

Axminster Town Council

Town Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow Town Clerk: Paul Hayward



Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held Monday 3rd March 2025

To be approved at Annual Parish Meeting on 2nd March 2026

Present:

Chair of the Council – Cllr. Jill Farrow

Town Clerk – Paul Hayward

Representatives of The Axminster Chamber of Commerce

Representative of The Royal British Legion (Axminster branch)

EDDC Cllrs. Sarah Jackson and Paul Hayward

42 members of the public in attendance

1. Opening of the meeting; introduction and welcome

Introduction by the Mayor of Axminster, Cllr Jill Farrow who warmly welcomed all those present to the Annual Parish Meeting and highlighted the fire safety procedure and fire exits.

2. Apologies:

Apologies received from Town Cllrs. Burrough, Hurren, Keen, Leat & Thew, and also from County Councillor Ian Hall and District Councillor Simon Smith

3. Minutes of the last meeting:

Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 4th March 2024 were considered and noted. Cllr. Farrow proposed the adoption of the minutes from the chair. These were resolved by the majority of those present by way of a show of hands. Cllr. Farrow signed the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

4. No matters arising from those previous minutes.

5. To receive a presentation from representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, and local retailers, on the topic of Axminster's economy and the importance of the high street.

Summary of representations from those present following the presentation:

Concerns over decreasing footfall and loss of banking services which attracted shoppers to town centre.

Challenges of external factors (NI, rates, cost-of-living pressures) which are harder to deal with locally.

Positivity over localised chamber projects and campaigns.

Agreement on need to market the town as much as possible, encourage diversity and independent trading.

Chair thanked both speakers for attending and speaking with such enthusiasm and hopefulness.

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6. To receive a presentation from representatives of the Royal British Legion, and the Axminster Heritage Centre, on the forthcoming celebrations for the 80th anniversary of VE Day (in May) and VJ Day (in August).

The speaker from the RBL reported on the past year's activity from both the main branch, and the Women's branch, and outlined the calendar of events planned for the coming months. The RBL works cooperatively with a number of organisations across the town for the common good of Axminster and to promote the aims and objectives of the Legion. The speaker from the Heritage Centre spoke at length about the positive inter-connect between the two organisations and how the AHC tries to bring together groups across the parish to share in the common heritage that binds every resident together. There were a large number of exhibitions and events planned for the celebration period and all were welcome to attend.

7. The Town Mayor's 2024/2025 report.

Cllr. Farrow read out a report which has been published on the town noticeboard and on the website and via social media for public review and reference and which is also appended to these minutes.

8. Town Council's Budget and Precept report for financial year 2025/2026.

RFO read out the budget and precept report which has been also published on the town noticeboard and on the website and via social media for public review and reference. This report set out the Council's financial proposals and plans, and details of the Town Council precept, for the next financial year.

9. Parish Footpath / P3 report.

No report available from Parish Footpath Warden. Clerk outlined the ongoing works undertaken by the Town Council on behalf of Devon County Council under the Parish Path Partnership scheme (P3).

10. East Devon District Councillor's annual report.

This was presented verbally by Cllrs. Sarah Jackson and Cllr. Paul Hayward (also present in his role as Clerk to the Town Council).

11. Devon County Councillor's annual report.

No annual report provided by Cllr. Hall. Noted.

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12. Open Public Forum

No representations from members of the public present.

13. To consider any demands to hold a parish poll as requested by those present in accordance with paragraph 18 (Schedule 12) of the Local Government Act 1972.

No requests or petitions were made for a Parish Poll by those present.
Cllr. Farrow closed this section of the meeting.

14. A closing statement by Town Mayor, Cllr. Jill Farrow.

Cllr. Jill Farrow brought the meeting to a close by thanking those members of the public who regularly attended the town Council meetings, the members of Council who gave up their time to represent Axminster and the staff of the Council for their efforts, all year round. The Mayor stressed that the Council operated in an open and transparent manner, that all meetings were open to the public, that the Council engaged where it could with residents via print, online means and face-to-face, be that at regular Cllr surgeries, community events or simply by Councillors being visible in their community.

