

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 MINUTES APPROVED 9th March 2026; Part ONE version (redacted)

Held at The Guildhall on Monday 9th February 2026 at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Price (JP) (Vice-Chair), Dowdeswell (MD), Hayward (AH), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), Norman (LN), Osborn (RO), Paice (EP), Walden (JW), Warwick (TW) and Willey (DW).

(Meeting was deemed quorate with twelve members present).

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (PH) (also representing EDDC and DCC)

Cllr. Sarah Jackson (representing EDDC)

One member of the public also present.

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

The Chair opened the meeting by paying tribute to former Councillor Robert Jordan (2011-2015) who had passed away recently. Chair offered their condolences to Mrs Gill Jordan on behalf of the Town Council.

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

There were no public representations.

JP spoke in public forum session on the plans to install ANPR cameras in the car park at the railway station and the potential adverse impact to rail users, and also visitors to the businesses operating in that area who also used the railway car park and access roads to reach their destinations. Noted.

The Chair subsequently closed the public forum session of the meeting at 7.15pm

FC26/024

To note members of Council present:

Councillors in attendance at meeting are shown above.

FC26/025

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

Apologies received from:

Cllr. Ashkettle. Reason for absence noted and accepted.

Cllr. Dunsbury. Reason for absence noted and accepted.

The Chair proposed that absence and reason be approved. Seconded by JW. Resolved.

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FC26/026

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

None.

FC26/027

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.

Members considered a request for a dispensation for Cllr. David Willey relating to the hire of the Guildhall venue (Section 33 of The Localism Act 2011) [Reason: that Councillors consider it appropriate to grant a dispensation for other reasons (E)]

Proposed by the Chair, seconded by the Vice-Chair, that the dispensation be afforded until May 2027. Resolved nem con (DW abstained).

No further declarations of interest made.

FC26/028

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the FULL Council held on Monday 12th January 2026.

Proposed by the Chair, seconded by JW, that the minutes be approved. Resolved nem con (TW abstained).

FC26/029

To consider any matters arising from those minutes:

i) Progress update on negotiations with energy suppliers. Chair recommended that this matter be further discussed in Part Two session later in the meeting if appropriate to do so. Noted.

FC26/030

To consider and review the draft minutes of the following meetings of committees of the Town Council as listed below (as previously circulated to members and published online):

- i) Operations Committee – 25th January 2026
 - ii) Employment Committee – 2nd February 2026
- Draft minutes were reviewed and noted.

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FC26/031

To note the specific recommendations arising from that committee meeting and to consider whether Council wishes to approve their adoption.

No specific recommendations for consideration.

FC26/032

To consider any additional 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. [See FC26/053 to 054(IC) inclusive].

None raised at this time other than those already listed on the agenda for Part Two discussion.

FC26/033

To consider Council's financial matters:

a) To consider and, if thought fit, to approve and ratify payments schedule for December 2025. Payments for January 2026 (£51,488 net) proposed for approval by the Chair, seconded by the Vice-Chair. Resolved unanimously.

b) To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the Bank Reconciliation for January 2026. Bank reconciliation for January 2026 was proposed for approval by the Chair, seconded by JW. Resolved unanimously. Clerk: please arrange for these documents to be signed by a non-bank signatory (MD kindly volunteered to complete this task).

c) To receive, and note, Responsible Financial Officer's report and financial pack for January 2026 (Q1 to Q4) (also published online) incorporating the Q1-3 budget monitor (summary) and Q4 forecast, and associated reports. Received and noted.

d) Questions to the RFO on these accounts / financial reports from members.
No questions raised.

e) To consider whether the Town Council wishes to renew its membership of The Blackdown Hills Parish Network for 2026 (annual charge – suggested £25 contribution for a parish council)

It was proposed by DW, seconded by the Chair, that the Town Council should renew its membership to the BDHPN and pay the requested membership fee of £25.
Resolved unanimously.

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FC26/034

Planning matters:

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

1) 26/0055/FUL – 10 First Avenue, Axminster, EX13 5EX

Proposed two storey side extension on the north elevation and replacement porch.

