

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
DEVON
EX13 5NX

Tel. 01297 32088

Email: Clerk@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk

Axminster Town Council:

Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy & Finance Committee 7pm

MINUTES APPROVED at S&FCOMM held 22nd May 2023; Part ONE Minutes (redacted)

Held in person on Monday 27th February 2023. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Sedgewick (AS) (Vice-Chair), Birnie (SB), Bourne (ABo.), Leat (SL), Spurway (MS) and Walden (JW).

(Meeting was declared as quorate).

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward.

No members of the public in attendance.

Chair welcomed all in attendance.

Chair highlighted the building fire precautions and alerted those present to the fire exits.

Public Forum session.

No public representations.

No members of the committee wished to speak in public forum.

As such, Chair closed the Public Forum session at 7.05pm

SF23/001

To note members of committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above (AS arrived at 7.10pm)

SF23/002

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

Cllr. Brooker. Absence and reason (unwell) was noted and apology/reason approved.

Cllr. Burrough. Absence and reason (conflicting engagement) was noted and apology/reason approved.

Cllr. Holt. Absence and reason (conflicting engagement) was noted and apology/reason approved.

Proposed by Chair, seconded by SL, that these apologies for absence be approved and absences noted. Resolved unanimously.

SF23/003

To note members of committee not otherwise present and to receive any other apologies for absence:

None.

Continued overleaf.

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SF23/004

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:

A declaration at this point does not preclude the need for members to declare any additional interests that may arise during this meeting.

The dispensations afforded to Cllr. Burrough & Cllr. Farrow (27/06/2022) were noted.

The dispensation afforded to Cllr. Birnie (12/12/2022) was noted.

No other declarations of interest put forward by members.

It was noted that members present also declared Other Registrable Interests in light of their dual roles as Trustees of the Guildhall Management Committee.

SF23/005

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the S&FComm. meeting held on 9th January 2023 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes:

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

No matters arising. Chair signed the minutes as a true and accurate record of that meeting.

SF23/006

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 (Admission to meetings) Act 1960: None raised by committee members.

SF23/007

Business to be considered by this committee:

a) To consider report from RFO on Council's Risk Management & Assessment Annual Review.

Chair thanked Clerk for work undertaken to prepare this assessment for the Town Council.

Three minor amendments/revisions proposed and agreed:

- i) Risk of mandatory H&S expenditure outweighing available income/reserves.*
- ii) Removal of "skatepark" from risk assessment (managed by a 3rd party)*
- iii) Addition of "noise nuisance" to Guildhall risk assessment.*

It was proposed by JW, seconded by AS, that the substantive Risk Management Assessment Review for FY22/23 be recommended to FULL Council for approval and adoption in accordance with Council's Audit and Governance responsibilities. Resolved unanimously.

RFO: Please add to March FULL agenda for final review & approval as recommended.

Continued overleaf.

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b) To re-consider revised draft of Council's revised Financial Regulations.

Further amendments were made to the substantive document and approved for inclusion.

Chair proposed, seconded by SBi, that the substantive Financial Regulations for Axminster Town Council be recommended to FULL Council for approval at the earliest opportunity.

Resolved unanimously. RFO: Please circulate to members of FULL Council and add to agenda for 13th March 2023 for final review and approval as recommended.

c) To consider (and affirm) the "scope and purpose" of the Strategy & Finance Committee

After review of the extant Terms of Reference (ToR) for this committee, it was agreed by members that the Chair, As and the Clerk be duly delegated to review the ToR, edit as felt necessary and bring back to this committee for further review and consideration.

Clerk: Please liaise with Chair and AS to make the necessary arrangements for that meeting.

d) To consider whether to formally adopt (and comply with) the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 (for larger authorities).

Proposed by Chair, seconded by SL. Resolved unanimously.

RFO: Please note and action accordingly.

e)i) To consider whether Axminster Town Council wishes to forge closer links and bolster cooperation with Seaton Town Council (as joint parties in the Axe Valley Local Government Catchment area) on matters such as tourism, economy, climate action and governance * and,

e)ii) To consider how Axminster Town Council would wish to work with other local partners and stakeholders to promote, bolster and support tourism in the Axminster parish area.

After lengthy discussion, it was agreed "in principle" that this Council should seek to forge closer links with neighbouring towns and parishes and also actively work with local 3rd party organisations and other stakeholders to promote tourism in the Axminster area as a driver for economic improvement.

Chair proposed (however) – seconded by AS – that any such activity in this regard should be deferred until after May 2023 so that the new Council administration could consider how this could best be enabled and effected. Resolved unanimously.

Clerk: Please note and diarise accordingly.

Continued overleaf.

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f) To consider future sponsorship of the Citizen of the Year (Robin Cross) Award and to also consider the “grant of benefit” (under s137 Local Government Act 1972) awarded to the recipient each year.

It was proposed by JW, seconded by Chair, that the current primary sponsor of the award (at a value of £100 per annum) be approached to enquire as to whether they wished to continue for another 5 years (2024 to 2028 inclusive). Furthermore, that our usual supplier be commissioned to provide five identical (individual award recipient) gifts for the sake of consistency of presentation and that a further display RCA shield be purchased in anticipation of space on the existing shield running out. Resolved unanimously.