15. With no other business to attend to, the chair brought the meeting to a close at 8.15pm.

Appendix ONE

Town Mayor's Written Report

See following pages



Town Mayor's Report 3 March 2025

Reviewing the minutes of meetings to write this report, I'm conscious of the enormous amount of work carried out over the year by Axminster Town Council's paid staff and the volunteer councillors. Over the last twelve months there has been a total of 24 meetings of the full Town Council, Strategy and Finance, Operations and Employment Committees, all of which take a great deal of preparatory and follow up work. Most of the meetings start at 7pm and last for at least two hours, but some have gone over the three-hour mark.

Since last March we've welcomed as co-opted councillors Jenny Bull, Roy Osborn, Jack Price, Trish Warwick, Richard Dunsbury, James Keen and Martin Thew, and said farewell to Dianne Bruce, Andrew Bourne, Bernie Steadman, Jenny Bull, Terry Langdon and Alfie Brooker.

A former member of the Council, Martin Mynard, died in June. He was a great railway enthusiast, and we placed a bench in his honour on the "green wedge" outside the station.

Financial issues are, as ever, challenging. The many debates about this year's precept demand have been vigorous and lengthy. We took the decision last March to suspend the Grant Scheme pending review, and in January decided to close it, on the grounds that there are many other sources of grant funding available and that our resources are insufficient to make a significant difference. We now have better accounting software, SCRIBE, in the office, and review in detail expenditure and financial data at every full Council and Strategy and Finance meeting. The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) was approved in June, signed off by the Internal Auditor and is available on the website.

The work of Axminster Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group continued in 2024. It needs to be aligned with EDDC's local plan, on which councillors responded to EDDC in June. Devolution and local government reorganisation will undoubtedly be problematic, not least because town and parish councils seem not to hold a place in national government's thinking.

A successful application for an EDDC Carbon Action Grant of £43,000 has enabled us to use solar power, rather than gas, to heat (and in summer to cool) the Guildhall. Work on insulating the ceiling continues. This is a huge step forward in implementing the decision to reduce the Council's carbon footprint in the light of the climate/environmental emergency, which we quote at the beginning of every meeting. After considerable discussion we agreed to a significant upgrade of sound and lighting equipment, another investment in the future of the building. Staffing needed review in the light of the increased activity within the building, and three further part-time posts have been created and filled.

The Guildhall cinema project was successfully launched last summer. The intruder and fire alarm systems were upgraded last spring, and further security improvements were made in November. We made it available free of charge for General Election hustings in June and have offered it to community groups in support of the VE and VJ day celebrations this year. After multiple debates about the refurbishment of the kitchen, the costs involved and other storage issues in the building, the kitchen is being decommissioned and the tea and coffee area adjacent to the bar improved.

Representations made to the Council, either in writing or in Public Forum at the beginning of every meeting are heard with interest. In July we had a presentation by Clearstone Energy Group about the proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at Blackpool Corner. After

debate we decided to support the application. At a Planning Committee Meeting last month we received multiple representations from the Hawkchurch Action Group, following their detailed written submissions, and have lodged an objection to the application on several different grounds.

Following the unlawful occupation of Jubilee Field and the cost of repairing the damage we took out a contract with a specialist firm for the protection of our sites and installed additional security measures.

Cemetery and allotment matters are a routine part of our work. We have amended the policy on the terms of exclusive rights of burial and the erection and maintenance of memorials, and in consultation with Axminster Allotment Association made amendments to the allotment rules and regulations.

Ongoing projects include the Millwey Rise Play Extension, providing equipment for children with additional accessibility needs, funded by Section 106 development contributions in conjunction with EDDC. We're exploring whether it might be possible to use other 106 money to develop a play area on the Cloakham Lawns estate. The Council has agreed to support the Rail200 initiative later this year.

Without doubt the nicest task we undertake each year is the selection of the recipient of the Robin Cross Award for Axminster's Citizen of the Year. We decided in December that Council members and staff should not be eligible candidates even if nominated for activities outside those roles. It was a privilege to present the award to Barrie Hedges in the presence of Lin Cross, Robin's widow.

I hope this summary of activity has been of interest. Further information appears in Council newsletters and the Website. I'd like to thank all of our staff, the volunteers who keep the town looking so fine, my fellow councillors for their continuing hard work and commitment, and those stalwart supporters who take the time to attend our meetings. You all make Axminster thrive.

Jill Farrow

28 February 2025