Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday to Thursday
9am – 4pm

Mayor: Cllr Jack Price
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

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Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Monday, 21st September 2026 at 7.00 pm at Axminster Guildhall.

Draft minutes, not yet approved.

Present: Cllrs Walden (JW) (Chair), Willey (DW) (Vice Chair), Dowdeswell (MD), Hayward (AH), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), Osborn (RO), Paice (EP) and Price (JP).
The meeting was quorate with 9 members present.

Also in attendance was the Clerk to the Council, Paul Hayward.

No members of the public were in attendance.

The meeting began at 7.00 pm.

The 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:
No members of the public were present, and no Councillors wished to speak in Public Forum.
The Chair subsequently closed the public forum session at 7.01pm.

OC26/061
To note the members of the committee present.
Please see those listed above.

OC26/062
To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies (and reasons for absence). (LGA 1972 S.85 (1))
The Committee noted apologies from Cllr Dunsbury and Cllr Farrow.
The Chair proposed that the reasons for these apologies be accepted, which was seconded by JP.
Resolved unanimously.

OC26/063
To note members of the Committee not otherwise in attendance.
Cllr. Margetts and Cllr. Warwick were absent. Noted.

Continued overleaf.

OC26/064

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.

At the FULL Council meeting held 09/02/2026, minute reference FC26/027, Cllr. Willey was afforded a dispensation ***** *to discuss and vote upon matters pertaining to the Guildhall. This dispensation applies until May 2027 (unless rescinded before that date) and is afforded with respect to Cllr. Willey's relationship to the Council as a regular hirer of the Guildhall.* ***** **Localism Act 2011 (s.33).**

AH asked that an "affects NRI" declaration be noted in respect of agenda items 070 and 079. Noted.

OC26/065

To consider and, if thought fit, approve the minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 15th June 2026 and to consider any matters arising.

The Chair proposed approval of these minutes. Seconded by Vice-Chair.
Approval of the minutes was unanimous. Resolved.
Action: The Chair signed the approved minutes**.**

Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising.

OC26/066

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.

Three matters were already tabled for Part Two consideration - [see agenda items OC26/084 to 086(IC)].

OC26/067

To consider whether this committee wishes the membership to remain as all elected/co-opted councillors by default, or whether it wishes to revert back to a smaller membership as previously.

Action: Members were content to keep membership open to all members of the Council at this time to ensure a quorum given the volume of business that the committee would be considering in the future.

OC26/068

To receive a progress report from Clerk on previous decisions, actions and recommendations of this committee.

Clerk presented report and answered members questions on progress, spend and future works.

Operations Committee business to be considered:

OC26/69

To consider matters pertaining to The Guildhall; To receive update reports on previous actions/decisions regarding that building.

i) To consider progress update report on Guildhall works project and to consider any revisions and/or additions to the works programme and the scheduling / prioritisation of such works.

Clerk provided a verbal report to members. Noted. It was agreed that all 3rd party hires of the Jubilee Room should cease on the 1st November 2026 to ensure that the workspace was free and available for contractors.

Continued overleaf.

OC26/070

To consider matters pertaining to Town Amenity and services, and to receive updated reports on previous actions/decisions regarding amenities in the town and parish.

i) To consider officer report on LGR (paused) asset transfers and services from higher tier authorities.
Clerk provided a verbal report to members. Noted. No further action at this time, due to the overall uncertainty of the LGR process and simultaneous projects at EDDC relating to potential asset transfers.

OC26/071

To consider matters pertaining to allotments.

The Clerk provided a brief update, noting that all previous items are progressing as resources allow. It was noted that the Allotment Association / Town Council liaison event was scheduled for the 30th November at The Guildhall.

OC26/072

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Cemetery (Chard Rd) and to receive update reports on previous actions/decisions regarding the cemetery.

Nothing to report at this time.

OC26/073

To consider matters pertaining to Town Orchard and Wildflower Meadow (Chard Rd).

Nothing to report at this time.

OC26/074

To consider any matters pertaining to Axminster Town Council Emergency Planning protocol/policy, and the ongoing activity and involvement of the Axminster Emergency Plan Working Group.

The Clerk confirmed that EDDC had offered their full support to the development of an Axminster Parish Emergency Plan and that an officer had been in touch to help organise any future events proposed. The recent grant from DCT had been acknowledged and the funds were earmarked for the creation of emergency grit and sandbag stores as previously resolved. Clerk to liaise with WG Chair to determine future budget for EP activity and membership of the group mindful of recent Councillor turnover.

