

Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday to Thursday
9am – 4pm

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

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**Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Monday,
26th January 2026 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall.**

Minutes approved on 23rd March 2026: Part One version

Present: Cllrs Walden (JW) (Chair), Price (JP) (Vice Chair), Ashkettle (JA), Dowdeswell (MD), Dunsbury (RD), Farrow (JF), Hayward (AH), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), Osborn (RO), Paice (LP) and Willey (DW).

The meeting was quorate.

Also in attendance were the Clerk to the Council, Paul Hayward, and the Deputy Clerk, Sarah Jackson.
No members of the public were in attendance.

The meeting began at 7.00 pm.

The Presiding Chair of the Committee, JW, welcomed all in attendance and outlined the fire precautions, exits, etc. and ran through the agenda procedure and protocol, noting the agenda statements as published.

Public Forum:

As there were no members of the public present, the Chair asked if any members of the Committee wished to speak in the public forum.

JF reported that she had received a call from the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Devon on behalf of the Lord Lieutenant of Devon, regarding a possible Royal visit in the future, who wanted to understand more about Axminster, including its key businesses, community groups and organisations. JF reported having already provided some feedback and asked that if anyone has any other ideas, they please get in touch with her.

The Chair subsequently closed the public forum session at 7:05pm.

OC26/001

To note members of the committee present:

As detailed above.

OC26/002

To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies (and reasons for absence). (LGA 1972 S.85 (1))

Apologies were received from Cllr Bridge, Cllr Norman and Cllr Warwick. These apologies were noted, along with the reasons for them.

The Chair proposed that these apologies be accepted, which was seconded by JP. Resolved unanimously.

OC26/003

To note members of the Committee not otherwise in attendance.

All members of the Committee were accounted for.

Continued Overleaf

OC26/004

To receive any declarations of interest from members of the Committee in relation to items of business on this agenda and to note any dispensations previously afforded.

There were no other declarations of interest.

OC26/005

To consider and, if thought fit, approve the minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 15th September 2025 and to consider any matters arising.

The Chair proposed approval of these minutes.

Seconded by JP. The approval of the minutes was resolved unanimously.

Action: The Chair signed the approved minutes accordingly.

Matters Arising.

There were four matters arising, which the Clerk gave an update about:

i) Regarding the installation of the two new emergency stores.

The Clerk gave a brief update on confirmed locations, agreements with third-party landowners, and weather-related delays.

ii) Guildhall Hearing Loop survey.

The Clerk confirmed that the Guildhall Manager had undertaken the survey, but he was of the understanding that there had been no responses.

iii) DEFRA report on Glyphosate impact.

The Clerk reports that he has not yet seen this report and doesn't believe it has been published yet.

iv) Online allotment 'Report a Problem' platform.

The Deputy Clerk confirms that this platform has been launched and is in operation and available from the "allotments" page of the website.

OC26/006

To consider any matters listed on this agenda that Councillors consider should be dealt with as confidential business as per the provisions of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

One matter was already tabled for Part Two consideration - agenda items OC26/014(IC).

Agreed.

Operations Committee business to be considered:

OC26/007

To consider matters pertaining to Town Amenity and services:

i) To receive an update relating to the Town Centre CCTV enhancement project.

The Town Clerk provided a brief project update, advising that the CCTV contractor has secured all necessary parts and materials and agreed arrangements with the host building for cable runs, access and wiring. The next step is the submission of the planning application by the Chair of Council, which is already underway. While the OPCC has agreed to fund the project, the funds have not yet been remitted to the Town Council.

Actions: Clerk, please prepare the necessary paperwork for the planning application for submission by the Chair of the Council and follow up with the OPCC regarding funding.

Continued Overleaf

ii) **To consider parish grit bins.**

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Deputy Clerk has liaised with the DEVON County Council (DCC) Highways Officer as instructed and submitted a notice of intent to apply for a Localities Grant. The Council is awaiting in-principle approval before purchasing the grit and grit bins. A supplier has been identified who can provide 11 bins at a lower cost than the previous quote for 10. The next step is to identify suitable locations and obtain consent from the relevant landowners or responsible bodies.

