

# BICKLEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

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## Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Bickleigh Parish Council held on Thursday 28th May 2026 at 7.30pm at the Woolwell Centre, Woolwell PL6 7TR

**Present:** Cllr Larry Taylor (in the Chair), Cllr Paul Blight, Cllr Andrew Clarke, Cllr Nicky Hopwood, Cllr Marcus Lane, Cllr Jackie Taylor, Cllr Geoff Pithouse, Cllr Brian Hill (virtually), Mrs Helen Broughton (Clerk – virtually).

**Minute number:** 260528:

### **Open Forum**

*It was reported that the road name sign at the top of **Long Park** is in poor condition and requires repair. Cllr Hopwood agreed to investigate the matter and provide an update.*

*The Chair of Woolwell in Bloom reported that the new planters have now been installed and have received an excellent response from the local community. The judging day is scheduled for 28 July.*

*It was suggested that recognition be given to the Parish Council for its grant funding towards the planters. This would help raise awareness of the grants available from the Parish Council to other local organisations.*

*It was agreed that Cllr Larry Taylor open the meeting*

- Election of the Chairperson**  
It was proposed that Cllr Hill be appointed Chairperson of the Council for the 2026/27 municipal year. There being no other nominations he was appointed unopposed.
- The Chairpersons **declaration of Acceptance of Office** would be signed before the next meeting.
- Election of the Vice Chairperson**  
It was proposed that Cllr Larry Taylor be appointed Vice-Chairperson of the Council for the 2026/27 municipal year. There being no other nominations he was appointed unopposed.
- Apologies for absence:** Cllr Brian Hill (who attended virtually)
- There were no **pecuniary or other interests** pertaining to items on the agenda.
- No **dispensations** had been received.

7. **Minutes**

It was agreed that the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 23rd April 2026 were a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

8. **Clerks Report** was noted.

Cllr Hopwood agreed to progress replacing of 17 tiles at the Woolwell Centre. A meeting with Trustees was suggested for a date after 28<sup>th</sup> June.

9. **Reports and updates**

- i. A written report had been received from the County Councillor (appendix A).
- ii. An update on local government re-organisation was expected mid-July.

10. **Committees and Working Groups**

- i. It was agreed that Committees remain unchanged:  
Finance / Staffing Committee  
Woolwell Centre Working Group
- ii. The following members were appointed:  
Finance and Staffing Committee – *Cllrs: Brian Hill, Nicky Hopwood, Geoff Pithouse and Marcus Laine.*  
Woolwell Centre Working Group – *Cllrs: Larry Taylor, Jackie Taylor, Andrew Clarke, Paul Blight, Nicky Hopwood and Brian Hill.*
- iii. It was agreed to appoint Geoff Pithouse as the Parish Council representative on the Roborough Village Hall Committee.

11. The following **policies** were reviewed and it was agreed to re-adopt:

- i. Financial Regulations
- ii. Standing
- iii. Orders and the Code of Conduct

12. **Finance and Administration**

- i. Insurance arrangements were reviewed and approved with James Hallam at a cost of £3,477.
- ii. It was agreed to appoint Cllr Hopwood to review the accounts and bank reconciliations on a quarterly basis.
- iii. Receipts and payments against budget as at 30<sup>th</sup> April 2026 were noted.
- iv. The April 26 bank reconciliation was agreed.
- v. It was agreed that an application to the District Council Climate and Biodiversity Fund for £2,000 for new benches and picnic tables be made.
- vi. A grant application from Roborough Methodist Church was approved in the sum of £2,785.00. It was noted that community groups would benefit from the improvements to the structure of the building.
- vii. The Parish Council grants policy was approved.
- viii. The following payments were approved and it was noted that invoices had been sent electronically to Councillors and that all invoices listed have been ‘examined and verified’ by the RFO).

**Pre-paid**

| SUPPLIER | DETAILS | TOTAL | VAT | NET |
|----------|---------|-------|-----|-----|
|----------|---------|-------|-----|-----|

|       |  |  |  |  |
|-------|--|--|--|--|
| Cutec |  |  |  |  |
|-------|--|--|--|--|

**For approval**

| SUPPLIER    | DETAILS                        | TOTAL   | VAT    | NET    |
|-------------|--------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| H Broughton | Salary May                     | 707.35  | 0      | 707.35 |
| Nest        | Pension April                  | 67.46   | 0      | 67.46  |
| Arborcure   | Grass cutting April 26         | 1013.47 | 168.91 | 844.56 |
| Cleanwise   | Cleaning of bus shelters       | 38.00   | 0      | 38.00  |
| Western Web | Annual Web Accessibility check | 54.00   | 9.00   | 45.00  |

**13. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)**

- i. The annual internal audit report was noted and minor recommendations were agreed to be actioned.
- ii. The effectiveness of the Parish Council’s Internal Audit was considered and reviewed and agreed.
- iii. Responses to the Annual Governance Statement assertions as set out in Section 1 of the AGAR for the year ended 31 March 2026, as informed by the Internal Audit report were agreed.
- iv. The Council resolved to approve Section 2 of the AGAR, Accounting Statements for year-ended 31 March 2026 (informed by Council Accounts and confirmed by Internal Audit figures)
- v. It was noted that the period of elector’s rights will commence on Wednesday 3rd June 2026 and finish on Tuesday 14th July 2026. Public notification will be placed on noticeboards and the website.

