

**STOKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
HELD ON 19TH FEBRUARY 2026 IN THE  
STOKENHAM PARISH HALL**

**PRESENT****COUNCILLORS:**

**JONATHAN ANSELL  
PAULA DOUST  
KIM GREENING  
RICHARD PAIN  
CHARLES ROGERS  
STEVE TAYLOR  
JULIAN BRAZIL (District and County Councillor)**

**OLLY BROOKING  
ADRIAN GOODMAN  
TIM LYNN  
LIZ ROBINSON  
PIERS SPENCE (Chair)**

**Also in attendance:**

**Clerk – Mrs G. Claydon**

**APOLOGIES:****COUNCILLORS:**

**GAIL ADDISON**

**CHRIS HART**

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors were invited to declare any disclosable interests, including the nature and extent of such interests they had in any items to be considered at this meeting. They were also reminded to consider whether in the light of recent activities any items within their Register of Interests should be updated. None.

**2. MINUTES**

The Minutes of full council meeting dated 15th January 2026 were approved by all present and duly signed as a true and correct record.

**3. CO OPTION**

RATIFIED to co-opt Steve Taylor and Olly Brooking as councillors, following their attendance at the previous meeting, submission of application details, and discussion within Open Forum. The Acceptance of Office and Declaration of Interests were forwarded electronically for completion and were received ready for online uploading.

**4. OPEN FORUM**

Twenty-five members of the public were present. Natalie Cordrey, who lives in Slapton and has a business in Torcross, spoke on behalf of Torcross residents (population c.120). In light of the current situation she wanted urgent clarification from the Environment Agency regarding their Hold the Line policy until 2055. Residents on the sea front were facing a risk to life and needed reassurance that the sea defences would be upgraded to give the protection to people and property they were originally designed to provide, and that they were currently clearly failing to give. The defences should be extended north of Torcross, as provided for in the Slapton Line Partnership strategy, to protect the car park and stop a breach of the ley.

Beyond the direct risk to houses on the sea front, residents' greatest fear is a significant breach of the ley, which would cause major flooding in Torcross and parts of Slapton. They wanted to know the views of the different parties – Natural England, EA, Wild Planet Trust etc – on the likelihood of the ley breaching in the near term (as opposed to the long term, which is anticipated in the SMP

documents). Natalie pointed out that the IROPI (Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest) exemption gives priority to public safety and wellbeing over environmental interests, and requested that this be raised with the various agencies.

The most recent economic impact assessment (Hardisty Jones, 2023) calculated the value to the community of the A379 road. Natalie felt that an updated study was required to evaluate the true cost of losing not just the road, but also the sea front, and a major breach of the ley leading to wider flooding in Torcross and parts of Slapton. She also sought clarity from Cllr Brazil on the figures of £18 million for the A379 repairs and £8 million for back roads that had been quoted in several national newspapers.

Finally she asked for clarification from Steve Mullineaux at SHDC on the offer he made at the Caroline Voaden meeting of a structural survey for sea front homeowners. A private structural survey carried out by one owner's insurers stated that the building was unsafe to inhabit until major structural repairs had been carried out, and implicated the ineffectiveness of the sea wall at the current beach level in preventing wave breaches as a possible cause of the damage.

The Chair thanked Natalie for all she had done. Her questions were legitimate and deserved a response, and he would be happy to raise them at the Slapton Line Partnership meeting. While we all remained hopeful for a positive outcome on the future of the road, that decision was beyond what parish, District, County, or even our MP could provide at this stage and would have to wait. In the meantime, Parish Council's first priority was the safety of people in our coastal villages, the safety of their properties, and the long-term viability of Torcross as a community.

Jane Saunders of Torcross believed there was talk of three options: first, costing for back roads improvement; second, repair of the A379; and third, a long-term, permanent solution for the village and the Line. She asked where Cllr Brazil had got his headline figures from. He explained that County had provided these so that Caroline Voaden would have something to present to the Minister. The Department of Transport had asked for more detail, which was currently being prepared. Cllr Brazil wanted to make clear, however, that the £18 million figure did not include a long-term solution to prevent coastal erosion in Start Bay. The top priority was Torcross village, especially along the front, and Cllr Spence had been asked to convene a meeting with the EA to seek assurances on the sea wall structure, to be held within the month. District had brought in 100,000 tons of rock armour from Cornwall, initially with the idea of protecting the road, but changed tack after the second storm and put it all in the car park at Torcross to protect the ley at the point where a breach seemed most likely. The immediate concern is that if a sudden breach did occur then houses on the other side of the ley would be threatened by coastal flooding; the Chair promised to ensure that the Environment Agency were fully aware of this risk.

