

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL
Held on Monday 11th October 2021 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall.

Present:

Town Mayor Cllr. Ms. J.J. Farrow

Deputy Town Mayor: Cllr. Mrs. A. G. Sedgewick,

Councillors: C.A. Doherty, C. Hall, S.P. Holt, Mrs. S.L.N. Leat, M.D.G. Spurway
and J. W. Walden

The Town Clerk (Miss H. Kirkcaldie), the Locum Deputy Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer, (Paul Hayward) and the Administrative Assistant (Mrs S. Gay)

In attendance: East Devon District Councillor Sarah Jackson.

10 Members of the public. 0 representative of the Press.

2021/0397 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Cllrs. M. Mynard, and O. Tucker
Also, County./Dist. Cllr. I. L. Hall and Dist. Cllr. Moulding.

2021/0398 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: CLLRS. DOHERTY, FARROW, MRS. LEAT, MRS. SEDGEWICK AND SPURWAY EACH DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE AXMINSTER GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEMS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL.

CLLRS. FARROW, HOLT, AND SEDGEWICK EACH DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING MEMBERS OF AXMINSTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP.

CLLR. DOHERTY DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF THE LABOUR PARTY

CLLR. FARROW DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND A GOVERNOR OF AXMINSTER COMMUNITY PRIMARY ACADEMY, A MEMBER OF THE LABOUR PARTY, THE NATIONAL TRUST AND THE CO-OP, A FRIEND OF FERNE ANIMAL SANCTUARY, A VOLUNTEER COLLECTOR FOR DEVON AIR AMBULANCE TRUST AND AS A JOINT TENANT OF A TOWN COUNCIL ALLOTMENT AT WOODBURY PARK ALLOTMENTS

CLLR. HOLT DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING LIAISON COUNCILLOR FOR AXMINSTER CHAMBER OF TRADE, TREASURER OF AXMINSTER HOSPITAL LEAGUE OF FRIENDS, A TRUSTEE OF AXMINSTER HERITAGE CENTRE, A MEMBER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND THE NATIONAL TRUST.

CLLR. LEAT DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING SECRETARY OF AXMINSTER DRAMA CLUB.

CLLR. SEDGEWICK DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING LIAISON COUNCILLOR ON AXE VALLEY LOCAL ACTION GROUP.

CLLR. SPURWAY DECLARED AN INTEREST, A MEMBER OF CO-OP FOOD GROUP, AND OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS.

2021/0399 MINUTES OF TOWN COUNCIL MEETING DATED 13th SEPTEMBER 2021:

Two minor edits were made to the draft minutes as circulated to members.

Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Walden, proposed that these substantive minutes be approved for accuracy. Agreed.

Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Hall, proposed that the above minutes be adopted as policy. Agreed.

2021/0400 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE SEPTEMBER COUNCIL MEETING:

EDDC Consultation periods had lapsed.

The matter of defibrillator provision was to be considered at a future OPS Comm. meeting. Progress had been made at Jubilee Field and Cllr. Holt was arranging some planting shortly. Inspection reports and quotes for tree works were pending.

2021/0401 TO RECEIVE RESIGNATION OF TOWN CLERK:

The Clerk spoke to confirm her intention to leave the Council at the end of December 2021. The Mayor thanked the Clerk for her many years of service to the Council and the Axminster Community and wished her every happiness for the future.

2021/0402 TO APPROVE THE APPOINTMENT OF A LOCUM RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER (RFO) AND DEPUTY CLERK (combined role):

Following the resignation of the former RFO/Deputy Clerk, there was a need to appoint a Locum to provide the Town Council with cover in respect of the financial obligations that the Council undertook and to support the Clerk in her duties. The Mayor outlined the recruitment process that had been undertaken in conjunction with the Council's Employment Committee. After contacting DALC (Devon Association of Local Councils) who had been unable to provide a Locum from their pool, two other local Clerks had been approached to enquire of their availability and willingness to step into the role. One had been unable to start until January 2022 and therefore the role was offered to Paul Hayward for an initial 6 month period. Cllr. Farrow proposed that the appointment be made, seconded by Cllr. Walden. Agreed.

2021/0403 TO RECEIVE PRESENTATION FROM BT. OPEN REACH ABOUT PROPOSED BROADBAND UPGRADES THROUGHOUT THE TOWN:

The representative of BT Open Reach had been unable to attend tonight's meeting due to an urgent commitment elsewhere. Cllr. Farrow proposed deferment of this matter until a later date. Agreed.

The Clerk advised the meeting that the proposed upgrades would begin in Raymond's Hill area.

2021/0404 TOWN FORUM – ACTION IN AXMINSTER:

Representation from members of nascent Axminster Men's Shed group.

