 be approved as an initial payment, with up to £4,000 further payable, subject to the provision of an acceptable fundraising plan to be determined under delegation by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and that any delegated funding approval should include agreement regarding the budgetary source of council funding.

Writing Box Bridport

Consideration was given to a request from Bridport Writers Network to adopt two phone kiosks.

RESOLVED: that this item be deferred until the next meeting of this committee, subject to the provision beforehand of a detailed business plan.

Development of Community Bus Services

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the Council enters into grant agreements with Western Gateway Sub-Regional Transport Body and (subject to approval) Dorset Council for funding for a pilot bus service, and into a contractual arrangement with Dorset Community Transport for delivery.
- (ii) planning and delivery of the pilot be delegated to the Town Clerk, working in conjunction with relevant officers.

Bridport Food Matters

Members were updated following discussions which took place at the previous meeting. Bridport Food Matters had withdrawn their interest in the Old Dairy site as a venue for a community food hub, and had confirmed they would not be leading on another local food hub that aggregates produce from multiple farmers.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted.

77. MARKET & BUSINESS LIAISON WORKING GROUP

The notes of the meeting held on 6 February 2025 were received and noted. There were no recommendations for consideration.

78. INCOME GENERATION TASK & FINISH GROUP

Members considered the notes of the meeting held on 18 February 2025, including two recommendations.

RESOLVED: that, following informal consultation with Task & Finish Group members, Finance & General Purposes Committee approves an increase of 8.05% in fees and charges, excluding car parks.

RESOLVED: that a wider benchmarking exercise be carried out by the Task & Finish Group later in 2025/26.

RESOLVED: that the notes be received, noting that Cllr Jonathan Bourbon had chaired the meeting, and not Cllr Paddy Mooney.

79. WEST BAY CAR BOOT SALE GRANT AWARDS

Members thanked the panel for its work, and it was

RESOLVED: that

(i) Grants totalling £5,200 be awarded, covering 12 organisations as follows:

Ref	Applicant and Grant Purposes	£
A3	The Stepping Out Cancer Rehabilitation Community Group	£500
A4	Bridport Stage Company	£500
A6	Bridport Food Matters	£500
A7	Ripple Workshop	£500
A8	Bridport Millennium Green Trust	£400
A9	Thriving Wild CIC	£500
A10	Emerald Ant CIC	£500
A11	Loders Youth Club	£250
A12	Bridport Dance Festival	£300
A13	Bridport Youth Dance	£500
A14	ASCape	£500
A15	The Cowshed	£250
	Total Grants approved	£5,200

(ii) the following conditions be applied:

- Application 4 – that Bridport Community Shed, as accountable body for the funds, be required to show how the funding was applied, and that the applicant advise how the performances will be sustainable over time.
- Application 10 – that the applicant should liaise with West Bay Discovery Centre to avoid duplication in the provision of walks.

(iii) the following applications be declined: St. Mary's Church £500, Park Yoga £500, and West Bay Days £1,000.

80. SERVICES ADMINISTERED BY THE TOWN SURVEYOR AND PROPERTY MANAGER

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk and Property Manager, ENCL: 3989, in respect of the following projects:

Charging opportunities at Bridport FC Car Park

St Mary's School, Bridport Family Hub and Dorset Community Transport currently used the Football Club car park for parking. It was proposed to allow permit parking on the following basis:

- St Mary's School two permits at £700pa,
- Family Hub twelve permits at £4,200pa, and
- Dorset Community Transport four permits at £1,400pa (and not £1,200 as in the report).

RESOLVED: that members agree the proposal in principal, with detailed arrangements to be delegated to the Town Surveyor and Property Manager.

West Bay Play Area upgrade

The large Dino net needed replacing, due to its age. The Town Council had one in stock. Proposed further work was to replace some of the surfacing, matting, wooden sections, bridge parts and small slides. The total estimated cost was £5,000 from existing budgets.

RESOLVED: that the large Dino net be replaced and further work to replace the surfacing, matting, wooden sections, bridge parts and small slides, at an estimated cost of £5,000 from existing budgets.

Cherry Tree Play Area

It was proposed that equipment be added to the play area, including a new climbing frame from existing stock, extra seating, and new pathways, at an estimated cost of £3,500.

RESOLVED: that the estimated costs of £3,500 for provision of a new climbing frame, extra seating and new pathways for the play area, be approved.

Pageants Fields Play Area

To add an accessible path for users of all abilities, to make the play area more user friendly. This had been previously deferred from 2024 and the total estimated cost was £2,500.

RESOLVED: that an accessible path be added to make the play area more user friendly, at an estimated cost of £2,500.

Bridport FC Car Park

Works to improve the surface and drainage on the east side of the car park had been completed in January 2025. Dorset Council had swept the car park on 25 February 2025 in advance of the white lining. This was to be carried out by Yeomarks Lining Ltd and a date was to be agreed. The car parking machine was to be relocated, and a new electric supply fitted.

