

Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday to Thursday
9am – 4pm

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

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Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Monday,
31 March 2025 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall.

Draft Minutes – not yet approved: Part One version (redacted)

Present: Cllrs Walden (JW) (Chair), Bridge (PB), Burrough (KB), Dowdeswell (MD), Farrow (JF) (Mayor), Leat (SL), Paice (EP), Price (JP) and Willey (DW).

The meeting was quorate.

Also in attendance was the Clerk to the Council, Paul Hayward and the Deputy Clerk, Sarah Jackson.

No members of the public were in attendance.

The meeting began at 7.00pm.

The Presiding Chair of the Committee, JW, welcomed all in attendance and outlined the fire precautions, exits etc. and ran through the agenda procedure and protocol, noting the agenda statements as published.

Public Forum:

As there were no members of the public present, the Chair asked if any members of the committee wished to speak in the public forum. No member wished to speak.

The Chair subsequently closed the public forum session at 7:09pm.

OC25/021

To note members of the committee present:

As detailed above.

OC25/022

To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies (and reasons for absence). (LGA 1972 S.85 (1))

Apologies were received from Cllr Hurren, Cllr Osborn and Cllr Dunsbury. These apologies were noted, along with the reasons for them.

Chair proposed that these apologies be accepted. Seconded by JP. Resolved.

OC25/023

To note members of the Committee not otherwise in attendance.

Cllr Keen and Cllr Warwick were noted as absent.

OC25/024

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.

No declarations of interest were made.

Continued Overleaf

Draft Minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 31st March 2025 (Part One version)

OC25/025

To consider and, if thought fit, approve the minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 3rd February 2025 and to consider any matters arising.

The Chair proposed approval of these minutes.

Seconded by DW. Approval of minutes was resolved unanimously.

Action: The Chair signed the approved minutes accordingly.

Matters Arising.

There were two matters arising:

- i) **Regarding agenda item OC25/011/IV/4, which pertained to capital expenditure for the acquisition of tables for the Guildhall, deferred from the Operations Committee meeting on 3 February 2025.**

The Clerk explained that the committee did not yet have the end-of-year balances available to them to facilitate consideration of the necessary capital expenditure on tables for the Guildhall. He added that this matter would be put on the agenda for the next Operations Committee.

Actions: Clerk, please add the matter of the proposed capital expenditure on tables for the Guildhall to the agenda for the June meeting of the Operations Committee.

- ii) **Conflict resolution training for staff.**

Considering recent events, JF inquired about the progress on Conflict Resolution Training for staff. The Clerk advised that this had not yet been arranged but that he would progress it as a priority.

Actions: Clerk, please arrange Conflict Resolution training for staff as a priority.

OC25/026

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.

Two matters were already tabled for Part Two consideration - agenda item OC25/036(IC) to OC25/038 (IC).
Agreed.

Operations Committee business to be considered:

OC25/027

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Cemetery:

- i) **To consider cemetery plot allocation and the programme of works for site preparation in light of the recent decision of FULL Council not to utilise the land to the northwest of the existing cemetery site for future interments.**

The committee considered the briefing report provided by the Clerk, which indicated the amount of available space remaining in the cemetery. However, historic cemetery records are unreliable, so he sought direction to appoint a ground radar service to inspect some older plots and determine if there was a reason why these had been left vacant. If more usable plots could be identified, it would provide more time to prepare the next part of the cemetery. The Clerk also reported having been in contact with the Catholic Church regarding the consecration of new plots for that particular faith group.

It was proposed by Chair that the Council delegate authority to the Clerk to appoint a ground radar service up to a value of £1,500 and to continue liaising with the Catholic Church as necessary.

Seconded by JP. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please arrange for a ground radar survey and continue liaising with the Catholic Church.

Continued Overleaf

OC25/028

To consider matters pertaining to Town Amenity and services:

- i) To consider a proposal for the replacement of defibrillator pads (adult and child) that are due to expire within the next calendar year; estimated cost: £750 plus VAT (5 devices affected).

The Committee were content with the purchase of replacement defibrillator pads and discussed whether future budgets should increase the sinking fund to cover the ongoing cost of replacement defibrillator pads and maintenance of the defibrillators and cabinets. A query was raised about whether this also covered replacement items for the bleed control kits.

It was proposed by Chair that the Council purchase the replacement defibrillator pads at the cost of £750. Seconded by DW. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please purchase the replacement pads and review the allocation for the defibrillator and bleed control kit sinking fund in future annual budget proposals.

OC25/029

To consider matters pertaining to Emergency Planning in the town.

- i) To consider proposals for the purchase and installation of an additional two secure stores for emergency access/use in a town emergency to provide public access to sandbags/salt/tools; estimated cost £2500 incl. construction (funded using unspent budget from FY24-25 and approved budget from FY25-26) – any remaining funds to cover costs of sand for sandbag filling prior to the emergency need.

The Council discussed the increasing need for emergency provisions to support residents in the event of an unexpected weather event. Councillors acknowledged that some residents do not have access to a vehicle, so making these resources available at multiple locations around the town was sensible. One location had already been identified at the entrance to North Street allotments, but some suggestions of possible locations for the second store were discussed.

