



Coffinswell Parish Council

Serving the Communities of
Coffinswell & Dacombe

The Cirl Bunting is the UK's rarest farmland bird. The entire breeding population is found between Exeter and Plymouth.

MINUTES OF THE COFFINSWELL PARISH COUNCIL MEETING TUESDAY 17TH MARCH 2026 7PM AT ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

Present: Cllr N Orchard (Chair), Cllr S Avery (Vice Chair), Cllr C Bell, Cllr S Spokes, and Cllr E Barnard

In attendance: District Cllr J Radford
DCC Heather Horner
Cllr Stephen Horner, Teignbridge District Councillor
Mrs L Moorese – Parish Clerk

1. The Chair opened the meeting at 7.00pm, welcoming everyone in attendance and received apologies from Cllr M Atkinson and District Cllr J Taylor (via District Cllr J Radford).
2. **To declare any interests arising at this meeting.**
None

3. **Reports:**

3.1 County Councillors' report.

County Councillor Heather Horner, attending for the first time, introduced herself and provided an overview of Devon County Council's 2026–2027 budget and priorities. Key areas of focus include significant investment in highways, with £32.4 million allocated plus an additional £4 million for road repairs, drainage, and maintenance, contributing to a five-year plan exceeding £546 million and aimed particularly at improving rural infrastructure and responsiveness to local issues. She also advised that children's services and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) will also see increased funding, with a £268million budget and £76.5million in capital investment to expand specialist provision and facilities, alongside a call for more foster carers.

Despite the need to achieve £39million in savings, locality budgets will increase to support community projects, and residents are encouraged to apply for funding. It was noted that Council Tax will rise by 4.99% to help sustain essential services. DCC Horner also highlighted the Devon Educational Trust as a valuable source of support for young people.

Discussion then turned to Local Government re-organisation, where multiple proposals—including a "5-4-1" model supported by the Devon County Council—are under consideration, with the final decision resting with central Government. Concerns were also expressed about the uncertainty surrounding the proposals - the potentially high costs; the risk of reduced local representation, and the possibility that additional responsibilities could be passed to Parish Councils without corresponding funding.

3.2 District Councillors' report.

The meeting moved to District Cllr Radford's report, beginning with an apology from the Chair and Clerk for a previous administrative error. Discussion then followed concerning issues with missing or inaccessible meeting minutes on the Parish Council's website, with confusion caused by a transition to a new, mirrored site. Concerns were raised about transparency, accuracy of records, and the importance of proper documentation, particularly during an election period. The Clerk acknowledged technical problems and agreed to investigate and resolve them.

District Cllr Radford confirmed a 2.99% increase in council tax and a notable rise in Parish Precepts, partly intended to prepare for possible changes under Local Government re-organisation. However, he questioned whether this was necessary given the ongoing uncertainty and expressed concerns about potential reductions in local District Councillor representation.

Significant concern was expressed over the closure of the local leisure facility, Teignmouth Lido, with the view that shutting it reduces both its value and its benefit to the community. It was suggested that expectations around financial performance may have been unrealistic. A strong volunteer-led effort is emerging to reopen the facility, supported by individuals with relevant experience, although challenges remain, and it was noted that the site cannot be sold due to ownership restrictions.

Additional updates included a new recycling initiative for cartons and batteries and plans to expand CCTV coverage via a central hub. Discussions amongst the Councillors also covered local issues such as traffic enforcement and road safety, unsafe rural roads, and the challenges of introducing lower speed limits due to cost, bureaucracy, and limited volunteer capacity, alongside the need to preserve the rural character of the area.

The Chair thanked both Devon Councillor and District Councillor for their reports.

3.3 Police Advocate and Neighbourhood Watch reports and updates.

The Chair advised that there were no major incidents to report, but it is noted that an abandoned car has been removed, along with another vehicle within the Parish. Fly-tipping remains an ongoing issue, with one resident reporting builder's waste being dumped in their garden. Despite this, Teignbridge is praised for responding efficiently when such incidents are reported.

4. Approval to consider, amend as agreed by the Council and approve the minutes of the following meeting:

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th January 2026, were approved without objection. (Proposed by Cllr S Avery and seconded by Cllr Bell).

5 Finance

5.1 Approval of payments schedule.

The Councillors reviewed the payments schedule covering two items. The Clerk advised that one invoice, relating to website and domain services, was currently pending due to being corrected and requested approval to process this payment once the corrected invoice is received. The Councillors duly authorised the payments schedule and also agreed for the Clerk to proceed with the payment upon receipt of the corrected invoice, together with the payment of £1 to BT for the phone box.

