

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT
COUNCIL HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY 29 JUNE 2023**

MEMBERS

* Cllr G Pannell – Chairman

* Cllr B Taylor – Vice-Chairman

* Cllr V Abbott	∅ Cllr S Jackson
* Cllr G Allen	* Cllr L Lawford
∅ Cllr J P Birch	* Cllr M Long
* Cllr L Bonham	* Cllr J McKay
* Cllr J Brazil	* Cllr P Munoz
* Cllr J Carson	* Cllr A Nix
* Cllr B Cooper	* Cllr D M O’Callaghan
* Cllr S Dennis	* Cllr C Oram
* Cllr A Dewynter	* Cllr S Penfold
* Cllr N Dommett	* Cllr A Presswell
∅ Cllr T Edie	* Cllr S Rake
* Cllr D Hancock	* Cllr M Steele
* Cllr J D Hawkins	* Cllr D Thomas
* Cllr J M Hodgson	* Cllr G Yardy
* Cllr N A Hopwood	

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

** Denotes attendance over Teams in a non-voting capacity

Officers in attendance and participating:

For all items: Senior Leadership Team; Monitoring Officer; Democratic Services
Manager

18/23 MINUTES

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 25 May 2023 were confirmed as a true and correct record.

19/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting but there were none made.

20/23 REPORTS OF BODIES

That the minutes and recommendations of the undermentioned bodies be received and approved subject to any amendments listed below:-

(a) Development Management Committee – 7 June 2023

21/23

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was noted that the following public question had been received in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, for consideration at this meeting:

From Mr John Grocock:

“Recent Liberal Democrat literature informed us there are ‘766 households in urgent need of affordable rented accommodation’. Once the action plan to tackle this has been published, how frequently, and by what means (other than online), will the public be updated on progress?”

Response from Cllr O’Callaghan (lead Executive Member for Housing):

In her response, Cllr O’Callaghan made the following statement:

‘Trying to provide good quality genuinely affordable housing is a top priority for this Council administration. We are also committed to trying our best to help people. At its meeting yesterday, the Executive approved measures to help tenants to take action against landlords who are failing to help with issues of damp, mould and disrepair through a streamlined reporting process following which the Council has the power (in serious cases) to inspect homes, challenge landlords and ultimately (in the worst cases) impose civil penalties and prosecutions.

Often, its hard to even move to escape with the freeze on Housing Benefits since 2020 drastically reducing the number of homes covered by benefit, with the Institute for Fiscal Studies figures suggesting that its now only 5% of homes.

In one of the richest countries in the world, people should have a basic right to damp and mould free homes in reasonable repair and a right to get redress if they don’t.

We’ll also be looking to improve the quality of our housing stock – through grants we have begun upgrading energy inefficient homes for people on low incomes and helped low income landlords improve insulation and draught proofing for example, but we need to do more.

As Mr Grocock’s question suggests, all too many people on the Devon Home Choice housing waiting list in South Hams are having problems getting affordable housing in the first place.

Nationally, we have inherited the problem of Council Housing offered as ‘Right to Buy’ from the Thatcher era onward not being replaced in sufficient numbers. In my own ward of Kingsbridge, there are plenty of houses being built– just not enough of them that locals can afford.

In the private rental market, prices are soaring, exacerbated by rising mortgage rates and there is a shortage made worse by some landlords switching to more lucrative AirBnB short-term lets.

The fact that there are I think 4,000 second homes in the district and only 3,450 social rented homes tells its own story.

The new administration wants to help and take action where it can and lobby Central Government where it cant.

We want to get genuinely affordable homes on the Ropewalk site in Kingsbridge for example and have asked for a review of all Council Capital projects and land owned by the Council to see where we could build further such homes.

We also want to invest in suitable property in our towns and villages to provide affordable/social rent homes. Government funding has enabled us to acquire seven homes to support Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, which can also be used as general purpose temporary accommodation. These are being built currently and should be ready for Christmas.

Next year, the Joint Local Plan (which covers the South Hams) is up for review and we have the opportunity to lobby for a higher proportion of affordable homes in developer led housing.

Whilst a long introduction to the question, I wish at this first Full Council meeting to set out an idea of what our priorities and aims are in this key area.

Our action plan involves, of course, over the coming weeks and months of talking to and consulting with our communities to establish what they (or in fact you) want to see and to help guide us on to the right track. We will prepare a draft document after talking to town and parish councils and other key partners and stakeholders.

We will then carry out a four week public consultation in early Autumn, as well as online engagement (for example, we will have on-street surveys). We do not want to be seen as doing things to you, we want to do them with you in a spirit of partnership working.