Cllr. Farrow thanked them for coming to the meeting and suggested they submit an application for grant funding to assist towards the project's start-up costs.

With regards to enquiry regarding use of the Minster Room at the Old Courthouse, the Clerk confirmed that the Council was still exploring all opportunities for that space and that the group might wish to submit an Expression of Interest for the Council to formally consider.

Representation from former Town Councillor, Brian Watson, thanking the Clerk on behalf of the residents for her service to the Council and town and also wishing the Locum deputy Clerk well in their new role.

Cllr. Farrow mentioned a Clean-Up and Repair event at the Primary School (Academy) to be held on 16th October and invited all volunteers to attend.

With no further representations or questions, the Mayor closed the Town Forum at 7.20pm

2021/0405 FINANCIAL MATTERS – PAYMENTS FOR SEPTEMBER:

Cllr. Walden queried payments relating to the Churchyard lighting electrical supply.

The resultant discussion of the matter of the lighting in that location raised the proposal that the topic of the duration and frequency of said lighting should be considered by the relevant committee at a later date, taking into account the Council's Climate Change/Environmental declarations. Clerk/Deputy Clerk to add to the next agenda accordingly.

After agreement on the value and nature of the payments to be made, it was proposed by Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Walden, that these payments be duly approved. Agreed.

2021/0406 FINANCIAL MATTERS – RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER'S REPORT:

The former Responsible Financial Officer had circulated a written report to members of Council before her departure from the Council's employment. Contents of the report were reviewed and noted.

2021/0407 FINANCIAL MATTERS – QUARTERLY REPORT AGAINST BUDGET:

Report received and noted by members.

2021/0408 TO APPROVE FOLLOWING MAJOR EXPENDITURES:

- a) Rectification of matters highlighted in Safety Audit Report (SAR).

Cllr. Farrow proposed, seconded by Cllr. Doherty, that the Town Council accept the quote for the urgent remedial works. Initial spend of £1000 to resolve the most pressing matters highlighted. Authority delegated to Locum RFO to carry forward action in conjunction with Cllr. Holt. Agreed.

- b) Council Structure benchmarking exercise.

It was proposed by Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Sedgewick, that the Town Council proceed with the benchmarking exercise as quoted for £1500 (Net) as a matter of urgency given the recent resignation from the Council's staff team. Agreed. Cllr. Sedgewick was duly afforded delegated authority to proceed as above.

- c) Planting and landscaping at Jubilee Field site.

This matter was deferred until consideration of agenda item 14) below.

d) Autumnal works at Old Courthouse.

It was suggested that external contractor resource be obtained in order to coincide with the re-opening of the Arts café venue. A suggested expenditure limit of £250 was proposed, the arrangements for the works to be delegated to the Clerk and Locum Deputy Clerk/RFO and a ratification of their decision to be undertaken at a future meeting of the Town Council.

2021/0409 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY
SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON 17th AUGUST 2021:

Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Spurway, proposed that these be approved for accuracy. Agreed. No matters arising from that sub-committee meeting.

2021/0410 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 20th SEPTEMBER 2021:

Cllr. Leat, seconded by Cllr. Spurway, proposed that these be approved for accuracy. Agreed. Cllr. Leat, seconded by Cllr. Spurway proposed that they be adopted as policy. Agreed. No matters arising from that committee meeting.

2021/0411 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 21st SEPTEMBER 2021:

Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Holt, proposed that the minutes of the above meeting be approved for accuracy. Agreed. Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Holt, proposed that they be approved as policy. Agreed. No matters arising from that committee meeting.

2021/0412 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STRATEGY AND FINANCE
COMMITTEE HELD ON 27th SEPTEMBER 2021:

Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Leat, proposed that the minutes of the above meeting be approved for accuracy. Agreed. Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Hall, proposed that they be approved as policy. Agreed. No matters arising from that committee meeting.

2021/0413 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 4th OCTOBER 2021:

Cllr. Leat, seconded by Cllr. Hall, proposed that these be approved for accuracy. Agreed. Cllr. Leat, seconded by Cllr. Hall, proposed that they be adopted as policy. Agreed. No matters arising from that committee meeting.

2021/0414 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 5th OCTOBER 2021:

Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Spurway, proposed that these be approved for accuracy. Agreed. Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Spurway, proposed that these be approved as policy. Agreed. Matters Arising: Clarification was put forward regarding the reasons why a quote for expenditure on the Jubilee Field site was rejected. Noted.

2021/0415 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 6th OCTOBER 2021:

The approval of these minutes was not proposed or seconded. The consideration of these minutes was deferred to a later meeting of the Town council.

