

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 FULL Council

APPROVED MINUTES – 12th February 2024; Part ONE version (Redacted)

Held in person on Monday 8th January 2024 at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Bourne (ABo.), Bridge (PB), Brooker (ABr.), Bruce (DB), Burrough (KB), Dowdeswell (MD), Langdon (TL), Lippett (RL) and Walden (JW).

(Meeting was deemed quorate with ten members present).

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (PH)

Cllr. Sarah Jackson (SJ) (EDDC)

Rural Inspector, Philip Grey (DCP)

PCSO Hayley Widger (DCP)

14 members of the public.

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

Public Forum session.

Presentation of The Robin Cross “Citizen of the Year” Award 2024 by the Town Mayor to PCSO Hayley Widger.

Open Public Forum session (limited to 15 minutes or as otherwise agreed by Chair presiding).

Representation from Mr. Ian Hall regarding matters pertaining to safeguarding which he felt were preventing him from standing for co-option (his application having been withdrawn).

Chair thanked Mr. Hall for his comments and advised that the subject would be added to the February agenda for members consideration and debate.

Mr. Hall also made a representation regarding use of Section 106 monies for play facilities on Cloakham Lawns. Noted. *(see FC24/015 below)*

Representation from trustee of Cloakham Lawns Sports Centre seeking Town Council’s support for the temporary use of the sports MUGA as a car park for centre users. JW advised that this was a planning matter for EDDC and that ATC would consider the issue in its role as a statutory consultee when application submitted and validated.

Representation from Mr. Parkin, a resident at Stoney Bridge, regarding Town Council’s response and communication protocol during flooding events. He asked that the Town Council liaise with the EA and EDDC/DCC in future should such incidents be anticipated.

Continued overleaf.

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Representation from Mr. Kennard regarding Town Council's communications with the higher statutory authorities regarding flood resilience and prevention. Mr. Kennard asked that a letter be sent to The Rt. Hon. Michael Gove (Minister for DLUHC) and that, furthermore, the EA be asked to attend the Annual Parish Meeting on 4th March 2024 to speak on the subject of flooding in the town. Chair thanked Mr. Kennard for his suggestions and directed the Clerk to action accordingly.

Chair subsequently closed the Public Forum session of the meeting at 7.30pm

FC24/001

To note members of committee present:

Councillors in attendance at meeting are shown above.

FC24/002

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

Cllr. Leat. Absence noted and reason and apology approved (family commitment).

Cllr. Paice. Absence noted and reason and apology approved (family commitment).

Cllr. Steadman. Absence noted and reason and apology approved (unwell).

Cllr. Willey. Absence noted and reason and apology approved (unwell).

Acceptance of reasons for absence proposed by Chair, seconded by JW. Resolved.

FC24/003

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

None received.

FC24/004

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.

An "Affects and Prejudicial NRI" declaration was made by Cllr. Dowdeswell as one of the applicants for co-option was a family relation. The Chair sought agreement from those present that Cllr. Dowdeswell should not have to leave the room but suggested that he abstain from the vote when the time came. This suggestion was made on the grounds of "reasonable adjustment" in light of Cllr. Dowdeswell's circumstances. Noted.

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FC24/005

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the Ordinary meeting of the FULL Council held on Monday 11th December 2023 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes:

Approval of the minutes proposed by Chair, seconded by JW. Resolved unanimously
Minutes were signed by the Chair as a true and faithful record of the business of that meeting.

FC24/006

Matters arising from those minutes:

Chair asked that the letters referred to above are prepared for her signature without delay.
Noted. Copies to be cc'd to relevant stakeholders and local councillors as appropriate.

FC24/007

To note the minutes of the following Committee meetings held (as dated below) and to consider any matters arising from those minutes: Noted.

- a) Strategy & Finance Committee meeting – 27th November 2023
- b) Guildhall Sub-Committee meeting – 7th December 2023 (adjourned)
- c) Strategy & Finance Committee meeting – 18th December 2023

FC24/008

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. See minutes below (FC24/023) below for Council business considered in Part Two session.

FC24/009

To consider nominations for the co-option of a Councillor to the vacant Raymonds Hill ward seat (Section 89; Local Government Act 1972) (The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006; Section 5)

Continued overleaf.

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FC24/009

To consider nominations for the co-option of a Councillor to the vacant Raymonds Hill ward seat (continued):

3 nominations were received.

