



## Minutes of the ANNUAL TOWN PUBLIC MEETING

Held on

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024 at 7:30 p.m. at The Community Centre, Irnham  
Road, Minehead TA24 5DW

**Present:** Councillors C Palmer (Chair), Lawton, Hodson, Hall, Beynon, Jewell, M Palmer and Bonar.

**Apologies:** Councillors Bartlett, Hall and Kravis

**In Attendance:** B Parker (Town Clerk), Somerset Councillors Chilcott, Lawrence and 38 members of the public.

1. Welcome by the Mayor of Minehead.

Councillor C Palmer introduced himself, the Councillors present and the Town Clerk. He welcomed the members of the public present and thanked them all for their attendance.

2. To receive and approve the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

The minutes of the Annual Town Council Meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023 were approved.

3. To receive the Minehead Town Council Annual Report.

The Minehead Town Council Annual Report was received. Cllr C Palmer gave a brief overview of the report and informed all in attendance that a selection of paper copies would be available after the meeting. The annual report would also be available on the Minehead Town Council website.

4. Short reports from local organisations/groups who have received support or grants from Minehead Town Council.

The following local organisations/groups gave a brief verbal presentation.

- Minehead and Coast Development Trust.
- Minehead National Coast watch.
- Minehead Eye/Youth service.
- Citizen Advice West Somerset.
- Minehead Twinning Association.
- Minehead & Exmoor music festival.
- Minehead Museum.
- Minehead Wombles.

5. To receive a verbal update from Minehead Together, Business Association.

Anne Douglas of Minehead Together Business association gave a verbal presentation introducing the newly formed business association and identifying their key objectives including locally focused town events such as the Christmas light switch on May Day events.

6. To present the RHS In Your Neighbourhood Awards to local groups.

Cllr C Palmer explained that as part of Minehead obtaining a silver gilt Southwest in Bloom award in 2023, various local organisations and groups received recognition for the role they played in the upkeep of the town. All these groups were awarded with a level 4 – ‘thriving’ certificate. In your neighbourhood awards were presented to:

- Minehead Wombles for their work across the town
- Brian Milligan for his work monitoring and protecting the Reed Warbler population at Lower Marsh Common
- Community Pay back for their work in Blenheim Gardens.

Blenheim Gardens Volunteers group also received an award. However, no one was in attendance on their behalf. The Clerk will arrange the presenting of their certificate at a later date.

7. Public Question Time – To receive questions relating to the town of Minehead which may be asked by any Minehead resident.

A number of questions were received in advance and a written answer has been provided as an attachment to these minutes. (*Please see Appendix A*)

The chair allowed further verbal questions to be received. A number of additional questions were received.

8. Mayor’s closing comments.

The Mayor closed by thanking everyone for their attendance and thanked all the local organisations and groups for their hard work in providing for the town. He closed by reminding all that light refreshments are available.

Meeting closed at 21:18.

Councillor Craig Palmer  
Mayor of Minehead  
May 2024

## Appendix A

### Questions received in advance of Annual Town Public Meeting including Minehead Town Council Answers

Tuesday 7th May 2024

**Question Asked by:** Robbie Hamblin

"In light of our town's growing population and the need to provide more recreational opportunities for young children, particularly as the number of families increases, I would like to ask for community feedback on a proposal for a new football pitch.

Given the economic challenges faced by some areas of our town, especially those around Culvercliff Park, would you support the idea of building a new pitch there to not only provide a safe and accessible space for young people to play sports, but also to stimulate local businesses through increased foot traffic and community events?

This pitch could become a central hub for family-friendly activities, potentially boosting local commerce and revitalizing a part of town that has suffered economically. I would like to know your thoughts on this and whether the community believes this is the right location for such a development."