**14. Woolwell Centre**

It was suggested that a contract be taken out with an electrical contractor for minor repairs.

**15. Planning**

A response to the following planning applications were agreed:

1327/26/HHO - The Beeches, Bickleigh Down Road, Roborough. Demolition of existing conservatory and porch. Erection of new rear extension, garage extension. Raise roof to provide new first floor rooms.

**No objection**

0789/26/HHO - 89 Woodend Road, Woolwell. Single storey rear extension

**No objection**

**16. Community and Environment**

- i. It was agreed not to host a free community talk delivered through the Age UK Devon Scams Awareness Service.

- ii. It was agreed to proceed with a quotation from Arborcure for weed killing. Expenditure of £2006 was agreed. The Clerk would ask Arborcure to begin with Woolwell then inform Cllr Hopwood when moving onto other areas.

17. **Roborough Village Hall:** Cllr Pithouse reported that the Fete had been very successful.

18. The **date of the next meeting** was agreed as 25<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

## Appendix A

*Bickleigh Parish Council*

*To the Chairman and members of Bickleigh Parish Council*

*May 2026*

*DCC report*

*Cllr Tony Carson*

### **Summary**

- *Rolling out budget decisions agreed earlier in 2026*
- *Pushing service changes (especially libraries, SEND, and transport)*
- *Progressing major planning and environmental strategies*
- *Continuing the backdrop of local government reorganisation*

*The Budget is still the big story*

*Although the budget was set in February, May is when the effects are becoming real.*

- *DCC approved an £839m budget for 2026/27, with a 4.99% council tax rise*
- *Heavy spending is going into:*
  - *Children's services (£268m), especially SEND.*
  - *Road repairs and highways*
- *But the key issue:*
- *The council still needs ~£39m in savings to balance finances*  
*Services are being protected in priority areas, but cuts and restructuring are still quietly happening elsewhere, especially in community services.*
  - *Libraries row (still rumbling)*  
*One of the more politically sensitive issues this month:*
  - *The council is pushing "transformation" of library services*
  - *Around £1m reserve and funding adjustments are being used to reshape it.*
- *But:*
- *This follows earlier proposals to reduce hours / change delivery models*
- *Public concern remains that cuts are being reframed as reform.*
  - *In plain terms:*  
*Libraries aren't closing outright, but the service model is being scaled back and restructured.*  
*Major focus on children, SEND and fostering*  
*This is probably the single biggest operational focus.*
  - *Recent developments:*
- *Extra funding to:*
  - *Speed up Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)*
  - *Expand specialist school places*
- *New support measures:*
  - *Council tax reductions for foster carers*
- *Active campaigns:*
  - *Recruitment drive during Fostering Fortnight 2026.*

*The high demand for SEND and children's social care is one of the main reasons DCC finances are under pressure.*

*Environment and planning decisions moving ahead*

*From April Cabinet decisions feeding into May activity:*

- *Adoption of the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy*

- *Work progressing on large-scale development projects, including:*
  - *A proposed new town in East Devon (~10,000 homes)*
- *Other May announcements:*
- *New strategy to reverse nature decline across Devon*

*DCC is trying to balance:*

- *Growth (housing, infrastructure)*
- *Environmental obligations (biodiversity, climate targets)*

*Infrastructure + roads*

- *Increased funding for:*
  - *Road maintenance and drainage*
  - *Faster delivery of improvements tied to new housing*

*This reflects ongoing criticism about Devon's road conditions*

*Cost-of-living and community support*

*Recent activity includes:*
- *Continued use of the Crisis and Resilience Fund for low-income households*
- *New initiatives linking:*
  - *Businesses*
  - *Environmental fundraising.*

*Local government reorganisation*
- *Devon has bid for a "mega-council" restructure to achieve greater economies of scale, and service delivery efficiencies, although this may not be the Government's preferred option for the County.*
- *This affects:*
  - *Elections timing*
  - *Staffing*
  - *Service design*
- *Governance structures and collaboration decisions continue to be made with this future in mind*
- *Reality:*

*A lot of current decisions are being taken with "this council may not exist in its current form by 2028" in mind.*

*This month at Devon County Council is about pressure and transition.*

*The key items are:*

- *Financial strain despite a large budget*
- *Rising demand in children's services*
- *Quiet restructuring of community services like libraries*
- *Balancing development with environmental commitments*

- *Preparing for major structural change in local government*