SL (Chair of Planning Committee) proposed support for this application.

Seconded by EP. Resolved unanimously.

2) 26/0057/FUL – Kennack, Horslears, Axminster, EX13 5JX

Proposed single storey rear extension, rear decking and first floor side extension.

SL proposed support for this application. Seconded by EP. Resolved unanimously.

3) 26/0059/FUL – Contay, Chard Road, Axminster, EX13 5ED

Proposed single storey extension on SE elevation with dormer window.

SL proposed support for this application. Seconded by JW. Resolved unanimously.

4) 26/0020/CPE – Chubbs Storeroom, Castle Street, Axminster, EX13 5NP

Applications for a certificate of lawfulness confirming lawful use of building as Class E.

SL proposed support for this application. Seconded by DW. Resolved unanimously.

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 to be considered.

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

None to be considered.

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

Clerk advised that a late application had been received for Lower Westwater Farm.

SL suggested that the matter be considered at a meeting of the Planning Committee to be convened immediately prior to the scheduled Strategy & Finance Committee meeting to be held on the 23rd March 2026. Agreed. **Clerk: Please arrange accordingly.**

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e) To consider any Planning Correspondence received.

- i) Clerk updated members about the ongoing BESS appeals to be heard in March and May 2026. Noted.
- ii) Clerk advised members that the previous planning application for sponsorship signage on the Shand Park roundabout had been withdrawn by the applicant/agent. Noted.

Other Council business to be considered:

FC26/035

To note any recent correspondence from DALC and NALC.

To consider nominations from the Town Council to attend the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on Friday 8th May 2026 (nominations are drawn from the hat at DALC, and 3 winning pairs of tickets are allocated for the DALC area).

EP and AH both indicated that they would wish to enter the draw for tickets if available. Members voted and endorsed EP's submission to the draw.

Clerk: please notify DALC accordingly.

FC26/036

To consider matters pertaining to Axminster Emergency Planning (EP) protocol and policy.

After a lengthy debate, it was:

- i) Proposed by the Chair that the following members (JF, JP, LN, JA, WH and the Clerk) should meet to discuss the potential for a streamlined and responsive EP working party. Seconded by JW. Resolved. Clerk: Please liaise with members to arrange a suitable date and venue.
- ii) Agreed that the Town Council should not – at this time – apply for grant funding for emergency planning / emergency refuge provision at The Guildhall until the EP group had met to consider what service/amenities could realistically and practicably be provided by the Town Council. Noted.

FC26/037

To receive reports/updates on matters pertaining to:

a) The Axminster Chamber of Commerce;

AH provided an update report on recent Chamber activity and events. Noted.

b) Plastic Free Axminster (PFA);

RO provided an update report for members as Town Council's representative on PFA. Noted.

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FC26/037

To receive reports/updates on matters pertaining to (continued):

c) Axminster Climate Action Group:

Nothing to report from JW. Noted.

d) Light Up Axminster:

MD provided an update report on fundraising activities, volunteers and out-turn from Christmas lighting event. Noted.

e) Axminster Carnival (committee).

MD provided an update report.

The committee was aware of the DCC road closure application process and deadlines for submission prior to the event in September. Noted.

FC26/038

To receive an update report from Clerk on matters pertaining to Devon Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

i) To receive report from Clerk / District Councillors / County Councillor.

The Chair proposed suspension of Standing Orders to allow Cllr Hayward to present on this subject. Seconded by the Vice-Chair. Resolved unanimously.

Presentation/report received from PH. Questions from JW re: EDDC budget adjustments. response provided by PH. Noted.

The Chair proposed resumption of Standing Orders. Seconded by the Vice-Chair. Resolved unanimously.

ii) To consider whether the Town Council wishes to create a LGR Working Party/Group. It was felt that this would not be necessary at this time. No further action to be taken.

iii) To consider whether the Town Council wishes to tentatively convene a FULL Council meeting in August to consider any matters pertaining to LGR that may arise over the summer session.

Chair felt that it would be prudent to provisionally reinstate the date for the Council meeting in August (Monday the 10th) as the Secretary of State was due to make their decision on the preferred LGR option for Devon County (Unitary) in July and, as a result, some budgetary and operational decisions may be necessary that could not wait until September's FULL meeting. Agreed by all. Clerk: Please note and action accordingly.

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FC26/039

To note the scheduled date for the Annual Parish Meeting on 2nd March 2026.

i) To consider and agree upon the theme of this parish meeting.

Themes agreed by members:

- a) Tackling ASB and disorder in the town centre; a representative of the Police to be asked to attend.
- b) Tackling loneliness and isolation in Axminster; representatives from local voluntary, charity and support groups to be invited to speak on that subject.
- c) Promoting volunteering and community events in Axminster; representatives from local voluntary, charity and support groups to be invited to speak on that subject.
- d) Potholes and highway deterioration; a representative of Devon County Council to be asked to attend.

ii) To consider and agree upon the scope (and costs) of advertising for the event.

Members felt that the usual methods of promoting the event should be repeated ie a display board on Minster Green, social media activity, website news posts, posters on noticeboards, news articles in the press, and localised town centre advertising. Costs and spending to be delegated to the Clerk within the agreed budget for advertising already approved.

iii) To consider whether a further public meeting should be held later in the year to provide information and updates to residents.

Whilst members discussed this option, no firm decision was made with members keen to re-consider as further developments, especially regarding LGR, necessitated. Noted.

Clerk: Please note and action above in conjunction with the ATC admin team members.

FC26/040

To consider whether the Town Council wishes to undertake a Councillor Skills Assessment / Training Need assessment exercise to ensure that it is fully utilising the skills, experience and expertise of its elected/co-opted membership.

This was felt by members to be a good idea, which will allow the collation of relevant data to help ensure that all relevant skills, experience and abilities were fully utilised and explored. Clerk to send a data capture form to all members, to be returned to Clerk by 9th March.

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FC26/041

To consider any revisions necessary or appropriate to the extant Committee Membership matrix.

No amendments felt necessary at this time. Noted.

It was confirmed that all members can attend all and any committee meetings, with the exception that Part Two session attendance for Employment Committee (EC) was limited to EC membership only to ensure that any Employment Appeals Committee meetings could be convened (if necessary) with a quorum and in line with the EC terms of reference.

FC26/042

To note the recent news regarding the potential closure of Charmouth Fire Station and to consider the impact of that potential closure on the Axminster Community and local First Responder Service.

The Vice-Chair spoke to this agenda item. It was recommended that all members actively engage with the consultation given the importance of the station (in Dorset) to the Axminster area (as a support service) and promote the petition and campaign within their own networks. It was also agreed that the campaign be shared on the Town Council's social media pages. Noted.

FC26/043

To consider matters pertaining to the DCC Community Road Warden Scheme and to determine whether this Town Council should be a participant in that scheme.

Update report from Clerk received and noted.

FC26/044

To note the recent announcement of funding for the 2028 UK "Town of Culture" competition and to decide whether Axminster should make a submission or application.

In light of staff resourcing challenges at the town council presently, and the proximity of Axminster to other more prominent and active towns in the area, it was felt that it would be an unwise use of time and resource for the Town Council to submit an application at this time. **Proposed by RO, seconded by JW, that no further action be taken. Resolved unanimously.**

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FC26/045

To note the ongoing EDDC (draft) Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS consultation and to decide whether a formal, corporate response/reply should be submitted by the deadline date of 27th February 2026.

After debate, it was agreed that no corporate Town Council consultation submission should be made, although Chair invited members to respond individually if they so wished. Noted.

FC26/046

To note the recent EA consultation event on The River Axe Restoration Feasibility Study (Stakeholder Participation) and to determine whether the Council wishes to submit initial comments on the options proposals contained in the draft report. *This exercise is being undertaken by Jacobs on behalf of the Environment Agency.*

Noted. No formal comment recommended.