MD advised that he would not be voting on the matter (see FC24/004 earlier).

After the first round of voting, one candidate was disqualified with the remaining votes cast for the two other candidates resulting in a tie. No candidate has a clear majority.

After the second round of voting, the two remaining candidates still had the equal amount of votes resulting in a tie.

The Chair requested a third round of voting with a wish to see Council make the decision rather than the Chair having to use their casting vote.

After the third round of voting, the two candidates still had the same number of votes (there being one abstention). Therefore, as per Council's Standing Orders, the Chair exercised her casting vote for Wayne Hurren, who was therefore co-opted to the Council to represent Raymonds Hill ward by a majority of 5 votes to 4 with a single abstention (and with Cllr. Dowdeswell recusing himself from the vote).

Clerk: please arrange for Mr. Hurren to visit the Town Council offices to sign his Declaration of Acceptance of Office and to receive his new councillor induction briefing.

FC24/010

To consider Council's financial matters:

a) To consider and, if thought fit, to approve and ratify payments for December 2023.
Payments for December 2023 proposed for approval by Chair, seconded by JW. Resolved.

b) To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the Bank Reconciliation for December 2023;
Bank reconciliation for December 2023 proposed for approval by Chair, seconded by JW. Resolved. Clerk: please arrange for this document to be signed by a non-bank signatory.

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FC24/010

To consider Council's financial matters (continued):

c) To receive, and note, Responsible Financial Officer's report and financial pack for December 2023 in the approved format (also published online) incorporating the Guildhall Operational Financial Statement.

Noted.

d) Questions to the RFO on these accounts / financial reports from members.

No questions raised.

FC24/011

Planning matters:

a) To consider any planning applications received prior to the agenda publication and currently awaiting consideration (and decision):

None advised to Council.

b) To ratify planning decisions made by way of delegated authority afforded to Chair of Planning Committee, Cllr. Leat, and the Council's Proper Officer in consultation with the members of the Council's Committee.

None requiring ratification.

c) To consider any tree related planning applications received prior to the agenda publication and currently awaiting consideration (and decision):

None advised to Council.

d) To consider planning applications received after the agenda publication and currently awaiting consideration (and decision) – published on a supplementary agenda (if applicable):

None advised to Council.

e) To consider any planning correspondence received:

None advised to Council.

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Council Business to be considered:

FC24/012

To consider the recommendation of the Strategy and Finance Committee (as per their meeting held on 18th December 2023) to adopt the substantive and revised Internal Financial Control Review [Policy].

Adoption proposed by Chair, seconded by KB. Resolved.

FC24/013

To consider the recommendation of the Strategy and Finance Committee (as per their meeting held on 18th December 2023) to adopt the substantive and revised Investment and Borrowing Strategy [Policy].

Adoption proposed by Chair, seconded by ABr.. Resolved.

FC24/014

To consider a proposal that the Town Council should acquire a drone for the purposes of site and building surveys, town mapping and traffic management
(this matter was deferred to the FULL Council by the Operations Committee)

It was proposed by JW, seconded by the Chair, that the proposal should not be taken forward ie approval not supported. Resolved unanimously.

FC24/015

To review the Heads of Terms document provided by EDDC for a 30-year peppercorn lease of land adjacent to Millwey Rise Play Area (First Avenue) for the purposes of creating an ancillary accessible play amenity using allocated Section 106 funding and to consider whether the Town Council wishes to proceed with this project using said funding and any other funding that it deems appropriate.

Chair acknowledged the early representation made by Mr. Ian Hall in the public forum session. Chair outlined the rationale for the Heads of Terms agreement with EDDC and JW confirmed that the Section 106 funding was provided by way of a legally binding agreement between EDDC and the funding developer.

It was subsequently proposed by Chair, seconded by KB, that the Town Council would proceed with the lease agreement (having approved the wording of the Heads of Terms) with EDDC to acquire the leasehold of the land in question for the purposes of creating an additional play amenity using only available Section 106 funding with no additional contributions from Council's reserves. Clerk to be authorised under delegated powers to make the necessary arrangements for the signing of the lease in conjunction with the Council's own legal representatives. Resolved unanimously.

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FC24/016

To consider recent correspondence from DCC (Highways) regarding the Cabinet decision to proceed with Community Self-Delivery of Highway Improvements (CET/23/102).

It was proposed by JW, seconded by Chair, that the Town Council would not wish to support the proposals from DCC at this time as the Town Council's finances and resources were not sufficient. Resolved.

