

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday 13th July 2020 at 7.00 p.m.
Under Regulation 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020

Present:

Town Mayor: Cllr. A.L. Young
Deputy Town Mayor: Cllr. Ms. J.J. Farrow
Councillors: M.N. Adamson-Drage, C.A. Doherty, M. Featherstone,
Mrs. S.L.N. Leat, M. Mynard, Mrs. A. G. Sedgewick
J.W. Walden

The Town Clerk (Miss H. Kirkcaldie), Deputy Town Clerk (Mrs. Z. Adamson-Drage) and
Administrative Assistant (Mrs. S. Gay).

In attendance:

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

2020/0209 APOLOGIES: Cllrs. D.J. Moore and M.D.G. Spurway and Cty./Dist. Cllr. I.H.
Hall and S. Jackson. Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Walden, proposed that the
absence of Cllr. Moore on the grounds of ill-health be approved. Agreed.

2020/0210 NOT PRESENT: Cllrs.: A.E. Bourner and Dist. Cllr. A.T. Moulding.

2020/0211 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: CLLRS. DOHERTY, FARROW AND MRS.
LEAT 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. FARROW DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER
TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND A GOVERNOR OF AXMINSTER
COMMUNITY PRIMARY ACADEMY AND AS A JOINT TENANT OF A TOWN
COUNCIL ALLOTMENT AT WOODBURY PARK ALLOTMENTS

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.

CLLR. ADAMSON-DRAGE DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING THE

SPOUSE OF THE DEPUTY-CLERK

CLLR. SEDGEWICK DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING THE SPOUSE OF THE RECTOR OF AXMINSTER

2020/0212 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8th JUNE 2020: Cllr. Farrow referred to item 2020/0196 and asked that this be corrected to read donation equivalent to the cost of putting an additional function on the Town Council web site. Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Walden, proposed that the minutes be approved for accuracy subject to that correction. Agreed. Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, proposed that the minutes be adopted as policy. Agreed.

2020/0213 FINANCIAL MATTERS – APPROVAL OF PAYMENTS FOR JUNE: Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Doherty, proposed that the revised small grants policy be adopted. Agreed.

2020/0214 FINANCIAL MATTERS – APPROVAL OF SECTION 1 OF ANNUAL ACCOUNTS – STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE: the Responsible Financial Officer took Councillors through each of the nine points on this section, setting out the reasons for the recommended response. The Town Mayor had a copy of the document to be completed as Councillors considered each statement. Councillors approved a positive response to each statement that was applicable, namely 1-8. Statement 9 is not applicable as the Council does not act as a sole Trustee for any charity. Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Mynard proposed that Section 1 be approved. Agreed.

2020/0215 FINANCIAL MATTERS – APPROVAL OF ANNUAL ACCOUNTS – SECTION 2 ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS FOR 2019/2020: the Responsible Financial Officer said that the Internal Auditor had agreed the final year end figures and the supporting paperwork explaining variances as between the year in question and the prior year would be forwarded to the external auditor. Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Mynard proposed that Section 2 be approved. Agreed.

2020/0216 FINANCIAL MATTERS – QUARTERLY PROGRESS AGAINST BUDGET: The Responsible Financial Officer said that this year was an exception because the first quarter covered the entire period of lockdown imposed as a result of COVID 19. No progress had been possible with proposed projects at the Guildhall and the allotments. Cemetery income is down as interments and memorial works have been deferred during COVID. Old Courthouse income from commercial tenants is down but this situation appears to be picking up. Tenants were being given leeway regarding payment of rents. Full first half precept had been received in April. Over all 96% of expected income had been received. Administration cost had gone down as staff were working from home. Allotment costs were only 12% of projected expenditure but there was likely to be an upturn in the next quarter as work began to pick up again. The fine weather in May, combined with the fact that more people were working on the allotments because of COVID meant that there had been a much greater than usual consumption of water, particularly at one site but the situation will be monitored in case there is a leak. Amenity expenditure was only 45% of that expected. There had been a spike in the use of electricity at the Cemetery and this will be investigated but the overall expenditure was 21% of that expected.

CLLR. YOUNG DECLARED A PECUNIARY INTEREST AS AN EMPLOYEE OF AXMINSTER GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE WHEN DISCUSSION MOVED ON TO THE GUILDHALL AND WAS MOVED INTO THE WAITING ROOM FOR THE

DURATION OF THIS DISCUSSION.

It was not known when the Guildhall would re-open but the costs paid by the Town Council on behalf of the Guildhall Management Committee exceeded £10,000 but there had been no drawdown of the amount budgeted for Guildhall support. In relation to proposed projects at the Guildhall which the Town Council wished to undertake, such as the new doors for the inner foyer, the Responsible Financial Officer said that there may be a wish to defer this until the next financial year when the situation may be clearer.