Torcross was not alone: at Beesands, houses backing what used to be the Village Green saw the buffer between the sea and the road shrink from 15m to 9m in one night. Hallsands had learned from experience and built Fordsworth Cottages safe up the hill but now there were new houses along the front, facing the full force of the waves. Jane Saunders asked where the £10 billion of coastal flooding mitigation funding referred to was held and whether the EA had access.

The Chair said he didn't know the answer, but revealed that he was frustrated by what he saw as a longstanding lack of honesty in conversations around this subject. For years people had been told that a permanent solution to coastal flooding was just around the corner, achievable if only they wanted it badly enough and were prepared to find enormous sums of money. But in truth the science was clear – the only viable long-term solution was managed retreat from the coast in the most threatened areas. To believe otherwise is to deny the reality of 25 years of scientific studies in Start Bay, many of which are published on the Slapton Line Partnership website. The SLP's

role is to find short- and medium-term solutions in order to buy time for residents to adapt their lives to the changing coastline, not to pretend that all would turn out for the best while keeping the inconvenient truth from the local population. Jane noted she had no engineering skills but around the world they had found ways to hold the water back, up to and including a massive breakwater with a road on top. The meeting's response was that anything was possible given unlimited funding. The trick was finding a solution that was affordable, sustainable, and appropriate to the location and needs of the population. Pat Hunter hoped the passion expressed within the hall would be taken to the SLP as the group appeared to have had meeting after meeting with nothing done. Cllr Rogers assured her Cllr Spence was the person to take this forward.

Cath Sanders from the Tradesmans Arms, Stokenham, reported from a meeting of the newly-created Business Group that the loss of the road was affecting the wider business community from Dartmouth through Strete, Stoke Fleming and other villages towards Kingsbridge. She pleaded for proper highway signage to let people know that businesses and amenities in the affected area were still open – signs had been promised but nothing had materialised. Cllr Brooking had attended this meeting as a business owner and had taken on the challenge of creating a map of businesses to encourage people to shop local. This was a great example of community spirit in action and she urged all to remain positive and upbeat about the area and not argue amongst each other. The Chair endorsed this, and said it was essential that all remained positive and did not talk the area down. It was suggested that extra signage was required on the Totnes-to-Kingsbridge road, naming all the villages at various turnings, to get people down here.

Cllr Brazil was asked whether it would be possible to suspend parking charges in Torcross for the summer. He acknowledged the spirit of the question but pointed out that if parking was free the spaces would quickly fill with long-term parkers: this would have a knock-on effect on vehicle and customer turnover, which could be detrimental to local businesses. He also cautioned care when talking to the media: recent sensational reporting in some national newspapers implied that Torcross was completely cut off. This sent out a very negative message that would turn visitors away.

Cllr Brazil thanked Devon County and District Council staff for their efforts to get the car park, toilets and coast path open for half-term. Unfortunately by Wednesday the sea had thrown more shingle up on the road and the car park had to close but they were out again clearing. The Chair noted that the SLP was already looking at wider adaptation along the bay, with active plans in progress for land to increase car parking in Strete and Torcross, and perhaps in time summer pop-up stalls along the Line to draw more visitor traffic to the area. He drew attention to the large numbers of visitors walking the road in recent days and said this was what needed to be capitalized on. Representatives of the businesses present said they could do without any extra competition while they were struggling. Tracy Kilpatrick from Torcross claimed that all the people walking the road had said they just wanted it open again.

Gail Stubbs from the Start Bay Inn, Torcross, urged homeowners to protect their property and not to delay reinstatement works, as the site of wrecked houses would detract from the area's special qualities. She was in favour of regeneration funding for the village. The caretaker of the Torcross Hotel apartments reported that he had received a number of cancellations but another attendee suggested Coast and Country or another lettings agency could fill the rooms through a targeted advertising campaign.

Improvements to the minor road network were essential and Cllr Brazil advised the SLP working group meeting on the topic had been rescheduled for the first week of March. Money was ready to begin work, and parishes would set priorities for the order in which improvements would be made. In some areas permissions would be required – at Deer Bridge a farmer had been prevented

from digging out a ditch because a permit had to be obtained from Natural England. The principal arterial routes for local traffic would be Five Mile Lane north from Slapton to the A381 at Stanborough Gate, and Three Mile Lane north from Strete to the A3122, Dartmouth to Totnes Cross, with east-west access at various junctions. These routes will never be a replacement for the A379 Slapton line, merely alleviate some of the strain, and visitor traffic should still be encouraged to use the main roads via Totnes Cross. At various times a one-way system has been suggested, but this brings its own problems as it is impossible to police and is therefore likely to remain an informal arrangement, locally adhered to like the Beesands one-way. Amy Hart from Stokenham advised that work to improve the lanes was urgently required as Easter was approaching and would bring confused motorists. Cllr Brazil acknowledged that County were due to speak to SatNav companies advising them not to promote use of back lanes. He reiterated that visitors should be encouraged to stick to the main roads.

