

Budleigh Salterton

***Annual Town
Meeting***

15 March 2023

Reports

**Budleigh Salterton
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Reports

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Town Council

Chairman – Cllr M C Hilliar

Whenever I am going to write a report like this I always like to go back through my notes and past reports to see what I have said and done before so that I don't repeat myself! However, I realised last time I was Chairman of the Council we were in lockdown and as Cllr Sherriff said in his report last year it really did feel like Groundhog Day and we never really knew what the next day would bring. But thankfully things are returning to normal and the Council is back to full meetings, face to face in the Council Chambers and the office is open to the public once more. And we don't have to remind people they are 'on mute' either!

Once again, our High Street has seen a change with many new shops opening providing a wide range of independent products and services. It has been great to walk the streets of Budleigh Salterton again and seeing it so busy not just during the summer season but also the winter.

As reported last year, the Town Council had noticed how untidy and unkempt the town was looking and decided to engage a local resident to clear leaves and remove weeds. This resident is still working with us and he is never short of jobs. I would like to thank Alec on behalf of the Town Council for all the work and effort he has put in over the past year. And my thanks also goes to the Town Clerk for coordinating the works. If anyone has noticed any areas that need some weeding or leaves cleared away please let the Clerk know and she will happily add the area to the list!

Our Town Emergency Plan has been going from strength to strength and I would like to thank Cllr Adrian Harris for remaining as chairman of the committee. I am sure he will have plenty to update you on with regards to the plan later this evening.

I will also be updating you on where we are with the Climate Change group later on this evening.

The Council has worked hard over the past year making sure that those groups and organisations that need support and funds are heard. And as result we have made several donations to help various organisations and groups get back on their feet for the 2023 season.

As always, we have continued to support those organisations that support others in the town such as Budleigh Relief in Need, Seachange and Wesley's and I know that this council will continue to provide help and support to anyone that needs.

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Chairman cont/...

I just want to spend a minute talking about the town's toilets. As many of you will be aware EDDC decided that they could no longer fund all of the toilets in the Town and decided to consult with local residents, businesses and town councils on how they could provide this service in the future. As a result it was decided by EDDC that they could no longer continue to support Brook Road and Station Road toilets in our Town. After much debate the Town Council decided that it couldn't spend tax payers money on both sets of toilets and reluctantly decided to give up Brook Road toilets and focus on the Station Road toilets instead due to a number of facts. After we received the heads of terms from EDDC we noticed there was no break clause in the 99 year lease, we would receive the toilets in their current condition and would be responsible for maintenance, cleaning and up keep of the toilets and a percentage of any profit we make on the charging for the toilets would have to go back to EDDC. Along with these factors the Town Council has decided not to continue with taking on the lease for Station Road and will now set up a working party to look at converting part of the Norman Centre into a state of the art toilet facility which this council and the tax payers of Budleigh Salterton will have more control over.

Finally I would like to thank all my councillors for the support they have given me, to each other, the employees of the council and to the town. We have a wide range of councillors from many different backgrounds with different views and perspectives and I feel that this council represents all parts of Budleigh Salterton.

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Planning Committee

Chairman – Cllr R D Sherriff

Between April 2022 and March 2023, the council considered 83 planning applications of which 17 were regarding arboricultural matters. The vast majority were extensions and general property improvements. While there were still some infill applications, there is now an increase in applications where residents are applying to convert their garages into living accommodation. All the decisions made were based on the relevant policies of the towns Neighbourhood Plan. When it comes to planning decisions, Budleigh Salterton Town Council is purely an advisory body, the final decision is made by East Devon District Council who are the statutory planning authority. 63 applications were granted, two were refused, three were withdrawn and 15 are at present awaiting a decision. There was only one application where EDDC and BSTC's views differed.

These statistics demonstrate the value of the Neighbourhood Plan with regard to planning.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project is on schedule for completion by the end of the year. From a wildlife perspective it is already proving a great success with a substantial increase in bird sightings. The pipeline works at Lime Kiln car park and Otter Head are nearing completion and the car park should be returned to full use by the end of the month and the Otter Head works returned to agricultural use at the same time.

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Finance Committee

Chairman – Cllr D J Hayward

The previous few years have meant a time of rebuilding for many. The Town Council continued to support and contribute to the community as it has done over many years and will for many years to come.