CLLR. WALDEN, SECONDED BY CLLR. FARROW, PROPOSED THAT STANDING ORDERS BE SUSPENDED TO ALLOW THE CHAIRMAN OF THE GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE TO SPEAK. AGREED.

The Chairman of the Guildhall Management Committee reported that she had just been notified that an application for a £25,000 grant had been successful. Councillors welcomed this news.

The Responsible Financial Officer said that the situation would just have to play out as the year progressed but this gave much more security.

STANDING ORDERS WERE RE-INSTATED AND CLLR YOUNG RETURNED TO THE MEETING

£2000 had been budgeted for re-decoration at the Old Courthouse and expenditure was 200% over budget. There were various options for dealing with this situation, either by playing a watching brief or by viring from another budget such as the Town Building Fund. The Town Clerk added that there would be considerable expense involved in resolving the problem of water ingress at the Arts Café. The Town Mayor said that her preference would be to consider the best course of action later in the year. Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Young, proposed that the matter be reviewed in December. Agreed. Over all, expenditure was at 66% of that expected, largely because of lack of progress with large projects. Decisions would need to be taken as to whether to defer these to future years.

2020/0217 FINANCIAL MATTERS – RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER’S REPORT: The Deputy Clerk said that she had renewed the tractor insurance with the firm which offered the most competitive terms. She was working on altering the bank mandates, arranging transfer of the final account from the previous bank to the present bank and reported receipt of the debit cards approved to facilitate on-line ordering by office staff.

2020/0218 REVIEW OF COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS: Cllr. Sedewick indicated that she wished to join the Employment Committee and the Guildhall Management Committee. Cllr. Farrow said she wished to join the Planning Committee and the Traffic Management Committee. Cllr. Young proposed that Chairmanship of the Employment Committee lie with the Deputy Mayor, ex officio. Cllr. Sedgewick seconded the proposal. Agreed.

2020/0219 PROPOSED PURCHASE OF VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGNAGE: Cllr. Adamson-Drage stated that Devon County Council had different requirements from Dorset in terms of what is permitted for speed indicator devices. He explained that his proposal was for the purchase of equipment which could be rotated round three or four sites on Chard Road, Crewkerne Road, Lyme Street/Lyme Road and Musbury Road with signage reminding drivers of the speed limit. He estimated that the cost would be in the region of £4000.

Cllr. Walden proposed that Devon County Council be approached to find out what would be

permitted and where such equipment could be located so that the full financial implications were clear. Cllr. Young seconded the proposal. Agreed.

The Town Clerk was asked to request 30 m.p.h. signs within the built up area along the Chard Road.

2020/0220 DISTRICT COUNCIL PROPOSALS FOR RE-OPENING OF TOWN

CENTRES: there was little inclination to get involved with this as it was felt to be out of date.

2020/0221 UPDATE ON AXMINSTER COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE: Cllr.

Farrow said that the services provided were winding down as the community emerged from lockdown but the providers stood ready to go into action again should it be necessary. Once it was agreed that its services were no longer needed the funds held would be split equally between the Care Service and the Foodbank.

2020/0222 LIAISON WITH BUSINESS COMMUNITY: as no Councillor was willing to take on this commitment Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Mynard, proposed that the informal discussions between the Clerk and members of Totally Locally will continue as the main avenue of communication. Agreed.

2020/0223 PROPOSED REMOVAL OF LAST TELEPHONE KIOSK IN THE TOWN

CENTRE: the Clerk had obtained information regarding the usage of this telephone. Cllr. Young proposed that the Town Clerk inform the District Council that it was the Town Council's wish that this public telephone be retained. Agreed.

2020/0224 TOWN FORUM – CLEANING OF JUBILEE FOUNTAIN: a member of the public asked that the Town Council consider having the Jubilee Fountain cleaned as well as the War Memorial. The Town Mayor said that she felt the Council should be cautious in spending money at the moment as it was not clear what effect COVID 19 might have on the financial position. This would not preclude obtaining a quote.

2020/0225 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8th JUNE 2020: the Town Clerk will circulate these.

2020/0226 MATTERS OF URGENCY – REPORTING OF CASUAL VACANCIES: the vacancies caused by the death of Cllr. Hull and the resignation of Cllr. Hall were notified formally to Council and will be reported to the Returning Officer.

2020/0227 MINUTES OF PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8th JUNE

2020: the accuracy of the minutes having been confirmed, Cllr. Mrs. Leat, Chairman of the Committee, proposed, seconded by Cllr. Doherty, that these be approved for accuracy. Agreed. Cllr. Mrs. Leat, seconded by Cllr. Walden proposed that they be adopted as Town Council policy. Agreed.