The projected cost was £170,000 to be met by a £100,000 Shared Prosperity grant funded by central government. Remaining costs would be met from earmarked reserves, as previously approved by this committee.

No decision was required, as this item was for information only.

West Bay Discovery Centre

Four sash windows were to be replaced, and with associated scaffolding, fencing and painting, the total estimated cost is £6,200. Awaiting a date for works to commence.

No decision required, as this item was for information only.

Badger Row

In February 2025 an application had been submitted to Dorset Council to transfer a piece of land in Bradpole behind Badger Row. Bridport Town Council had proposed that the site could be used as additional allotment plots. Dorset Council had asked for a business plan and fee of £412.50 to cover officer time and resources to assess our application. There would be a separate charge towards Dorset Council's legal fees, if the application was successful and the transfer went ahead. Bradpole Parish Council had previously been offered the land for £1.

RESOLVED: that the Town Surveyor be delegated to continue discussions with Dorset Council.

Allington Hill

Allington Parish Council had an existing lease with The Woodland Trust, who had approached Bridport Town Council to explore taking on further land at Allington Hill. Discussions had taken place with the Allington Hillbillies. The Woodland Trust would expect the council to take on the management and control, within the conditions of the lease. The council would be expected to carry out tree inspections and pay for any work needed. Proposals to diversify the land, i.e. for allotments, would need to be brought forward to The Woodland Trust.

RESOLVED: that Bridport Town Council should not take on the additional land at this time.

Verge cutting

This year the annual verge cutting would begin in late March/early April, with the grounds team starting with visibility splays.

No decision required, as this item was for information only.

Bridport WI Hall

A funding application to Dorset Council had been unsuccessful. The grant panel considered that the WI Hall was one of many community spaces and facilities in Bridport and there were other premises readily available to use in the town. Although unsuccessful, the grant panel recommended Bridport Town Council contact Andrew Galpin (Dorset Council) to identify any grants available through the S106 budget.

RESOLVED: that the Town Council contact Andrew Galpin to identify any grants available through the S106 budget, under delegation to the Town Clerk.

Locking of Gates at Borough Gardens

13 residences accessed from the Gardens were managed by Magna Housing, who had a formal right of way and had raised a number of concerns about the proposal to lock the

gates at night. Concerns were in respect of fire safety & evacuation process, emergency services access, and the locking mechanism. Magna had not agreed at this stage to the proposals and had requested a meeting to discuss solutions to assist with anti-social behaviour.

RESOLVED: that the Town Surveyor should meet with Magna Housing to discuss further proposals and report back.

St. Michael's Island

Bridport Town Council had been approached by Hayward & Co., to develop a management plan for St Michael's Island subject to two conditions, that (i) the cost of producing the plan would be met by Hayward & Co., and (ii) Hayward & Co. agreed to transfer the land covered by the plan to Bridport Town Council.

RESOLVED: that a detailed plan be produced, with details to be delegated to the Town Surveyor and Property Manager.

Dorset Community Transport Parking

Dorset Community Transport were looking to review their parking arrangements in Bridport. This included an interest in the former Fisherman's Arms site, and they had approached the Town Surveyor for assistance.

RESOLVED: that the Town Surveyor should continue discussions with Dorset Community Transport.

Mountfield – Second Floor

It was proposed that the second floor of the building be converted to a flat and let as residential accommodation, following it becoming vacant on 1 March 2025. It was noted that the commercial letting market was currently in decline. Proposed works to remove a partition wall were estimated to cost £2,000.

RESOLVED: that the proposal be agreed in principle, with detailed arrangements to be delegated to the Town Surveyor.

Old Railway Line

A member of the public had raised concerns about the sale of parcels of land adjacent to the Old Railway Line that ran from Burton Road to West Bay, and about the procedure used for disposal. The Town Clerk reported that:

- The land comprising the former railway line and environs had been, until 2021, in the ownership of West Dorset District Council (WDDC) and its successor (from 2019) Dorset Council. As early as 2017, the Town Council had entered discussions with WDDC about the transfer of the land, along with other assets, and in November 2018 agreed to proceed with detailed discussions. The transfer, by that time from Dorset Council, was completed in June 2021, albeit that this excluded a minimum 3m width along the length of the land which was retained by Dorset Council as the public bridleway.
- It was understood that during its term of ownership, WDDC had sold parts of the land. Detailed records of such sales were not available to the council, as WDDC was, and Dorset Council remained, wholly separate from the Town Council. Some information on disposals were however shown on Dorset Council's public mapping system. During

verbal exchanges on the transfer, Dorset Council officers had confirmed that there had been sales, and that some neighbouring properties had established unauthorised uses of the land.

