

Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday
10am – 12 noon

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk



THE GUILDHALL
WEST STREET
AXMINSTER
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EX13 5NX

Tel. 01297 32088

Email: Clerk@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk

**Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Tuesday,
3rd May 2022 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall**
Minutes approved OPSCOMM meeting 7/6/2022: Part One version (Redacted)

Meeting began at 7.00pm.

Chair, Cllr. Walden, welcomed all in attendance and outlined fire precautions, exits etc.

Public Forum:

Public representation received on subject of recent Council resolution to prohibit use of Glyphosate weedkiller on Council landholdings, property and by Council staff. The speaker highlighted the proliferation of weeds across the town and the excessive costs of using non-glyphosate-based methods to keep the weeds in check. The current lack of employed grounds-keepers was also commented upon. Chair thanked the speaker for their contribution.

Chair closed public forum session at 7.15pm.

OC22/095

To note those members of the committee present:

Present: Cllr. Walden (JW) (Chair), Cllr. Spurway (MS) (Vice-Chair), Cllrs. Brooker A (ABr.), Farrow (JF), Holt (SH), Paice (EP) and Sedgewick (AS). **(Meeting was declared quorate)**

Also, the Town Clerk (TC) (Paul Hayward).

One member of the public. No members of the press.

OC22/096

To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies (and reasons) for absence:

None received

OC22/097

To note members who were neither present nor had previously given their apologies, and to receive any other apologies of absence:

Chair noted that Cllr. Mynard (ongoing health matter) was absent but had not sent his apologies.

OC22/098

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:

AS & MS both declared a personal interest in agenda item OC22/102 as Councillor members of the Guildhall Management Committee. None others declared at this point of the meeting.

At the FULL Council meeting held 14/02/2022, Cllr. Farrow was afforded a dispensation* to discuss and vote upon matters pertaining to parish allotments. This dispensation applies until May 2023 (unless rescinded prior to that date) and was afforded in respect of Cllr. Farrow's disclosable pecuniary interests as set out in the Register of Members Interests. * *Localism Act 2011 (s.33)*.

OC22/099

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 12th April 2022 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes:

Approval of minutes proposed by Chair, seconded by SH. Resolved unanimously.

Minutes reviewed and noted. No matters arising raised.

Chair signed minutes as a true and accurate record of that meeting's business.

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OC22/100

To consider any matters arising (not included within this agenda as business to be attended to) from the meeting of the 12th April and to receive progress report from Clerk:

Clerk provided the Chair, and members of the committee, with a verbal report highlighting actions from previous meetings and updates on project/works completions and any delays being experienced in the execution of previously resolved upon proposals and recommendations.

OC22/101

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 (Admissions to meetings) Act 1960:

None proposed other than those already listed as being discussed in Part TWO session on the published agenda.

Committee business to be considered:

OC22/102

To consider matters pertaining to the Axminster Guildhall building and curtilage:

All business to be considered relating to the Guildhall was deemed confidential in light of the nature of that business (financial quotes, legal matters and 3rd party interests). See OC22/113 below – four business items to be considered in Part Two.

OC22/103

To consider matters pertaining to the Old Courthouse (OCH) complex:

i) To consider proposal that 3rd party gardening contract be extended throughout the summer for an initial two hours per week to maintain and improve the garden amenity for residents and visitors. Costs were confirmed as £50pw. for the summer growing season.

This was proposed by SH, seconded by JF. Resolved unanimously.

Members expressed their thanks to the 3rd party contractor for the work already undertaken in the OCH garden as per previous resolution.

Three other items of business to be considered relating to the Old Courthouse was deemed confidential in light of the nature of that business (financial quotes, legal matters and 3rd party interests). See OC22/113 below.

OC22/104

To consider matters pertaining to Section 106 projects ongoing:

Following on from last meeting of the committee, and the resolutions approved thereat, the Clerk was directed to contact the EDDC S106 officer (as a matter of urgency given the spending deadlines for these funds) and push for the completion of the S106 approval report to allow for the release of the funds for the climbing wall project now agreed upon to be installed at the Jubilee Field.