5.2 It was agreed by all to approve the Bank Reconciliation for the months of January and February 2026.

**** District Cllr J Radford, DCC H Horner and TDC Cllr S Horner left the meeting at 7.42pm ****

Additional Matter Raised – Planning and Drainage

Following the departure of the District and County Councillors, Cllr Spokes raised a matter relating to Pitland Lane. The Chair noted that this would ordinarily be considered under later agenda items but, with the agreement of members, permitted discussion at this point.

Councillors discussed concerns regarding apparent unauthorised development at Pitland Lane, noting that planning permission for a previous proposal had been refused and that construction appeared to be continuing in a different form. Concern was expressed that the development may not comply with planning regulations, and it was agreed that the matter should be reported to the relevant planning authority.

The Councillors also considered a separate issue relating to a blocked drainage pipe affecting a local property. Based on available information, it was noted that the blockage was likely due to the condition of the pipe rather than tree roots. Members agreed that responsibility for any remedial works rests with the landowner.

The Chair then brought the discussion to a close.

Return to Agenda

5.3 – Budget Update

The meeting resumed consideration of the budget update for the period 1st April 2025 to 28th February 2026 under Agenda Item 5.3.

The Councillors noted the current financial position with any unspent funds to be carried forward into reserves. With the financial year-end approaching, it was agreed by all present that there was a need to identify and process outstanding invoices.

Discussion covered precept levels and council tax, with some uncertainty over how increases are reflected in individual bills. An estimated underspend was considered, though this is expected to reduce once pending costs—such as payroll, training, and other invoices—are received. The Councillors agreed that the Clerk should follow up on outstanding items to ensure all expenditure is recorded before year-end.

5.4 Bank Mandate – Authorised Signatories.

The Councillors considered the current bank mandate following identification that several former members remained listed as authorised signatories. This came to light after a replacement debit card was issued in the name of a former chairman.

It was agreed that all former signatories be removed and replaced with current officeholders. A new bank mandate had been prepared, and the Chair and Vice Chair were authorised to sign the necessary documentation to update the account accordingly.

5.5 Parish Council Debit Card

Councillors considered a report on the introduction of a Parish Council debit card and whether a credit card should be used instead. It was agreed that a credit card was not appropriate for the handling of public funds due to the implication of borrowing, and that a debit card was the correct option.

Consideration was given to the number of cards and authorised users. While it was noted that bank transfers are used for many payments, the Councillors acknowledged that debit cards provide necessary flexibility for online and occasional in-person transactions. Further discussion then took

place on whether one or two cards should be issued, with the Responsible Financial Officer suggested as a primary user. However, it was also noted that additional cover would be beneficial where one authorised user is unavailable.

It was therefore proposed by Cllr Spokes, seconded by Cllr Avery, and unanimously resolved that two debit cards be issued, with authorised users being the Chair and the Clerk. This arrangement was agreed as providing both operational flexibility and appropriate financial control.

The Clerk confirmed that the necessary banking mandate forms would be completed to reflect the resolution being that two Parish Council debit cards be issued, with authorised users being the Chair and the Clerk.

6 Governance and Compliance.

6.1 IT & Digital Compliance Policy (AGAR Assertion 10 – Digital and Data Compliance).

The Councillors considered this agenda item in response to updated AGAR requirements regarding data governance and GDPR compliance. The policy includes strengthened provisions on data security, storage, backups, cybersecurity, password management, and remote working, and formalises the use of official Council email accounts under a dedicated domain.

It was noted that compliance is required by 31st March and that auditors will expect evidence of implementation.

The IT & Digital Compliance Policy was proposed by Cllr Barnard, seconded by Cllr Avery, and unanimously adopted.

6.2 Council's transition to a ".gov.uk" domain and Councillor email accounts.

The Councillors received an update on the implementation of official Council email accounts. Councillors have been issued login details, although some setup issues remain.

It was noted that the transition improves security, separates Council business from personal accounts, and supports audit compliance. Council correspondence will continue to be managed centrally via the Clerk, with publication of individual Councillor email addresses deferred until fully operational. Councillors were reminded to use their official email accounts for all Council business.

6.3 Parish Strategic Plan 2026-2029.

The Chair referred the Councillors to the updated Parish Strategic Plan, which had been previously circulated; pointing out that it builds upon the previous long-term plan and has been revised to reflect the current Council term and membership and also refresh previously outdated sections.

He reported that it was structured in two parts. Firstly, a statement of the Council's purpose and role, and secondly a progress and action tracking section.

Councillors noted the importance of the Plan as a guiding document for Council priorities and accountability. Following consideration, the updated Parish Strategic Plan 2026 was unanimously approved, with Cllr Spokes proposing and Cllr Bell seconding the motion.

It was agreed that the document should now be uploaded to the Council's website for publication.

7. Funding & Grants:

The Chair said that there was nothing to report on this matter except a P3 (Public Path Partnership) application that had previously been submitted pending a response.

