

Axminster Town Council

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

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Locum Clerk: Paul Hayward

www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk



THE GUILDHALL
WEST STREET
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Tel. 01297 32088

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Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Tuesday, 4th January 2022 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall

Approved by Committee 01/02/2022

Meeting began at 7pm.

Chair, Cllr. Walden, welcomed all in attendance and outlined protocol for meeting as per agenda.

Public Forum:

Representations from members of the public regarding 3 matters:

- i) Repairs to gateway at North Street Allotment. Clerk asked to liaise with speaker on that issue.
- ii) Comments regarding proposed Draft Volunteer Policy (to be considered later in meeting).
- iii) Council's contribution/assistance with festive lighting in conjunction with Light Up Axminster.

Chair thanked speakers for their contribution. Public forum session closed at 7.15pm.

OC22/001 To note those present:

a) Present: Cllr. Walden (Chair), Cllr. Spurway (Vice-Chair), Cllrs. Farrow, Hall & Sedgewick. The Locum Town Clerk (Paul Hayward) and 3 members of the Public. No members of the press.

OC22/002 To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies for absence:

Apologies received from committee members Cllr. Mynard (ongoing health matter) and Cllr. (A) Brooker (conflicting engagement). **Approval of apologies proposed from Chair. Resolved unanimously.**

OC22/003 To note members not otherwise in attendance:

None.

OC22/004 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:

Cllrs. Farrow, Sedgewick & Spurway all declared a personal interest in agenda item OC22/008i) as Councillor members of the Guildhall Management Committee.

Cllr. Farrow declared a further personal interest as her partner is the Chair of the Guildhall Management Committee.

Cllr. Walden declared a personal interest in agenda item OC22/022 as his business hosts a festive tree from the Light Up Axminster project.

OC22/005 To review the minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 7th December 2021 (approved by Full Council on 13/12/2021) and to consider any matters arising from those minutes

Minutes reviewed and noted. No matters arising raised.

OC22/006 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 considered as confidential other than those shown on agenda, items OC22/024-029 (incl.)

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OC 22/007 To consider matters pertaining to winter resilience:

Chair of Committee asked that the Town Council's Grit Salt stocks (in storage) be brought forward within the storage container for easier access with appropriate supplies being moved to cemetery and Guildhall sites for emergency provision if required. Clerk directed to arrange under delegated authority in conjunction with Town Handyman.

OC22/008i) To consider matters pertaining to the governance and administration of Axminster Guildhall:

Chair outlined current arrangements whereby the Town Council (ATC) owns the Guildhall Building but holds it "in trust" via a lease to a group of "Holding Trustees" who subsequently instruct the Guildhall Management Committee (GHMC) to administer the building on their behalf; this agreement was signed in 1967. It was noted that lease requires an annual lease/rent charge (of £1) to be paid (which appears to have never been demanded); the term of the lease also appeared to be just 21 years from 1967.

Summary of debate:

Adaptations and improvements to the building sought by GHMC to be considered by ATC. Clarity needed on the number of Councillor vacancies on GHMC (split 8:4 Councillors/Public) Suggestion that a meeting should be convened between ATC and GHMC to discuss future plans, governance arrangements, financial status, renewal of lease and so forth. Agreement that a review of the lease document (and GHMC Constitution) was critical and Clerk directed to liaise with Chair of GHMC to obtain these documents (and any copies of draft revised leases prepared) and circulate to all members prior to any meeting being held.

OC22/008ii) To consider proposals for refurbishment of the Old Courthouse Building and potential for enhanced use of the building for Town Council activities:

Cllr. Sedgewick reported that this matter had been tabled for discussion at the FULL Council meeting on 10th January 2022 and, as such, proposed deferment of this agenda item to that meeting. Seconded by Chair. Resolved unanimously.

Further to the earlier public representation on the subject, Cllr. Hall proposed that agenda item OC22/022 be brought forward for consideration with Chair's agreement. Seconded by the Chair. Resolved unanimously.

OC 22/022 To consider proposals to provide further festive illumination on Minster Green and across Town Centre; to include consideration of electrical supply challenges and liaison with 3rd parties in the town already engaged in festive lighting provision:

Cllr. Sedgewick confirmed that recent disruption to the Minster Green power supply (from inside the Minster church) had been identified and scheduled for restoration.

