

NORTH TAWTON ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

THURSDAY 30TH APRIL 2026

Rugby Club, North Tawton

Minutes

Present: Cllr C Lee (Chairman), Cllr S Whiteley (Chair of Finance), Cllr S McKnight (Vice Chair & Chair of Personnel), Cllr C Burrow, Cllr N Smith, Mrs C Ellis (Town Clerk), Dr H Bruni (Deputy Clerk) and approximately 18 residents.

Cllr Lee welcomed the residents to the meeting.

1. **Apologies** – Cllr S Davies (DCC) and Cllr M Casbolt (WDBC) both sent their apologies.
2. **Confirmation of the Minutes** – Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 1st May 2025 were approved.
3. **Guest speakers**
 - **First Responders** – There was a presentation and slide show from NHS SW Ambulance Service regarding the work of the Community First Responders. They have over 800 volunteers and they are trained and managed by the ambulance service. The incidents they attend range from ‘non-injury falls’ to the most serious cardiac arrests. If any resident wishes to volunteer, they were asked to speak to them after the meeting. The residents were reminded the Council have organised defibrillator training on 3rd September 2026 at 7pm at the Rugby Club.
 - **Police** – The Clerk informed the residents Inspector Jones had contacted her and he had ‘stood down’ PCSO Watts from attending. He encouraged residents to attend the drop-in meetings or the meetings held at Okehampton Police Station, the next one being on 27th May at 6pm.
 - **Arla** – Absent.
 - **Devon County Council (Cllr Davies)** – Cllr Davies had apologised for her absence, but Cllr Casbolt has issued a report regarding the Local Government Reorganisation. At present Devon operates under a two-tier system, but the Government has decided to move towards unitary councils, where a single council delivers all local services in the area. A consultation had been taken place, and the Government were reviewing the submissions. A decision was expected in the Summer 2026. May 2027 there will be elections to the new unitary councils. They will initially operate in shadow form, preparing for transition. In April 2028 the new council will formally take over.

BREAK

4. Council Reports

- **Chair annual report** – Cllr Colin Lee reported it had been a busy year. The Town Clerk has now been in her position for 18 months and the Deputy Clerk for just over 12 months. The Chair informed the residents of the assets the Council manages, including the Memorial Park, shelter and play equipment, public toilets, 2 car parks, cemetery and the closed churchyard. The land swap for the new cemetery had been delayed by probate but is now going ahead. We have new contractors. DH Garden Services now looks after the Grounds Maintenance and Tamsin Fudge is our Handyperson. The WI are busy knitting and crocheting poppies for Remembrance Sunday as they will be decorating the 'Tommy Statues'. The Council were planning Christmas tree and light event for Sunday 6th December 2026. The residents were reminded the Council are here to represent them. The office was open Monday – Wednesday, if they would like to speak to a Clerk please pop in. There was more information on the website. The Town Council currently have 3 vacancies. If you would like to apply, please speak to a Councillor or the Town Clerk. Residents are welcome to attend Council meetings which are normally held on the 1st Tuesday of the month in the Council office at 7.30pm.
- **Annual Financial report** – Cllr Steve Whiteley reported setting the budget for 2026/2027 starts in September 2025 with the aim to finalise in January 2026 to submit to WDBC, who collect the council tax. With so many factors to consider this was not easy. Inflation last year was at 3.8% and NI was set to rise significantly along with increase in wages cost. As reported last year a member of the public challenged the 2023/2024 AGAR, which they are entitled to. The Council set aside £1500 for estimated cost of the external auditor, unfortunately the actual cost was £5800 plus VAT. The additional £4300 the Council took from the General Reserves. Anticipating a possible 2024/2025 challenge the Council, on the advice from the RFO, and a member of the of the public, to create an earmarked reserve of £8000 as it is possible to have 2 invoices in one year from the external auditor. This proved to be the correct thing to do as the Council has received a challenge from a member of the public to the 2024/2025 AGAR, which was ongoing. All these factors considered we were looking at a rise in the precept of 7.1% initially. Two meetings later we managed to trim the budget back to an estimated 3.8%, which turned into 3.5% after reaching WDBC. Brighter news, the Cemetery fees has remained the same this year for Parishioners, with a rise for non-Parishioners. Access fees for residents who use the car park to access their property are the same as last year, but an additional £5 if not paid after 14 days of invoicing. The Councils grass cutting contract ended in March 2026. With the new contract we have limited the number of cuts to some areas, which with the new contractor has resulted in a possible saving of £3,000 that will be reflected in the 2027/2028 budget. The Council has closed two accounts with Nat West, for several reasons, including poor interest rates and has opened an account with an investment bank CCLA. At the moment giving a monthly return of approximately £400 compounded until needed, again this will be reflected in the 2027/2028 budget. A big thank you to our RFO Caroline, in preparing the budget which went to version 5, before being accepted by the Full Council.
- **Transport Issues** –Cllr Lee reported the VAR sign had been installed, but it was very sensitive and would trigger before the 30mph limit. This was an issue they were aware of. It was suggested lowering the speed limit to 40mph to where it meets the 30mph limit, from De Bathe crossroads. The Council had investigated, with Devon Highways, installing a 7.5 tonne limit from De Bathe Cross, including the signage, but the Town Council would have to fund

this. It was suggested to ask Gregory's and Arla to help with the funding. The Council would reconsider investigating the 20s Plenty Initiative. The Council were looking for volunteers to enable Speedwatch to be resurrected. Residents would be trained in the use of the device. It had been requested by a retailer to consider a time limit for parking in the Square, on the Post Office side, to allow visitors to the Town to frequent the shop more easily. The Council thought these issues and should go out for consultation.

- **Emergency Plan** – Cllr Whiteley reported North Tawton Town Council were obligated to keep a Community Emergency Plan, which needs to be reviewed. We have now finalised a review, with a new response team, although in a real crisis all Councillors are expected to assist, unless having a good reason not to. If any resident has a particular skill or knowledge that would be useful in an emergency, please contact myself or the Deputy Clerk and we can include your details for reference. Parishioners with special needs, who consider themselves to be vulnerable in a crisis, can register with the Council. There is a restricted version which is only available to the Community Emergency Team.

We will be updating the emergency advise leaflet, which will be delivered to your door when available. We are looking for volunteers to help with the distribution of these leaflets. The Devon Resilience Fund have grants available up to £1500. Hannah our Deputy Clerk has applied for the funding towards the printing of the plan, and leaflets together with updating the items held in the office.

Thanks to Hannah for her work in preparing the plan and filing the grant application.

- **WDBC** – Not present.

5. **Public session Questions** - The Council were asked if they could lobby for a better bus service and for a bus service to the new train station when it was open. A resident asked the Council to consider building car parks within the town. A resident asked what skills maybe required to help when there was an emergency. Suggestions were residents with 4x4 vehicles, tractors and use of chainsaws etc.

Meeting closed at 9.10pm