

**Minutes of the Seaton Town Council ('the Council')
Meeting
on Monday, 3 March 2025**

Present:

Chair: Cllr. A. Singh

Town

Councillors: K. Beer, E. Bowman, P. Burrows, D. Haggerty, M. Hartnell, J. Oldfield,
J. Rowland, J. Russell & D. Ledger

Officers: Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk

Public: Approximately 50 members of the public were in attendance.

152. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received, and reasons accepted, from Cllrs Wood & Dyke.

153. Declarations of Interest

Cllrs. Hartnell, Haggerty & Ledger declared a personal interest as East Devon District Councillors (EDDC) and Cllr. Hartnell as a Devon County Councillor (DCC). Cllr. Bowman declared a personal interest as a volunteer at the Gateway Theatre Company who occupied the town hall and Cllr. Hartnell declared a personal interest as his son was a volunteer there.

154. Council Minutes

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the extraordinary meeting of Seaton Town Council held on Monday, 3 February 2025. (proposed Cllr. Rowland, seconded Cllr. Singh)

155. County Councillor's Report

Cllr. Hartnell gave his final report, as a Devon County Councillor, before the end of his tenure and highlighted:

- Devolution – Government has set out ambitious plans to reorganize local government.
 - Devon had sought to be part of the first phase, which required us to apply for a delay to the election in May, however this was declined by Government.
 - an interim plan to be put to government before 21st March.

- there is widespread criticism of the government for rushing this through and for a lack of consultation with town & parish councils as well as the public.
- it looks as if each authority will submit interim plans, not all will agree on the same vision. There is a risk that government will impose a new structure on us.
- Devon Election – Notice of Election is expected to be published on 25th March, when we enter a period known as 'purdah'. It is a sensitive time for councils, especially around communications, however DCC still needs to conduct business as usual. The election is on 1 May 2025
- Devon has set the budget for 2025/26 which includes:
 - extra £4m support for highways
 - extra money for SEND (see below)
 - 8.2% on adult services
 - increase of 2.99% + 2% for adult social care
 - DCC Homelessness budget doubled to £1m using £500k extra cash from council tax on 2nd homes.
 - Government had removed the rural services delivery grant worth over £10m to Devon, choosing to put extra money into urban areas.
- SEND budget still challenging despite 5.5% increase in budget for children's services
 - pressure driven by demand and increasing costs
 - Devon received 2400 requests for EHCP (Education Health & Care Plans) in 2024 – roughly twice that of 2019 (pre-pandemic)
 - actual issued EHCPs has increased by 11% since 2023
 - this financial year SEND overspend is around £50m – more than anticipated
 - 10,000 young people are supported across Devon with this funding, helping them achieve and thrive.
- Department for Transport capital budget for Devon is £83.6m in 2025/26 which is a reasonable increase and should help to improve roads. Seaton & Colyton have benefited from a significant amount patching using elastomac treatment since January, including Dolphin St Colyton, Harepath Rd Seaton, and the A3052 between Tower Services & Stafford Cross. Sidmouth Rd Colyton has been resurfaced. There has been a delay to Valley View Seaton resurfacing, as gas works have overrun.
- Temporary change to minor injuries service (MIU) in East Devon –
 - new investment in Honiton Hospital - £0.5m Xray room improvement
 - MIU & Xray temporarily relocated to Ottery St Mary hospital
 - service available 7 days a week 8am-8pm from Monday 24th February
- Baker Estates application approved – outline only including access. Cllr Hartnell pressed for a safer crossing point at Colyford Rd; the developer

agreed to explore options with DCC and the emerging draft local walking and cycling plan.

156. District Councillors' Reports

Cllr Haggerty – the 'Coach Friendly' project was progressing well with inspections have been undertaken and towns approved for the scheme. Signage was being improved in some towns. The initiative was supported unanimously by EDDC and would bring more coaches to East Devon

Cllr Heath - highlighted the matters in his written report, as published with the agenda, and, additionally, stated that he had spoken to the trustees of the Gateway Theatre Company and advised them they must convey evidence of learning from their mistakes.

Cllr Ledger – with regard to devolution, a joint statement had been agreed by seven Devon Councils seeking two unitary authorities in the form of:

- South Hams, Teignbridge and West Devon areas with Torbay
- East, Mid and North Devon, along with Torrington District and the City of Exeter

The consultation on the local plan closes on 31 March. The West Walk toilet upgrade has been delayed pending further structural calculations, to enable the demolition of the existing toilets to be completed. The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPE) has now been activated providing emergency accommodation for all rough sleepers, regardless of whether accommodation has previously been refused. New community grants were being launched to alleviate poverty in East Devon. In response to a question as to whether the Moridunum had now been sold, Cllr Ledger agreed to follow this up. Finally, Members noted that complaints had been received about the untidy state of Windsor Gardens around the shelter. This would be reported to Streetscene.

