MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

Held at the Guildhall, on Monday 13th  January 2020 at 7.00 p.m.

Present:

Town Mayor: Cllr. A.L. Young

Deputy Mayor: Cllr. D.J. Moore

Councillors: C.A. Doherty, Ms. J.J. Farrow,

M. Featherstone, Mrs. S.L.N. Leat , M. Mynard,

Mrs. A. G. Sedgewick, M.D.G. Spurway, J.W. Walden.

The Town Clerk (Miss H. Kirkcaldie).

In attendance: Cty./Dist. Cllr. I.L. Hall.

Over 30 Members of the public. 1 representative of the Press.

2020/0001 APOLOGIES: Cllrs. M.N. Adamson-Drage, A.E. Bourner, D.R.H. Hull, P. Wales, and Dist. Cllr. S. Jackson and Dist. Cllr. A.T. Moulding.

2020/0002 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: CLLRS. DOHERTY, FARROW, MRS. LEAT, MOORE, AND SPURWAY EACH DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE AXMINSTER GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEMS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL.

CLLR. YOUNG, IN HER CAPACITY AS GUILDHALL MANAGER FOR WHICH SHE DECLARES A PECUNIARY INTEREST, HAS A DISPENSATION TO SPEAK ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL PROVIDED THE PECUNIARY INTEREST IS NOT OF OVER-RIDING SIGNIFICANCE.

CLLR. SPURWAY DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF THE MANAGEMENT TEAM AT CLOAKHAM LAWN SPORTS CENTRE.

CLLR. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE.

CLLR. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNORS OF AXE VALLEY ACADEMY AS A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER SKATEPARK STEERING GROUP, AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND AS BEING SAFEGUARDING LEAD FOR AXMINSTER YOUTH CLUB.

2020/003 PRESENTATION OF THE ROBIN CROSS AWARD FOR CITIZEN OF THE YEAR: a joint award was made to Mrs. Lesley Frankau and Mrs. Yvonne Taylor. The Town Mayor made the presentation to Mrs. Frankau and the Deputy Mayor that to Mrs. Taylor. Both recipients were congratulated and thanked for their work with numerous groups in the community over very many years.Each recipient was presented with a floral bouquet.

MANY MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE LEFT THE MEETING FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATIONS, AT WHICH POINT 10 MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC REMAINED.

2020/0004 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 9th DECEMBER 2019: The Town Clerk pointed out that minute 2019/0492 should read Castle Street not Castle Hill. There were no other corrections. Cllr. Mynard, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, proposed that the corrected minutes be approved as an accurate record. Agreed. Cllr. Doherty, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, proposed that these be adopted as Council policy. Agreed.

2020/0005 TOWN FORUM – TOWN SIGNAGE: member of the public sought a report on the progress with replacing the town signs. He pointed out, also, that Axminster was the only town which did not have brown tourist signs at the entrances to the town and felt that this should be addressed. The Town Mayor said that discussions were on-going with the Heritage Centre as to what information should go on such signs.

2020/0006 TOWN FORUM – DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT: Cllr. Hall spoke of a meeting he had put in place to improve liaison between the police and the Town and Parish councils. This will be held on 28th February at All Saints Village Hall.

2020/0007 TOWN FORUM – PROPOSED BENCH: former Town Mayor, Mrs. S.R. Spiller, said that, after due consideration, she felt the best location for the bench which the Town Council proposed to dedicate in her honour would be outside the entrance to the Cemetery.

CLLR. YOUNG PROPOSED THAT AGENDA ITEM 13 BE BROUGHT FORWARD. AGREED.

2020/0008 LOCATIONS FOR NEW BENCHES: Cllr. Walden said that he would support the location suggested by Mrs. Spiller. His other proposed location was outside the library. The Deputy Town Clerk said that she had contacted the library service but they had declined the offer. Cllr. Young had spoken to the proprietors of The Castle Garage to see whether a space could be found there. A formal letter will be sent. The Town Clerk said that she was aware that Cllr. Hull wished to donate a seat with a plaque in honour of members of his family.

Cllr. Young proposed that Mrs. Spiller’s suggestion be approved. Cllr. Walden seconded the proposal. Agreed.

2020/0009 TOWN FORUM – VARIOUS: A member of the public suggested that the monthly police surgery at the library was very beneficial for the public. Referring to the subject of public bench provision he said that there was a need for more benches on the steep hills such as Lyme Road.

2020/0010 TOWN FORUM – SOUTH STREET: Cllr. Walden, who declared an interest as a trader in South Street, asked whether cones could be put across the end of Church Street to prevent heavy goods vehicles from turning right and parking be suspended in Church Street. The Town Clerk will contact the appropriate authorities.

