

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MANATON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

MONDAY, 19th MAY 2025 AT 7.30 PM AT MANATON PARISH HALL

Present: Cllr W Boughey (Chair), Cllr C Frampton (Vice-Chair), Cllr B Warne, Cllr S Mount, Cllr J Kidner and Cllr P Martin

In attendance: One member of the public
Mrs L Moorse (Clerk)

With Guest Speakers

Devon County Councillor Sally Morgan
Churchwarden Rose Underhill
DNP Ranger Rob Steemson
Nathan Robinson (Landscape recovery)
John White – Chairman of Manaton Show & Fair Committee

1 WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman of Manaton Parish Council welcomed those attending.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received from Cllr M Wylie

3 MINUTES OF THE 2024 APM

The Minutes of the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting having been posted online and available for inspection in the Parish Hall, approval of the minutes was proposed by Mr N Beyts (previous Vice-Chair) and seconded by Cllr B Warne and unanimously agreed by all present and signed by the Chairman.

4 THE CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Composition of Council:

At the annual meeting of the Parish Council held earlier in the same evening he had been re-elected Chairman and Cat Frampton re-elected as Vice-Chair.

Cllr James Kidner (Planning) and Cllr Pete Martin (Assets North) had recently joined through the Co-option procedure. Other Councillors were also continuing with their responsibilities unchanged: Cllr Mount, highways; Cllr Warne, assets south; Cllr Wylie, PC representative on the Parish Hall Committee; and himself, PC representative on the Games Court Committee

Events during the year:

The Chair advised that the Parish Council had progressed further on a new village website with Kat expected to provide further details later.

The Chair praised community contributions, especially the litter picking event led by Robin Moore, and commended Rob Steemson's signage work for local footpaths. He highlighted improvements on the path from Becky Brook to Greator Rocks and thanked a dedicated group of volunteers for their weekly maintenance efforts—for example boardwalks, car park clearing, and work with the National Trust at Half Moon.

Accounts for 2024-2025 and Budget for 2025-2026: Copies of the Council's draft accounts for the previous year were available in the Hall.

In terms of finances for the year ending 31 March 2025, the Council remained within budget: £7,640 in expenditures against a £7,872 budget. Key expenses included clerk salary, grass cutting (£1,220), insurance (£548), and tree inspections/work (£710).

He advised that for the year 2025-2026 the Council had raised the precept modestly by 1.25% to £7,475 to ease financial pressure on parishioners, though a larger increase may be needed next year.

5 COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

Games Court:

The Chair also reported on the Games Court: resurfacing planned for 2025 has not occurred yet, but a quote has been obtained, and grant applications are in progress. Events are planned to build community support and strengthen funding bids. There is also interest in adding pickleball to attract more members and expand usage beyond tennis.

Assets South:

Cllr Warne provided an update on Mellowmead Field, highlighting its popularity due to public and permissive footpaths enhanced by volunteer-installed boardwalks. The field is valued for its natural beauty, wildflowers, bluebells, and a blossoming community orchard. Managed with minimal mowing to support biodiversity, the land also includes a tennis court and access for South West Water. Recent improvements were supported by Manaton Show grants, and unsafe ash trees identified in an August survey were removed over winter. Residents are invited to suggest ideas for future use of the field.

Highways: Cllr Mount advised her key role involves reporting potholes, and she noted that sometimes these reports result in repairs. She also manages grit supply at the lower bus shelter and is addressing its current needs. She encourages residents to contact her if they encounter potholes they are unable to report themselves.

Assets North:

Cllr Martin described the work done in his remit: the benches on the Manaton Green (temporarily removed for winter) are being returned, and minor tree pruning was conducted per a recent tree report. The bus shelter at Town Barton is in decent shape and informally hosts a community book exchange. He reported that a major achievement is the refurbishment of the children's playground, spearheaded by John White and supported financially by Manaton & Show Fair. The newly painted play area is a source of pride and community enjoyment.

Parish Website Development Update

Cllr Frampton (Vice Chair) gave an update on the parish council website, explaining that its development has been more complex than expected due to regulatory requirements for official status and a ".gov" domain. The new website, which will replace the outdated Blogspot page, is nearly complete and will host Council information, contacts, policies, agendas, minutes, amenities, and community contributions. After taking far longer than anticipated, the project is now close to completion.

Planning:

Cllr Kidner opened by praising former Councillor, Nick Beyts for setting a very high standard during his eight years overseeing planning matters for the Parish Council. He stressed the importance of the Council's role in representing the collective view of the village in planning applications, noting that the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) takes its input seriously.

Drawing on experience as a former DNPA member, he described the current planning system as under severe strain, caught between local opposition to development and government pressure for growth. He acknowledged the challenges facing DNPA, including staffing shortages and heavy workloads, but criticised its failure to respond to concerns over unauthorised buildings at the Dartmoor Horse and Pony Sanctuary during the COVID period. Despite these concerns, he recognised DNPA's sound decisions on other applications and reaffirmed respect for its work. The discussion concluded with reflections on the complexity of renewable energy planning on Dartmoor, highlighting the need to balance sustainability with protection of the landscape, as shown by recent approvals for solar panels.