8. Footpaths & Highways

The Councillors discussed the temporary road closures that are currently taking place in connection with infrastructure works - resulting in some daytime disruption and noted that roads generally are re-opening in the evenings. Some concerns were noted regarding signage and occasional driver confusion during the works.

The general condition of the local roads including the presence of several significant potholes were discussed, and it was noted that reporting issues to Devon Highways can produce varied outcomes, although providing clear information and photographs may assist in achieving a response.

Information was shared regarding forthcoming works, including planned drainage-related road closures and South-west Water works near Home Farm scheduled for July. Uncertainty was raised regarding exact locations and the communication of these works to all affected residents, and it was agreed that further information would be obtained.

Regarding the drainage matter involving water near a BT manhole, it was noted that responsibility for the issue remains unclear between relevant authorities, and members discussed the potential use of dye tracing as an option to help better understand the source, while also being mindful of environmental issues.

As referred to under Agenda item 7 (Funding & Grants) the Chair confirmed that the P3 funding application had been submitted for routine maintenance. The Councillors were invited to bring forward any future footpath improvement ideas for consideration in future funding bids.

9 Parish Matters:

9.1 Annual Parish Meeting format.

Councillors discussed arrangements for the Annual Parish Meeting scheduled for Tuesday 21st April at 7:00 pm, providing an opportunity for residents to raise questions and issues. The Chair outlined the usual format, beginning with a summary of the year's activities followed by a public question session and refreshments will be served afterwards.

9.2 Update concerning the Parish phone box.

The Councillors received an update on the proposed transfer of the Parish telephone box, a K6 heritage model. An agreement from BT has been received and under review, with confirmation that the purchase price is £1.

It was reported by the Clerk that the Planning Authority had confirmed that no planning permission would be required provided the phone box is retained in its existing form. It was also noted that the land beneath the structure remains part of the public highway and is not included in the transfer.

The Councillors discussed the condition of the phone box, including minor repairs required to the door, and noted that replacement and repair options are available, although some components may require specialist work.

The intended use of the phone box by the Parish was outlined, including its proposed conversion into a book exchange, with additional seating outside to create a small informal community space. The purchase agreement restrictions were noted and acknowledged by the Councillors, confirming that the phone box must not be used for commercial purposes.

Potential ongoing maintenance responsibilities and liability matters were briefly discussed, with reassurance that public liability insurance would apply and that appropriate safety considerations would be addressed.

It was agreed that, subject to final review of the agreement, it was proposed by Cllr Avery, seconded by Cllr Spokes and agreed unanimously that the Chair may proceed to sign the contract on behalf of the Parish Council.

9.3 To review and agree the signing of the Solar Farm Community Benefit Fund Agreement.

The Councillors considered and discussed the proposed Solar Farm Community Benefit Fund Agreement, which offers a community contribution of £20,000 subject to the Solar Farm becoming operational.

Concerns were raised regarding the clarity and wording of the agreement, particularly a confidentiality clause which appeared to restrict disclosure of information. It was noted that this could conflict with normal expectations of transparency in Parish Council matters. It was acknowledged that key financial details are typically public and would be recorded in the written Minutes of the Parish Council's Meeting(s).

The Chair confirmed that clarification had already been sought from the company and that the agreement would not be signed until satisfactory confirmation of the terms is received. All those present agreed that this approach was appropriate and noted the need for urgency given that payment is dependent on signing the aforesaid agreement.

In principle, it was agreed that once received, the fund would be managed within the Council's existing financial systems, rather than creating a separate entity. Consideration was given to establishing a small working group to oversee and invite proposals for the use of the funds, ensuring they are allocated for the benefit of the Parish. It was agreed that further detail on governance arrangements would be considered once the agreement is finalised.

10 Planning: - No planning applications nor decisions received for the Parish.

It was noted, however, by the Councillors that a non-material amendment has been submitted in relation to the Solar Farm development, following a change requested by National Grid. The amendment seeks to bring variation in line with the original approved plans, and it was anticipated that this would not present significant issues.

11. Enforcement Issues:

An ongoing planning matter at Pitland Lane was also reported, where the status of development works remains to be clarified. The Chair confirmed that contact will be made with the landowner to seek clarification and, where appropriate, encourage submission of a retrospective planning application. If this is not progressed, the matter may be referred to Teignbridge District Council for further consideration.

12. Correspondence

The Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council will receive its precept payments as per the usual scheduled times, specifically on 29th April and 30th September.

13. Public Question Time:

No public in attendance.

14. To note the date of the next meeting:

Tuesday 21st April 2026 – Annual Parish Meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the Meeting which ended at 9.09pm.

Signed:
Chairman of Coffinswell Parish Council

Dated: