

## AGENDA ITEM 6 – ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2021

### Strategy & Finance Committee Report 2020/21

In 2020 the then Buildings and Finance Committee was concerned with the management of Axminster Town Council assets, including the Guildhall, the Old Courthouse, and the allotments.

In June it approved the necessary changes to the offices to allow Council staff to work appropriately socially distanced, setting up a separate office for the Guildhall Manager. Arrangements were put in place for monitoring the entry and exit of staff and visitors to the Guildhall, and the Manager completed a COVID risk assessment for contractors working in spaces occupied by staff and tenants.

Consideration had to be given to water ingress at the Old Courthouse, but the fire in October was hugely damaging to the business of the Arts Café's valued tenants. Balancing their desire for security with public access to the gardens has been an ongoing subject of difficulty.

The Committee was glad to be able to arrange for the War Memorial to be cleaned once the necessary Listed Building Consent had been obtained.

Other work undertaken during 2020 included:

- progressing the removal of asbestos from the allotments
- recarpeting the offices at the Guildhall
- addressing the budget for 2021/22
- purchasing laptop computers for the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Admin Assistant to ensure business continuity.

In 2021 the committee structure was amended, and the work subsumed into the Strategy and Finance Committee. It still awaits the Emergency Services report into the Arts Café fire and is working on the future of the Old Courthouse now that the Senior Citizens Centre has closed.

The Council's ambitions for the next five years include working on the Neighbourhood Plan, which is the subject of a separate report.

Jill Farrow

## Axminster Cemetery Report 2021

Axminster Cemetery, Chard Road, was opened in 1855. A committee was set up to manage its operation and regulation.

In January 2021 the Axminster Cemetery Committee became part of the Operations Committee. Today nine councillors of Axminster Town Council sit on that committee.

Some highlights from the operation of the Cemetery over the past twelve months include:

### 1. Maintenance and Repair Work

a) Trees. A report written in April 2019 by Chris Groves Associates regarding tree work at Axminster Cemetery, led the Town Council to start a phased programme of tree works. The work was done at a cost of £1450. Earlier this year the inspection period interval was changed to every 12 months from every 36. This change was brought about because of the effects of climate change and the increased impact of tree disease on tree safety.

b) Walls: Our two Caretakers have cleaned up growth on both sides of the wall next to the A358.

c) Fences: Some Birch tree growth has been removed by a Contractor next to Millwey Rise play area and it was agreed to close gaps in the top boundary with appropriate native hedging species.

d) Seats: it was agreed to install seats on Cemetery land.

e) Paths: Many hours have been spent maintaining paths within the Cemetery. The problem revolves around vehicular movements both by our own staff and by undertakers and their supporting contractors. This increasing damage to the paths is due to modern vehicles being wider and heavier than those used historically. Two options are being considered:

1. A simple task of cutting out damaged path ways and repairing with hardcore and covering with tarmac.

2. Creating a new path through the field (adjoining Millwey playing field and allotments) to the field gate at the bottom side of the Z section. It may be necessary to replace the grass grid paths put down in the existing part of the Z Section as these have not borne up well, especially in wet weather. Advice is being sought as to a surface which would meet our requirements.

Option 2 would future-proof the Cemetery roadways and paths, and would be built to a standard fit for any future vehicle weight or size.

Both solutions continue to be specified and costed, but some work for health and safety are being done as needed.

### 2. Administrative Matters

Committee members regularly met to: review Fee Sheet costs and wording; Cemetery Regulations and Right of Burial Terms to insure that these are in line with current legislation and practice.

### Digital Mapping

A new project has taken shape called Digital Mapping at a cost of £4435. This project will see manual paper data transferred to a digital format. When complete, Cemetery details will show: the Cemetery boundaries within the Axminster Town Council boundary; buildings and paths within the Cemetery; grave and cremation lines; individual grave and cremation interments and a “clickdown” giving administrative report on an individual site. Yearly update will be required.