Chair expressed the Council's thanks to all involved with Light Up Axminster (LUA) for both the extensive festive lighting across the town and for all events during the year, supported by a team of volunteers.

Locum RFO confirmed that Council held a reserve for improvements/repairs to Minster Green lighting, but had also provisionally set aside funds within the 2022-23 budget plan for additional festive lighting provision.

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Locum Clerk (LC) was directed to liaise with the LUA executive team to ascertain what their requirements were for the improvement/expansion of festive lighting in the town and then return to Ops.Comm. (OC) with that information for further discussion/consideration. LC was also asked to clarify what powers the Town Council had at its disposal to assist towards and financial expenditure in this respect.

There was also a suggestion that the Town Council consider planting further trees to mitigate against the Carbon Impact of additional lighting/power usage. This was felt to be an appropriate measure and it was agreed that OC would consider this in conjunction with the primary topic as above.

Chair proposed that the published agenda order be resumed. Resolved unanimously.

OC 22/009 Update on Section 106 projects ongoing:

- a) Raymond's Hill Play Area. This matter is scheduled to be considered as item OC22/0241C (in committee) later in this meeting and so was not discussed at this point.
- b) Axminster Skatepark at Cloakham Lawns. LC was directed to contact the trustees of the Skatepark Committee to seek confirmation that all the necessary legal papers had been signed and approved to permit EDDC to take on the land in question and start the procurement process for the S106 skatepark project.
- c) Cloakham Lawns Public Artwork Project. LC was directed to seek clarity from EDDC S.106 officer as to where the money could be spent (ie. a precise geographical location within Cloakham Lawns estate) and what constraints on spending were contained within the S.106 legal agreement. The involvement of the S.106 Officer would be pivotal in the delivery of this project. A suggestion was made from the committee that benches could be provided with some form of integrated artwork, delivering both art and amenity to residents on the estate. LC was asked to raise this with the officer too.

OC 22/010 To consider matters pertaining to signage in the Town Centre and on roads/highways within the parish; to include update on vehicle Activated Sign (VAS).

- a) Town Centre Signage Project. Chair proposed that this matter be deferred to the next meeting of the OC on 1st February. Agreed. LC was due to meet with a representative of South Western Railways regarding potential collaborative projects at the station and he was asked to also raise the issue of additional signage at the point that SWR landholdings joined the public highway (near Tesco roundabout/crossing to Axminster Power Tools showroom).
- b) LC was asked to contact the DCC Highways Officer to seek guidance on how the Council could possibly arrange an additional "Brown" Tourism sign on the A35 (East>West) to bring additional visitors into the town. Chair noted that previous requests had been refused on the basis that signs east of Hunters Lodge might encourage drivers to cross the Eastbound traffic stream to turn onto Lyme Road/Musbury Road to come into the town.
- c) LC updated members on the progression of the VAS project. The VAS device had been received and Council was now awaiting installation of the mounting poles (by DCC) whereupon the unit could be brought into use. No further actions required at this time as in the hands of DCC.

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OC 22/011 Update on Jubilee Field Project:

a) LC asked for Committee's consent to sign a set of legal papers on Council's behalf (as their [Locum] Proper Officer) to conform with mandatory legal requirements re: nomination of legal representatives. **Proposed by Chair, seconded by Cllr. Hall. Resolved unanimously.**

LC reported that he was awaiting a call-back from the Council's legal team to clarify the timescales for the handover to the Town Council, and a call from EDDC's S106 Officer to confirm that "dowry" sum forthcoming. As soon as this information was received, members will be further updated.

b) In terms of site amenity and future landscaping, it was noted that Council has already resolved (following public consultation) to progress with Option ONE for the provision of dog facilities on site, and that Cllr. Holt had been given delegated authority to gather in quotations for the landscaping of the overall site, to be brought back before OC at the earliest opportunity to consider. LC reported that additional street furniture had been ordered via the EDDC Welcome Back Fund and that this would provide much-awaited public amenity on the field.

OC 22/012 Update on Public Rights of Way/P3 works:

LC provided a verbal update on works in the pipeline/progressing and his recent discussions with the Hon. Footpath Warden (John Vanderwolfe). No further action necessary at this time.

OC 22/013 To consider matters pertaining to Town Cemetery:

a) LC apologised for delay in circulating a draft design for the consolidated signage previously agreed upon. Noted.

b) LC was asked to obtain quotations for purchase or hire of chipping equipment to provide further amenity at the cemetery site. Noted.

c) LC reported that he had been in communication with the Council's commissioned surveyor/valuer to chase the outstanding survey works to the Council's buildings and land assets. Noted.

d) **It was proposed by Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Hall, that a local resident (who operated a drone with the correct certification and licence) be permitted to fly over Council's landholdings and take photos for his own portfolio, subject to confirmation that he held the necessary and applicable insurance for such non-commercial drone flight activity. Resolved unanimously.**

Arrangements and verification of correct paperwork to be delegated to the LC.

OC 22/014 To consider matters pertaining to allotments:

a) LC advised that no progress had been made with DCC regarding provision of new line markings on roads outside of Woodbury Park site. LC asked to chase DCC accordingly.

b) **It was proposed by Chair, seconded by Cllr. Hall, that Council engage services of a contractor to install the new gate posts (and gate) in the proposed new position at the North St. allotment site, rather than trying to use volunteer labour to achieve the same result. Resolved unanimously.**

The action was delegated to the LC to arrange as expediently as possible and a suggestion was made that the LC and the parishioner (who raised the recent concern re: delays) meet on site at a date to be agreed to confirm the proposed siting point and any other remedial works required in association with the gateway re-instatement. Noted.

c) The matter of Allotment Regulations (revision) was deferred by Chair to a future meeting of the committee in light of the remaining business to be considered this evening. Noted.

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OC 22/015 To consider matters pertaining to Health and Safety/H&S Sub-Comm:

a) LC advised that the Fire Risk and Legionella reports had been recently received and these would be forwarded to members of Ops.Comm. although further consideration should be undertaken by the H&S Sub-Committee who would make their recommendations to either Ops.Comm. or FULL Council. Noted.

b) To consider Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Sub-Committee.

LC was asked to provide some draft wording for the Sub-Comm. to consider, revise and approve.

OC 22/016 To consider update from Locum Clerk re: welcome Back Funding capital expenditure:

LC reported that (as directed) he had placed an order with EDDC for approximately £10,000 (ten thousand) of street furniture as per the criteria set out within that scheme; to include new and replacement benches, picnic benches, bicycle racks and litter/waste/recycling bins. The order had been confirmed and approved by EDDC officers and the items would be delivered to the Town Council in due course. The costs of the capital purchases were being met from within the Welcome Back Funding (c/o the European Development Fund) and thus no costs would be borne by the Town Council other than installation of the equipment at the various locations to be agreed upon. Chair asked that this matter be considered at the next Ops.Comm. meeting. Noted.

OC 22/017 To consider the need to make future meetings of this committee (until a date to be agreed upon) "Consultative" only; to be held via Zoom or other digital / web platform in light of ongoing Coronavirus health risks and with recommendations being duly delegated to the Proper Officer to administer and execute:

LC outlined the potential need for this type of meeting in light of ongoing CV19 situation and possible future restrictions. **It was proposed by Chair, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, that future meetings of this committee would be held on a "consultative" basis if circumstances necessitated, subject to the prior consultation, agreement and consent of the Committee Chair and the Council's Proper Officer. Resolved unanimously.** Noted.

OC 22/018 To consider Town Council's Draft Volunteer Policy:

Cllr. Sedgewick had circulated a revised draft of the Council's Volunteer Policy to members prior to the meeting. After debate, it was suggested that certain section be removed/amended and that the revised draft be re-circulated to members and that it also be passed to Council's insurers and DALC (Devon Assoc. of Local Councils) to seek their confirmation that it accorded with extant legislation and standards. LC and Cllr. Sedgewick to liaise accordingly.

OC 22/019 To consider matters pertaining to CCTV installation and coverage within Town Centre and at Guildhall:

LC reported that there had been no progress on this matter and that he had chased both installer and consultant to see further updates on Town Centre system commissioning and improvements to Guildhall capability and data capture for security.

OC 22/020 To consider matters pertaining to Poplar Mount noticeboard:

No further progress. Quotes to follow as requested.

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OC 22/021 To consider proposals to undertake a review of the Town Council's energy supply costs:

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by Cllr. Hall, that LC be directed to seek comparative quotes from energy suppliers for the provision of utility supplies to Council's buildings and landholdings and to report back to OPSCOMM. at the earliest opportunity with the results of these enquiries. Resolved unanimously. Noted.

OC 22/022 This matter had been discussed at an earlier point of the meeting. See minutes above.

OC 22/023 Chair's Announcements / Matters of urgency to be noted:

A query was raised regarding the enforcement of the Disabled space and Loading bays outside of the West Street shops (from Post Office to Axminster Printing) on Sundays. LC to seek clarity on the matter from the DCC Highways Officer.

It was also noted that letters from the Guildhall sign on the front elevation had become detached and LC was asked by Chair to seek quotes for their replacement as a matter of urgency. Noted.

Vice-Chair of Committee (Cllr. Spurway) 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. Seconded by Chair. Resolved.

Meeting moved into committee session with members of the public and press excluded.

OC 22/024 (IC) To consider matters pertaining to ongoing Section 106 Play project at Raymonds Hill.

LC provided a verbal report based on recent email correspondence and phonecalls between landowner and former Clerk. Councillors expressed their frustration at this turn of events and asked the LC to contact the landowner to seek an urgent meeting in an attempt to find a way through the current disagreement and to bring the project back on track. Noted.

OC 22/025 (IC) To consider matters pertaining to cemetery maintenance and to agree principles for future maintenance of the amenity site:

After discussion, it was agreed that LC should be directed to explore options for the out-sourcing of maintenance works here (and elsewhere in the town, where the Council was either the landowner in question or wished to take on the maintenance responsibility as an enhanced public amenity). Noted. LC to bring this matter back to OPSCOMM when possible, but also liaise with Employment Committee who were also considering future recruitment of outdoor personnel; the two matters being intrinsically linked.

OC 22/026 (IC) To consider matters pertaining to cemetery mapping software:

LC was directed to liaise with the suppliers of the digital mapping software (already purchased by the Town Council) to understand the capabilities and benefits of the system and to ensure that the TC was using the software to its best ability for the purposes of improved cemetery administration and town amenity enhancements (see OC22/025(IC) above).

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OC 22/027 (IC) To consider quotes received for tree and hedge maintenance at allotment and cemetery sites:

LC advised that he was still attempting to obtain two comparative quotes in order to accord with Council's Financial Regulations for expenditure of this type and amount. Noted.

OC 22/028 (IC) To amendments to licence wording for prospective tenant of Minster Room at OCH:

As previously resolved, the LC had prepared a draft licence agreement for the tenant which had been reviewed by their legal representatives and some amendments requested/proposed. Members considered these and agreed to the amendments. LC to return to tenant and confirm acceptance of changes and progress with licence of the room as quickly as possible at the rental amount agreed upon. Noted.

OC 22/029 (IC) To consider matters pertaining to chattels currently in storage in museum space at OCH:

LC presented a verbal report following meeting with tenant of the OCH building complex. Members considered that the chattels (in question) were gifted to the incumbent tenant as part and parcel of the building when they took over the tenancy and that, as such, the Council considered them to be items which the tenant would insure at their own cost (being not fixtures of fittings but moveable and portable assets). No legal paperwork exists to specify the ownership of the items, other than noting that they belonged to the previous operator of the building who had passed them to the Town Council without charge upon their departure. The Council had never sought payment for the items, nor levied any rental/hire charge for their unencumbered use and did not list them on the Council's asset register. It was clarified that the rental charge levied by the Council to the tenant related to the building (and curtilage) and not any such chattels or portable electrical equipment.

LC was directed to return to tenant and report the views of the Council accordingly.

Matters relating to lease negotiations were considered briefly and LC advised that such matters were in the hands of Council's legal representatives (and the tenant's) and should be considered at another time once the two solicitors had provided their report and opinion.

Noted.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 21.30hrs.

Signed Date