

MINTUES OF AXMINSTER ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 18TH MARCH 2019

AT AXMINSTER GUILDHALL

PRESENT: Town Mayor: Cllr. J. W. Walden
Councillors: S.E. Clarke, C.A. Doherty, P.G. Hayward,
Mrs. S.L.N. Leat, M. Mynard, Mrs. S.R. Spiller,
B.R. Watson and A.L. Young.

The Town Clerk (Miss H. Kirkcaldie) and the Deputy Town Clerk (Mrs. Z. Adamson-Drage).
27 Members of the public.
0 representative of the Press.
No representatives of Devon and Cornwall Police

1. OPENING OF MEETING: The Town Mayor, Cllr. Walden, welcomed the public.

2. APOLOGIES: Cllrs. G. Alderson, A.E. Bourner, D.R.H. Hull, D.J. Moore, L.A. Rowe and A Seward.
Cty. and Dist. Cllr. I.L. Hall.

3. MINUTES OF 2018 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING: these had been circulated. Mr. Spurway,
seconded by Cllr. Young, proposed that they be approved. Agreed.

4. POLICE REPORT: None.

5. GUEST SPEAKERS' PRESENTATION – THE GREATER EXETER STRATEGIC PLAN: the Guest
Speaker, Mr. Huntley, an officer from Teignbridge District Council, said that this plan was born from a
recognition by East Devon, Mid-Devon and Teignbridge District Councils and Exeter City Council, the
Councils which cover the Exeter Travel to Work Area, that residents travelled across their boundaries
to work, shop, for leisure, recreation and many other purposes. The County Council is also very
involved. The aim is to look at the area from an over-arching perspective as well as the more detailed
plans at local levels. A tiered approach will develop, with neighbourhood plans, local plans and the
greater Exeter strategic plan interlinking. The latter will concentrate on cross boundary plans to focus
on infrastructure. Decisions would have to be based on unanimity and therefore a measure of
compromise for each body. It is intended that the plan be adopted in 2022 but there would be several
consultation stages prior to then, which would result in the final plan.

The Guest Speaker then responded to questions from the floor. In response to one question he said
that a key aspect was housing provision, and this would be looked at in the round to pick the most
suitable sites, wherever these might be. In addition to the larger sites, there would be smaller sites
which would come through at more local level. Each District would have a particular target within the
Greater Exeter Strategic Plan. Each level of plan would be equally important. In response to another
question, it was explained that some of the elements of the abandoned Regional Spatial Strategy had
been absorbed into the local plans, although some elements would form part of this plan. A further
question related to the south west local enterprise partnership and the speaker explained that this would
play a role in the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan. An enquiry regarding the effect on the Greater Exeter
Strategic Plan should the proposed housing east of Axminster proved to be non-viable elicited the reply
that a site of similar size would then have to be found elsewhere within the plan area. It was stated that
the Neighbourhood Plan had to comply with the policies in the Local Plan. A resident expressed his
opposition to having housing development imposed on a local area by Government diktat. It was pointed
out that while the numbers are set by central government the precise location was set at a local level.
Another questioner asked whether the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan would tackle the issue of the need
for a bypass which would resolve the problems posed by Weycroft Bridge and the junction of the B3261
with the A35 at Raymonds Hill which would remain obstacles if the plan for a relief road is carried
through. The speaker said that he could not comment on this matter. The Mayor added that the
Weycroft Bridge was a bottleneck for traffic trying to access east Devon and west Dorset and therefore
was a matter of wider transport strategy not just for Axminster. Cllr. Hayward said that Axminster was

in a tri-county situation and those working on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan needed to take that into consideration.

6. STAND UP FOR AXMINSTER – THE APPROACH TO THE LOCAL ELECTIONS: the Town Clerk said that new blood was always welcome on the Town Council. She stressed that anyone considering coming on to the Council should realise that it was quite an onerous commitment as there were numerous committees and sub-committees in addition to the regular monthly meetings of the full Town Council. She spoke about the Code of Conduct, the Register of Member's Interests and the disclosure required in that document. Cllr. Hayward then spoke about the Nolan Principles, Councillor allowances, the role of Councillors as volunteers. He continued by outlining the processes required in standing for election, including the different requirements at Town and District levels. He then explained the differences between a contested and an uncontested election. The Town Clerk concluded the presentation by explaining the processes and paperwork required between the election and attending and participating at the first meeting of a Council such as the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and the various guidelines such as Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. She added that training opportunities were available for new Councillors.

7. TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT: Cllr. Walden said that the past two years had been very challenging. There had been many community achievements during the year, such as Light Up Axminster and the Yarty Party. He said that, for many, the dominant issue in terms of Council business had been the proposals for housing east of Axminster and the accompanying relief road. These had been controversial and divisive issues. He referred to the fact that the District Council had applied for, and been awarded, a £10 million grant towards the construction of the relief road from Homes England and was prepared to borrow a further £7 million to enable up-front construction of the relief road. This would be repaid as the housing was developed. A strategic masterplan had been produced for the site by the various key stakeholders and this had been approved at the end of January. Applications were being prepared by the developers for the three parcels of land. It was then revealed that Homes England had back tracked and was stating that the grant was, in fact a loan, not a grant and would be repayable by the developers as homes were built. This shift in policy had put the proposed development in jeopardy, said Cllr. Walden. He felt it was a betrayal of the town by central Government. District and County Councillors were trying to exert pressure on those in central Government.

Reverting to the more positive topic of community action, Cllr. Walden spoke of the Christmas lunch, held at the Guildhall, community litter picks involving all generations and fund-raising events to support the counselling local charity ARC.

Cllr. Walden then stressed the importance of challenging intolerance in society for whatever reason it is demonstrated. He concluded his report by thanking his fellow Councillors, particularly those standing down and not seeking re-election, and the staff for their assistance during the year.

8 REPORT FROM CHAIRMAN OF AMENITIES COMMITTEE: Cllr. Walden began his report by saying that the allotments had been well used but there were still many plots available. One plot at Woodbury Lane site had been set aside for use as a car park to ensure that the main paths can be kept clear. He said that it was policy to recoup costs from vacating tenants who failed to clear their plots, leaving the Town Council to do so. New notice boards had been purchased for three sites in the town centre. New benches had been installed at Latches Walk and near the duck pond by the football ground.

Moving on to the allocation of Section 106 funds, Cllr. Walden said that there had been delays for many reasons but it was hoped to progress this matter soon once the District Council officers had the time. The District Council would be upgrading some of the existing play areas during the coming year, however the problems with the Jubilee Field remain unresolved by the developer and the Town Council will not take this area on until they have been and the field has been free of problems for a complete year.

On a more positive note, the floral displays organised by a small team of volunteers had been excellent and greatly appreciated by local residents and visitors. Thanks were expressed also to those volunteers who assist in times of snow and flood, though these two items had not caused major problems during the past year.

Cllr. Walden concluded his report by thanking the Handyman for all his work and the office staff for their support. He said that it was hoped to employ a lengthsman during the coming year.

9. REPORT FROM CHAIRMAN OF CEMETERY COMMITTEE: Cllr. Mrs. Spiller started her report by thanking the various Cemetery and outdoor staff and the volunteer who assists with servicing the machinery for their contributions towards maintaining the Cemetery to such a high standard. She said that grass grid had been installed in the Z section and it was hoped that this would make the area easier to access on foot.

Another aspect of the Cemetery Committee's work is to review and update the regulations and other documents related to the administration of the Cemetery.

The Cemetery Committee Chairman concluded by thanking her fellow members and the administrative staff for their continuous support.

10. REPORT FROM CHAIRMAN OF OLD COURTHOUSE COMMITTEE: Cllr. Hayward said that the Old Courthouse continued to offer a haven of peace to residents of Axminster and further afield and the retail and refreshment opportunities were also appreciated. He regretted the loss of some of the boundary shrubs and said that efforts were being made to plug these gaps. He paid tribute to the gardener for his role in tending for this garden.

He said that maintenance continued to be a challenge but this was inevitable with a heritage building.

He thanked his fellow Committee members and the staff for their help during the year.

11. REPORT FROM HONORARY FOOTPATH WARDEN: speaking on behalf of the Hon, Footpath Warden, the Town Clerk said that he had nearly completed his annual inspections. Most paths are in reasonable condition but some will require works, notably path 55.