I would like to thank our Caretakers, Mr John Hoden and Mr Edward Cutler for keeping our Cemetery in pristine condition. John Hoden is retiring after nearly 32 years with us, and Edward, nearly 2 years, for a new job. Both are leaving this May. A new Caretaker/Groundskeeper position has been created and an advert has been released.

I would further like to thank John Jeffery for his servicing and maintenance of Cemetery equipment. John has now relinquished this responsibility and the Committee has spoken to local businesses to create service and maintenance schedules.

**OPERATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

**24<sup>TH</sup> May 2021**

The Operations Committee of Axminster Town Council is responsible for all aspects of our estate and property. We set the policy for our staff, volunteers and contractors to act upon. The best way to describe what we, as a council, do is to look at each aspect in turn.

**ALLOTMENTS**

We have 140 allotments spread over 3 sites: Woodbury Park, North Street and Millwey Rise, with about 150 tenants – some plots being divided between 2 tenants. We have 15 people on our waiting list and are seeking to find more land for an activity which has increased dramatically over recent years. This has been caused by an increased desire to grow our own food, but also because new homes have much smaller gardens than before and in many cases such space is used more for leisure these days. Should you wish to be considered for a plot, please contact the council on 01297 32088.

We have to make the allotments “wipe their face” so that income from rents over time meets all the expenses we incur. This is to ensure that the allotments do not put a drain on council resources. The money we do spend is on hedging, path care, general maintenance and removal of rubbish.

The allotments are generally in good order, and working with Axminster Allotments Association we are able to identify areas of concern and act on them.

**JUBILEE FOUNTAIN**

The fountain in Trinity Square, erected to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, is due to be cleaned soon. It is listed, and so planning permission is required. It is a Ham stone erection, and needs special care. A local contractor has been engaged, who is well known nationally and experienced in this delicate work. Watch this space.

**SEATS AND BENCHES**

Various seats and benches in town are the council’s property and responsibility. We also took a decision several years ago to provide 2 new benches per year, either to replace existing ones or for new sites, reflecting our growing population. One is due to go close by the play area at Flax Meadow Lane, and another will be placed outside the Cemetery in honour of former Councillor Sue Spiller, to reflect the great service she gave to the town over 25 years. The bench opposite Le Pisani will also have a plaque in honour of George Pye who passed away recently to reflect the many years he worked for our council and EDDC keeping our streets clean. The present bench, in honour of Winston Churchill, will be located elsewhere. One of our staff also has great skills in renovating our old benches, and this keeps him busy during the winter months, when outside work is difficult, and when the grass is not growing. So, if you see a seat disappear, this will be the most likely reason. Our newer benches are lower maintenance, being made from recycled materials, but they are just as comfortable and quite elegant.

**BUS SHELTERS**

## AGENDA ITEM 8 – ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2021

We have 4 shelters in current use, in Trinity Square, at Raymonds Hill and on either side of Musbury Road at Gamberlake. The old shelter at Millwey is due to be removed soon, as it has been replaced by one provided by the bus contractor.

Unfortunately due to vandalism, the shelter windows are in need of constant replacement. This is an expensive job, both with materials and labour. Would that the few people who damage these shelters could be made to realise that this wanton behaviour achieves little and does much harm to our civic pride.

We hope to repaint those shelters needing it soon. They are power washed at least twice a year.

### **FLORAL DISPLAYS**

We are responsible to displays on the Minster Green, hanging baskets at South Street car park, the Guildhall and the Tesco roundabout. The latter is sponsored by W G Potter funeral directors. They are replanted twice a year. The Town Council pays for the plants, and they are planted up by an eager team of volunteers, led by Bryan Ball. Should you wish to help him, please contact our Administrative Assistant Sue Gay on 01297 32088. Bryan Ball and John Jefferies also water our plants throughout the season. This town owes a debt of gratitude to all who work on our floral displays, which add so much to our home.