Mr Kilpatrick from Torcross noted comments from Professor Gerd Masselink of Plymouth University regarding the inevitability of further erosion along the Bay and highlighted residents' fears that their houses were vulnerable and no longer worth anything. He wanted reassurance that the authorities would protect Torcross with engineering and not give up on them, and asked who was responsible for the sea wall and the A379 road along the Line. Cllr Brazil clarified that the Environment Agency owned the wall and sea defences up to Torcross Point; that Devon County Highways Authority, who do not have resources for longer-term sea defences, own the road; and that the shingle ridge itself – the focus of the SSSI – is the responsibility of Natural England. NE had previously taken a very strict line against the introduction of foreign materials into the site, hence the aversion to Cornish granite, but more recently they have adopted a pragmatic stance and appear agreeable to commonsense steps to reduce the risk of flooding.

Oliver Pawley asked when the SLP Minutes might be available. Cllr Brazil said he would ensure the SLP website was updated or Minutes given to Stokenham Parish to place on their website.

Jane Jenner from Hallsands asked if the SLP meeting would review damage in areas of the bay beyond Torcross. The Chair was able to confirm that although the Partnership had originally been created to monitor the Slapton Line road, it had pivoted over the last couple of years towards oversight of the whole of Start Bay and he was hopeful that this brief would be formalised soon.  
*20.45p.m. Open Forum ended and members of the public left.*

#### **DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT**

Cllr Brazil advised the District budget was up 3 per cent but there had been no cuts to services and they had frozen car park charges.

The County budget meeting was on Tuesday so they would propose a budget but as a minority administration they needed the support of other parties. They would be recommending extra money for roads maintenance with £4 million in revenue and borrowing £50 million to invest in roads to seal them. They would be working differently, repairing a whole area not just individual potholes. This was being trialled and the project would go back to committee in March or April with a view to expand this work across Devon.

There was to be a pot of money for parishes and towns from within the £50 million for them to decide what they want doing, such as flooding, drainage. With the departure of lengthsman they had lost local knowledge and this was an opportunity for parish to steer and guide proactive work. Currently they had no Clerk of Works to check what is being done but this was being addressed. They would also create a Parish Hotline to email complaints.

Extra funding would go into children's services. Devon had been failing children for decades so this was a priority and they were hopeful of the SEND White Paper to align with Government on inclusion, not sending children out of County to providers profiteering off the backs of children. In mainstream schools they hoped to have inclusion hubs but this needs extra funding from Government and awaited the White Paper.

A request was made for contractors to be contacted to collect the many A-frame Road Works boards that are now littering parish roadsides.

*Cllr Brazil left the meeting.*

## 5. PLANNING & PLANNING MATTERS

The applications to be considered at this meeting with observations submitted to District:

- 0006/26/HHO Householder application for proposed window configuration to front elevation, introduction of new side window, replacement front door, external rendering, internal alterations 13 Chestnut Park, Beesands – Response 26<sup>th</sup> February  
Firstly it should be highlighted that this address should read 13 Beesands. Chestnut Park was a completely different location in Beeson and was therefore misleading.  
OBJECTION This was a pebbledash house next to a listed building, formerly the Kings Arms pub and the intention was to render and paint thus creating a visual imbalance. No flood risk assessment was provided and yet the Environment Agency website states it will flood. Given recent events this is a major red flag. A bedroom is proposed on the ground floor, creating a risk that if someone was asleep having taken a sleeping pill they could drown. A window was shown on the boundary wall which impeded the right to light of Number 14. Windows are proposed with fire-rated glass but a UPVC frame – this could melt! Scant regard had been paid to the climate action form. Local knowledge advised that the proposed designated parking space was not capable of accommodating any car, no matter how small.
- 0150/26/HHO Housholder application or the erection of a replacement garage with ancillary accommodation over Burnside, Torcross – Response 25<sup>th</sup> February – DEFERRED and an extension to respond provided till 20<sup>th</sup> March in order that a site visit can take place.

