

Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday to Thursday
9am – 4pm

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk



THE GUILDHALL
WEST STREET
AXMINSTER
DEVON
EX13 5NX

Tel. 01297 32088

Email: Clerk@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk

**Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Monday,
6th November 2023 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall
Minutes approved on 15th January 2024: Part ONE version (Redacted)**

**Present: Cllrs. Walden (Chair), Brooker (Vice-Chair), Paice and Willey.
Meeting was quorate.**

Also in attendance was the Clerk to the Council, Paul Hayward.
One member of the public in attendance.

Meeting began at 7.00pm.

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr. Walden, welcomed all in attendance and outlined 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 in attendance. No committee members indicated that they wished to speak in public forum session.

Chair subsequently closed the public forum session at 7.05pm.

OC23/063

To note members of the committee present:
As detailed above.

OC23/064

**To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies (and reasons for absence):
(LGA 1972 S.85 (1))**

Cllr. Bruce sent her apologies for absence due to a conflicting engagement.

Cllr. Burrough sent her apologies for absence due to illness.

Cllr. Farrow sent her apologies for absence due to illness.

Cllr. Langdon sent his apologies for absence due to a vehicle breakdown.

Chair proposed that these apologies be accepted, and the absences approved.

Seconded by Vice-Chair. Resolved unanimously.

OC23/065

To note members of the committee not otherwise in attendance.
None.

OC23/066

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. This does not preclude the need for members to declare any additional interests that may arise during the meeting.

None declared.

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OC23/067

To consider and, if thought fit, approve the minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 4th September 2023.

Chair proposed approval of these minutes. Seconded by Vice-Chair. Resolved unanimously. Chair signed the approved minutes accordingly.

OC23/068

To consider any matters arising (not included within this agenda as business to be attended to) from the meeting of the 4th September 2023 and to receive progress report from Clerk:

Clerk outlined those matters outstanding/arising from the previous meeting that had not been included in this meeting agenda. Noted with thanks.

OC23/069

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.

No such matters raised or considered other than those also shown on the agenda under item OC23/077 (IC).

Operations Committee business to be considered:

OC23/070

To consider matters pertaining to allotments in the parish:

i) To review draft of recently revised Allotment Regulations and to agree whether to adopt these as policy.

After review, Chair proposed that revised allotment regulations be adopted as policy. Seconded by Cllr. Paice. Resolved unanimously.

ii) To review draft of recently revised Allotment Regulations (Sub-Section specifically relating to the keeping of chickens on the allotment sites) and to agree whether to adopt these as policy.

After review, Chair proposed that revised allotment regulations be adopted as policy. Seconded by Cllr. Willey. Resolved unanimously.

iii) To consider whether to limit allotment tenancies to two plots (half or full) per tenant.

Chair proposed that the recommended tenancy limit of two plots be adopted as policy. Seconded by Vice-Chair. Resolved unanimously.

iv) To consider whether new tenancies are subject to a defined-term probationary period and, if so, whether that probationary tenancy is completed via a "nursery bed/plot", a half-plot or a full-plot.

After debate, it was felt that this proposal would be both unworkable and unfair upon those who passed their probationary period and were then asked to move onto a new plot as a permanent tenancy allocation. Members agreed that the new inspection timetable should alleviate most of the concerns and issues around new tenancies and that any further consideration of this matter should be deferred until a reasonable amount of time had elapsed for the new revised regulations to be in place and adhered to by tenants. No further action therefore proposed.

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OC23/070

To consider matters pertaining to allotments in the parish (continued):

v) To consider how the committee wishes to deal with overgrown plots in terms of Town Council maintenance resources allocation (ie. use of GMO labour, equipment and membrane/site coverings).

It was proposed that the day-to-day maintenance and clearance of un-let plots be delegated to the Deputy Clerk (managing the GMO team) to administer and oversee, in conjunction with the Admin Assistant. Works would be carried out on an “ad hoc” basis after suitable inspections / assessments had been completed as per the execution of the revised regulations above.

In the meantime, Clerk was authorised to purchase a supply of weed-control membrane for use by the GMO team – up to the value of £200 initially. Proposed by Chair, seconded by Cllr. Paice.

Resolved. Clerk: please note and action accordingly.

vi) To consider hedgerow maintenance protocol for allotment boundary hedges (ie height and width control).

Chair proposed that delegated authority be afforded to the Clerk (in conjunction with the Admin team and the GMO team) to cut boundary hedges (along their upper face) as and when required, either on safety or amenity grounds. Members did not wish for hedges to cut on a defined timetable as they were mindful of the environmental and habitat benefits of such hedges and felt that cutting “for the sake of cutting” was contrary to the Council’s established objectives on climate action. **Seconded Vice-Chair. Resolved.** Clerk: please note and action accordingly in liaison with the Council’s other staff and allotment tenants etc.

vii) To consider whether to re-purpose plots 16A & B for alternative use. Suggestions include grassed area for communal tenant use, creation of nursery beds (see iv above), possible link path to the northern boundary.

In light of the ongoing discussions to reform the Allotment Association, the Chair proposed that no decision be made on the re-purposing of this plot holding until progress had been made elsewhere on determining the future of the association membership. Measures to ensure that the site did not become a nuisance were to be delegated to the Clerk to oversee and manage.

Seconded Cllr. Willey. Resolved. Clerk: please liaise with GMO/Admin. Team accordingly.

viii) To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the protocol for how the Town Council deals with non-cultivation and/or any other breaches of the established regulations (terms and conditions of tenancies) and the timeframes within which such action will be taken (up to and including the point of tenant eviction) and how a suitable and reasonable appeal process can be included within such a protocol.

This process MUST accord with the legislation laid down within the Allotment Act 1950.