**Answer:** *Our Town Clerk has already spoken to Mr. Hamblin to discuss this matter further. While Culvercliffe open space is not owned by Minehead Town Council, we do manage other areas within the town that could potentially serve as better-suited locations for recreational facilities. We understand the ongoing need to cater to our community needs, especially families with young children.*

*The ground at Culvercliffe could be unstable due to its previous use as a rubbish tip, which could also raise concerns about potential toxic waste contamination. The Southwest Coast Path route may also be affected by any development in this location. It is also seen as an important area within the town for dog owners to exercise their dogs.*

*The Town Council would like to work collaboratively with Mr. Hamblin and explore the possibility of developing the recreational capacity at Periton Park instead. We will continue to assess the feasibility of developing available amenities, taking into consideration factors such as location, community impact, and economic costs. The Town Council values community feedback and will ensure that any proposed projects undergo thorough consultation to align with the needs and aspirations of our residents.*

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**Questions Asked by:** Jacqueline Fleming

1. Most of the drains in this town are blocked. I have reported the one outside of my house in Summerland Rd on many occasions since living here. It does concern me that nothing has ever been done to clear the same waste floating on the same water levels within the drain since coming here

I think the recent floods within the town were not helped by drains that were already blocked and unable to cope with the sheer volume of water at the end of last year, when we all watched the Avenue and others roads turn into rivers.

What will Minehead Town Council do or support the town in achieving a drain system that isn't blocked all the time?

What will the town Council do or support residents in safe guarding people's homes and businesses from being flooded again?

**Answer:** *The drain network in Minehead falls under the responsibility of various authorities, including Somerset Council and the Environment Agency. However, Minehead Town Council is willing to engage in further conversations with Somerset Council as part of the devolution talks to explore if there is a need for the Town Council to play a role in roadside gully clearing.*

*Recently, the Town Council has created an information hub on its website with useful links for flood prevention and response to assist the wider community. Additionally, we are in the process of updating our emergency response plan, which will clearly identify the role the Town Council will play in any emergency response within the town.*

*While we understand the frustration caused by blocked drains and the risk of flooding, safeguarding homes and businesses from such incidents requires a collaborative effort between multiple agencies. The Town Council remains committed to supporting residents and addressing these issues through proactive measures and open communication with the relevant authorities.*

**2. Question:** I was a keen swimmer and had been using the sea since my arrival as part of The Minehead Mermaids Blue Tits Group.

Whilst swimming at Minehead beach it became very noticeable that large numbers of Rats have taken up homes within the rock boulders that go from sea wall to waters edge at various points along the beach.

These rats are numerous and very active as the sun goes down. This was reported to Minehead Town Council 18 months ago and I was assured action would be taken. Rats are still living on the seafront.

Minehead often receives sewage alerts and swimmers are unable to use the beach to swim during these times.

When will Minehead Town Council address or support residents to have a beach free of rats and sewage?

**Answer:** *As the Town Council, we would like to clarify that the management of these particular issues does not fall directly under our jurisdiction. However, we are prepared to work collaboratively with the relevant authorities to address these problems effectively.*

*If you could kindly forward the response or provide the date when the email regarding the rat sighting was sent to Minehead Town Council, we can review our records and identify any potential miscommunication or misunderstanding on our part. Regarding the sewage alerts, while it is not the direct responsibility of Minehead Town Council, we have recognised the importance of keeping residents and visitors informed about potential water pollution incidents. As such, we have taken on the duty of ensuring that the information board at the beach entrance is promptly updated with the daily pollution warnings received from the Environment Agency.*

*We appreciate you bringing this issue to our attention, and we are ready to work towards finding suitable solutions in coordination with the appropriate authorities responsible for managing these aspects of the beach area.*

**3. Question:** Given the sewage, rats and tidal times of our Minehead Beach, how will Minehead Town Council support the residents of Minehead who are involved in a Cooperative idea for local people to provide a Local Swimming pool and Leisure facility for the residents of Minehead and surrounding towns and rural communities.

Will Minehead Town Council be supportive during these financially trying times. We want your support and use of land for which hopefully we will come to a beneficial arrangement for all concerned.