### APPLICATION FOR WORKS TO TREE PRESERVATION TREES

- 0368/26/TPO Oak - Crown lift to 4.25m, T2 Beech - Crown lift to 4.1m, T3 Beech - Crown lift to 3.2m - All 3 trees are blocking light to gardens and windows Bank House, Chillington – Response 12<sup>th</sup> March – Reasonable works in the circumstances due to the size of trees and proximity to neighbouring property.

### PLANNING CORRESPONDENCE

- 0309/26/AGR Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed agricultural access track (length 928m x width 3m) Lower Widdicombe Farm, Stokenham. No comment.

## 6. CHILLINGTON PLAY AREA

Feedback from Remus stated that their contractor had advised a cost of £1750 plus VAT to remedy the bridge repairs. It was not clear if this was given for their works alone, included parish section or just for the ramp belonging to parish council into the playing field. Expert advice noted these works provided value for money even if soft wood only lasted five years and ensured all the bridge was made safe again. It was AGREED that if an invoice was produced for this amount covering the parish section it would be paid.

## 7. TRAINING

It was AGREED to run an evening Good Councillor training for £350 plus mileage and this would

be arranged soonest.

## 8. REPORTS

- Cllr Greening – Noted the Salvation Army clothes bank at Stokeley Farm shop was full. Cllr Brooking noted this had been reported on various occasions and Cllr Greening was asked to add her observation to this.
- Cllr Goodman – Had been asked if the shingle on the A379 road could not go back on the beach due to storm contamination as this was felt stupid. Last time this had been the case as it contained tarmac so was taken away but not now.

### CLERK'S REPORT

- Footpaths and toilets were closed but reopened for half term. Further notice for realignment of the Beesands and Hallsands footpath sections were awaited following Definitive Footpath officer conversations with landowners.
  - County had laid on a shuttle bus during the week from Torcross to Kingsbridge. Taxis had been offered to assist to get to Slapton but whilst running at present is still being investigated.
  - A list of names and mobile contacts for properties along Torcross promenade and all of Beesands had been created and shared with District and blue light services. A further list of other residents in Torcross was being put together, as is one for Hallsands.
  - Toast rack cycle stand was collected for installation at Torcross tank car park but due to weather not installed. Contractor holding awaiting instructions.
  - A circular from the Environment Agency was delivered to all residents including information on how to sign up for flood alerts. It advised that the seawalls at Torcross and Beesands had been inspected and no evidence found of significant structural instability with no cause for immediate concern. The sheet pile toe and walls at Torcross had not moved, but there had been some movement between elements following the recent storms and high spring tides, with joints opening by 10-15mm in some places. A detailed survey had been commissioned alongside longer-term monitoring. They are working closely with local authorities to help communities recover.
- Following the storms Rod Birtles, Devon Communities, emailed and discussed the involvement of District and County together with blue light services agreeing that there was nothing to call the Emergency Plan in for. One suggestion he had learned following the Exmouth evacuation of households due to a bomb detonation was that the Emergency Plan Grab Bag/List of Important items should be highlighted with vulnerable households to put together meds/insurance docs/family and friends telephone numbers/bag of clothes/car keys et al. Holiday homes should also carry a message explaining coastal unpredictability and to watch out for bad weather and inland flooding as visitors are often not aware.
- Gary Jolliffe, Till the Coast is Clear, offered his group of volunteers to carry out beach cleans at Torcross on 13<sup>th</sup> and at Beesands on 21<sup>st</sup> February. Others had been invited to take part.
  - Amy Hart advised that a Start Bay Business Group had been set up and they wished to invite a parish council representative to a meeting to discuss the impact the devastation was having on local businesses focusing in particular on what can be done to help get them through the coming season. Tuesday 3rd March at 11am The Tradesmans Arms, Stokenham. Cllrs Robinson and Brooking were already members of this group and would attend as parish council representatives.

## 12. FINANCE

***Balances were provided and the below transactions were approved:***

Current £4854.18

Savings £49309.41

Investment 6 months £90,000 was reinvested Unity for further 6 at 4% - Matures April 2026.

***Received:***

Instant Access 3 monthly interest next due end March.

***Payments:***

Unity Bank – Monthly charge £7.00

HMRC Feb – Tax & NI £488.72

Wages and elected councillor allowances Feb - £2389.57

DCC Feb – Pension £463.82

Hosted Broadband – Telephone and Broadband £12.17 and £51.00

Citizens Advice – Grant approved December 2025 £500

Parish Council websites – Domain renewal 2 years £72.00

**13. NEXT MEETING**

The next full parish council meeting would be held on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026 commencing at 7.30p.m in the Wesley Smith Room, Stokenham Parish Hall.

Meeting finished: 9.30p.m.

Signed ..... Chairman      Dated: 19<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

DRAFT