

**MINUTES** of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 2.30 p.m. at the Pannier Pantry on Bridgeland Street, Bideford.

**PRESENT** Tony Pratt, Huw Thomas, Peter Hames, Rosemary Gent, Keith Funnell, Cathrine Simmons, Tracey Beresford, Ruth Funnell

**1. APOLOGIES** Apologies were received from Cathy Slaughter, Gillian Stevens, Colin Jones, Miranda Cox, Peter Christie, Will and Gill Douglas-Mann, Lorraine Drake

The AGM learned with considerable shock and distress of Peter Christie's sudden and serious illness.

**2. MINUTES OF THE 2022 AGM** These were agreed as a correct record.

### **3. MATTERS ARISING**

**Proposed "green column"** Cathrine asked what had happened to the approach by Joe Bulmer to set up a regular "green column" in the Gazette. Ruth said she would check with North Devon Greens to find out what had happened.

### **4. REPORTS**

**a) Treasurer:** Cathrine reported our current balance is £2,476.09. We had raised £112.50 at our summer social event and received three monthly donations from one member totalling £66. Head Office are holding back Capitation fees for this year and next to fund the General Election. These amounted to £351.70 in 2022 leaving a hole in our income. Cathrine thanked the very generous member and Ruth commented that perhaps others could do something similar to help fill the gap.

**b) Secretary:** Apart from District Council Elections which our ERO will talk about, we have had a social afternoon in July which was well attended.

**c) Press Officer:** Peter Hames said he was finding himself too busy to do the role adequately. The meeting was sympathetic to this. Ruth asked Tracey Beresford if she would be interested in the role and she said she would.

**d) Webmaster:** Colin has continued to maintain the website and Facebook page. Ruth commented that, with the General Election looming, we need to update our online presence to attract younger voters. It was suggested that the national party should have some advice on this and that Howard Porter was responsible for "Comms" across Devon. Rosemary suggested that a Zoom meeting might attract people who didn't get to face to face meetings.

**e) Membership:** Rosemary reported that the current list stands at 98. Since the last AGM we have gained eight members but lost twelve. Eight people cancelled their subscriptions, four of whom were people who had joined within the last two years. Three had allowed their subs to expire. Finally and very sadly, John Simmons died in September. Rosemary said we needed to discuss how to recruit more active members before the General Election.

**f) Electoral Returning Officer:** Keith summarised a very successful District Council campaign in May 2023 when Green Party councillors doubled – from 2 to 4 – with Peter Christie returned in Bideford North and Peter Hames in Appledore, whilst Huw Thomas was successful in Bideford East and Wendy Lo-Vel in Northam. These wards all abut one another and suggest this area might be more fertile ground for the county council elections

in 2025 than our past targets of Torrington and Hartland where the Lib Dems are resurgent. The only firm election date next year is the Police and Crime Commissioner in May, with a possible general election in the spring or, more probably, the autumn.

## 5. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Colin had agreed to carry on as Webmaster, Ruth as Secretary, Cathrine as Treasurer, Rosemary as Membership Secretary, and Keith as ERO for local elections. Tracey Beresford agreed to take over from Peter Hames as Press Officer.

This was proposed en bloc by Cathrine and seconded by Huw Thomas and agreed unanimously.

## 6. REPORTS FROM OUR COUNCILLORS

**a) Peter Hames, TDC:** Peter is Lead Member for Climate Emergency. The Carbon Plan has been revised and approved by Councillors and the Council is assessing what carbon reduction measures can be achieved on TDC properties. Torridge is currently near the bottom of the scoring of local authorities performance on carbon emission reduction.

Peter is Vice Chair of TDC Planning Committee and uses every opportunity to ensure climate and biodiversity policies are recognised when considering Planning Applications. He also Chairs the Council's Active Travel Advisory Group. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan has been approved by County but financial constraints together with hostility from some members may make it hard to implement fully.

Torridge received funding to develop a Clean Maritime Centre in Appledore which will attract research on sustainable maritime products and activities and generate local skilled jobs.

**b) Huw Thomas TDC:** First, getting elected to East the Water (to Huw's complete shock!) and (even better) getting more votes than the three Tory candidates for the ward, none of whom were elected. Second, organising a beer festival in his ward and raising £1,500 for local causes. Third, highlighting the issue of SWW being consulted on planning developments and starting the process of calling for an independent body to evaluate the impact of developments on our crumbling infrastructure. Also on the External Scrutiny Committee.

**c) Colin Jones, Dolton Parish:** Colin has organised an "energy event" with the help of 361 Energy, Mole energy (solar), Abode Energy (heat pumps) and Mitchell and Dickenson (glazing and insulation). The event had a good attendance and hopefully a number of people were helped. Dolton's "20 is Plenty" group have been successful in getting a 20 mph speed zone within Dolton which should be installed by April 24. Colin is also co-ordinator at the local Speedwatch group and appeared on Spotlight waving a speed monitor at traffic.