As per the adoption of the revised allotment regulations (which contain a section on such matters), it was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Cllr. Paice, that the protocol and timetable for the management of non-cultivated plots be adopted as policy and incorporated within the regulations as revised. Furthermore, that delegated authority be afforded to the Clerk (in conjunction with the Chair of the Committee) to manage the process but that any proposed evictions were notified to the committee with a background report before the final eviction of the tenant occurred.

Resolved unanimously. Clerk: Please note and action accordingly.

ix) To consider a suggestion that a suitable repository be created to house gardening books etc in memory of former tenant/allotment advocate who recently passed away.

Chair proposed that this matter be deferred in line with vii) above. **Agreed unanimously.**
No further action at this time.

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OC23/071

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Cemetery:

i) To consider a proposal to utilise waste spoil to create a “Devon Bank” between the lower cemetery field and the adjacent land-holding (on the boundary occupied by the Town Council). This will be in conjunction with the proposals to utilise that boundary line for the planting of new trees and hedgerow etc.

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Vice-Chair, that the Council move forwards with the creation of a “Devon” bank alongside the boundary line of the lower cemetery field, in conjunction with the advice of the Hon. Tree Warden, the Axminster Community Action group and any external bodies who could provide support in this respect. Resolved unanimously.

Clerk: please note and action accordingly.

ii) To receive an update report from Clerk on options for the creation of enhanced/improved hard-standing adjacent to the entrance of Z section and to consider a request to create a compound for the storage of skips and other amenity until the permanent area can be completed (see minutes of OPSComm. 4/9/2023).

It was proposed that up to £2500 (gross) be authorised for expenditure in relation to the creation of the storage/works compound; authority delegated to Clerk to oversee and arrange as site conditions/requirements allowed for. Proposed by Chair, seconded Cllr. Willey. Resolved.

Clerk: please note and action accordingly.

iii) To ratify a decision made under delegated authority of the Chair of the Committee for the purchase of a powered wheelbarrow for the movement of spoil and similar within the site as a cemetery asset/resource.

Ratification proposed by Vice-Chair, seconded by Cllr. Paice. Resolved unanimously. (Costs to be met from savings attributable to reduction in soil skip hire over the next year).

OC23/072

To consider matters pertaining to Town Amenity and services:

i) To consider whether the committee wishes to continue with the (free) supply of dog gloves to fill the dispensers at various points across the town; to consider the annualised cost of such provision.

Chair outlined the history of the amenity provision in the parish.

After debate, it was proposed by the Chair that GMO staff should only fill the dispensers with a maximum of 2 glove-packs per fill, and that they should be monitored for the next few months to assess the effects of that reduced fill and to determine whether any complaints were received from the public. If concerns are raised, or the amenity is perceived as falling short of expectations, the matter is to be brought back to committee for further review. Resolved.

Clerk: please note and action accordingly in liaison with Deputy Clerk and GMO team.

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OC23/072

To consider matters pertaining to Town Amenity and services (continued):

ii) To consider a proposal for the purchase and installation of a Bleed Control (First Aid) cabinet/kit within the Town Centre area as a public amenity.

After a lengthy debate, it was proposed by Cllr. Willey, seconded by the Chair, that two Bleed Control Stations (cabinet and kit) be purchased and installed at a cost of £800 * (gross); one to be sited in the Town Centre, the other at Cloakham Lawns near the Skate Park as an amenity for that recreational facility. Resolved unanimously.

** Subsequently, in consultation between the Chair and the Clerk, it was agreed to expend the same sum to purchase one unique marked cabinet, but to increase the number of Bleed Control First Aid packs from two to five (5) and position these within the existing defibrillator cabinets around the town at key locations as per current operational guidance for the allocation and provision of Bleed Control amenities. SWAST / Police Services would be notified as to where the kits were located for ease and speed of access in the event of an emergency.*

iii) To consider a suggestion that the Town Council consider the purchase of a drone amenity to assist with building/land/site maintenance/survey/project works and activities; members to consider cost vs benefit data and to receive report from Clerk/RFO.

It was proposed by Cllr. Willey that this matter be deferred for the decision of the FULL Council in January 2024 in light of the need to gather information and data on costs, privacy implications, training, licensing and use of the data/images to be collected. Seconded by the Chair. Resolved.

Clerk: Please note and diarise accordingly. Please liaise with Cllr. Willey to prepare the necessary report.

OC23/073

To consider matters pertaining to the Guildhall:

Ordinarily, any such matters would be discussed by the Guildhall Sub-Committee but, from time to time, matters of urgency can be considered by this committee by virtue of the extant Terms of Reference.

i) To consider a matter relating to parking and space availability at the Guildhall and to agree a protocol for employee, guest and visitor parking arrangements.

It was proposed by Cllr. Paice, seconded by the Chair, that no changes to the parking arrangements (for visitors and staff) at The Guildhall venue be considered at this time. Resolved unanimously. Clerk: Please convey this decision to the Guildhall Manager.

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OC23/074

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

Chair asked that the Clerk take all possible steps to ensure that the Minster Green Christmas lighting was operable and safe ready for the switch-on event in late November. It was recognised that the recent tree works on Minster Green (and the age of the lighting) could pose a challenge to the use of the lighting but Clerk was asked to do what he could to ensure illumination took place. Noted.

OC23/075

Date of next scheduled meeting for the committee; 15th January 2024 * – 7pm (Guildhall)

* Held back one week to allow the FULL Council meeting to be held on the 8th.

Future meetings: 4th March, 3rd June, 2nd September & 4th November 2024.

OC23/076

With no business to conduct in Part Two, this motion was not considered or proposed.

OC23/077

With no business to conduct in Part Two, this motion was not considered or proposed.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 20.30hrs.

Signed Date. 15th January 2024

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6th November 2023 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall**

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