OC26/075

To consider any matters pertaining to parish footpaths, bridleways and other related P3 issues, and to receive update reports from the Clerk on that subject.

The Clerk drew attention to the circulated update report and explained there was nothing further to add. Mr. Norman is enjoying his duties as Honorary Footpath Warden and is providing regular updates and reports to the Deputy Clerk. Noted.

OC26/076

To consider any matters pertaining to Jubilee Field amenity.

The Clerk gave a brief update, including that the Deputy Clerk was actively progressing the pathway project, with work due to start shortly on the delivery of the field pathway extension. Noted. Clerk also advised that the play equipment had been repaired as discussed previously and that no further damage/loss has been recorded.

OC26/077

To consider any matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse asset / amenity and to receive any update reports from the Clerk on that subject.

Clerk advised that sale completion was scheduled for the end of this month. Noted.

Continued overleaf.

OC26/078
To consider any matters pertaining to Town Centre Placemaking projects and funding, and to receive any update reports from the Clerk on that subject, and:

OC26/079
To consider any matters pertaining to future community engagement and events planning, and to receive any update reports from the Clerk on that subject:
Clerk confirmed that a grant application had been submitted in respect of the current Town Centre Placemaking scheme and that the outcome/decision was expected in December. Noted.
The proposals for a Town Centre Manager / Community Engagement Officer had been integrated into the draft budget proposals, but needed to pass through the established review process via Employment Committee, Strategy and Finance Committee, and ultimately, FULL Council prior to agreement and approval. Timetable for that approval – by December 2026. Noted.

OC26/080
To note that the next meeting of the committee is designated for Budgetary Discussions for FY27-28.
Noted. Scheduled for 23rd November 2026 (originally for 16/11 but deferred for scheduling reasons).

OC26/081
Chair's Announcements / Matters of Urgency for discussion only to be noted.
One matter was raised but the Chair felt that it should be considered in closed session as it related to a 3rd party and thus was deemed commercially sensitive and confidential. Agreed by all members. See below.

OC26/082
Date of next scheduled meeting for the Committee:
23rd November 2026, 7pm, at Axminster Guildhall.

OC26/083
The Vice-Chair proposed 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. Seconded by the Chair. Resolved unanimously.

Matters to be considered in Confidential Committee Session (Closed Session).

The agenda items below were considered confidential due to the commercially sensitive subjects/topics to be discussed and the involvement of 3rd parties or employee matters which would necessitate disclosure of confidential information during the discussions. (see OC26/066).

OC26/084 (IC)
To consider matters pertaining to Jubilee Field curtilage and assets.
This topic was deemed confidential as it related to matters involving a third-party.
The Clerk provided a verbal report for members. Noted. No further action at this time.

Continued overleaf.

OC26/085 (IC)

To consider any matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse building complex.

This topic was deemed confidential because it related to matters involving a third party.

The Clerk provided a verbal report for members. Noted. It was agreed that the Clerk should arrange for the artwork within the complex to be removed and placed into storage until alternative display locations could be agreed upon. Noted.

Clerk: Please action accordingly mindful of the forthcoming sale completion deadline.

OC26/086 (IC)

To consider any matters pertaining to current / future Guildhall building works.

This topic is deemed confidential as it may relate to matters involving 3rd party hirers, contractors or project management considerations.

The Clerk provided a verbal report for members. Noted

OC26/081 (IC) (deferred from open public session – see above)

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

This topic was deemed confidential because it related to matters involving a third party.

Clerk updated members on a matter relating to festive lighting in the town. Noted.

Clerk confirmed that the existing voluntary group had been providing and arranging Christmas Lighting (and other events throughout the year) as an independent unincorporated organisation (not a charity) and that they had indicated that they were unable to support the governance and administration of the events in the future. It was agreed that the Town Council and Light Up Axminster should issue a public joint statement to reassure residents that the festive lighting of the town would be taken on by the Town Council but that the display in 2026 may be smaller and lower-key than previously due to time/resource constraints.

The following Councillors offered to support the creation of a new Christmas Lighting working party: DW, EP, SL, RO, WH, AH, MD, JW.

Noted.

Clerk: Please liaise with volunteer teams to ascertain what assets are available, their condition, value and location.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.15pm.

Signed ..... Date: 23rd November 2026

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DRAFT