The Council intends to publish an annual delivery plan, with regular performance monitoring. Housing updates will be provided on a regular basis to the Council's Executive. All these formal meetings are open to the public, livestreamed if you are unable to attend and available afterwards on our Council website.

We update the public via our Communications Team on social media and in the local press and District Councillors attend their local town and parish council meetings to provide updates and these meetings are also open to the public.

Councillor contact details are publicly available should constituents wish to ask questions about housing policy or anything else.

Finally, thank you Mr Grocock for your question and your interest.'

22/23

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

It was noted that no Questions on Notice had been received in accordance with Council Procedure Rules.

23/23

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

It was noted that one Motion on Notice had been received in accordance with Council Procedure Rules;

a) From Cllr McKay and Cllr Abbott

'A priority for this Council is to address the challenges of climate change by reducing emissions across the district of South Hams and to prepare the area for the inevitable consequences of global warming.

This Council will set itself goals based on the latest climate science, and in the interests of its residents and beyond strive to achieve these. However, it recognises that it will need help from central government in terms of both funding and legislation.

It is therefore essential that this Council, in partnership with other Local Authorities, either directly or through the LGA, vigorously and persistently lobbies central government for the support that is desperately needed to effectively address the threats to our communities as a result of climate change.

Of immediate importance are the problems community renewable energy projects face, which can only be dealt with through changes to legislation. Currently, to become an energy supplier, it is necessary to enter into highly complex network agreements and grid balancing codes that make the cost prohibitive.

The Local Electricity Bill was an attempt to address this by the introduction of:

- a) *A Community Electricity Export Guarantee: which would create a right for sites that generate low carbon electricity with a capacity below 5 megawatts to export their electricity to an existing electricity supplier on fair terms.*
- b) *A Community Electricity Supplier Services Scheme: which would create a requirement on existing larger energy suppliers to work with community schemes to sell the power they generate to local customers. Existing suppliers could charge a fee for doing this, but that fee must be reasonable.*

The Local Electricity Bill has now been absorbed into the Energy Bill as clauses 272 and 273. The Energy Bill is at its Committee stage, and has still to progress through its Report and 3rd Reading stages before it becomes law. It is an enormous bill.

The need for community based local renewable energy schemes is becoming increasingly urgent if we are to drive down eCO2 emissions, provide energy security for our residents while also addressing the cost of energy for residents and businesses alike.

This Council therefore resolves that:

- 1. It recognises the urgent need for community energy generation projects and the need to create the legislative environment in which they can succeed.*
- 2. It fully supports clauses 272 and 273 of the Energy Bill and urges government to speed the passage of the Energy Bill or, in recognition of the importance of clauses 272 and 273, to allow the Local Electricity Bill to proceed separately and at speed.*
- 3. It will write to our local MPs and the leaders of all the UK political parties emphasising the importance of community energy projects and the urgent need to expedite changes to legislation to make them viable.*
- 4. It will seek to partner with other Local Authorities both directly and through the LGA to lobby parliament to achieve the legislative changes.*
- 5. It will publicise, through all suitable media channels, the importance of the need for changes to legislation to allow community energy projects to succeed.'*

During debate, the following points were raised:

- (a) A number of Members stressed the importance of this Motion and therefore wished to put on record their thanks to the proposer and seconder for submitting it for inclusion on this agenda;
- (b) In light of a Member suggestion, an additional (part 6) to the motion was approved by the proposer and seconder for inclusion as part of the substantive motion. This addition read as follows:

'It will write to the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Department for Business and Trade and request that the installation of the vital grid network link at Hinckley is brought forward as a matter of urgency to enable more renewable energy projects to come forward and not be left awaiting the commissioning of Hinckley C Nuclear Power Station that could take years.'

It was then:

RESOLVED

That Council:

1. recognises the urgent need for community energy generation projects and the need to create the legislative environment in which they can succeed;
2. fully supports clauses 272 and 273 of the Energy Bill and urges government to speed the passage of the Energy Bill or, in recognition of the importance of clauses 272 and 273, to allow the Local Electricity Bill to proceed separately and at speed;
3. will write to our local MPs and the leaders of all the UK political parties emphasising the importance of community energy projects and the urgent need to expedite changes to legislation to make them viable;
4. will seek to partner with other Local Authorities both directly and through the LGA to lobby parliament to achieve the legislative changes;
5. will publicise, through all suitable media channels, the importance of the need for changes to legislation to allow community energy projects to succeed; and
6. will write to the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Department for Business and Trade and request that the installation of the vital grid network link at Hinckley is brought forward as a matter of urgency to enable more renewable energy projects to come forward and not be left awaiting the commissioning of Hinckley C Nuclear Power Station that could take years.

(Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 2.30 pm)

Chairman