

Bridestowe Parish Council

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Bridestowe Parish Council Meeting Minutes (draft)

Meeting held – Wednesday 7th January 2026 at 7.30 pm The Ark, Bridestowe

In attendance: Clerk, Parish Cllrs Young (Vice Chair), Thirtle, Proctor (Chair), Burder, Hodgson, Bickle, Pritchard, Borough Cllr Southcott, members of the public (0)

1. Apologies.

Borough Cllr Mott – apology accepted.

2. Possible Declarations of interest.

None.

3. Public Open Question Time.

None.

4. Approval of minutes of meetings held November 12, 2025.

Cllr Thirtle proposed the minutes be signed as a true record of the meeting, this was seconded by Cllr Young and agreed by all. The chairman signed a copy.

5. Matters arising.

Cllrs confirmed that the sand bin next to the pub is well stocked and has plenty of bags in it too. Cllr Young volunteered to monitor this.

6. Cemetery regulations.

The Working Party reported that they had met at the cemetery to begin discussions on potential plans. The group compared the existing plans with the current layout of the cemetery and recorded each occupied plot, reserved plot, available plot, and unusable plot. Cllr Thirtle created a spreadsheet to accurately reflect this information. Time was also spent calculating future burial capacity. Cllr Young advised that the orchard should be considered as a potential burial space. Cllr Pritchard reported that cemetery regulations and fees had been compared with those of neighbouring parishes to gain a clearer understanding of appropriate provisions and reasonable costs. The Working Party will continue to progress the project and will provide a further update at the next meeting. Councillors discussed the details of the cemetery regulations training course provided by ICCM via SLCC and agreed that it would be beneficial for the Clerk to attend. The motion was proposed by Cllr Thirtle, seconded by Cllr Proctor, and unanimously agreed. The cost would be £274+VAT.

7. Station road flooding.

The Clerk advised that there was no further update from the highways officer and the issue was still being investigated. Cllrs suggested keeping a diary of events and evidence of the issues.

8. Tree care on the boundary of the cemetery/village hall.

The Clerk advised that a third quote was still awaited and would be followed up.

9. DCC P3 Footpath Scheme update.

The Clerk advised that a member of the PROW team had been in touch to apologise for the delay in responding and to confirm that it would be possible to join the scheme. Paperwork is due to be received in next couple of weeks.

10. Grants – to discuss and award applications received.

10.1 Bridestowe Scout Group

10.2 Tor Support, Okehampton

10.3 Citizens Advice

Councillors discussed the grant applications in detail, looking at locality, organisation revenue and expenses, direct effect on parishioners and taking into consideration the budget allocated. The final decision was to award Bridestowe Scout Group £300, Tor Support £200 and not to award Citizens Advice

a grant on this occasion. The motion was proposed by Cllr Proctor, seconded by Cllr Hodgson and agreed by all Cllrs.

11. Budget and Precept.

Ahead of the meeting, the Clerk circulated detailed information outlining the current, historic, and projected costs of running the Parish Council and highlighted concerns regarding the steadily reducing end-of-year bank balance. Councillors held a detailed and thoughtful discussion on past, present, and forecast budgets, including a review of ten years of precept requests. All areas of expenditure were carefully examined, from the Clerk's salary through to grounds maintenance.

Councillors expressed significant concern about the impact any increase in the precept would have on parishioners and the resulting rise in council tax. It was acknowledged by all that this was not an easy decision and that councillors were acutely aware of their responsibility to balance financial sustainability with affordability for residents. However, it was also clear from the figures reviewed that without a meaningful increase to the precept, the Parish Council would exhaust its reserves within the next five years.

Cllr Southcott advised that guidance recommends the Parish Council retain a minimum reserve of £1,000 to cover the cost of a potential election. The Chairman reported that further guidance suggests parish councils should reasonably hold between six and twelve months' worth of operating costs in reserve. Councillors carefully scrutinised all budgets and explored every available option before considering an increase to the precept, treating the matter with the utmost seriousness.

It was agreed that, until the Parish Council is able to meet its basic annual running costs and rebuild a reasonable level of reserves, no additional or discretionary spending would be approved. This includes the replacement of playground equipment. Councillors also considered alternative income sources, such as cemetery fees, but accepted that as this income is irregular and unpredictable, the precept must reliably cover annual expenditure and allow for unforeseen costs, including essential tree works.

Councillors discussed ways to achieve long-term financial security while remaining mindful of the direct impact on parishioners and their council tax bills. The importance of maintaining essential services and facilities, including the playground and regular grass cutting, was also recognised. Various approaches were debated, including a gradual year-on-year increase to the precept to close the gap between income and expenditure, or a more proactive approach involving a larger initial increase to achieve financial stability sooner and reduce the likelihood of repeated increases in future years.

Using the WDBC guidance calculator, councillors assessed the direct impact different precept options would have on parishioners. After lengthy and careful consideration, councillors reluctantly agreed that the precept request for 2026–27 would be £18,530. The motion was proposed by Cllr Proctor, seconded by Cllr Hodgson, and unanimously agreed.

Councillors were keen to ensure transparency and to clearly justify the increase to parishioners. It was therefore agreed that a statement explaining the reasons for the precept increase would be prepared for inclusion in *BaSE* magazine.

To future-proof the Parish Council, councillors further agreed that a formal policy should be developed setting out appropriate reserve levels and the principles for budget-setting and precept decisions. This will be considered at a future meeting.

12. Accounts for payment:

12.1 Northmoor Garden Machinery – mower service £93.96

12.2 Stamps £1.74

12.3 The Ark – room hire £80.00

Current account statement balance on December 18, 2025, £15,951.52 Cashbook circulated to all Cllrs.

Cllrs agreed to pay all accounts stated above, proposed by Cllr Thirtle, seconded by Cllr Pritchard, agreed by all.

13. Correspondence: Mostly circulated to councillors.

13.1 Newsletters, District Cllr Reports, County Cllr Reports.

Acknowledged.

13.2 RBL Thank you email.

Acknowledged.

13.3 WDBC Litter Bin Collection Costs

Acknowledged.

13.4 Free Landmark Tree

Cllrs instructed the Clerk to accept the tree.

14. Date of next meeting and close (proposed date Wednesday 25th February)

The next full council meeting was agreed for Wednesday 25th February 2026.

**** Part II Meeting****

15. Payroll Updates

Two bank signatories signed the letter to the bank updating the salary standing orders.

16. Close

The meeting was closed at 9:25pm.

DRAFT