

Axminster Town Council (ATC) – Chair’s Report to March 2023

In April 2022 the Council decided to offer financial support to community groups to enable them to run events celebrating Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth’s Platinum Jubilee. We were delighted on 2 June to open formally Jubilee Field. The event was marked with a commemorative piece of natural rock with a slate plinth (created and donated by stonemason Alfie Brooker). The appointment of Michael Davis (CMLI) as ATC’s Honorary Tree Warden gave the Council access to much helpful advice and guidance in respect of tree planting in the field. We used £15,000 of Section 106 grant funding to erect a new climbing wall there.

Work continued throughout the year on the Neighbourhood Plan. In May the responsible East Devon District Council (EDDC) officer visited Axminster for a lengthy walking tour and discussion with members of the Steering Group. Consultation events on this and EDDC’s Local Plan were well attended. Throughout the year the Council supported EDDC’s (sadly unsuccessful) levelling up bid.

At the May meeting we agreed that the Town Council should continue to maintain the Guildhall and to work to modernise its governance. In July we authorised the expenditure of £52,000 from reserves to carry out essential work to fulfil risk management and health and safety obligations.

In June we applied to the Great Western Railway Community Fund for a grant award towards the Green Wedge Project (the land between Axminster Station and the ‘Tesco’ roundabout) and later agreed to participate in a joint funding venture to provide E-Bike facilities there. ATC has allocated £10,000 towards a potential £60,000 project.

I attended, with Devon County Councillor Ian Hall, the inaugural Stop Line Way Park Run in September. DCC and ATC had both provided financial support for this initiative. We contributed £84,000 towards the building of Axminster Skatepark, which is hugely enjoyed by its users.

There have, of course, been frustrations. Residents and business owners in Castle Street have yet to see progress on repairing the collapsed wall. ATC has no power to act but made representations to Devon County and East Devon District Councillors. There was also nothing we could do about the closure of Lloyd’s Bank, other than express extreme disappointment on behalf of the town.

In September we discussed the Flamingo Pool, following its public crisis meeting. Unfortunately ATC has insufficient resource to provide it with financial support, though everyone recognises what an asset to the town the pool is.

We were able to support community groups running Warm Space initiatives through the winter. Both No Toy Left Behind and Nourish ran successful projects.

Grants to other community groups and charities were approved throughout the year. We also declined to approve some applications, on the grounds that they were outside the parish or contained insufficient detail for the funds requested.

Other activity throughout the year included support to a DCC proposal to extend the 20mph speed restriction, the formation of the Climate Change Action Group, and the provision and installation of multiple defibrillators around the town.

There was less churn of Town Council members than we have previously seen. We lost Sue Brooker and welcomed Andrew Bourne and Rebecca Lippett.

In addition to the work above, I’ve had the pleasure, as Mayor, of having 30 official engagements, ranging from opening new businesses and a composting toilet, to drawing raffle tickets, to proclaiming on Minster Green the accession to the throne of King Charles III. It’s been quite a year!

Jill Farrow

Chair