**d) Rosemary Gent, Littleham and Landcross:** A second "Wilder Littleham and Landcross" event was organised in conjunction with the community Biodiversity Group in March 23 attended by over 100 people from the Parishes and surrounding area. It included talks on no-dig gardening, pond dipping and displays of local flora and fauna plus a wildlife survey results. Large saplings were planted in the playing field and Village Hall car park to provide shade when mature as climate change mitigation. The project was supported a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund "Together for Our Planet" scheme.

Ongoing discussion about whether to create a Neighbourhood Plan or update the existing 2006 Parish Plan. Conversations are ongoing with residents. The PC has joined the Parish Paths Partnership and set up a working group of Councillors and residents to survey, document and arrange maintenance of public footpaths and bridleways within the Parishes and the re-opening of disused paths and creation of new ones.

**e) Lorraine Drake, East and West Putford:** The meetings have been mainly about Common Moor and Planning. There has been considerable tree felling to restore an area of culm grassland but Lorraine has pointed out that it is destroying an existing valuable habitat in the process. The PC has held a photographic competition for a calendar to be sold in aid of Devon Air Ambulance. A new Parish Clerk has been appointed after a gap without one.

**f) Peter Hames, Northam Town Council:** Peter is currently Mayor of Northam which has involved Chairing the Council and attending such civic events as welcoming the Lithuanian Ambassador to Appledore Shipyard. On climate action the solar and battery system on Northam Hall is contributing significantly to its energy consumption and carbon reduction and water containers proposed by Peter have been installed to capture rain water. Roof and wall insulation are planned to follow.

An Orca electric flat bed vehicle has been purchased and it is being charged with the solar energy from the Village Hall. The Climate Emergency Committee, which Peter chairs, is implementing a biodiversity plan for rewilding the Council's open spaces. Appledore School used grant money for hedging and several Councillors helped the children with the planting. Peter also did a presentation to Bideford College students on Northam's climate actions and as a result a climate action group has been formed at the school.

Peter has pushed for climate and biodiversity policies to be incorporated in the Neighbourhood Plan.

## **7. GENERAL ELECTION: APPOINTMENT OF ERO**

Ruth explained that so far we had no Prospective Parliamentary Candidate hopefuls from either Tavistock or Torridge. We had hope that Neil Lawson would stand until his unexpected death in May. We also have no one willing to act as the Electoral Returning Officer for the constituency. It is therefore proposed that we approve the use of the Regional ERO, which could bring us a suitable candidate from another Devon local party.

The following proposal was agreed unanimously:

*“Torridge Green Party propose that we temporarily appoint Ed Fraser, the Electoral Returning Officer for the South West Region, as our ERO for selecting General Election candidates only.*

*The ERO will work with neighbouring local parties to ensure we have General Election candidates selected across all constituencies which fall wholly or partly within our local party area. They will ensure all members receive a call for nominations and are invited to vote for their preferred candidate and will ensure nominations and selections are undertaken according to the constitutional by laws of the Green Party of England and Wales.*

*Their temporary appointment as ERO will expire once the selection of all parliamentary candidates in our area is completed. They are expected to complete this no later than*

*February 2024. We agree the candidates selected will be registered as our parliamentary candidates for the next General Election unless they are otherwise disqualified.*

*The Torridge Green Party agrees to donate £50 to the South West Green Party to contribute towards the material costs of running the selection process.”*

## **8 PLANS FOR 2024**

It was agreed that we need to raise our Green Party profile as, post Covid, there has been little activity beyond our success in local Parish, Town and District Elections. Ruth said we needed to get to grips with our online profile and it was suggested that we approach the National Party to see if they had any helpful information about the best way to achieve this. It should be possible to get a group of younger members together from North Devon and Torridge to work up a strategy.

We also need to look at other ways to get more active and it was agreed that we should use the next ordinary meeting to focus on this.

Ruth also offered her house for a New Year social gathering on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> January with a bring and share lunch time buffet and sales table as a mini fund raiser.

## **9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Tracey Beresford spoke about “Make Votes Matter” which is not party political but campaigns for proportional representation and “Compass” which was founded by Neil Jameson, the North Devon Branch of which has suggested a “primary” for all opposition candidates so people attending can decide which candidate would be the most likely to defeat the Conservatives. She will keep us informed of future events.

Ruth showed the, very unexpected, leaflet that Geoffrey Cox had circulated which has no blue on it, only green. He is clearly anxious about the next GE.

## **1- DATE OF NEXT ORDINARY MEETING**

This was agreed for Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> December at 11 am to discuss, principally, item 8 on the AGM minutes.