The health and wellbeing of people in this area must be of paramount importance to the Town Council. It's a sensible plan given the rising age range of older people who whilst living longer aren't always living healthier.

A swimming and leisure centre owned by the people for the community has to be something you would want to succeed and any help of a practical nature would be gratefully received. It would be good to know we have your continued goodwill to enable us to make this happen.

**Answer:** *A swimming pool and leisure facility for Minehead and the surrounding communities is something that the Town Council has demonstrated its willingness to assist with over the years. We have even earmarked some of our land as a potential site for such a facility.*

*However, the Town Council recognises that we may not currently possess the level of expertise within our organisation to lead such a complex project. Therefore, community involvement and expertise would be very much welcomed in taking this matter forward.*

*As the Town Council is prepared to provide a location for a pool, it is important that we are involved in any proposals from the outset. We would welcome representation on any community groups or cooperatives that have a desire to provide these facilities for the town.*

*While we cannot make any definitive commitments at this stage, the Town Council remains open to exploring possibilities that promote the health and well-being of our residents, especially in these financially trying times. We value initiatives that aim to provide accessible leisure and recreation opportunities for people of all ages in our community.*

4. **Question:** Given the potential health benefits of an active town, I would ask Minehead Town Council to support local people who try to live active happy healthy lives and take advantage of all that Minehead has to offer.

Therefore if you can put a stop to the most recent attack on local people who are in, or not, Minehead Watersport and Sailing Club, who are now being asked to pay an extraordinary increase in Slipway fees every time they want to push a kayak into the water. This was done without any consultation, which I thought was a legal requirement for Councils and even where it isn't best practice suggests it should be part of Council behaviour.

If this solely comes under the remit of Somerset Council, then please support us at those council meetings to overturn local covenants put in by the Luttrell Family that ensured the residents of Minehead could and should have access freely to the best the area could offer in terms of the great outdoors.

I call upon you to condemn the outrageous attack on locals to pay an extraordinary amount of money to walk down the Harbour slipway with a canoe. The free use of the slipway be returned to all residents of Minehead.

**Answer:** *We acknowledge the concerns raised by the community about the slipway fees at Minehead Harbour and the potential impact on organisations like Minehead Sailing and Watersports Club.*

*At this stage, the decisions regarding the slipway fees and their implementation fall under the jurisdiction of Somerset Council. As the Harbour Authority, Somerset Council is responsible for setting and managing these fees. Minehead Town Council is prepared to better understand the situation and the rationale behind the decisions made by Somerset Council. However, we recognise that this is primarily a matter for Somerset Council to address directly. We remain committed to representing the interests of our community and will continue to monitor developments related to this issue.*

*Should there be an opportunity for the Town Council to play a constructive role in facilitating dialogue or seeking reasonable solutions, we will consider such involvement.*

**5. Question:** What will Minehead Town Council be doing to ensure a continuing bus service to Taunton and also potentially build links within existing structures to have alternative health care, hospital treatment and opportunities in Bridgwater. Ensure a bus service or more effective links with HPC buses and assist them to put on more frequent free buses to build equally strong links with Bridgwater as well as Taunton.

**Answer:** *Minehead Town Council already allocates funds to subsidise local town bus services, as we recognise the importance of connectivity within and to a town like Minehead. Any further support or subsidy for initiatives such as extending services to Bridgwater or increasing frequency would need to be raised through the precept.*

*However, as we demonstrated when the Taunton to Minehead bus service was previously under threat, the Town Council is ready and willing to engage with partner organisations and community groups to promote and protect vital transport services.*

*We understand the need for effective transportation links, not only for commuting but also for accessing healthcare facilities and other essential services in neighbouring towns. The Town Council remains open to exploring solutions and collaborating with stakeholders to ensure the continued availability of bus services that meet the needs of our residents.*

**6. Question:** The appalling situation that Minehead Residents were left with last year when Minehead Medical Centre was closed down. Since it's reopening the service isn't visibly any better than before.