Clerk: please note and action accordingly.

g) To consider matters pertaining to the ongoing Axminster Renewal Forum / Urban Renewal project and to decide how the Town Council engages with the process and on what projects it wishes to be seen as the “lead stakeholder” (if any).

Chair proposed suspension of the Standing Orders to permit the Clerk to speak in respect of his dual role as EDDC Portfolio Holder for Economy and assets. Agreed.

Cllr. Hayward was invited to speak to committee by the Chair.

After further debate, it was suggested by Chair that the Town Council take up the EDDC offer to lead on the Renewal Forum project for the coming 12 months and assess any additional resourcing required in 2024, whilst supporting the forum with Council representation moving forwards.

Furthermore, that the Town Council should be supportive of the overall principles of the Urban Renewal process, should promote the “quick wins” proposed within the Urban Renewal document (by DCC/EDDC) and note the content of the report and the aspirations/objectives detailed therein (but being mindful that some of these were unachievable at present due to financial constraints).

Chair proposed resumption of the Standing Orders. Agreed.

h) To consider any assets (land or chattels) that this Town Council wishes to seek ownership of under the nascent EDDC Community Asset Transfer policy.

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that no such applications for Community Asset Transfers should be submitted to EDDC at the present time but that this subject should be re-visited by the committee in FY24-25. Resolved unanimously.

Clerk: Please note and diarise accordingly.

Continued overleaf.

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SF23/008

To consider any matters considered as urgent by presiding Chair for discussion & notation only:

The Clerk had been asked by local Police representatives if the Town Council would be willing act as the primary data controller for any new CCTV systems at the Skatepark to assist towards crime prevention and the reduction of anti-social behaviour. Members discussed the request and felt that – at the time – the Council's resources could not manage this additional responsibility and that Cloakham Lawn Sports Centre (who already had extensive CCTV on their sports hall site) may be better suited (in terms of their proximity to the Skatepark) to assist the user charity. Chair wished to stress the Town Council's support for the local Police teams and their efforts to help reduce ASB in the area of the skatepark. Noted.

Clerk: Please liaise with the Police accordingly.

SF23/009

AS 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. JF seconded the proposal. Resolved.

Part ONE recording was stopped at this point and the meeting moved into Part TWO (Confidential) session whereupon recording was resumed.

SF23/010 (IC)

To receive a report from the Clerk on a potential land acquisition opportunity in the parish and to decide whether this Council wishes to begin negotiations/discussions with the freeholder to provide improved open public space amenity in the town. *

This matter is deemed confidential due to the commercial sensitivity of the subject to be discussed and the nature of the information to be considered by members.

Through a 3rd party, the Council had been asked whether it might wish to take on ownership of a parcel of land (designated as open green space). Whilst the Chair was reluctant to take on more assets which could potentially become liabilities in the future, it was felt by members that this was a unique opportunity to consider and that – as such – Clerk should commence initial discussions with the landholder to see if a deal could be negotiated. **Proposed by JW, seconded by JF. Resolved unanimously.** Clerk: Please note and action accordingly.

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SF23/011 (IC)

To consider proposals pertaining to the ongoing maintenance of the Town Council's assets (buildings) and to agree upon a schedule of works / prioritisation of said works based on the information available to the committee; to receive report from Clerk.

This matter is deemed confidential as it pertains to financial & legal information considered commercially sensitive.

After a lengthy discussion, Clerk was directed to prepare a report for the first meeting of S&FCOMM after the May elections to outline the key priorities for the Council's building asset "stock" in terms of repairs, preventative maintenance, planned improvements, user requests. This would allow the new Council cohort to consider the matter as a new administration and make their decisions with all the key facts and evidence to hand. Noted.

Clerk: Please note, diarise and prepare report accordingly.

SF23/012 (IC)

To receive update from the Clerk on the matter considered at FULL Council on 30/01/2023, namely:

EFC23/009 (IC) To consider matters pertaining to the Axminster Guildhall,

This matter is deemed confidential as it pertains to financial, legal & employment information considered commercially sensitive.

Clerk provided an update for members following recent discussions with Council's legal representatives and was directed to maintain the pace of discussions with 3rd parties to reach the conclusion of the matter as had been agreed upon by Council.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.50pm.

Signed Date.....

Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy & Finance Committee.

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S&F Committee Recommendations from meeting held 27th February 2023

SF23/007a) Recommendation to FULL Council to approve and adopt Annual Risk Management Assessment Review for Financial Year 2022-23.

SF23/007b) Recommendation to FULL Council to approve and adopt substantive revised Financial Regulations (2023).

SF23/007d) Recommendation that the Council immediately adopt and comply with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 (for larger authorities)

SF23/007g) Recommendation that the Council support the overall principles of Urban Renewal in Axminster, promote the “quick win” projects detailed in the UR report and re-consider the leadership and ownership of the Axminster Renewal Forum in 2024.

SF23/007h) Recommendation that the Council does NOT seek to submit any applications to EDDC for Community Asset Transfers until FY24-25.

S&F Committee Recommendations from meeting held 27th February 2023 – Part Two

SF23/010 (IC) Recommendation that the Council directs the Clerk to commence discussions with 3rd party landowner to enable the acquisition of the Open Green Space outlined in the minutes.