2020/0011 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINTUES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH DECEMBER 2019 – 2019/0473 and 0475 RAYMONDS HILIL PLAY AREA WORKING PARTY: Cllr. Adamson-Drage had reported that it had proved difficult to find a time for members to meet. A copy of his proposed consultation letter had been circulated and enquiries will be made regarding use of a mailing service to distribute this.

2020/0012 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINTUES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH DECEMBER 2019 – 2019/0474 – USE OF CAR PARK RECEIPTS: An enquiry had been lodged but no response received to date.

2020/0013 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINTUES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH DECEMBER 2019 – 2019/0498: the contractor had attended on site but the operatives were of the opinion that the problem was more likely to lie with the flashings around the skylight. The Town Clerk had asked for the matter to be investigated further.

2020/0014 APPLICATIONS FOR CO-OPTION TO THE CASUAL VACANCY AT RAYMONDS HILL: One had been received and Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, proposed that the applicant Mr. C. Hall, be co-opted on to the Council. Agreed.

2020/0015 MATTERS OF URGENCY: none.

2020/0016 MINUTES OF PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9th DECEMBER 2019: the accuracy of the minutes having been confirmed, Cllr. Doherty, Vice-chairman of the Committee proposed, seconded by Cllr. Moore, that these be approved. Agreed. Cllr. Doherty, seconded by Cllr. Featherstone, then proposed that they be adopted as Town Council policy. Agreed.

2020/0017 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE HELD ON 9TH DECEMBER 2019: None.

2020/0018 MEETING OF RISK AND EMERGENCY PLANNING WORKING PARTY HELD ON 6TH JANUARY 2020: Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Sedgewick, proposed that the notes from this working party represented an accurate record of the meeting. Agreed.

2020/0019 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY POLICY DOCUMENT: the policy, as revised by the above working party had been circulated to members. In response to a request from the Town Clerk for any further amendments, none were raised. The Town Clerk said that the thematic Risk Register and further detailed information would be added from existing policies and the document fleshed out over the coming months.

Cllr. Young proposed that the policy be adopted. Cllr. Doherty seconded the proposal. Carried.

2020/0020 FINANCIAL MATTERS – APPROVAL OF PAYMENTS FOR DECEMBER:

CLLR. MOORE DECLARED A PECUNIARY INTEREST, AS BEING THE RECIPIENT, IN RESPECT OF A PAYMENT DATED 12TH DECEMBER 2019 FOR £16.38 AND LEFT THE CHAMBER WHILE THIS ITEM WAS DISCUSSED.

Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Mrs. Leat, proposed that the payments, as listed, be approved. Agreed.

CLLR. MOORE RETURNED TO THE CHAMBER.

2020/0021 FINANCIAL MATTERS – REPORTING OF ANY ITEMS APPROVED FOR EXPENDITURE BY TOWN MAYOR OR COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN: None.

2020/0022 FINANCIAL MATTERS - RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER’S REPORT: The Responsible Financial Officer said that she had been fine-tuning the budget in response to various comments made by Councillors. The interim internal audit report had been received and circulated. Staff would be undergoing training on the online version of the accounts package shortly. She asked for Councillors to come in and sign recent bank reconciliations. She welcomed approval of the Risk Management Strategy Policy but reminded Councillors of the need to be Risk Aware when reaching any decisions whether at full Council or at Committee level. She reminded Councillors that the grant awarding process would be changing from April to October.

2020/0023 FINANCIAL MATTERS - QUARTERLY REPORT AGAINST BUDGET: The Responsible Financial Officer said that the Old Courthouse was significantly over budget arising from the urgent need for repair works to the roof and to the floor in the Senior Citizens’ Centre. Work on emergency lights at the Guildhall had led to that cost centre being over budget. The Outdoor Team had gone over budget as a result of equipping the new member of staff. Councillors had no questions for the Responsible Financial Officer.

2020/0024 FINANCIAL MATTERS – ADJUSTMENTS TO BUDGET: Councillors suggested that this item be considered in conjunction with the next agenda item regarding precept.

2020/0025 FINANCIAL MATTERS – SETTING OF PRECEPT: The Town Clerk said that it had been suggested that the Cemetery budget be increased to allow for repairs to the tarmac paths. Cllr. Featherstone said that he had not had time to look into this matter. Other areas where increase was needed might be Guildhall Support, Risk and Environment. She said that what was important at this meeting was to set the precept but that finalization of the budget could be deferred until the next meeting to allow further work on the areas outline above.