6 REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

Devon County Councillor Sally Morgan

Cllr Sally Morgan introduced herself, noting her previous service as County Councillor from 2005–2009 and her recent return to Local Government. She advised that she also currently serves as a District Councillor and a member of the National Park Authority and encouraged residents to contact her for assistance. She spoke warmly of her predecessor, DC Cllr George Gribble, acknowledging his long service and respected position within the community, and noted that he is currently unwell. Cllr Morgan highlighted their long-standing friendship despite political differences.

Cllr Morgan outlined her strong local connections and reaffirmed her commitment to serving the community, while also drawing attention to the financial pressures facing local authorities and concerns about ongoing local government reorganisation. She concluded by urging residents to contact her with any concerns, reiterating her accessibility through council websites.

7 GUEST SPEAKERS

Churchwarden Rose Underhill:

The Churchwarden gave a brief update on church activities, noting that much remained similar to the previous year. She reported that Tim Baily has settled well into his role as churchwarden alongside her. Despite changes in leadership, she confirmed that Church operations remain stable. She advised that the current incumbent would retire in June, resulting in a vacancy, but reassured members that the priest in charge based in Chagford will be available to maintain regular services so regular worship will continue without disruption.

Nathan Robinson - East Dartmoor Landscape Recovery Project

Nathan Robinson of the Devon Wildlife Trust gave an overview of the East Dartmoor Landscape Recovery Area, a DEFRA-funded project currently in its development phase. The initiative involves conservation bodies, over thirty landowners, and common land, aiming to deliver large-scale nature recovery through collaborative, landscape-scale management.

The project covers approximately 5,000 hectares across the Becka, Bovey, and Wray Valleys, with around 3,000 hectares already included. Much of Manaton parish falls within the project area. The focus is on restoring biodiversity, supporting climate resilience, and strengthening long-term ecological health, with attention given to priority species such as curlews, cuckoos, and marsh butterflies.

In discussion, Robinson highlighted the importance of balancing ecological restoration with farm viability, noting that the project includes financial incentives for participating landowners. He advised that while the current phase is closed to new entrants, future expansion may be possible through five-year review points within the proposed 20-year agreements.

Manaton Show & Fair Committee

Mr John White, Chair of the Manaton Show & Fair Committee, provided an update on the event's development and community impact. He reflected on the Fair's origins and its long-standing aim to support local institutions, noting that these ambitions have now been realised through sustained community effort.

He reported that the Fair now attracts around 1,000 visitors annually and remains focused on accessibility, with low entry costs and free children's activities. Weather permitting, it generates approximately £8,000 in profit from £20,000 income. Funds are distributed according to an agreed model, supporting the Church; Parish Hall; children's projects; reserves, and other community initiatives. Recent grants have funded improvements to local children's play areas and walking trails. Cllr White invited the Parish Council to propose future projects for funding.

Community Contributions and Pavilion Improvements

Discussion followed highlighting rising costs and financial pressures, including the impact of inflation. While increasing charges was mentioned as a potential way to offset future costs, the emphasis remained on community effort. A significant portion of this year's funds has been used to improve the Cricket Pavilion, including the addition of Wi-Fi courtesy of the Parish Hall, supporting events such as the annual Show and Fair.

Gratitude was expressed to local organisations and volunteers for their substantial contributions, notably undertaking hedging work free of charge which reflected a keen sense of local cooperation and community pride.

DNP Ranger Rob Steemson:

Rob Steemson provided an update on Public Rights of Way and his Ranger activities. He outlined his dual role, supported by a volunteer Warden, and noted that he visits one of six Parishes every Friday.

During recent visits, he has surveyed local paths, including the Boardwalk and Footpath 16 near Neadon Cleave, and inspected Slinkers Lane. Over the past year, ten new signs were installed with thirteen more on order. A major project at Leighon and Hound Tor, completed and received positive community feedback. Future work may include drainage or boardwalk installations along Footpath 14, and repair of a damaged stile at Torhill.

He also reported on moorland surveys; controlled burns at Hayne and Cipton Down, and signage replacement at Holwell Lawn. He went on to highlight budget pressures, including a 9% funding cut and £615,000 drawn from reserves to cover unavoidable costs. Mention was made of the upcoming Supreme Court decision on wild camping rights scheduled for the following week, and finally he then offered to answer any further questions.

8 Public Participation

A member of the public raised concerns over delayed work on the road from Moor House to Bovey Tracey emphasising persistence in reporting to achieve results. Updates were provided on the Oxygen Conservation Project and the Leighon Estate land management, noting limited public consultation and the use of Government grants for woodland and pasture schemes. Funding challenges for large-scale environmental projects were discussed, along with local issues at Becky Falls, including footpath encroachment and traffic management. Road maintenance priorities were also addressed in that DCC Cllr Morgan provided an update on pothole repairs, noting that the new administration aims to bring contracts back in-house for better oversight. This approach prioritises quality over lowest-cost solutions, addressing issues like repeated repairs and tyre damage. The strategy also involves simultaneous repairs rather than isolated fixes.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting which ended formally at 8.25pm. Attendees were then invited to stay and chat and enjoy the refreshments provided.

These Minutes remain in draft form until they are approved by the Council and signed by the Chairman below.

Approved by Manaton Parish Council and signed by

Chairman.....

Date:.....