2021/0416 TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING POLICIES:

a) Staff Handbook (policy):

Cllr. Holt outlined the revisions recently made and integrated into the handbook. After review, it was proposed by Cllr. Holt, seconded by Cllr. Walden, that the Staff Handbook be published and adopted as the official employee reference guide. Agreed.

b) Overtime Policy:

It was proposed by Cllr. Holt, seconded by Cllr. Spurway, that the Overtime Policy be adopted. Agreed.

c) MS. TEAMS protocol (policy):

It was proposed by Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Holt, that the TEAMS Protocol be adopted. Agreed.

Cllr. Farrow reminded all members not to delete anything from the TEAMS schedule as this deleted access for all.

2021/0417 CHRISTMAS ARRANGEMENTS:

a) Light-Up Axminster Switch On event was scheduled for Saturday 20th November (4pm until 8pm). Councillors were invited to attend to represent the Town Council (fancy/festive dress optional).

b) Town Council Office Opening Hours 2021.

Office would close on 20th December and re-open on 4th January (i.e. Closed on 21st December through to 3rd January). Cllr. Walden suggested that an emergency contact number be publicised for residents to access emergency Council services over the period; the phone to be manned by way of a rota between officers and members of Council.

2021/0418 PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATION/ARRANGEMENTS:

Events scheduled from 2nd to 5th June 2021 inclusive.

Cllr. Holt advised members that the proposal was to launch the Town Council formal acquisition of the Jubilee Field (at Boxfield Road) on that weekend. It was felt that this would dovetail extremely well with the wider Jubilee celebrations and that the Town Council's new amenity should be widely and vigorously promoted as a positive for the town's residents.

There was still a question mark over the extent of planting (horticultural and arboricultural) on the site but that Cllr. Holt had met with an experienced landscaping consultant to put together a series of ideas for members to consider at future meetings. There was also a consideration that a Jubilee Oak tree could be planted as a community landmark.

Cllr. Farrow proposed that £100 be spent from Council's reserves towards the costs of the landscaping consultant's report. Furthermore, that an additional sum of up to £100 be spent on the purchase of bulbs for an immediate amenity improvement in the field (prior to the formal handover but with EDDC's agreement). Seconded by Cllr. Hall. Cllr. Holt was duly delegated to organise these works and liaise with Locum RFO for payment. Agreed.

Councillors then considered the wider issue of hard landscaping amenity together with matters including dog control, play space and areas on the field where drainage could be a barrier to improvements. The Clerk advised that there were some tentative draft plans that Council had considered in the past and Cllr. Farrow asked that these be circulated to all members for their perusal and review. Members agreed that co-operation between the Council and the wider community was critical to the success of this project.

2021/0419 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN UPDATE:

Cllr. Sedgewick reported that the Steering Group was due to meet shortly and a report would come back to the Town Council thereafter. Noted.

2021/0420 TO INVITE NOMINATIONS FOR THE ROBIN CROSS 'CITIZEN OF THE YEAR' AWARD:

Clerk spoke to outline the history of the award and to invite nominations from the public for residents who had provided services to the town in the last year. It was suggested that the deadline for the receipt of nominations be the 6th December 2021, with the award being made at the Town Council meeting on the 10th January 2022. Agreed.

2021/0421 MATTERS OF URGENCY TO BE CONSIDERED:

Cllr. Leat respectfully requested that the 1st tranche of the Guildhall Management support grant be paid by the Town Council as per previous resolution. Locum RFO to liaise with Clerk accordingly as a matter of urgency.

2021/0422 CORRESPONDENCE:

As listed on agenda. Recent TTRO (Traffic Orders) received were discussed by members and noted.

Cllr. Sedgewick 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. Cllr. Farrow seconded the proposal. Carried.

2021/0423 QUOTES RECEIVED:

None received for consideration.

2021/0424 TENANCY MATTERS:

It was proposed by Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Holt, that a single-year tenancy agreement be drawn up between the Town Council and the prospective tenant identified. It was also noted that building works were currently ongoing and that other parties had expressed an interest in the room in the future. Agreed.

2021/0425 TO APPROVE REMUNERATION FOR THE LOCUM RFO ROLE:

It was proposed by Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Doherty, that the rate recommended by the Employment Committee be approved and paid to the Locum RFO for the hours also agreed by the Employment Committee. Agreed.

2021/0426 INSURANCE MATTERS:

Clerk reported that no further information had been received regarding the ongoing claims. Cllr. Walden asked (as Chair of Operation Committee) to be kept up-to-date on this matter.

Draft minutes of 11th October 2021, Min 2021

With no further business to consider and discuss, the Mayor closed the meeting at 8.30pm.

Signature Date.....

ACTIONS LIST

DRAFT FOR ATC 8th November 2021