The Town Council finances have been closely monitored and I am pleased to report are still in good stead. Efforts have been made to reduce spending, but this is not always possible, especially with the increase in the cost of utilities.

Income from the Public Hall has returned to pre-covid levels and the Norman Centre is being used more and more.

As the finances are remain in a positive position it was agreed there was no need for an increase in the precept again this year (the precept is the funding demanded via Council Tax which the Council needs to operate).

There are still many projects that we would like to pursue and many of these are included within our five-year Plan. With the continuation of all the efforts made by all councillors I am sure they will be achieved.

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Public Hall Committee

Chairman – Cllr Mrs L D Evans

The Public Hall and Norman Centre are being used by the community by a variety of groups.

We took the decision not to increase charges for this year, and made concessions to hire charges for the early part of the year to enable our hirers to get back on their feet, as of course initially people were still hesitant about being indoors.

I expect charges will have to increase over the next 12 months, just to cover increased costs.

The outside of the building was painted in the Spring of 2022, this had not been done for 12 years, and some repairs were carried out to the roof.

All opening windows in the Hall have had new winders installed to enable the windows to open fully.

We've had to spend money on general maintenance, equipment is now starting to show its age, general wear and tear.

In the coming weeks:

- The Dormer windows will be replaced and new blackout blinds installed, we felt it practical to do both at the same time.
- The hall floor will need to be resealed. The floor is starting to show signs of wear and will at some point need replacing.

I can't believe I'm again talking about toilets, one of my first reports on the Public Hall probably 8/9 years ago was the state of our toilets. Thankfully we now have facilities to be proud of.

Why am I talking toilets, as you probably know EDDC in their wisdom have decided to evaluate the need for Public Toilets within the area, cost cutting. The blocks up for closure being Station Road Car Park and Brook Road. A great many discussions have taken place with EDDC but their terms were really not acceptable. The Council is now investigating creating Public Toilet facilities within the footprint of the Public Hall, this will of course cost, but in the long term it will be cost effective.

As always, my thanks to the Town Clerk, her Assistant and the Caretakers for the running of the building.

Please continue to use the Hall it is a building we can be proud of.

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Foreshore & Footpaths Committee

Chairman – Cllr R D Sherriff

EDDC Streetscene have continued to provide excellent service emptying the bins and cleaning the toilets on the seafront throughout the year. Their hard work, particularly during the summer months, is particularly important. No matter how untidy visitors leave the seafront, Streetscene have it looking spik and span every morning. This Council would like to put on record their thanks and appreciation for the excellent work they do.

Streetscene and the Town's handyman have worked hard to keep on top of the invasive weed problem along the foreshore and the drainage gutters have also been thoroughly cleared out. But it is a challenging task that is ongoing.

Good progress painting the 150 seafront benches has been made, unfortunately due to staff shortages a number of benches in the vicinity of Steamer Steps remain to be re-painted.

Last year I reported that the shelter by Lime Kiln was in a particularly bad state of repair. I'm pleased to report that the shelter has been repaired and repainted, some work still remains to be done and EDDC have been made aware of this. However, it is looking so much better.

The railings on the seafront and along Fore St need to be repainted and renovated, we are in discussions with EDDC and we will look to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

A survey has been carried out on Steamer Steps and designs for new steps have been approved. A timeframe and the costings to carry out this task have yet to be agreed and the Council is in discussion with both DCC and EDDC to resolve this.

This Council was approached by Coastwatch to help facilitate the installation of a camera on the Budleigh Salterton Club to relay images back to the Coastwatch centre in Exmouth. The camera which is solely for their use and that of the RNLI, covering the area from Straight Point to Otter Head. This Council made a substantial financial contribution towards the installation of this facility, which will make the beach and sea around Budleigh a far safer place for all concerned. The Council are also looking to install a webcam on the seafront similar to those at Exmouth and Sidmouth which will enable the public to view the weather and sea conditions.

Many thanks to Budleigh Lions and the volunteers from the Marine Conservation Society for their regular beach cleaning sessions, their work keeping our beach clean is greatly appreciated.

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Community Gardens Committee

Chairman – Cllr A F Chaplin

The first half of 2022 started with very wet conditions followed by the summer heat and drought, this resulting in a year of very mixed results for our plot holder's produce.