It was proposed by Chair that the council allocate £2,500 for two new emergency stores. Seconded by KB. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please liaise with any necessary third parties to identify suitable locations for the second emergency store and bring these to the Council for consideration. Please also set aside £2,500 for the purchase and installation of the emergency store once the locations have been chosen.

OC25/030

To consider matters pertaining to the Guildhall building and venue.

- i) To consider a suggestion from a member of Council for the purchase and installation of a “hearing loop” within the Guildhall venue as an amenity for patrons with hearing impairments.

JP highlighted that numerous other venues offer this facility, and not only would it provide a benefit to those with hearing impairments who want to attend council meetings, but it would also enable them to enjoy other events held at the Guildhall, too. He added that he had been approached by members of the public in the past whilst volunteering to ask if this facility was available.

Actions: Clerk, please explore the options and costs available and bring this item back to the committee at a future meeting for further consideration.

OC25/031

To consider matters pertaining to allotment amenity/provision in the town.

- i) To consider matters pertaining to proposed alterations to the extant allotment regulations.
This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Operations Committee.
- ii) To consider matters pertaining to the Town Council’s “waiting list” policy.
This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Operations Committee.

Continued overleaf

OC25/032

To consider matters pertaining to P3 / Footpaths, etc.

i) To consider a proposal for improvements to pedestrian access/amenities on FP82 (Latches Walk).

Councillors considered the proposals but felt that installing a ramp adjacent to the steps would be unsafe, particularly for those with wheelchairs or buggies, due to the gradient. It was also highlighted that the ramp could easily become very slippery when wet or icy. It was felt that the proposal should not be progressed.

Actions: Clerk, please communicate the Council's position to the member of the public.

ii) To consider a request from Clerk for capital expenditure spend on a suitable Compaction device for the preparation and finishing of hard-standing path surfaces as part of Town Council's P3 works; estimated capital spend (to be funded by P3 grant/reserve) £315 plus VAT [hire costs £41-50 per day].

Council heard how the grounds maintenance operatives are now competent to use a compaction device and that there are now more jobs in the pipeline that require such equipment. It was felt that this equipment would provide good value for money in the long term.

It was proposed by Chair that the Council purchase a suitable compaction device for £315 plus VAT. Seconded by DW. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please proceed with purchasing the compaction equipment.

OC25/033

Chair's Announcements / Matters of Urgency for discussion only to be noted:

There was 1 matter of urgency pertaining to S106 money for community art projects on Cloakham Lawns estate.

The Clerk briefed the council that the Axminster Skatepark (CIO) had contacted EDDC with proposals for a sound-based project to find out if it qualified under the terms and conditions of the S106 agreement. The Clerk also highlighted that any qualifying project must involve school children and that former Cllr Bull had started to explore another scheme with the schools prior to her resignation. The Clerk asked if the Council wanted to appoint someone new to continue with this project. KB offered to progress it, but it was felt that it should be considered by the whole Council in the first instance.

Actions: Clerk, please bring this matter to the next Full Council meeting for consideration.

OC25/034

Date of next scheduled meeting for the Committee; 23rd June 2025 – 7pm (Guildhall).

Future committee meetings: See the 2025 meeting calendar.

OC25/035

JP 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) should 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 Chair. Resolved unanimously.

Continued overleaf

Matters to be considered in committee session (Part Two)

The items of business listed below and any others from this agenda to be agreed upon by members of the Committee if and when appropriate (see OC25/026).

OC25/036 (IC)

To consider a matter pertaining to The Old Courthouse complex:

This matter is deemed confidential as it pertains to confidential tenancy agreements.

A confidential & commercially sensitive matter was discussed after members had received a report in Part Two from the Clerk.

A proposal to proceed with relevant actions was put forward by Chair, with an associated spend value of £750. Clerk was to be afforded delegated powers to take these actions forward and report back to Operations Committee or the FULL Council as appropriate.

Seconded by DW. Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please progress this matter and action accordingly as above.

OC25/37 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to the site management and habitat control of Axminster Town Council-owned land.

This matter is deemed confidential as it pertains to 3rd party tenancy agreements.

Consideration was given to the previous resolution not to use Glyphosate, the environmental impact of its use, the methods and training requirements for staff to safely use herbicides and the practicalities of weed control in certain areas, particularly those where hand-weeding is not sufficient, damaging to other assets, or where invasive plants such as bamboo are present.

It was proposed by Chair that the Council first explore the effectiveness of weed-control methods, including non-glyphosate-based herbicides, for the areas of key concern. Seconded by KB, Resolved unanimously.

Actions: Clerk, please explore non-glyphosate weed control methods, including alternative herbicides, and return with those findings to the committee for further consideration.

OC25/038 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to Network and A/V service contracts at The Guildhall.

This matter is deemed confidential as it pertains to commercial service agreements.

This item was deferred to a later meeting of the Operations Committee if necessary.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 19:40 hrs.

Signed Date:.....

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