Continued overleaf.

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OC22/105

To consider matters pertaining Town Centre development and regeneration:

i) Town Centre Signage project:

a) Gateway Signage (x4) at Town entrance points.

This matter was deferred until the next meeting of the OPSCOMM to allow for additional information to be gathered in by the Clerk for members to consider. It was recognised by members that current staffing shortages at the Council were having a detrimental effect on the ability to see some of these projects through to fruition.

b) Consideration of design and style for town centre replacement finger-posts and signage. Clerk provided a brief update and confirmed that he had not heard back from the EDDC Conservation officer as to their thoughts & opinions on the design and style proposals. Clerk was asked to chase that officer and obtain a reply as quickly as was possible. Noted.

OC22/106

To consider matters pertaining to the Jubilee Field open space amenity:

i) To consider arrangements for ongoing inspection and maintenance of play equipment.

Clerk confirmed that current regular/routine/operational play area inspections were being undertaken on a paper basis and that those records would have to be maintained and kept for 21 years in accordance with operational guidelines and legislation. Clerk reminded members that a proposal was coming before FULL Council shortly to seek Council's agreement to use a proprietary asset management/play inspection software package to undertake this same recording functionality but that those records would be cloud based; reminders would also be generated if any inspections were missed. That could also apply to the inspection, maintenance and asset management of any of the Council's assets including buildings and trees (and their Risk and H&S assessments).

ii) To consider offer of tree donations from local community group as part of "Queen's Canopy" national scheme; members to consider and agree whether such a donation should be accepted. **SH proposed, seconded by AS, that Council accept the offer of donated trees for the Jubilee Field Recreation Area (and elsewhere in the town if the Jubilee Field could not accommodate the entire batch). Resolved unanimously.**

It was noted that the trees would have to be applied for in the next few weeks but that delivery of the trees (if grant application was successful) and their planting would not be until the Autumn. Delegated authority was afforded to SH and the Clerk to liaise with the benefactor and ask them to apply for the tree packs and to coordinate planting and maintenance volunteer events nearer the time. This matter to be re-discussed at a future OPSCOMM meeting.

The topic of conversation then turned to the grand opening of the Jubilee Field amenity area on the 2nd June at 11am. This event would enable the stone/rock/plinth to be unveiled and also anything else that had been installed by that time. The Mayor was asked to confirm her availability for the event. It was agreed that Council's social media/website channels should be used to properly publicise the event beforehand. KB offered to assist with event planning for the subsequent event on the 4th June (Saturday).

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OC22/106

To consider matters pertaining to the Jubilee Field open space amenity (continued):

JF asked that this matter also be added to all subsequent Council and committee meetings until the date of the Jubilee celebrations had passed. This would allow for any last minute decisions to be taken if so required. Noted.

OC 22/107

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Cemetery:

i) To consider suggestion that the redundant tap (and drain) at the Cemetery entrance be capped off on safety grounds.

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by EP, that the redundant tap be removed, the supply capped and the adjacent drain checked for flow and – if no longer required – filled. Resolved unanimously. Clerk: please action accordingly.

ii) To consider request from funeral directors for vehicle access improvements adjacent to Z section.

iii) To consider suggestion that the eastern section of the “future” cemetery field be repurposed with appropriate hard-standing etc to enable storage of waste, amenity and materials away from the former “bonfire field” and to consider the future use of that latter area for future interments. **Chair proposed that both of these items be considered at the same time as intrinsically connected.**

Members received a report from the Clerk outlining recent requests from local funeral directors in this regard but also suggestions from our cemetery groundskeeper as to logistical, practical and appropriate measures to improve the cemetery amenity for all users.

JF proposed that this matter be deferred until the Council was fully staffed and proper research could be undertaken and quotes obtained as per Financial Regulations. SH seconded. Resolved. The principle of the improvements was supported subject to the further research proposed. It was also felt that the extended works proposal (option 2) was preferable as this provided a longer term solution to the issues faced at the cemetery and would be economically preferable and more beneficial. MS suggested that Clerk liaise with Admin. Assistant to review the site plans as he felt that something similar had been considered in the past.