157. Public Question Time

Five members of the public spoke during public question time, on the request from the Gateway Theatre Company and, in summary, raised the following points/questions:

- a statement was read out from a locally based newly qualified theatre producer, expressing the opinion that opportunities had increased and advocating for an optimistic approach
- concerns were expressed that if the Gateway had to close its doors, then the public would have to pay 100% of its costs
- support for the Gateway remaining open but it should learn lessons from the experience and not be let off its responsibilities
- the level of community support was reflected in the amount of funds raised on the Gateway's Go Fund Me appeal
- would any decision made be final or could it be affected by the outcome of the devolution process?
 - the Council replied that, at this stage the details of how devolution would affect the town council were unknown. However, it was very

likely that some services would be devolved to town and parish councils leading to greater pressure on the Council's finances

- where could information be found on the Council's budgets and monies spent on the town hall?
 - the Town Clerk confirmed that information was available on the Council's website and on the reports to the Council's Finance and General Purposes Committee which met 6 times a year. If other information was required, a request could be sent to the Town Clerk at any time

158. Committee Minutes

Members noted the minutes of the following meetings of the Council's committees:

- **Planning Committee** – 3 January and 13 February 2025

159. Town Clerk's Report

Members noted the report and correspondence log.

160. Update on Seaton Tourist Information Centre

Members noted the update on enquiries to the tourist information centre. Cllr Bowman advised that the tourist information centre would be open on the weekend of The Grizzly 2025 and thereafter weekend opening would resume from Easter for the summer season. He invited anyone who would like to volunteer to contact him.

161. Update on Council's financial position

Members considered the budgetary update, particularly in light of the ongoing expenditure on the town hall. The Town Clerk highlighted that, as part of its budget setting process for 2025/26, the Council had reduced its general reserves from six to three months and a small, estimated underspend, thereby enabling it to keep the increase in the precept as low as possible. An overspend was now inevitable.

Members, **RESOLVED** to:

- note the actual financial position, as against budget, as at 27 February 2025
- retain monies received at the maturity of the Council's 32-day Deposit Account, in the Treasurer's Account at Lloyds Bank
- fund, upfront, the cost of the fire-proofing of the stage and auditorium curtains at the town hall to a maximum cost of £2,000 + VAT, with reimbursement from GTC
- approve Supplier B to carry out the works to the external concrete panels at the town hall, at a cost of £5,549 + VAT, to be met from EMR328
- note the anticipated upcoming costs of £29-32,000 + relating to the town hall
- retrospectively apply £19,316.19 from EMR331 CIL Funding towards the works at Fisherman's Gap with the original allocation from EMR321 reverting to general reserves
- note the position with regard to earmarked reserves

(proposed Cllr. Hartnell, seconded Cllr. Ledger)

162. Request from Gateway to reverse Council decision of 27 January 2025

Members considered at length a document received from the Gateway Theatre Company ('GTC'). In summary, this included requests:

- a) to partially waive monies owed to the Council, under invoice 1731. The invoice total is £12,343.43 and the request was to waive £8,022.69 of that total; and
- b) to defer the payment of other monies due to the Council by 31 March 2025, under invoice 1749, of £10,619.07; and
- c) to defer further monies anticipated to fall due within the current financial year, for works currently being undertaken at the town hall, totalling between £5-7,000
- d) the basis of the deferment request was that the amounts be deferred:
 - o to the end of March 2026; or
 - o be paid in installments of £5K per quarter, commencing in June 2025 with a second payment in the second quarter of 2025/26

The request was supported by a document entitled '*Third Submission by GTC*' and included four budget scenarios. Prior to this meeting of Council, GTC had consented to a redacted version of the submission being published, with the projected budget scenarios removed.

At the commencement of the meeting on 3 March, after further discussions with the Town Clerk, GTC agreed that the four budget scenarios could also be circulated to the public, thereby enabling meaningful questions to be asked on the figures and their robustness tested. **A copy of the unredacted and updated submission has now been attached to the report on the Council's website providing transparency for the public, as to the basis on which discussions at the meeting took place, questions were asked, and the Council's decision reached.**

Members debated the submission and raised questions of GTC trustees on the figures included therein. Additionally, statements that had been made in the public meeting held by GTC on 19 February were raised and, where appropriate, corrected. A summary of matters discussed, clarification given and questions raised included the following:

- o the Council reaffirmed its commitment to retaining the town hall as a safe and well-managed community venue
- o the town hall as a building was distinct from GTC, as the tenant organisation, and the Council had to consider GTC's ability to manage the building safely and meet its financial commitments
- o GTC, as the tenant organisation paid £60 a year in annual rent and contributions of 50% or 100% towards the maintenance of different aspects of the building. The Council organised and paid for the building's insurance (currently £8,000 per annum) and GTC paid 50% towards this. Waiver/deferment of invoices, relating to these contributions for maintenance and insurance, were under discussion