Cllr. Walden proposed that the funding for support of the Guildhall be increased from £17,000 to £23,000 as this was a more realistic budget figure. The Responsible Financial Officer explained that the Environment Budget was to cover the cost of off-setting selection of an environmentally friendly option in preference to a non-green option. The Town Clerk said that she felt that £2000 seemed a bit light. Cllr. Walden said it sounded quite complex. Cllr Farrow felt that if the Responsible Financial Officer was able to manage the finances in this way then they trial the process in the coming year.

Cllr. Walden felt that items such as the new carpet for the Guildhall should be included in budget but funded from reserves.

The Responsible Financial Officer had circulated a table showing the effect of applying different percentage increases to the precept. Cllr. Walden proposed that an increase of 2% be made to the precept. Cllr. Young seconded the proposal. Carried. £34,616 of the budget would then be funded from reserves. This latter figure would increase should any further items be added to the budget.

2020/0026 FINANCIAL MATTERS – OPTIONS FOR RE-INVESTMENT OF BOND: Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Doherty proposed that the money arising from the surrender of the existing bond be re-invested with the same financial institution. Agreed.

2020/0027 FINANCIAL MATTERS – UPDATE ON VEHICLE ACQUISITION: Cllr. Farrow, while regretting that due to circumstances beyond the Town Council’s control the monthly lease cost for the proposed vehicle had increased by roughly £34, proposed that the new terms be accepted. Cllr. Walden seconded the proposal agreed.

2020/0028 TOWN COUNCIL POSITION REGARDING MANAGEMENT OF GUILDHALL BOOKINGS:

CLLR. YOUNG DECLARED A PECUNIARY INTEREST AS BEING GUILDHALL MANAGER AND IN A POSITION TO BE AFFECTED BY THE MATTER UNDER DISCUSSION AND LEFT THE CHAMBER AT THIS POINT.

Cllr. Moore referred to a decision taken by the Town Council prior to the elections in May to pursue a policy of taking over the management of Guildhall bookings. He sought the views of present Councillors regarding this matter and referred members to the briefing documents circulated by the Town Clerk.

Cllr. Walden felt that the option should be kept open as the Town Council had not seen any budget from the Management Committee as the money paid in support represented 10% of the Town Council’s budget.

Cllr. Leat said that Council should accept the advice it has been given. She said that the accounts for the last four years had now been received from the accountants. She pointed out that there are 8 Town Councillors on the Guildhall Management Committee because of the support from Town Council funds so that the points Cllr. Walden had raised had been addressed.

Cllr. Farrow seconded Cllr. Moore’s proposal which was carried. Cllrs. Walden and Cllr. Mynard voted against the proposal.

2020/0029 FUTURE PLANS – PROPOSED REPAIR CAFE: Cllr. Young welcomed the fact that such a café was proposed for Axminster. She said that it supported the Town Council’s environmental initiative and provided a social opportunity for all involved.

2020/0030 CORRESPONDENCE :

* 1. Letters Received.
     1. D.A.L.C. – invitation to nominate candidate for Royal Garden Party.

CLLR. MOORE PROPOSED THAT THE MAYOR BE NOMINATD. AGREED.

* + 1. D.C.C. – re land at Lea Combe

THE TOWN CLERK HAD BEEN INFORMED THAT THE LAND WAS LEASED TO DEVON AND SOMERSET FIRE SERVICE BUT THE TERMS OF THE LEASE DID NOT PERMIT SUB LETTING. SHE WAS ASKED TO MAKE THAT ORGANISATION AWARE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL’S ASPIRATIONS AND WHETHER IT WOULD BE PREPARED TO USE THE LAND TO THAT END.

* + 1. Safer Towns Initiative -re Axminster. CLLR. SEDGEWICK SAID THAT A SEED-FUNDING GRANT HAD BEEN RECEIVED AND A MEETING TO DISCUSS ITS USE WOULD BE HELD ON 28TH JANUARY. THE TOWN MAYOR WILL ATTEND.
    2. Statement from North Devon Healthcare Trust and R.D. & E.
    3. Various re arrangements for closure of South Street.
  1. Meetings
     1. Budget Road Show – meeting 5th February, 4.00 p.m. Blackdown House.
     2. L.A.G. meeting - 9th January 2020 Colyton.
     3. Opening of new Play Areas 28th January 2020 at Loretto Road (1.30 p.m.) and Foxhill (2.00 p.m.)
  2. Reports Received:
     1. L.A.G. Minutes from November.

The Deputy Mayor 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. Walden seconded the proposal. Agreed.

The meeting closed at this point as there was insufficient additional information available to progress the matters listed.

Signed ……………………………………………. Date……………………................