FC26/047

To consider whether the Town Council should provide suitable and compliant IT devices for serving members to meet the requirement of Assertion 10 and to comply with sector “good practice”

There was a lengthy debate on this subject, with contributions from all members. A summary of the matters discussed can be found below:

- Data Protection and Retention.
- Benefits with accessibility and consistency and continuity.
- Training needs and challenges.
- Cost implications and lifespan / obsolescence of devices; public perception.
- Future Council planning and decision making.
- Cyberattacks and online vulnerability / hacking / malicious online activity.
- Security of devices, both in use and post-use.
- Mitigation of risk / not yet required by legislation.

As a result of the debate, the Clerk was directed to undertake more research on potential costs and specification of IT equipment required and return to Council when information available for further deliberation and decision. Noted.

As the time had reached 9pm, it was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Vice-Chair, that Standing Orders be suspended to allow the meeting to continue past the regulated 2-hour period. Resolved unanimously.

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FC26/048

To consider whether to replace the Town Flag (flown at The Guildhall and damaged in recent storm events) and (if so) to agree upon design and construction.

Clerk advised members that an anonymous donor had been in touch with the Council offices (noting the damage to the existing flag) to offer to cover the entire costs of a new replacement flag. Delegated authority was afforded to the Clerk (and Deputy Clerk) to liaise with the donor to decide upon the final design, with the new flag being no larger than 5 foot by 3 foot to prevent any recurrence of the damage caused by the recent storms.

It was proposed by SL to accept the kind donation for the cost of a replacement flag and to allow Axminster Town Council staff to liaise with the donor and agree upon a suitable design for the town flag as above. Seconded by EP. Resolved nem con.

FC26/049

To receive an update from the RFO pertaining to ongoing sale of The Old Courthouse buildings in Church Street.

Received and noted. No questions / issues raised.

FC26/050

To consider any matters considered as urgent by the presiding Chair for notation only.

- i) To receive correspondence from Honiton Town Council, and Chard Town Council, regarding forthcoming civic events.
- ii) To note correspondence from Richard Foord MP; Clerk to liaise with Mr Foord to arrange a meeting with Council members and officers, and other elected Councillors from higher tier authorities, to discuss matters pertaining to traffic and congestion.
- iii) To note the resignation of former Councillor Paul Bridge; Clerk to liaise with EDDC Electoral Services Team to initiate the Casual vacancy procedure.
- iv) To note responses from correspondents regarding the Town Council's recent communications on building condition and occupancy in the town centre area.

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FC26/051

To confirm the date of the next scheduled FULL meeting of the Town Council on Monday the 9th of March 2026, and other Council committee meeting dates.

- i) Planning Committee – 23rd February 2026 – 7.00pm
- ii) Strategy & Finance Committee – 23rd February 2026 – 7.30pm
- iii) Annual Parish Meeting – 2nd March 2026 – 7pm
- iv) Operations Committee – 23rd March 2026 – 7pm

FC26/052

Recommendation: that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act namely, the financial affairs or business affairs or employment affairs of the Town Council by virtue of the fact that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Proposed by the Vice-Chair. Seconded by the Chair. Resolved unanimously.

The meeting moved into Part Two session. All members of the public left the room.

The agenda items below are considered confidential due to the commercially sensitive subjects/topics to be discussed and the involvement of 3rd parties which would necessitate disclosure of confidential information during the discussions.

PART TWO COUNCIL BUSINESS TO BE CONDUCTED:

FC26/053 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to The Old Courthouse and correspondence received.

This matter is considered commercially sensitive due to the subject to be discussed.

Clerk provided update on progress with sale. Noted.

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FC26/054 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to The Town Cemetery buildings and associated plant, equipment and materials.

This matter is considered commercially sensitive due to the subject to be discussed.

Clerk provided an update and a revised timeline of proposed works and procurement value. Noted. Clerk also provided updated provisional costs and supplier details for upgraded security works and access enhancements at the chapel/cemetery site. Noted

With no further business to deal with, the Chair closed the meeting at 9.25pm.

Signed Date: 9th March 2026

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MINUTES APPROVED 9th March 2026; Part ONE version (redacted)
Held at The Guildhall on Monday 9th February 2026 at 7.00 p.m.**

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