

Axminster Town Council

Chair's Report for the Annual Parish Meeting 4 April 2022

This time last year, we were in the period of national mourning, following the death of HRH Prince Philip, and still holding virtual meetings. The first physical meeting post-lockdown was held in May.

In April, the Neighbourhood Plan steering group was formed, following a consultative public meeting. Over the year it has achieved significant progress, for which thanks are due to Councillors Sedgewick and Holt and some key members of the public who have made their time and expertise available for this important project. In February, a draft version was submitted to East Devon District Council's Neighbourhood Plan officers.

In June, ATC committed £150,000 of Section 106 funds to the new Skatepark, together with a "substantial sum" from reserves. Further news on this project is expected shortly.

Discussions about Jubilee Field took place in many meetings and we're still hoping to take ownership in time to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June. A public meeting was held in February after consultation about dog-free areas had been concluded. For the Jubilee, ATC is making the Guildhall available for community groups, as well as modest funding for events. EDDC kindly provided the Jubilee Oak which was planted in Jubilee Field in March.

The October floods were a major source of concern to the community. Subsequently, we improved the accessibility and availability of sandbags. Devon County Councillor Ian Hall attended a Town Council meeting to ensure that concerns expressed reached Devon County Council.

Axminster Town Council agreed to redecorate the Guildhall taking funding from reserves and did remedial work on the stanchions and the electrics. The Old Courthouse took a lot of staff attention – in the aftermath of the fire in the Arts Café rising damp was discovered, which had to be dealt with.

In other activity, we supported the Totally Locally initiative to put benches on Minster Green, worked to make progress on the Raymond's Hill Play Area, negotiating with the landowners about the lease. We agreed to pay for the hire of the Guildhall to host defibrillator training for members of the public, and to obtain and fit defibrillators at the outdoor Bowls Club and Cloakham Lawns.

A major planning application was discussed by the full council, and a proposal to build 30 dwellings off Beavor Lane was opposed because of the potential harm to the River Axe and the potential to exacerbate the flood risk in the Millbrook area.

In January 2022 the Freedom of Axminster was awarded to former Councillor Susan Spiller, as had been agreed in 2019, and a bench in her honour was placed at the cemetery. Karen Taylor was presented with the Robin Cross Citizen of the Year Award.

The Council decided to deformalize its meetings – we now allow ourselves to use first names and I only get addressed as Madam Mayor when I'm in robes on a formal occasion.

GRANTS

May - £700 to Royal British Legion for the War Memorial Centenary Event

June - £2,000 to Axminster Job Club

September - £265 to Plastic Free Axminster for the ECO-fair.

November - £1,000 to Axe Valley Ring and Ride (to be paid 1/4/22)

January - £1,000 to Cloakham Lawn Park Run

February £2,000 to the Community Shed

In addition, in September, the Children's Community Art Exhibition was given a donation from the Mayoral allowance.

Over the period we declined to support two organisations which submitted grant requests on the basis that there was insufficient evidence that their work directly benefitted Axminster residents.

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

We welcomed newly co-opted members Charles Hall, Sarah Birnie, Alfie Brooker, Sue Brooker, Liz Paice, Bernie Steadman, Angela Huskisson, Kara Burrough and Andrew Bourne. We said farewell, on resignation, to Simon Sleigh, Olly Tucker, Carol Doherty and Charles Hall.

Jill Farrow

31 March 2022