Actions: Clerk and Deputy Clerk, please identify suitable locations and liaise with the relevant landowners for consent to place a grit bin on their land. Deputy Clerk, please submit a grant application as soon as you receive approval in principle from DCC.

iii) **To consider Jubilee Field tree planting.**

The Town Clerk advised that, following removal of the Dog Free Zone fencing and with a significant sum remaining in the parish tree planting reserve, the Council may want to consider planting additional lime trees along the eastern side of the North/South pathway.

The Deputy Clerk reported that each mature tree costs approximately £100, with additional costs for supports, topsoil, compost, chippings, tree collars and contractor support. The success of the trees can depend heavily on weather conditions during the first summer, and so she recommended that Autumn/Winter planting should the Council wish to proceed.

The Committee felt that the Council should, in principle, proceed as there was sufficient money in the tree planting reserve, but requested a more comprehensive project cost before making a firm decision.

JW proposed that officers be directed to ascertain all project costs for the Operations Committee to consider with a view to planting additional trees in late Autumn. Seconded by JP. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk and Deputy Clerk, please ascertain the full project costs and bring them back to the Operations Committee for consideration.

iv) **To consider the matter of drainage in Jubilee Field.**

The Clerk advised that drainage and subterranean water ingress affecting a property adjoining Jubilee Field had been considered at a previous Council meeting and that further correspondence has since been received from the resident's daughter. The Clerk outlined the concerns and financial position and sought the Council's direction on how to proceed.

The Committee discussed all of the following points.

- The root cause of the issue, and the increasingly severe weather conditions.
- What drainage had been previously installed, by whom, when and why.
- Responsibility for the drainage infrastructure.
- No work had been undertaken on the site that would increase water runoff from the field.
- Liability issues
- Potential costs vs effectiveness of any work.

CLlr Dowdeswell offered some legal advice based on case precedent.

JW proposed that the tenants' daughter be advised that the Council do not believe that it has any liability with respect to water permeation into their garden from Jubilee Field due to rainfall. Seconded by DW. There were 11 votes in favour and 1 abstention. The decision was carried.

Actions: Clerk, please write to the tenant and her daughter with the Council's position.

Continued Overleaf

v) **To consider the matter of the Devon County Council Road Warden scheme.**

The Clerk highlighted the poor condition of roads across Devon, including Axminster, and outlined the County Council's financial position. He explained that a Road Warden Scheme is in place to enable town and parish councils and voluntary organisations to carry out temporary pothole repairs, but noted its limitations. The Clerk sought the Committee's direction on whether road repairs should be explored as a potential new work stream for the Grounds Team at this stage.

Committee Members highlighted Sector Lane as a particularly dangerous area requiring urgent resurfacing.

Members raised concerns about poor-quality, poorly executed and unsafe contractor repairs, unclear accountability, and the need for DCC to conduct independent audits of its contractors' work. There were also concerns that, as the repairs the Town Council could provide are only temporary, the Town Council could end up incurring significant expense from repeat visits to the same locations. Similarly, the Town Council could suffer reputational damage if it were unable to deliver road repairs to the extent and standard truly required of DCC.

It was suggested that the Council should not participate in schemes until roles and responsibilities are clarified, and the Road Warden Scheme has been significantly improved.

JW proposed that Axminster Town Council not participate in the Road Warden Scheme until it has been reviewed and improved. That Axminster Town Council should also communicate its concerns regarding the standard of highway repairs and accountability for them to Devon County Council, and include its view that DCC should appoint an independent assessor to audit works undertaken by its Highway Maintenance contractor. Seconded by MD. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please write to Devon County Council to communicate the Council's position accordingly.

vi) **To consider the matter of Millwey Rise (additional) play area and ongoing discussions regarding Cloakham Lawns play provision (both S106 funded).**

The Clerk updated the Committee on Vistry's position regarding potential additional play space versus allotment provision at Cloakham Lawns and noted that if development of a play facility at Cloakham Lawns were not viable, there would be £124,000 of S106 funding available for open space or facility enhancements. He sought guidance on which routes he should explore.