JF put forward a formal proposal that Option Two proposal was supported “in principle” but that this was a project that would have to wait a short while before work could commence. Seconded MS. Resolved unanimously.

Continued overleaf.

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OC22/108

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Allotments:

- i) To consider update on progress with proposed North Street extension project.
Clerk advised that contact had been made with the landowner of the middle section and that communications were continuing. Clerk was asked to keep members abreast of developments in this regard.
- ii) To consider correspondence received from EDDC re: use of composting facilities.
Clerk provided an update to members and advised that he was awaiting the return of the Admin. assistant from annual leave in order to undertake a further site visit to address this, and other related, matters on the Woodbury Lane allotment site. It was likely that letters would be required to allotments tenants who were not complying with their agreed terms and conditions of tenancy.

OC22/109

To consider matters pertaining to Health and Safety / H&S Sub-Committee:

Chair thanked Clerk for completing the H&S assessments against the backdrop of a heavy workload. It would not fall to the H&S Working Party to review the reports and come together to propose actions and measures (in conjunction with the retained H&S consultant) to bring all such H&S compliance and inspection processes up to date. This was a role for the (yet to be employed) Council Administrator to take on board once recruited although the Clerk would naturally take an overview so that members could be assured that all necessary work was being completed in this regard.

OC22/110

To consider proposals for new/improved/replacement amenities in the parish:

- i) To consider proposal that one of the Council's recently acquired "Welcome Back" benches be installed within the 'mural' alcove on Belle Vue walkway (with the agreement of Tesco Stores PLC) and that the Council undertake some minor foliage trimming and clearance to enable said installation.

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by AS, that the installation proceed as a matter of urgency and that the alcove "mural" be cleaned at the same time as the foliage was cut back. Furthermore, a plaque to be purchased and installed upon the bench to provide details of ownership and provenance ie. Supplied by the Town Council.

Resolved unanimously. Clerk: Please note and action accordingly having first obtained agreement in writing from the Tesco Store Manager. Please also liaise with that manager to discuss long-term maintenance and cleaning of the Belle Vue walkway and steps. Noted.

Continued overleaf.

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OC22/110

To consider proposals for new/improved/replacement amenities in the parish (continued):

ii) To consider condition survey on the “cow and herdsman” sculpture on Belle Vue and to determine whether the Town Council wishes to work with partners in this regard.

Chair offered to talk with a former Councillor (who was acquainted with the artist who designed, created and installed the original artwork) to ascertain if it could be successfully/economically repaired. The Chair confirmed that the sculpture (and also the mural and the metal “carpet” sculpture) were the responsibility of the Town Council as they had been acquired under S106 funding for the provision of public art; certainly Tesco Stores PLC assumed no responsibility for them.

iii) To consider the feasibility, propriety, financial impact and scope of a potential grounds maintenance tender for municipal land, recreation & green open spaces across the town centre area.

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by JF, that Council supported “in principle” the creation of a town-wide grounds maintenance tender specification to ensure that open space/communal/public areas were maintained (either by the Town, District or County Councils) but that Council recognised that public perception was that those areas NOT attended to served to negatively affect the image and appeal of the town. Resolved unanimously.

Several areas of concern were highlighted and Clerk was asked to add to any future grounds maintenance tender specification but JF also recognised (as outlined above) that creation of such a project was dependent on staffing resource and ultimately on the ability of the Council to locate and fund a contractor (or staff) to carry out such maintenance. Mindful of the earlier public representation regarding weed control across the town, Chair asked that this be incorporated within any specification brief/report too. Noted.

Clerk highlighted his experiences in other parishes where similar work had been undertaken and confirmed that it did improve the local area and served to reduce resident complaints, whilst also reducing ASB and littering, graffiti, fly-tipping etc. On the other hand, it did cause some local conflict as it essentially creates a situation of “double-taxation” whereby the Town Council becomes responsible (at precept taxpayers expense) for grounds which a higher authority was already charging Council tax to maintain. This was the balance that needed to be found to satisfy all interested and affected parties. The Clerk did suggest that the Council should NOT expect any direct reimbursement from the higher authorities if such works were undertaken by the Town Council. Noted.