The year started off with a waiting list of 26 and plot inspections were carried out in June, August and November.

Following the inspections, a number of plot holders received a letter asking if they were struggling, wished to continue or give up their tenancy. This resulted in 9 plots changing tenants in January/February 2023.

Despite this the current waiting list is 19.

Overall the allotments are looking very good and well attended by all plot holders who have put in a lot of work over the year.

A small barrier (posts and chains) has been erected adjacent to plot 51 to restrict any vehicles from parking too close to the edge of plot 51 and allow Plot 51 access to all parts of their allotment.

An additional clause will be inserted into the Tenancy Agreement prohibiting both bonfires and incinerators on the plots.

Seachange who have plot 82 are encouraging locals to join in with their Community Allotment have made very good progress and are always looking for more help on their plot.

The committee had decided to increase the plot rent by £2.00 to £25.00 per year from January 2023.

For a very small outlay plot holders, young and old can enjoy the growing of their fruit, vegetables, flowers etc., and enjoy tremendous views.

We would like to encourage all plot holders to donate any excess produce to Wesleys at the Methodist Church to help those less fortunate and to avoid waste (Further details can be found at Wesleys).

Finally I would like to thank Jerry Hitt and the committee members for their time in assisting with the plot inspections and also thanks to Jo Vanstone and Lynne Ward for their tremendous hard work in keeping the administration side of the Community gardens running like clockwork.

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Community Infrastructure Levy Committee

Chairman – Cllr D J Hayward

During the year the Town Council has received a further £23800 in CIL Receipts which takes the total funds in hand to over £65000.

The Committee continues to consider suitable projects which pass the various criteria – a challenge! At the moment, the following are on the list:

- EV Chargers (in addition to those being installed by Devon County Council and East Devon District Council)
- A Bus shelter for East Budleigh Road and replacement shelters in Exmouth Road and Station Road
- Publicly Accessible toilets in the Norman Centre or Public Hall

The Delivery Plan is available on the Council's website and it contains a summary of what could be eligible for funding so please contact the Clerk if you have a project which you think may benefit from this funding.

A note of completed projects is also available online.

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Budleigh Salterton Traffic Group

Chairman – Cllr A L Jones

This group is not an actual committee of the Town Council and even though we have a wide remit, we are unable to make decisions. The group is made up of several parties, Budleigh Salterton Town councillors and councillors from Devon County, East Devon District Council and East Budleigh Parish Council, various town residents and possibly, and most importantly, the Budleigh Salterton Town Clerk, who acts as our secretary, and officers from Devon County Council who are there to keep us legal and able to get to the right people quickly and who can in many cases also answer a wide range of questions on the spot; which gives us a wide scope.

The Group has covers a variety of topics such as

- General speeding issues around the area, especially on West Hill/Exmouth Road, where there are no pavements.
- Investigating a priority scheme on Salting Hill
- Various blocked drains and overgrown hedges
- The general state of the road surfaces in this area, which is an ongoing concern for all road users
- Evans Field is an ongoing battle, mainly through the lack of footpath to link up with Bedlands Lane and lack of street lighting

There are many other smaller items but this is just a flavour of things we are doing, or hoping to do.

Through having a DCC officer on the group we are able to get our thoughts right into the team in Exeter.

We always feel that there could be a lot more done in various areas but money and pressures from all the other villages in Devon requiring maintenance and highlighting their local problems confines our aspirations sometimes, but we are pleased with our progress through this year and hope we can continue being successful through the coming year.

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Budleigh Salterton Emergency Group

Chairman – Cllr A J Harris

The Budleigh Salterton Emergency Plan was developed several years ago and has been subject to several updates. It is this plan that provides the framework for what has been developed over the last 12 months.

The scope of the plan has been widened to include much more than just a flood emergency, though this remains probably the most likely adverse event that could affect the town to a point where the emergency plan would be implemented.

Now, the plan considers that other emergencies may occur, such as a cliff fall, gas explosion, severe weather events or a multi-casualty accident. This is an important development as any of these events could occur and it would not be prudent to have an emergency just focused on what is most likely.

