PETROCKSTOWE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Baxter Hall on
Tuesday 15th April 2025 at 6.30pm.
Councillors present: M Busby (Chair), F Lowe (Clerk)
22 Councillors & parishioners

1. **Apologies of absence.** CCllr A Saywell, Cllr A Hunkin

2. **Chairman's Report.** The Chair welcomed all and read out a prepared report as below.

We are fortunate to have a team of Councillors who share the same love of village and community. This also goes for our District and County Councillors. I take this opportunity to thank them for all their support and hard work. I would particularly like to thank Andrew Saywell who has announced he will not be standing again in the May elections. He has been a good friend to the Parish and we wish him well in the future.

I can report that Maggie Goaman has joined the Recreation Ground Committee, more on that later.

Cheryl and her committee continue to save the St Petroc building. I can report I attended with Cheryl and Amanda Bright, along with Sir Geoffrey Cox, a meeting with the new Bishop of Exeter the week of Christmas. It was a very positive meeting and we have since had a letter offering support, alas not financial. More on that later.

Planning issues continue to occupy the council and to that end the Vice Chair and myself, accompanied by our two District Councillors had a meeting with the CEO of Torridge, Steve Hearse. It was a very positive meeting where we raised a number of issues and in particular our concern that the councils comments on planning were rarely listened to or given credence to. Also that enforcement was poorly enforced. We gave a list of outstanding cases where enforcement had not been carried out. Some cases have been followed up on and action taken, however unfortunately there are a number that are still outstanding.

Jonathan with the help of Maggie has done a lot of work on the poor drainage on many parts of the road through the village. Hopefully we will see some action from Highways to their findings.

There is a feeling, by a number in the village, that we need to introduce a 20 mph speed limit, and it was agreed at the last PC meeting we would re-look at this when the DCC reopen applications, which will not be until next year. We could consider setting up a community speedwatch group which has proved very effective in other villages; it does mean however we need a group of volunteers to run this.

Many will have seen commentary on English Devolution. Whereby Devon would be one or perhaps two Unitary Authorities with a Mayor, doing away with the County and District Councils. It looks as if this will go ahead as far I can tell sometime in 2026. Some County Councils have postponed this year's May Elections so that the new authorities can be voted on next year. However the Devon election will go ahead in May.

In theory these unitary councils should give the Parish Councils more say, Sir Geoffrey Cox, at a meeting of the Torridge Collaborative Group of Chairs commented "that the removal of a layer of authority such as the district council will, in my view, mean that parish councils will be more important".

In view of this change in the structure of local government, the Parish Council are looking at how we respond including preparing an NPS. An NPS a Neighbourhood Priority Statement which is a simplified version of the Neighbourhood Plan, but more on this later.

On behalf of my fellow Councillors and personally, I would like to thank our Clerk, Fiona Lowe, who ensures we have a professionally run council.

Finally, I would like to thank all the Parishioners, many who give their time freely volunteering in the many activities taking place in the Parish.

We live in a great village and I feel fortunate to live here.

3. **Petrockstowe Recreation Ground**

The Recreation Ground is a marvellous facility for the village. Eight acres of fenced land, for use by all the parishioners. It does however take quite a lot of work to keep it maintained and we receive no government funding for this. The funds needed are raised by volunteers and much of the work done to maintain the ground also done by volunteers. Currently the committee is made up of 5 volunteers, this is clearly not enough people, so I appeal today for more people

to step up and join the committee. It costs approximately £3,500 to keep the Rec running. This includes;

- Insurance
- Fuel for grass cutting
- Machinery maintenance
- Hedge cutting
- Utility bills electricity and water

This amount does not include any fund for future expenditure on machinery replacement, or building maintenance or replacement.
We are faced in the not too distant future with having to replace the changing rooms, kitchen and toilets.

The Summer Fair this year will be run in conjunction with Meeth and will include an evening event with music.