2020/0228 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE HELD ON 8th JUNE 2020: None.

2020/0229 MEETING OF EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 23RD JUNE 2020:
Cllr. Young, Chairman of the Committee, proposed, seconded by Cllr. Sedgewick, proposed that consideration of these be deferred. Agreed.

2020/0230 MINUTES OF THE BUILDINGS AND FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 29th JUNE 2020: Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Walden proposed that these be approved for accuracy. Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Waalden, then proposed that they be adopted as Town Council policy. Agreed.

2020/0231 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUILDINGS AND FINANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 29th JUNE 2020: None.

2020/0232 MINUTES OF PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 29TH JUNE 2020: the accuracy of the minutes having been confirmed, Cllr. Mrs. Leat, Chairman of the Committee, proposed, seconded by Cllr. Doherty, that these be approved. Agreed. Cllr. Mrs. Leat, seconded by Cllr. Mynard, proposed that they be adopted as Town Council policy. Agreed.

2020/0233 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE HELD ON 29th JUNE 2020: None.

2020/0234 OFFICE RE-ARRANGEMENT AND OTHER COVID RELATED MATTERS:
Following the decision to relocate the Guildhall Manager to a different office, the Town Council office staff had put forward a proposed lay-out for the office in a world where consideration had to be given to the on-going presence of COVID precautions.

Several Councillors were opposed to these proposals and the Town Mayor had put forward an alternative proposal.

Following prolonged discussion which included the need to consider long term options, Cllr. Young proposed that the office lay-out should remain as at present, subject to the provision of a Perspex screen and that the Deputy Town Clerk and the Administrative Assistant should share the space on a “hot desking” basis with the Deputy Town Clerk working from home most of the time. Cllr. Mynard seconded the proposal. Agreed. The Town Mayor will pass on details of screen providers to the Administrative Assistant.

2020/0235 CLEANING OF THE STONEMWORK OF THE WAR MEMORIAL: the Town Clerk said that cleaning of War Memorials was quite specialist work. When it had been done previously the methods used had inflicted damage on the fabric. A report had been circulated prepared by a local contractor who had considerable knowledge of this specialist field. Cllr. Adamson-Drage endorsed the credentials of the local contractor. Cllr. Farrow questioned the wisdom of spending such money at the moment. The Town Clerk said that grants might be available from the War Memorials Trust. Referring to the request for work to the Jubilee Fountain, the Town Clerk said that this was a different stone. Cllr. Mayor proposed that a decision be deferred until a response is received from the War Memorial Trust. Cllr. Adamson-Drage reminded members of the significance of the War Memorial. The Town Clerk said that Listing Building Consent would be needed also and that professional help would be needed for this.

Following further discussion, Cllr. Young proposed that it be agreed in principle that work be undertaken to clean the War Memorial. Cllr. Mynard seconded the proposal. Agreed. The Town Clerk will approach a planning consultant to submit the Listed Building Application.

2020/0236 CORRESPONDENCE: Various relating to COVID 19 or proposed road works. An invitation had been received to inspect recent works at Trinity House.

CLLR. MYNARD DECLARED A PECUNIARY INTEREST AS BEING EMPLOYED BY THE OWNER OF TRINITY HOUSE.

Cllr. Farrow 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

2020/0237 STAFFING MATTERS: None.

2020/0238 TENANCY MATTERS: In response to a letter received regarding the public garden at the Old Courthouse, Councillors made it clear that the reasons for the removal from this area of the tables, which had not been put there by the Town Council, were that it was in the control of the Town Council so the tables should not have been there anyway and that even if they had been put there by the Town Council they would have been removed to minimize the Council's responsibility for maintaining them in a hygienic condition in the light of the Government advice relating to COVID 19. A letter to that effect will be sent to tenants. Similarly, chairs not in use during the day to day business of tenants should not be stored in the garden but removed elsewhere for storage.

Cllr. Leat said that one of the tables used by the Arts Café had, historically, been the property of the Drama Club.

The Town Clerk will try to locate the inventory of items left in situ by the previous tenants as this may clarify the position regarding various items.

Cllr. Walden proposed that a letter be sent to tenants pointing out that the responsibility for what is permitted in the public garden is solely the responsibility of the Town Council. Cllr. Mynard seconded the proposal. Agreed.

2020/0239 INSURANCE MATTER: the Town Clerk reported that the Insurance Company had indicated that they would expect the Town Council's vehicles to be serviced by a third party and not by a volunteer.

A formal letter will be sent to the volunteer concerned to let him know of the advice and to thank him for his many years of assistance in this matter.

Signature Date.....