### **JUBILEE FIELD**

This field between Boxfield Road and Dukes Way will, eventually, become part of the Town Council's portfolio. There have been delays, not of our doing, but the end is in site. When in place, we will put out for consultation, plans for what is intended. They will include tree planting, (one for every year of Her Majesty's reign, separation of a dog exercising area, a play area, and somewhere for people to sit and rest, have a picnic or just kick a ball around. This will be a dog free area. We also intend to plant natural wild flowers on the bank near the bottom, which covers the attenuation tanks and is unsuitable for trees. Once we have taken in account the response to the consultation we will start work.

### **PROPOSED PLAY AREA AT RAYMONDS HILL**

This is in the planning stage at the moment, and we are in negotiation with land owners at the moment. It is hoped to provide a climbing wall and two other items, with hopefully more equipment as funds become available. When firmed up we will apply for planning permission to EDDC, and residents can make their views known at this stage.

## AGENDA ITEM 9 – ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2021

### REPORT FROM CHAIRMAN OF PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Planning Committee is there to respond to the planning and licensing applications for the Axminster area. We act purely as a consultee for the district council and therefore can not make decisions about applications, we consider and give our recommendations.

We meet at least once a month and all meetings are open to the public and the applications we discuss are available for everyone to view on the EDDC website prior to the meeting.

Currently there are 7 councillors on the Planning Committee and we all have different levels of experience and knowledge. However, we always welcome the opinions and expertise of the residents of Axminster so why not come along to a meeting one day and see for yourself.

Over the last year we have seen the usual applications for home improvements, agricultural buildings and tree management but what has excited the committee most has been the applications for new businesses and the regeneration of some of the buildings in our vibrant town. In a year where retail and hospitality has been in hibernation it's humbling to see the faith local businesses and traders have and it's part of the committee role to support them where we can.'

Those who are of a statistical bent of mind, might like to know that between the 2019 Annual Parish Meeting and what should have been the 2020 Annual Parish Meeting, 74 applications were submitted for consideration. In the equivalent period since then 99 applications were submitted for consideration by the Committee. Was this a consequence of COVID or simply a co-incidence?!

**Axminster Town Council – Employment Committee Report 2021**

The purpose of the Employment committee is to oversee matters relating to the employment and management of the Council's staff.

Our responsibilities include:

- Overseeing the recruitment and appointment of staff – we are currently advertising for a new Groundskeeper and Cemetery Caretaker following the retirement of John Holden, and Ned Cutler's move to a different role.
- Drafting implementing, reviewing, monitoring and revising policies for staff – this year we have reviewed and revised a number of employment policies including:
  - Equality and diversity
  - Dignity at work
  - Recruitment and selection
  - Induction
  - Appraisal and Performance Improvement
  - Training and development
  - Flexible working
- Arranging new employment contracts and changes to contracts when we appoint new staff, and when staff change the hours they work.
- Establishing and reviewing performance management and staff training – this year we have introduced appraisals for all staff; and are delivering training for staff on appraisal processes, time management, Risk Management and Strategic Planning,
- Keeping under review staff working conditions and health and safety matters.
- Monitoring and addressing staff absence in accordance with national guidelines
- Reviewing salary and pay-scales in line with national recommendations and increases.
- Overseeing any process leading to the redundancy of staff should this be necessary.

The Employment Committee meet monthly, agendas and minutes are posted onto the Council website. Members of the public are welcome to attend the first part of our meetings.

Councillor Andrea Sedgewick  
Chair of the Employment Committee

May 17<sup>th</sup> 2021

## **RIGHTS OF WAY REPORT 2021**

All of our rights of way within the parish were inspected well within the timeframe laid down by Devon County Council. A copy of that report was sent to the Town clerk, and hopefully circulated to all members.

There are some 52 paths within the parish of Axminster. The parish covers a large area and borders with the parishes of Kilmington, Membury, Hawkchurch, All Saints and Chardstock. The longest path goes out just short of Beckford Bridge. The inspection involves walking about 30 miles; therefore it is good exercise. Some of these paths are now pavements or paths through areas that have been developed, whilst others pass through some of the most scenic countryside in Devon.