12. AXMINSTER COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE REPORT: Cllr. Young said that she had come to this process very late, having just attended her first meeting. She commended the hard work and enthusiasm of all those involved. She regretted that major changes in the personal circumstances of the lead personnel had led to a long term delay in the process. She said that the plan had reached its tenth draft, which needed to be scrutinised and then passed back to the consultants.

13. AXMINSTER GUILDHALL:

a) Chairman's Annual Report – Mr. Spurway began by saying that the level of bookings had increased over the year with previous hirers returning and also new ones coming on board, such as health-related information sessions. Tribute band evenings such as the Jersey Boys and Queen, had been good fund-raisers for the Guildhall under the new funding arrangements set up by the Manager. Events at the Guildhall are advertised in many ways, including on the notice boards and via posters around the town. Various items relating to food hygiene and preparation have been replaced. Improvements it was hoped would be implemented in the coming year were new glazed doors between the outer and main foyers, new carpets, bar refurbishment and new stage curtains. Mr. Spurway concluded his report by thanking the manager for all her work and also his fellow committee members, the designated premises supervisor, the caretaker and other staff who work behind the scenes.

b) Annual Accounts: the audited accounts were not available and it was agreed that this matter be deferred to the following year.

c) Election of Committee for Coming Year – in view of the forthcoming elections, it was agreed that the present Council members of the Committee should remain in office and that the new Council should select members to replace them from among those elected.

Ms. Watts and Mr. Leat had indicated that they wished to stand down as Community Members. No one at the meeting offered to replace them but the Mayor asked that if people knew of anyone who might be interested in doing so, they should contact the Manager.

Town Council Representatives – Cllrs. A.E. Bourner, C.A. Doherty, P.G. Hayward, D.R.H. Hull, Mrs. S.N.L. Leat, D.J. Moore and B.R. Watson.

Community Representatives – C. Furse and M.D.G. Spurway were elected, duly proposed and seconded.

14. OPEN DISCUSSION:

a) Neighbourhood Plan: in response to a question from the floor, the Mayor said that it was hoped that this would be completed prior 2022 and outlined the various stages still to be completed.

b) Environmental Concerns: a resident outlined the benefits enjoyed by visitors and said that her great concern was that each and every individual had a duty of care to the surrounding environment. She said that Axminster was a small market town which had a long history going back to Roman times and earlier. She referred to the land earmarked for development and said that this had been recorded as a deer park in mediaeval times and the area was home today to rare species and an abundance of wildlife. She said that as a country Britain had failed to meet most of the targets relating to wildlife and many plants, insects and animals were in decline. She urged residents to read the biodiversity reports for the planning applications. She felt that the scale of the proposals was selling Axminster down the river. Other members of the public echoed her sentiments. Cllr. Mrs. Spiller said that developers appeared to take no notice of local comments. Cllr. Walden said that it was important that discussions should be undertaken with civility, despite differences of opinions.

b) District and County Councillor Reports: in response to a question from Cllr. Watson, the Mayor said that these had been circulated with the agenda.

c) Grant/Loan from Homes England: A resident expressed her surprise that, at the most recent Town Council meeting, Town Councillors were unaware that Homes England had notified the District Council that the grant to assist in funding the relief road was to be reclassified as a loan not a grant. She said that that information had been circulating on social and other media earlier in the day and she felt that it was an insult to the Town Council that this information had not been passed on its members. The resident felt that the statement released by Cllr. Hall was inappropriate at a time of election purdah. In the absence of Dist. Cllr. Hall, the Town Mayor asked Dist. Cllr. Moulding to comment. Cllr. Moulding said that he did not feel that the statement he and Cllr. Hall had released was political as it was Conservative Councillors being critical of a Conservative Government. Cllr. Walden said that he felt that the Town Council appeared to be wrong-footed as it was not aware of this information. In response to Cllr. Walden's enquiry as to what response the District Council would be making to the announcement, Cllr. Moulding said that it was looking at what legal challenges were open to it. Cllr. Hayward expressed the view that he felt that too often the Town Council was not kept informed about matters affecting Axminster as promptly as was desirable.

d) Scaffolding by George Hotel: the Mayor asked that the Town Clerk contact the contractors and ask that the wording by the Tesco roundabout be aligned with that used in Honiton to prevent over-large vehicles going into the town centre.

The meeting closed at 10.00 p.m.

Signed Date