- In preparation for the transfer, the Town Council had discussed its future management of the land and as part of these discussions had agreed to seek to regularise unauthorised use of the land, including resolutions to transfer parcels of land and access strips, approved at meetings in November 2019 and November 2020 respectively. Whilst no specific environmental reports were drafted during the transfer process or subsequently, the meetings also considered the environmental and wildlife impact of any such transfers.
- Subsequent to the transfer, the Town Council had entered into discussions with three prospective purchasers. One transfer had been completed (March 2024), and two remained under negotiation.
- As part of the transfer, the Town Council had taken ownership of a ditch that it was required to clear periodically, at significant expense. The council was also required to maintain a 1m strip either side of the bridleway as verge (on the land within its ownership), again at its own expense. These and other covenants associated with the transfer to the Town Council were included in the one completed transfer to a third party.
- Two people had to date contacted the Town Council about the sale of parts of the land transferred. There were however more frequent reports from members of the public when there was wild growth overhanging the bridleway.
- One of the concerns raised was of a legal procedural nature, and would be considered in closed session later in the meeting. Other concerns revolved around environmental protection and retention of the land for community use. Members had previously been included in circulation of the concerns raised.

Members were invited to consider the environmental and community-related concerns, and discussed these matters, as follows:

- It was noted that the environmental impact of sale of parcels of land had been discussed previously, when approving the sales and delegating the matter to the Town Surveyor.
- Members recognised that there may be some benefit from a more comprehensive plan for the land, and that this could usefully extend to the large green space in the layby on Burton Road, which was home to rare orchids.
- The Town Clerk confirmed that such maintenance as did take place was in keeping the ditch clear, and in maintenance of the required verge strip, in accordance with the council's cutting regime. This included some protection for biodiversity.
- The possibility of a site-specific management plan was considered. This would include community engagement in the form of a survey of the public, and most likely further input from organisations with specific knowledge or interest in biodiversity and other relevant aspects. Such a survey would also obtain views on the future use and/or sale of land.
- It was noted that there had been no concerns from environmental interest groups about the management of the land.

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that a management plan should be produced, covering environmental management, the community benefit to be derived from the land, and the approach to future sale of land, and that development of the plan should incorporate community engagement on these aspects.

The Town Clerk reported that the concerns received had referred to a "personal impact". No further information had been provided to expand on this.

RESOLVED; that the legal procedural aspects of this matter be considered further in closed session.

A comfort break was taken at 8:38pm and the meeting reconvened at 8:42pm.

81. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT AND APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2025/26

Councillors considered a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: ENCL: 3990.

Members noted the scope of the audit service, its robust challenge, and its independence from the Town Council. It was further noted that the existing auditor would retire in 2025 and a process was required to engage a replacement.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Town Clerk be noted.

RESOLVED: that the existing audit arrangements are effective and independent.

RESOLVED: that a delegation to the Town Clerk and Finance & Office Manager to engage a replacement internal audit service be agreed.

82. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Town Clerk presented List 5 of the 2024/25 accounts, ENCL: 3991, in the sum of £280,992.66, which had been authorised for payment since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: that Payment List 5 of 2024/25 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

83. COMMUNICATIONS

The Town Clerk reported that this was the final Finance & General Purposes meeting for Paul Fuszard, the retiring Finance and Office Manager, whose successor will be Lisa Pinch. He offered his personal thanks for Paul's 26-year service to the council and the community. He further reported that Lisa Pinch had been offered and had accepted the position as Paul's replacement.

Cllr Paddy Mooney noted that Council Tax bills had been sent to residents, and that the Town Council's increase would need to be explained.

84. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

RESOLVED: that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

85. STAFFING

The Town Clerk presented a report updating councillors on matters relating to:

- The impending retirement of the Town Surveyor and the recruitment of a Works Manager;
- The resignation of the Project Manager, and proposed alternative arrangements;
- Apprentice Clerk & Administrative Officer;
- Retirement of the Finance & Office Manager; and

- Cover for maternity leave.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that the proposals set out in the report be agreed.

RESOLVED: that further consideration of the recruitment of an Apprentice Clerk & Administrative Officer be deferred to the next meeting.

The Town Clerk left the meeting at this point (9:40pm), prior to consideration of grading arrangements for the post of Town Clerk. Cllr Ian Bark introduced a review of the grading, and following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that, following a job evaluation, the Town Clerk's salary is increased to point 52 (in a range of 50-54) of the NALC pay scale, to be backdated to 1 May 2024.

86. PROPERTY MATTERS

The Town Clerk updated members on the legal matters raised in relation to the sale of land adjacent to the Old Railway Line, including advice received from the council's solicitor.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that the existing policy regarding sale of land continue for the two parcels currently under negotiation.

RESOLVED: that future policy on sales be determined following the production of a management plan, incorporating community engagement.

RESOLVED: that the council's solicitor be asked to approve release of the legal advice provided.

The Town Surveyor set out a proposal to let, on a short-term basis, the second floor flat at Mountfield to a named tenant, and explained their circumstances.

RESOLVED: that a six-month tenancy be approved, with the detail delegated to the Town Surveyor.

The meeting closed at 9:53pm.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 9 June 2025