There have been two rewrites of the plan, but we still need to get it into a position where it is fully effective. The 'Christmas tree' contact pyramid has been started and would work, but another layer or two is required to initiate an effective initial response. The plan includes an initial contact tree of three councillors but adding another row will take this to a much more resilient position of seven initial contacts. Locations have agreed to act as 'hubs' to assist residents in the event of an emergency and this is a significant step forward, but the contact details of these locations need to be firmed up to ensure an effective and comprehensive initial response.

Ideally, we would also be able to exercise the plan in the coming 12 months. This will not be easy to organise and will require liaison and agreement with local emergency services but is an aspiration for the coming 12 months. It must be recognised that the purpose of this plan is to provide the framework with which the council will respond to an emergency affecting residents. As soon as possible after the initial response, responsibility will be handed over to the emergency services and councillors will act in support of the professional services.

A significant recent development is that the Town Council has applied for and been granted finance through a grant scheme from EDDC to purchase equipment that will give the initial response team the means to respond to emergencies. The grant is for just under £1,000 and will allow us to purchase lighting and safety equipment, such that we will be able to control a location where an emergency may have occurred until the arrival of the emergency services. This equipment will be purchased in the next few weeks.

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Budleigh Salterton Emergency Group cont/...

So, in summary, it has been a year of progress towards where the plan and Council's ability to respond to an emergency needs to be. This is good progress after a period of little development, but slower than would be ideal. The plan needs to be robust and workable and we are a good way towards that objective, but the final elements now need to be refined (location contacts, contact tree and test initiation) to make the plan fully workable and complete. That is now the desired end state for this time next year.

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Budleigh Salterton Climate Change Group

Chairman – Cllr M C Hilliar

The Climate Change Group has been going from strength to strength and we have now expanded the group further to include representatives from East Budleigh and Otterton Parish Councils so that they can be supported in decarbonising the Raleigh Ward.

The group has had several meetings over the last year where we have discussed issues like better cycle improvements between Budleigh Salterton and East Budleigh and we have received some positive support for this from our County Councillor and Clinton Devon Estates.

We have also discussed the introduction of EV chargers in the town and I am pleased to see that EDDC are working hard to introduce them in two of our four main car parks. Hopefully these will be up and running soon. The council itself at the moment cannot install EV charging points in the town however we hope to work with our partners at District and County to continue the roll out of chargers across the Raleigh Ward.

The group has also been looking at water pollution and I am pleased to hear that St Peter's School are working alongside the Otter Valley Association and Home Instead to purchase a water pollution testing kit to test the sea water for pollutants. Not only will it provide us with useful data on our water quality which we can present to South West Water but it also provides an educational lesson for the pupils of St Peter's School.

We have also looked at issues regarding transport in and out of the town, especially for those students attending St Peter's School from Exmouth. Unfortunately due to ever tightening budgets Devon County Council is unable to provide a bus service to the school, however it might be possible for the parents of those students who are attending the school to pay for a bus in the future. We will be keeping our ear to the ground on this one.

Overall the group is progressing well and over the next year we hope to continue to push East Devon District Council and Devon County Council to promote greener initiatives in our local area. And with the Devon Climate Emergency Plan now in its final version I believe we will become carbon neutral by 2050.

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County Councillor

County Cllr Mrs C Channon

Things are at last getting back to normal at County Hall. Only a handful of staff are still working from home and we are having fewer virtual meetings. This means an improvement in Team work and newly appointed staff getting to know and work with their fellow officers. This will make a great difference to efficiency, particularly in our Children's Service which has been under pressure for some time. The previous new Director was still living in London and only coming to Devon for two days a week.

There are still deep concerns about the funding for SEND. Devon has a greater percentage of children and young people than the national average but the money we are allocated is based on data from 2012. There is also a national shortage of educational psychologists, who carry out assessments and unfortunately Devon has too high a backlog of children awaiting assessment. Together with our local MPs we are lobbying for this situation to be addressed.

There has been an increase in the funding for schools but the teacher's pay rise will quickly absorb this extra money.

The highest percentage of your Council Tax goes to fund adult social care. The demands are much higher since the Covid lockdowns and the increasing number of extra-care housing being built in Devon by companies such as McCarthy and Stone and Pegasus adds yearly to this problem. Government needs to work with Local Government to improve the relations between social care and health.

