

MINUTES of the 2024 Annual General Meeting of Torridge Green Party held on Saturday 28th September 2024 at 2.30 p.m. at Fairlight, Torridge View, Great Torrington.

PRESENT Huw Thomas, Tracey Beresford, Cathrine Simmons, Keith Funnell, Ruth Funnell, Jack Gordon, Mark Haworth-Booth (N. Devon Greens)

1. APOLOGIES

Gary Holder, Callum MacDonald, Lorraine Drake, Gillian Stevens, Colin Jones, Brian Garman, John Puddy, Wendy Lo-Vel

2. MINUTES OF THE 2023 AGM

These were agreed as a correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Ruth asked what had happened to Joe Bulmer's plan for a "green column" in the Gazette. Mark pointed out that Joe no longer works for the paper and the proposal seems to have died.

4. REPORTS

a) **Treasurer:** Our funds show a healthy balance of £2,739.34

b) **Web Master:** Colin had sent a report for the year. Our Facebook page has 270 followers with Tracey's post about the Plough Hustings being the most popular, reaching 317 people. However the numbers are pretty low. The meeting agreed that we need to improve our online reach and Ruth said she would put a reminder in the next Green Info asking people to like and share. The best online account might be Instagram but we might get advice via our Regional Organiser, Steve. Colin has also heard from Nick Humberstone, who is in charge of online stuff centrally, that the set up of GP local websites is changing and the new format will be with us in six weeks. Colin is pleased with this as the old formats are tired.

It would be good if members, and especially local councillors, could send material to Colin to post. We need to keep members and supporters aware of Green successes by our Councillors.

c) **Secretary:** Ruth reported that it had been a sad year beginning last September with the death of John Simmonds, followed by the very unexpected loss of Rosemary Gent and finally the irreplaceable Peter Christie, the longest serving Green Councillor in the country. A memorial gathering for Rosemary was organised in Littleham which made us aware of what a lot she achieved in her life both inside and outside the Green Party. Peter's funeral Service at St. Mary's in Bideford was packed and Peter Hames gave a moving address.

Peter Hames said a history writing competition has been set up by Book Relief in memory of Peter.

We had a Green Gathering on 6th January but it was very sparsely attended. We need to review how we organise these events to attract more members and supporters.

Gerry Sables is working to organise a new bus route from Great Torrington, via Umberleigh Station to South Molton. This would provide a valuable public transport connection between these points especially now the regular bus taking students from both towns to Exeter is being halted, leaving them dependent on the public buses which do not coincide with College times. After a meeting of over 50 people at The Plough, a petition is now being organised. It has to reach 6,000 signatures to force a debate at County Council.

d) **Membership Secretary**: Ruth reported that membership is stable at just over eighty members. It was noticeable that the General Election brought half a dozen new members, presumably as a result of the free election communication. Since then we have had no increase.

e) **Press Officer**: Report attached

f) **Election Agent**: Report attached

5. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Cathrine proposed that the current officers be re-elected and this was unanimously supported. The meeting also unanimously elected Cathrine as our Chair.

6. REPORTS FROM OUR COUNCILLORS OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN 23 – 24

a) **Bideford Town Council**: Jack had a motion passed to wild seed in sites permitted by Highways. He has also successfully proposed that Town Council meetings should be broadcast online. The Town Rangers are changing to electric equipment and a Town Climate Plan is being drawn up. A formal complaint has been made against Cllr. Bushby who said inappropriate things about the prospective visit by ITV to interview the new Mayor who is trans.

b) **District Council**: Huw talked about the need to be aware of “red flag” issues and to get a press release sent out in advance of raising them. The example is the furore over Ricky Knight’s proposal in North Devon which was misreported as an attempt to make the Council only serve vegan food. When in fact he has asked the Council to consider providing vegan options.

Sham Fest has raised more money this year despite less sponsorship. There had been a bigger attendance.

Peter Hames noted that Donna Sibley said carbon emissions actually increased slightly last year. This was due to taking the swimming pools back into Torrridge control and the shortage of finance to improve their energy efficiency. Green Councillors continue to press for greener Council waste and recycle vehicles.

A challenge has been made to the Government’s proposed increased housing target in North Devon and Torrridge which is not based on need. Peter also raised concern that increased housing density ignores domestic gardens as vital supporters of wildlife and the need for stronger requirements for energy efficiency in new builds.

There is now a new property manager who is hopefully more sympathetic to “green” proposals.

c) Northam Town Council: The Council is looking at alternative ways of controlling weeds. More bulb planting, installing bird boxes at Anchor Park and an arrangement to lay the hedge at Burrough Farm will improve diversity.

There are plans to build an energy efficient Pavilion by the tennis courts in Westward Ho! To use for community meetings, courses, etc. Volunteers are creating nature friendly gardens and wilded areas in the park.

d) Dolton Parish Council: Colin Jones has been trying to get an EV charger in the parish car park. The Council has applied for the LEVI fund and been accepted but it could take a couple of years to get it installed. Colin is part of the Parish Emergency Committee and they have been setting up an emergency plan and are applying for funding to buy a range of equipment for emergency use.

The Parish is also looking for a volunteer Road Warden. The village cleaner retired and the funding for the post disappeared so there is a move to encourage parishioners to keep the village tidy and help those less able to do so. Colin has also been working on a code of conduct for the Council website which he runs alongside a Facebook Page he has set up.

7. GENERAL ELECTION REPORT AND COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2025

Keith’s report on the Bideford North By-elections and the General Election is attached. For next year, the proposal is to concentrate on the two County Council seats where we have the greatest chance and also use campaigning there to hopefully build active membership. The seats are Bideford East and either Bideford West or Northam. We need to invite people to come forward as candidates. Ruth will put a piece in the next Green Info and will include a note of the expenses County Councillors can claim which currently stands at around £12,000 as this may help people who are concerned about the amount of travelling to Exeter involved.

8. BUILDING ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

Tracey said we need to consider ways to do this. She was previously a member of Southwark Greens and they had monthly action days which worked. She attended Conference and said North Hereford was won through leafleting and door knocking before the GE was called. We could do something similar here in the run up to the County Council Elections. There is money on our account now to fund a leaflet pointing out our Councillors’ achievements and Green policies for the County. It was agreed to work this up at our next meeting.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mark Haworth- Booth reported that North Devon was upbeat with a Green and Independent Group of twelve. He is the “Cultural Lead” for N. Devon and this is in partnership with Torridge where the lead is Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin. One current project is saving St. Petrocs Church at Petrockstowe as a hub for heritage skills.

Mark also added that American Pharma at Braunton wanted to put up wind turbines to power their factory and surrounding farms. The Greens successfully gained agreement that these turbines would last for 25 years instead of the originally planned ten. He is currently promoting awareness of high tech industries in Northern Devon and any suggestions of relevant business would be gratefully received.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING This was agreed for Saturday 16th November. A Bideford venue will be sought.