How are Minehead Town Council liaising with NHS Somerset ICB, to ensure the people in Minehead have the same health care service that often has to be achieved through a doctor's referral. This has not been a fair or equality of access for us in this town due to the absence or limited availability of a doctor in Minehead.

This is not an attack on the staff at the Centre who do a remarkable job with no resources of Doctors. The Nurses and the Paramedic there have coped admirably in the face of such overwhelming lack of support.

When will Minehead Town Council ensure or support Minehead having a adequate team of Doctors in place to offer the best health care locally and access to all the necessary health care where a doctors referral is the starting point?

**Answer:** *As a Town Council, our role in the direct provision of health services in Minehead is limited. However, we remain committed to working collaboratively with partner organisations to explore ways in which we can provide appropriate support.*

*We understand there are community concerns regarding the healthcare services, particularly the shortage of doctors in Minehead. While staffing and resource allocation decisions fall under the jurisdiction of the NHS, the Town Council is willing to engage with them to convey the concerns of our residents.*

*To illustrate our supportive approach, we regularly donate space within the community centre for NHS functions and support group meetings, ensuring vital services and resources remain accessible to our residents.*

*We recognise the importance of quality healthcare provisions and fair access for all residents. We will continue to advocate for improvement in services and collaborate with relevant stakeholders such as the NHS, to find viable solutions that address the community's healthcare needs effectively.*

**7. Question:** Having just returned from Southern Spain and spent some time visiting other UK beach towns, I am deeply disappointed that Minehead has never truly developed the beach front area for the better of locals and tourists enjoyment.

Local beaches in Seaton for example had beach front toilets with shower facilities. In Southern Spain there were groups of Toilets, showers for body and feet, exercise equipment, grassy palm tree

resting areas every 50 metres along the beach front for a beach that was 8 miles long huge resources to accommodate this. Many of the toilets were a small blue cabin type building you might find on a building site. Local eateries were in receipt of the keys to these cabins. Might the Town Council encourage similar partner arrangements for toilets showers on Minehead sea front. Minehead Town Council should install gym like equipment of the variety in design on the walk areas along the beach front. Healthy citizens cost less in later life to the NHS and couldn't joint money be found for ideas like this in every part of our Country but for us here at Minehead maybe work could start soon next winter for use next summer. Two areas along Minehead seafront with these amenities should be sufficient. Extend these things in time along Culver Cliff pathway.

**Answer:** *Minehead Town Council acknowledges the need for an attractive and inclusive seafront that caters to the needs of both locals and tourists. This is reflected in our decision to take over the public toilet facilities when the district council closed them in 2016.*

*As the seafront is a Somerset Council-owned asset, it has undergone revitalisation works in the recent past, with the construction of two new shelters being completed earlier this year. Given Somerset Council's financial difficulties, the Town Council will continue to explore ways to support and assist in the upkeep of Somerset Council-owned areas.*

*However, any proposals for public use equipment, such as gym facilities or additional amenities along the seafront, will need to be carefully considered in terms of cost and suitability against the environmental backdrop. While enhancing the seafront experience is desirable, we must strike a balance between providing amenities and preserving the natural environment that draws visitors to our coastal town.*

**8. Question:** I would like to thank Minehead Town Council for supporting the free music to residents and visitors to Blenheim Gardens on the weekend over the Summer period. Could we also have gym equipment installed in the park please. Some picnic tables dotted about would be nice for families and board games etc and area for a large chess board on the floor. Some activities that wouldn't cost the earth but a way of locals enjoying the surroundings they have in a rich variety of ways. Maybe a further use of locals wanting benches in honour of loved ones, maybe a picnic like round table and chairs should be alternatives in the future rather than the long benches everywhere. They don't encourage togetherness or facilitate activities. Maybe a small Pickleball court, Americas version of tennis which older people love to play.