- monies currently invoiced to GTC and due by the 31 March 2025 totalled £22,962.50
- the costs for the additional works currently being undertaken or scheduled at the town hall, and also likely to fall within the current financial year, amounted to between £5,000-7,000
- the tenant, as occupier, was responsible for the day-to-day H&S of the town hall
- Members expressed concern that, at GTC's public meeting on 19 February, it was stated that, prior to closure of the town hall, there was absolutely no risk to the public and that the current works arose from changing requirements of the insurers of the building. This was incorrect.
- fire risk assessments commissioned by GTC in 2022, 2023 and 2024 were referred to. These included several actions required, with varying degrees of priority and deadlines for completion. Members expressed concern that, had these works been undertaken in a timely manner, as recommended by the fire risk consultant, then the cash balances referred to in GTC's submission would have been significantly reduced.
- various questions were raised of GTC's trustees, as to whether they felt the forecasted budgets set out in the submission were realistic? The Council acknowledged that the figures were, necessarily, based on estimated projections.
- the trustees confirmed that as at the 3 March, £24,000 was held in GTC's bank account, due to a donation of £30,000 received from a small group of people. Additionally, approximately £18,000 had been secured via GTC's Go Fund Me appeal and it was hoped this amount would increase
- particular concern was raised as to whether, if deferred, the monies due could realistically be repaid to the Council, within the 2025/26 financial year, in light of other upcoming expenditure on the building that would have to be met, in part by GTC, during the next financial year.
- Members acknowledged that there was a difficult balance to be considered.

The following motion was proposed:

- to waive part of invoice 1731, totalling £8,022.69
- to defer the repayment date of monies due under invoices 1749 (£10,619.07) and other monies falling due by 31 March 2025 until later in the financial year 2025/26 with the payment rate being delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair

The motion failed.

An alternative proposal was brought and Members **RESOLVED** to:

- reaffirm the resolutions of the Council made on 27 January 2025
- refuse to waive invoice 1731, or any part thereof
- refuse to defer the repayment date of monies due under invoices 1731 and 1749 totalling £22,962.50, until later in the financial year 2025/26. These invoices remain due by 31 March 2025

- agree that any further contributions due from GTC towards works undertaken during this financial year (where the relevant invoices had not been received at the date of this meeting) would be rendered to GTC as part of the service charge due to the Council in March 2026
(proposed Cllr. Hartnell; seconded Cllr. Ledger)

163. Community Grants

Members considered and **RESOLVED** to approve the following application for a community grant:

- Citizen's Advice East Devon - £2,000

(proposed Cllr. Hartnell; seconded Cllr. Ledger)

164. Consultation on varied Public Spaces Protection Orders

Members **RESOLVED** that the Council's response to the consultation should confirm that it did not consider that changes were needed in Seaton
(proposed Cllr. Hartnell; seconded Cllr. Singh)

165. The Look Out – Cllr Rowland

Members **RESOLVED** that the Council should:

- write to the owners of The Look Out and to establish their intentions regarding the building and express the Council's concerns about its current condition and how this impacted on the seafront
- write to the planning enforcement team at EDDC and ask them to revisit the possibility of serving as s215 notice under the Town & Country Planning Act

(proposed Cllr. Rowland; seconded Cllr. Hartnell)

166. Seaton Community Arts

Members **RESOLVED** that a letter in support of the request by Seaton Community Arts CIC for funding from the Arts Council should be sent from the Council.

(proposed Cllr. Beer; seconded Cllr. Hartnell)

167. Proposal for Seafront Scheme

Members **RESOLVED** that, in principle, the Council would support a proposal in the terms published with the agenda, should it be formally submitted to the relevant principal authority by the applicant, with all requisite consents being in place. However, Members reserved the right to consider any future application on its merits, along with all other relevant information, at the point of submission (proposed Cllr. Ledger; seconded Cllr. Hartnell)

168. Playpark inspection reports

Members noted the play park inspection reports.

Confidential Item

The Chairman moved that, in accordance with the Council's Standing Order 1(d), press and public be excluded from the meeting during the discussion of the following item, as matters discussed include commercially sensitive information.

169. Update on relocation of Seaton Library

As heads of terms had only been received from DCC in the latter part of the week before the meeting, and in light of all capacity being taken up by the town hall, there had been insufficient time to consider the proposed terms in detail and raise questions of DCC. Therefore, Members **RESOLVED** to defer consideration of this item until the next meeting on 7 April 2025. (proposed Cllr. Ledger; seconded Cllr. Singh)

The meeting closed at 8.54pm.

Signed: _____

Dated: _____