JW/JF suggested residents of Cloakham Lawns declare their residency before speaking.

JP, declared an Affects ORI as a resident. He proposed a leaflet drop with an online survey to gauge demand for allotments versus play provision.

JF noted that allotments are heavily subsidised, offer limited wider community benefit, and there is currently insufficient demand for a fourth site, so the Council should not take it on when it is offered.

WH supported the survey as a demonstration that Axminster Town Council listens to residents.

SL asked whether Vistry might reconsider; the Clerk explained that their position is unlikely to change, but additional evidence could be submitted at minimal cost and might encourage them to reconsider.

The Deputy Clerk confirmed that paper responses could be provided to those who do not use computers, and that all responses would be cross-checked to prevent duplicates.

Regarding the accessible play extension at Millwey Rise, the Clerk confirmed consultation with children has not yet occurred, and discussions are ongoing on how to structure it when that time comes.

WH proposed that information and a survey be prepared and delivered to all residents of Cloakham Lawns, and that the results should be reported back to the Council for further consideration.

Seconded by JP. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please work with the Deputy Clerk to formulate an information pack and survey for distribution.

Continued Overleaf

OC26/008

To consider matters pertaining to allotments:

i) To consider any matters requiring attention.

The Clerk explained that much of the ongoing maintenance, allotment clearance work, and site improvement projects have been put on ice temporarily as the team is currently without equipment and the sites are too waterlogged to undertake certain works. Nonetheless, those works that can continue, have. He also explained that the Deputy Clerk and Admin Assistant would soon write to Allotment holders with a deadline to express an interest in downsizing. This would enable plots not needed for transfers to be made available to new tenants as soon as possible.

RO asked if the number of vacant plots could be confirmed. The Deputy Clerk explained that this information could not be provided at this time, as there were a number of larger plots under offer to new tenants and she was unsure of their current status.

ii) To consider correspondence from the Allotment Association

The Clerk reported that there was no new correspondence to consider.

OC26/009

To consider matters pertaining the Guildhall:

The Town Clerk explained that the Business Plan work was still ongoing with Strategy and Finance and that this would likely inform the direction of travel.

The Clerk also highlighted that the front of the building had started to leak again and will require attention in the coming months. The works required will include repointing, brickwork, leadwork, roof and gutter maintenance, redecoration and damp course, in order to prevent further deterioration to the fabric of the building.

He also commented on the re-rendering requirements for the boundary wall to the rear of the dressing rooms, and that additional heating will need to be installed in the WCs, as they are very cold.

Actions: Clerk, please bring a report back to the Committee with some costings.

OC26/010

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Cemetery:

i) To receive an update relating to the Cemetery Chapel condition and security works.

The Town Clerk updated the Committee and explained that the two contractors had been commissioned to undertake the works and were now actively working on these projects.

JA raised a concern that no formal vote was recalled regarding the appointment of the contractor and that more cost-effective options may not have been fully explored.

A number of other Committee members explained that the Council had approved an exemption from its procurement rules to enable urgent action to secure the chapels. While obtaining three quotes is standard practice, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations may be suspended in exceptional circumstances.

Members noted that alternative solutions had in fact been discussed at a previous meeting, in consideration of costs, operational and storage needs, and that the Council determined securing its own assets was the most appropriate long-term solution.

It was further highlighted that insurance requirements for reinstating cover could be challenging to meet through third-party sites or at a container storage facility.

Continued Overleaf

ii) To receive an update relating to Cemetery / grounds-team assets

The Town Clerk provided an update on the procurement of new equipment, noting that equipment needs had been carefully assessed in consultation with the GMO team. A competitive quote has been received from two suppliers able to provide Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) services.

It was noted that due to weather conditions and the need to secure the chapels prior to delivery, it would be premature to proceed with the purchase until this work is complete. This delay has allowed the Council to ensure the best value for money.