I have been asked about the new signs at the recreation ground.
The reason why it was necessary to put up the new sign was as a result of a complaint made to the council about Rec use. The legal department at Torridge advised that we must put up a sign with the rules/by-laws of the Rec. We did not just arbitrarily do this. You will notice that many parks open spaces do this.

Questions were welcomed, but none offered

4. **St Petroc's Church**.

Over 60 villagers attended a meeting on the 23rd March at Baxter Hall to discuss alternative uses for St Petroc's.

Our MP, Sir Geoffrey Cox, facilitated the meeting and a number of suggestions were voiced and some submitted in writing.
Among them;

- Cycling/walking hub/hostel. Cafe, Repair Shop
- Sports and Craft facilities
- Sports venue, gym, skittles, climbing wall
- Sell off Baxter Hall and Methodist Church invest funds in St Petroc's
- Heritage centre with permanent exhibition of artefacts, incorporating small cafe. Preservation of Bell Tower and Organ.
- Demolition would cost £400 - £500K, have the Church factored in this scenario.

18 people have put their names forward to form a working group to develop a plan that is acceptable to the Diocese for alternative uses for the church.

Sir Geoffrey has offered to chair this group.

There is a deadline that the Diocese has set of June for a viable plan to be presented.

The first meeting with Sir Geoffrey will be on 26th April at 10.45am at the hall. However the group met on 9th April and Cheryl was elected Chairman of the group and Carol the Secretary.

I am going to ask Irene who attended the meeting to give us a feedback.

Irene shared that the estimated cost to make the building watertight was £400,000. Cheryl advised that the suggestion that came out on top was to create a heritage/craft hub and using local skilled craftsmen, to hold workshops and use the fabric of the building (where possible) to teach others the skills to repair and maintain heritage buildings. The working group are hoping that the diocese will be supportive and that it will be possible to involve universities. Potential skills would include stained glass, lime building – using Mike Wye as the local supplier with Made Well and Peters Marland School possibly involved. It is hoped to make the building whole again while supporting the community. A list of the assets will be created including the very old, expensive Father Willis organ. Cheryl ask for parishioners to support this suggestion. The diocese have advised that if nothing is done by June then they could put the building on the market. It is known that there are lots of grants available that were not accessible when the building was being used as a church. The hope is that the skills learnt will then support other heritage buildings across the area. While it is possible that the diocese could lease the building, or sell it cheaply to the parish, the parish can't afford to take it on. It was asked if there were enough people with enough skills locally to support the suggestion. It was replied that if not, skilled craftsmen could travel and stay locally. Cheryl has enlisted the support of a person with experience in creating similar hubs.

It was confirmed that should the Methodist Chapel be sold that that proceeds would go to the Methodist Church UK.

5. **Neighbourhood Priority Statement**

Before we go onto the NPS a little more background on the Devolution plan, for those who are not aware. Cllr Busby explained "What is devolution"

Once in place this new unitary structure may generate an opportunity for greater representation from the parish to the new body on what parishioners consider important in the future for our area. With this in mind the PC are researching the possibility of preparing an NPS.

An NPS is intended to be a 'simpler' and more accessible way (than a neighbourhood plan) for communities to set out their key priorities and preferences for their local areas. The idea is that the NPS will summarise the principle needs and views of the community in respect of 'local matters'. Once prepared and submitted to the local authority, the authority 'must have regard' to the NPS when preparing a Local Plan.

However the timing on this is unclear and very much in the hands of central government. Once we have a clearer idea on how the new devolution structure for local government pans out we can take a decision

Notwithstanding an NPS, we will consult with the community on their priorities and wishes. And also keep them informed on the impact of Devolution on our village.

Q. How many unitary authorities will a Mayor cover? A. County Councils put forward the plans to the Government and currently for Devon, there are suggestions of 1, 2 or 3 unitary authorities within Devon with a Mayor for each.
Q. Will Devon merge with Cornwall? A. At this time, that is unknown. It could equally merge with Somerset.

6. **Open Session**

No further questions

With no further business, the Chair thanked all for attending and the meeting was closed at 7.02pm, and the bar was opened.

Chairman …… Date ……..