Axminster was one of the first parishes in Devon to join the Parish Paths Partnership, known as P3, in fact we held a meeting in the New Commercial under the chairmanship of the Mayor, the late David Hallett, to persuade the neighbouring parishes to also join the scheme. The scheme has been extremely useful, and provides some funding to keep paths open.

There are two paths that have not been used for many years, one is in Raymonds Hill, and the other is a small loop path off Woodbury Lane. Both have dwellings on them.

I am pleased to inform you that on the day of inspection none of the paths were obstructed; other than the two long term ones mentioned above.

A problem with the surface on the path that goes from Castle Hill towards Cloakham has been dealt with by the landowner. The council only had to pay for some materials.

At the other end of that path, in Watery Lane, which is the boundary between Axminster and All Saints parish, a footbridge was damaged. This has been repaired by our contractor.

At the other end of the parish, where the borders of Axminster touch Membury there is a bridleway near a farm known as High Lea. A number of gates were proving difficult for horse riders, and have been rectified by our contractor.



There is a bridleway known as Evil Lane, which runs from Beaver Lane to Cuthays Lane. There may well be a Devonshire reason for the name evil, however, on several occasions, after a great deal of rain, the name lives up to its name when you attempt to walk it. Devon County council has noted this and has given us some funding to improve this path.

There are a number of paths that could benefit from additional signage, and this will be a project for the summer.

I thank the Axminster Parish Lengthsman for keeping the urban paths in the town clear.

We need to push Wain Homes into signposting the path that was diverted because of the development at Millbrook. At present the route is somewhat confusing in places.

This is also the case on the development at Cloakham which has a footpath running through it that requires some marking to aid walkers

As there are a number of new councillors it might be useful if we organised a series of walks around the parish. Please let me know if this is something you would like to undertake.

As usual I make a plea on behalf of farmers that walkers with dogs keep them on a lead whilst passing through fields where there is livestock. Walkers should also note that they only have the right to walk along what is legally known as the definitive route of the footpath or bridleway, and not to walk anywhere else, or divert from that route, unless the route is obstructed.

Should walkers find any obstructions on the route or broken gates or stiles please inform the town clerk, who will pass the information on to me.

John Vanderwolfe

Hon. ROW Warden

### **Axminster Neighbourhood Plan – Report for Annual Parish Meeting**

Following two on-line public meetings organized by the Town Council during March 2021, a new Steering Group has been formed to undertake work to create a Neighbourhood Plan for Axminster. Five Town Councillors are members of the Steering Group, alongside several members of the community. It is planned that the Plan will be completed to be launched alongside the new Local Plan for East Devon in 2023.

The purpose of a Neighbourhood Plan is to provide developers with information and guidance about local priorities and aspirations and how they relate to the wider public good. Once approved and adopted the plan will be a formal planning document which ensures that local people's views on land use or the changes to land use in our Parish are considered.

The Steering Group is working to refresh and update the draft Neighbourhood Plan which was prepared by the Axminster Community Enterprise group in 2018 – ensuring that data is refreshed, and policies updated to reflect current and future circumstances.

It is proposed that the Neighbourhood Plan will have sections covering land use policies for housing, economic and retail developments, leisure, arts and culture facilities, for environmental interests and for traffic and transport infrastructure.

One of the key elements of neighbourhood planning is that it must be based on the views of local people. During the coming months there are going to be a number of consultation activities to seek the views of all residents, and of community and business groups, to ensure that the policies and priorities in the plan accurately reflect the views of everyone who lives in, works in, otherwise relies on, or visits our town.

Please do take this opportunity to let the Steering Group know your thoughts, and to feed back to us your views when the draft plan is published early in 2022.

Thank you

Andrea Sedgewick

Project Lead for the 2023 Axminster Neighbourhood Plan.