Contractor M is closest to Axminster and has quoted: £17,123 net
Contractor P can also provide MRO services, has quoted: £17,157 net
The equipment can be sourced online for a total of: £16,997 net

The online option represents a modest saving; however, this does not account for any delivery fees and doesn't provide the same level of consumer protection we would otherwise receive through a local provider that would like to retain business of our service and repair needs.

JW proposed that the Council accept contractor M's quote and that the purchase of the equipment take place at the appropriate moment. Seconded by DW. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please note and action accordingly, coordinating purchases with workshop availability.

iii) To receive a report relating to Cemetery wall - maintenance and repair works.

The Town Clerk outlined the need for some wall adaptations to enable vehicular transit to the far end of the cemetery without endangering existing graves and memorials.

JA asked if the damage was being caused by vehicles belonging to members of the public. It was confirmed that whilst they might play a contributing role, it was more due to larger vehicles belonging to contractors undertaking work in the cemetery, as the corner was currently too tight for modern vehicles.

WH requested that some photographs be included with the next report and suggested that a sensitive alternative to a bollard be explored.

JP proposed that advice be sought from a suitable contractor and quotes sourced for delivery of the adaptations. Seconded by JW. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please seek the necessary quotes from suitably qualified contractors for Committee consideration.

iv) To consider initial proposals for the new cemetery interment section W (aka Willow) and a new memorial bed for ashes scattering in Z section (aka Elm).

The Town Clerk gave a brief update about the next phases of preparation required to develop additional grave space in the W section of the cemetery. He detailed that this would only provide an extra 5 to 10 years of interment space, and that attention will soon need to be given to finding a new location, if the Council felt that re-use of older plots was insensitive.

The Clerk also suggested a preliminary proposal for a second memorial bed for ashes scattering along the western boundary of Z Section (Elm) and the possibility of a memorial wall. The Deputy Clerk outlined the process for ashes scattering rather than interment. The new memorial bed would give the bereaved a choice, and the Council resilience to accommodate further scatterings.

Continued Overleaf

Councillors discussed that they felt the additional memorial bed in Z Section was a good idea, but WH and JF had concerns that the memorial plaques could incur significant maintenance and administrative burden. JF also commented that, if a memorial was desired, an ashes plot should be purchased instead.

JW proposed that the Council direct the Clerk to explore possibilities and return with options, including costings, administration, and maintenance burden. Seconded by WH. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, undertake the necessary research and return with some options for the Committee to consider taking forward.

OC26/011

Chair's Announcements / Matters of Urgency for discussion only to be noted:

The Chair raised one matter of urgency for discussion with respect to a communication from JA relating to the Church Clock reserve.

Actions: It was suggested by the Chair (to JA) that she liaise with the Clerk to request that this matter be added to the agenda for the next meeting that JA can attend; wording of a relevant motion to be agreed between JA and the Clerk.

OC26/012

Date of next scheduled meeting for the Committee: 23rd March 2026 – 7pm (Guildhall).

For future committee meetings, see the 2026/27 meeting calendar.

OC26/013

Recommendation: that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act namely, the financial affairs or business affairs or employment affairs of the Town Council by virtue of the fact that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Proposed by JP, seconded by Chair. Resolved.

Matters to be considered in committee session (Part Two)

The items of business listed below and any others from this agenda are to be agreed upon by members of the Committee if and when appropriate (see OC26/006).

OC26/014 (IC)

To consider a commercially sensitive matter pertaining to the Cemetery Chapel works.

This matter is deemed confidential as disclosure would compromise the security of council assets.

The Clerk provided a recap of the security measures being implemented, including the reasons why they were necessary, and then gave an overview of the final tweaks required to the CCTV coverage plans at the cemetery chapels, as well as other security provisions to be implemented.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 21.05 hrs.

Signed Date: 23rd March 2026

**Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Monday,
26th January 2026 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall.**

Approved Minutes: Part One version