Clerk: Please communicate this decision back to DCC.

FC24/017

To consider recent correspondence from residents adjacent to the River Axe regarding the Town Council's duties and obligations regarding flood alleviation and defences.

Chair spoke to suggest that this matter had been adequately covered in Public Forum session and that the Council had already agreed to communicate with key stakeholders in this regard; no further action proposed pending responses from those correspondents. Noted.

FC24/018

To consider recent correspondence from SW Railways regarding the CCIF grant funding and potential for alternative projects in light of 3rd party delays to E-bike project at Axminster Railway Station concourse; Council to consider and agree upon progress and next steps.

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by KB, that the Town Council would not proceed with the E-Bikes (CCIF) project at the "Green Wedge" site by Axminster Railway Station in light of the inability to find a delivery partner willing to take the project forward within the timeframe permitted. Resolved unanimously. Clerk: please advise SWR accordingly.

Furthermore, the Chair proposed that the Clerk be afforded delegated authority to discuss alternative schemes to encourage active travel and public transport use from the station "hub" (and to reduce reliance on cars and such vehicles). Resolved.

Clerk: please note and action accordingly, bringing the matter back to Council as and when developments warrant.

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FC24/019

To consider recommendations from the Strategy & Finance Committee as to the 2024-25 Financial Year Budget Preparation and Precept Calculation process; The Full Council to resolve budget figures and precept demand for this period, prior to submission to EDDC [The Billing Authority] (Financial Regulations Section 3.1 to 3.3 inclusive)

Chair confirmed that Strategy & Finance Committee had considered the budget (and precept) in two recent meetings with the RFO providing multiple option papers and budget forecasts for member's consideration and reference. Chair acknowledged that household budgets were under pressure across Axminster, as elsewhere in the UK, but stressed that the Town Council's share of the overall annual Council Tax Bill was less than 5% of the total charged, with the majority going to DCC and the combined Fire and Police services.

The Town Council was being asked to take on the responsibility (and cost) for more services and amenities by the higher tier authorities and that the ongoing development and improvement of the Guildhall, together with amenities such as the Jubilee Field, and the maintenance costs of several Grade 2 listed buildings was increasing Council's costs year-on-year. Inflationary pressures from outside the Council were also having an affect on budgets and finances.

Subsequently, and after considerable debate, it was proposed from the Chair, seconded by JW, that the Town Council's expenditure budget for the financial year 2024-25 be set at £692,800 (option 6C) with a commensurate (balancing) precept demand of £446,524 applied on a declared taxbase of 2,898 (as per EDDC advice). This would equate to an annual Band D equivalent precept figure of £154.08, an increase of £51.35 per band D dwelling. This would take Axminster Town Council's share of the overall Council Tax Bill to 6.3% of the total precepts charged – an increase of 1.8% across the board*

(* based on the information available to the RFO at the time of the preparation of the budget).

Resolved. 8 votes for, 2 against, no abstentions.

RFO: Please submit precept demand to EDDC as per regulations and prepare a Council statement for publication on all media channels and comms. outlets. The topic of Budgets and Precepts to be included on the agenda for the Annual Parish Meeting in March.

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FC24/020

To receive any announcements from the Chair of the Council or to consider any matters considered as urgent by the presiding Chair.

None.

FC24/021

To confirm the date of the next scheduled FULL meeting of the Town Council on Monday the 12th of February 2024, and other Council committee meetings.

- i) Guildhall Sub-Committee – 11th January 2024 – 7pm (reconvened from 7th Dec.)
- ii) Operations Committee – 15th January 2024 - 7pm
- iii) Employment Committee – 22nd January 2024 - 7pm
- iv) Strategy & Finance Committee – 29th January 2024 - 7pm

FC24/022

Vice-Chair 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 ABr. Resolved.

All members of the public left the meeting at this point. The Part One recording was stopped and the Part Two recording commenced.

Other Council Business to be considered (Part TWO – Confidential)

FC24/023 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to the Old Courthouse and Guildhall buildings.
Such matters are considered commercially sensitive in light of the ongoing tenancies of those buildings.

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Members were briefed on a recent event at the Old Courthouse relating to building condition.

Clerk was asked to expedite the survey completion as quickly as possible so that a further debate and discussion could be arranged with all the facts and data available for member's consideration. Noted

With no further business to deal with, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.45pm.

Signed Date: 12th February 2024

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