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OC22/111

Chair's Announcements / Matters of Urgency to be noted:

Clerk reminded all members that the election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Operations Committee would be the first items of business on the next committee meeting agenda in June.

OC22/112

Date of next scheduled meeting of the Operations Committee:

Tuesday 7th June 2022

OC22/113

MS proposed that under the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, (as amended by the Local Government Act 1972 the public, (including the press) be excluded from the meeting as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted. SH seconded the proposal. Resolved.

The member of the public left the meeting. Part ONE recording was stopped and Part TWO recording commenced.

Part TWO Business to be considered:

OC22/114 (IC)

To consider quotations received for enhanced/improved CCTV equipment and image capture capabilities at the Guildhall (interior and exterior):

After consideration of the quotes provided by the Clerk for the upgraded CCTV system, **it was proposed by JF that this project be deferred until more urgent and essential works to the Guildhall could be completed. Seconded by SH. Resolved.** No further action at this time.

OC22/115 (IC)

To consider quotations received for the removal and re-painting of line markings in the Guildhall car park for the purposes of improved amenity:

3 quotes considered. **JF proposed that Council proceed with quote Y for £550 plus VAT. Seconded by SH. Resolved unanimously.**

Clerk: Please proceed accordingly.

OC22/116 (IC)

To consider quotations received for the clearing and cleaning of gutters at the Guildhall and the provision of window cleaning:

2 quotes received for gutter clearance and window cleaning (initial clean and the regular ongoing).

It was proposed by SH, seconded by JF, that contractor L be awarded the window cleaning contract for £200/£120 respectively and that, if they were able to complete the gutter works for £400, then that contract would be offered to them also; if not, contractor B would be chosen. Resolved unanimously. Delegated authority was afforded to Clerk to finalise arrangements.

Continued overleaf.

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OC22/117 (IC)

To consider report from Contractor CW on the recent LOLER inspections in the Guildhall (front & backstage) and to agree forward steps to ensure compliance.

Clerk had provided committee members with a report from the recent LOLER tests which had identified several issues within the structural loading fabric of the Guildhall. **Chair proposed that the Council commission a structural survey. Seconded by AS. Resolved unanimously.**

Clerk to be duly delegated to source a suitably qualified surveyor and arrange the works up to the value of £2000 (committee ToR spending power) as expediently as was possible.

Clerk: Please action accordingly.

OC22/118 (IC)

To consider quotations received for the installation of CCTV equipment at the Old Courthouse for the purposes of site security and wider crime prevention in that area:

After consideration of the quotes provided by the Clerk for the upgraded CCTV system, **it was proposed by Chair that this project be deferred until more urgent and essential works to the Old Courthouse could be completed. Seconded by SH. Resolved.** No further action at this time.

OC22/119 (IC)

To consider a report from the Clerk on the provision of utility services into the Minster Room and to seek approval on supplier choice:

AS thanked Clerk for the work undertaken so far in this regard.

After review of the report provided by the Clerk, and discussion on the issues that led to the current position, it was agreed to enter into a 3 year electricity supply agreement on a fixed rate with EDF at the best rates that can be obtained (which due to market fluctuations are changing daily, if not by the hour!). Clerk afforded delegated authority to make the necessary arrangements.

OC22/120 (IC)

To consider further update on the legalities relating to ongoing/pending tenant leases etc and to agree Heads of Terms for both tenants awaiting formal rental contracts.

It was proposed by JW, seconded by EP, to offer the tenants formal tenancy agreements on the revised terms. Arrangements for the Tenancy at Will agreement to be delegated to SH to execute to resolve any conflicts of interest. Resolved unanimously.

Clerk/SH: Please note and action accordingly as quickly as can be arranged.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 21.10hrs.

Signed Date 7th June 2022

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