

CLERKS REPORT: BROADCLYST PARISH PRECEPT

Parish Councils are the tier of government closest to their electors, ideally placed to respond in a timely manner to the needs of their communities. Town and Parish councils are formed from those meeting criteria for election, one of which is that they must be on the electoral role for that parish at the time of election: local people governing their immediate area for and on behalf of their neighbours.

Community Governance is defined as “community level management and decision making that is undertaken by, with, or on behalf of a community, by a group of community stakeholders. The focus on community rather than on a corporation, organisation, local government or the public sector is the distinguishing feature of community governance” Totkidis, Armstrong and Francis (2005). Previously required to act within a restrictive set of legal powers, The Localism Act 2011 further empowers local councils: The General Power of Competence, for example, gives local councils the power to do anything an individual may do, enabling local councils to take on services devolved to them by principal authorities. Neighbourhood Planning (schedule 9 of the Localism Act, enacted by The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and Neighbourhood Planning Bill of 2017), gives communities not just influence as a consultee but legislative power over development in their Plan Areas.

The Communities White Paper renews Governmental focus on building strong communities, recognising such communities are built on a combination of people, place and local pride, and that a strong civic infrastructure unlocks ideas, knowledge and capacity as well as building social capacity (Brokenshire, 2019). Broadclyst Parish Council also recognises the benefits of building a strong community and its role to not just meet the needs of today but to lead its community forward into a sustainable future.

SUSTAINABILITY: WHY DOES IT MATTER?

We all aspire to live in places which are safe, healthy and interesting, places in which our needs are met, and we all have a chance to contribute to decision-making and change.

Sustainable communities can be described as places where:

- the needs of everyone in the community are met and people feel safe, healthy and happy;
- our environment is appreciated, protected and enhanced, minimising damage;
- our economy is vibrant, employment opportunities are improved, and our working lives are more rewarding (Stafford Borough Council , 2019)

A strong community is a sustainable community, with strong organisational capacity and community-led groups/networks/associations that meet the needs of local people; local pride and a sense of belonging and local identity comes from a connection between people and place, proven to improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and loneliness, and contribute to improve mental health (Locality & Power to Change, 2018; Public Health England, 2015; Pennington et al, 2018). Active communities play an important preventative role in community safety, as well as health and social care, this is important when demand for these services is increasing (Public Health England, 2018). Higher social capital supports local economic prosperity, with community participatory enterprise initiatives delivering strong outcomes (Involve, 2005; Scottish Government, 2016).

Creating a Sustainable Society involves:

Protecting and Enhancing the Environment

- using natural resources efficiently and with care;
- minimise waste, re-using or recovering it through recycling, composting or energy recovery;
- limiting pollution;
- value and protect the diversity of nature.

Meeting Social Needs

- create and enhance places, spaces and buildings which work well, wear well and look good;
- value and protect diversity and local distinctiveness, strengthening local community and cultural identity;
- protecting human health and amenity through safe, clean and pleasant environments;
- emphasise health service prevention action as well as cure;
- meet local needs locally wherever possible;
- empower all sections of the community to participate in decision-making;
- consider the social and community aspects of decisions.

Promoting Economic Success

- create a vibrant local economy that gives access to satisfying and rewarding work without damage to the local, national or global environment;
- encourage necessary access to facilities, services, goods and other people in ways which make less use of the car and minimise impacts on the environment;
- make opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation readily available to all. (SBC; 2019)

Local councils today are doing more than ever before, often bridging the gap between principal authority cuts and local community need. Epstein et al (2006) note that “For community governance to be effective, it must be about more than process, it also must be about getting things done in the community. And what gets done must make a difference.” Broadclyst Parish Council regularly demonstrates that it does listen to the needs of its community and responds in a positive way wherever possible. The Council recognises that the day-to-day things matter to people, for example where more dog bins / more frequent collections have been requested, Council has provided additional bins, increasing from 10 bins emptied once a week in 2013 at the cost of £210 to 19 bins in 2019 emptied three times a week at the cost of £4,750. People asked for additional areas of hedgerow and verges to be cut: these have been added to the visibility splay cutting contract. Residents in the more remote hamlets such as Westwood told us they wanted their potholes mended when they first appear, rather than wait until such a time they become of a size where they damage car suspension and cause a serious hazard to cyclists, so the Council put itself forward to be a trial parish in the Community Road Warden Scheme in 2014 and has been undertaking minor pothole works ever since.

It doesn't end there: The Council must ensure that the voices and wishes/needs of underrepresented groups (i.e. young people, the elderly, those on a low income, those with disabilities, ethnic/cultural minorities) are also heard and taken into consideration. The teenagers told us they wanted a youth club: The Council provides one. Parents of young children tell us how much they love the play parks: The

Parish Council chooses to spend council tax money on their upkeep at a time where other authorities are closing play areas due to lack of maintenance funds and proper budgeting processes to ensure end-of-life replacement funds¹. Sports Club members speak of the social value of their clubs, and so the Council provides public sports facilities. Broadclyst FC requested ongoing support to promote youth football in the parish: The Parish Council not only supports with £1,000 a year towards the cost of running the Club but offers the facilities at the Pavilions and Broadclyst playing field pitch at a reduced rate.

The Council Tax comprises the precepts of Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, Broadclyst Parish Council, Devon & Cornwall Police, and Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue. In 2019/20 the Parish Council cost the average Band D property £4.70 a week. National Statistics figures released² detail the level of Council Tax set by local authorities; what these figures do not do, however, is give any indication of services provided by these councils, any other income they receive, nor the size of their tax base, all significant factors which impact on their budgets, their balancing precept, and their Band D equivalent.

Leach et al (2018) emphasise the importance of community governance, noting “local choice should be exercised in a way which is responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities.” Community infrastructure, public amenities, and service provision does come at a price and it is recognised that we are at a time where principal authorities are still cutting services in order to stay within their allowed percentage increases and focus on their prioritised statutory obligations: “we have cut away the fat, into the flesh, and into the bone but we are on the point of breaking the bone” (John Hart, Leader DCC). Principal Authorities have made it very clear that they will not continue to fund services and community infrastructure as they have done historically; ultimately, it is for the community to decide what level of service provision and public amenities it wants its council tax to fund, and Broadclyst Parish Council continues to welcome input from all sectors of the community on this important matter.

This concludes my report to Council.

Angie Hurren
Broadclyst Parish Clerk
Principal SLCC
04th October 2019

¹ <https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/16-exeter-playgrounds-council-wants-2511135>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-tax-levels-set-by-local-authorities-in-england-2019-to-2020>

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Appendix

A selection of work carried out by the Council in addition to its statutory duties: footpaths, dog bins, potholes, gulley emptying, community refuse, sign cleaning, ditching, flood resilience,



More work carried out in addition to its statutory duties: play equipment, re-enactment days, community events, sports facilities, community meeting facilities, community projects.