Most of my post bag is about Highways matters which given the heavy costs of the two areas mentioned above enforces Highway Maintenance into a Cinderella role. Our local weather does not help. Severe frosts and heavy rain create potholes and road defects. January and February are the pothole season. Unfortunately the contractors who repair the potholes are the same team who grit the roads when they are icy, so it doesn't take long to create a backlog of work.

Phil Norrey stood down as Chief Executive in August and Donna Manson has now taken up that role. Donna comes from Scotland and has a wide experience of geographical large authorities.

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County Councillor cont/...

On a more positive note, the Friends of Budleigh Library do a wonderful job and not only keep our library open but vibrant. The revived Information Centre run by volunteers is making a good contribution to the town. Our local school goes from strength to strength. I was really pleased recently to be invited to meet with the young people in the Climate Change Group and impressed by both their ideas and enthusiasm. I have been able once again to offer financial support for our Music Festival from my Locality Budget and to cover the cost of replacing the handrail at the disabled entrance to St Peter's Church.

May I thank the Town Councillors and their staff for all the help and support they have given me over the past year. Without your eyes and ears my job would be more difficult.

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District Councillors

District Cllr A J Dent, District Cllr P M Jarvis and District Cllr T D Wright

As we approach the District and Parish Council elections on 4 May this a good time to reflect on current issues and activities in the Budleigh and Raleigh ward.

Car Parking Charges

Despite strong protests from Conservative Councillors the current administration went ahead with raising Car Parking Charges. This was largely to fill in the shortfall that reduced grants from central government had created in the council's budget.

We believed that whilst raising the charges was justified, there were better and more sympathetic ways of doing so.

Public Toilet Closures

Again, in order to save money, the current administration decided to cut the number of Public Toilets in the District from 27 to 14.

In Budleigh this meant retaining the two seafront toilets against the closure of the Brook Road and Public Hall Car parks. During the public consultation some 74% of Budleigh residents voted to retain the Public Hall Toilets.

Again, despite representations and meetings with officers, no satisfactory alternative solution could be agreed.

We now believe the Town Council might be able to devise an alternative scheme for creating Public Toilets in the ares of the Public Hall. Watch this space!

Longboat Cafe

Yet again, we are faced with the the enforced removal of the Longboat Cafe extension. This would negate the efforts of the Leaseholder to maintain a year round business.

Whilst the extension was built without planning permission the Leaseholder is claiming it is a temporary structure thus not requiring planning permission.

The issue has now escalated to EDDC Chief Executive who is sympathetic as the Cafe is a valuable asset to both the local and visitor economy. He has now received nearly 100 e-mails supporting the Cafe and asking for a way to be found for it to be retained. This is a work in progress, so again - watch this space!

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District Councillors cont/...

Lower Otter Restoration Project

A highly visible project which will create intertidal wetlands stretching from the Lime Kiln Car Park to East Budleigh introducing a wide range of wildlife, flora and fauna.

The new raised road to South Farm has now opened and later this summer the 70 metre footbridge to the South Coast Footpath will be installed along with improved footpaths on both east and western sides of the intertidal area.

Budleigh Cricket Club

The clubhouse and cricket pitch have now been removed and two new pitches along with a new innovative clubhouse are being established alongside the East Budleigh Road adjacent to Kersbrook. The Cricket Club will start to play matches on the new pitch this summer and members are in the process of fund raising to ensure that the decor, furnishings and fittings in the new clubhouse are fit for purpose for many years to come.

Cliff Path and Golf Club

The Cliff path from Budleigh to Sandy Bay has some stretches that are perilously close to the cliff edge. Along with Clinton Devon Estates, Devon County Council and EDDC we believe upgrading and improvements will take place fairly soon.

Cliff path walkers will have noticed a large amount of scrub has been removed from the Golf Club playing areas. This is to return the area to its original natural heathland habitat and further work will continue for some time yet.

The High Street

Many will have seen the TV programme which featured Budleigh Salterton and reported that High Street footfall had improved substantially. This is encouraging news, as is the fact some new businesses have opened in the last twelve months.

The Old Sorting Office has finally been sold and the new owner intends it to become a high quality antiques outlet along with some additional accommodation. Arthur & Martha have relocated to the top end of the High Street and there's a new Snacks and Coffee House in Station Road. Brook Gallery has been remodelled and now houses a podiatry service.

At last we have some better news for the High Street!