**Answer:** *While these ideas aim to promote community engagement and diverse activities, it's important to note that Blenheim Gardens is not owned or managed by Minehead Town Council. Any future developments or additions within the gardens would need to carefully balance public demand with preserving the historical significance and character of these iconic gardens. The council would need to consult with the relevant authorities responsible for Blenheim Gardens to gauge the feasibility and appropriateness of such proposals. Ultimately, any decisions would need to reflect the broader public's wishes while respecting the gardens' heritage and aesthetic value.*

*Blenheim Gardens is primarily a public garden, and some of the suggested activities may not be entirely compatible with its existing character. For instance, the gardens already has a putting course that occupies a significant portion of the open space. There may be other recreational sites around the town that are more suited to the proposed activities.*

*Locations like Irnham Road, King George or Periton Park could potentially be better alternatives for consideration. These areas might provide more suitable spaces for the suggested activities without compromising the historical and aesthetic appeal of Blenheim Gardens.*

*The Town Council recognises the importance of preserving the unique charm and heritage of Blenheim Gardens while also accommodating the evolving needs and interests of the community. Any potential developments or additions within the gardens would require extensive consultation with the relevant authorities and stakeholders, ensuring that the public's wishes are balanced with the preservation of this iconic green space.*

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**Question Asked By:** Mrs Davidson

Most councils try to increase their precept by the rate of inflation and “cut their cloth accordingly”. But it would appear MTC has decided what it wants to do, and increased the precept to accommodate their plans, thus resulting in a huge rise above inflation rate, and a much bigger precept figure than other comparable towns. Why was the latter method adopted and not the former (by inflation figure)?

**Answer:** *The council has a statutory obligation to prepare an annual budget estimating income and expenditure. The budget process for 2024/25 began late last year, with the Finance and General Purposes committee's recommendation in January and final approval by the end of the month. Council guidance emphasises estimating expenditure to determine the precept, rather than starting from a predetermined percentage increase.*

*Given the potential devolution of assets and services from Somerset Council, the devolution contingency constituted a significant portion of the 2023/24 budget. However, the council acknowledges the importance of public opinion on provided services and facilities in budget setting. Throughout 2024, the council aims to enhance communication with the wider community to ensure future budgets better reflect their needs.*

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**Question Asked by:** Mrs Debbie Allum

“What is being done to assist Minehead Sailing and Watersports Club, a ‘not-for-profit’ registered charity, no. 1118807, which was forced to close on 2nd April 2024, after over half a century of providing a vital community club, as it cannot pay the exorbitant new Slipway fees.

These fees are also payable by the wider community and visitors to Minehead, now £16 a day to launch one kayak, a family of four, for example, will now need to pay £64 to go out on kayaks, will have to negotiate the locked chain across the slipway, and may be aggressively approached on the slipway by the Assistant Harbour master, with his mobile phone in their face, recording them, as a member of the public was, this week.

The Savings Proposal Committee’s recommendations represent a 4483% increase on what the club paid last year, according to the incorrect figures they quote, yet the opening statement proposes to increase all fees by the 6.8% rate of RPI’

This decision was based on misrepresentation and inaccurate figures, and we urgently request immediate assistance to get our charity concession reinstated, and more reasonable fees for the wider public. In Salcombe, for example, canoes, kayaks, paddle boards and rowing boats are charged at £6 PER ANNUM.”

**Answer:** *We acknowledge the concerns raised by the community about the slipway fees at Minehead Harbour and the potential impact on organisations like Minehead Sailing and Watersports Club.*

*At this stage, the decisions regarding the slipway fees and their implementation fall under the jurisdiction of Somerset Council. As the Harbour Authority, Somerset Council is responsible for setting and managing these fees. Minehead Town Council is prepared to better understand the situation and the rationale behind the decisions made by Somerset Council. However, we recognise that this is primarily a matter for Somerset Council to address directly. We remain committed to representing the interests of our community and will continue to monitor developments related to this issue.*

*Should there be an opportunity for the Town Council to play a constructive role in facilitating dialogue or seeking reasonable solutions, we will consider such involvement.*