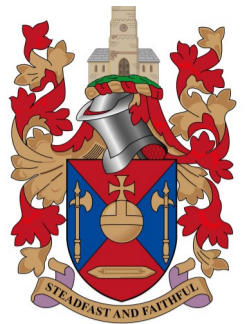


# Your Town Your Council

Axminster Town Council Newsletter

Issue 4 March 2024



## FRUIT TREES FOR THE FUTURE

The beauty of an orchard is obvious, especially in the Spring when the blossom heralds the Summer, and hints at delicious fruit to come. An orchard is also a haven for wildlife, providing shade and extending habitats for birds, mammals and invertebrates.

Orchards help combat climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide, providing delicious produce and enabling us to keep old varieties of apples from being lost. Our orchard fruit will be free for everybody. No need to ask, just pick when ripe and enjoy!

The Town Council has a small fund allocated for tree planting. In October, we bought 40 mixed fruit trees and the Axminster Climate Action Group recruited a fantastic team of orchard volunteers to care for the trees over many years to come.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2023 was one of the coldest days of the year but over 20 people, including councillors, council staff and Axminster residents, turned out to plant the newly acquired saplings under the expert guidance of Mike Davis, our Honorary Tree Warden. In a few hours, Axminster had its new community orchard and in three years we will all be able to share in the bounty.

If you'd like to offer an hour a month on a Saturday morning to help maintain the orchard, or to be part of our community orchard steering group, please contact:

[cllr.bsteadman@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.bsteadman@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk)



## Don't forget to register to vote!

Make your voice heard in upcoming elections! With Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May and a General Election later this year, registering to vote is crucial. Register online at: [www.gov.uk/register tovote](http://www.gov.uk/register tovote) or contact East Devon District Council on 01395 571529 for more information and to ensure that you are on the electoral roll. Remember, photo ID rules apply, so be prepared. Your vote matters in shaping our community's future. Don't miss out on this opportunity to influence important decisions.

## Reducing Carbon & Cutting Costs.

Utilising grant funding from East Devon District Council, we have installed solar panels on the Guildhall to reduce running costs and lower our carbon footprint.

Now, more than ever, escalating energy supply charges mean that the costs of heating and lighting a large building are considerable. This is especially true for old properties like the Guildhall.

With this in mind, last year Axminster Town Council took the initiative to apply to East Devon District Council for a grant from their Culture Leisure and

Tourism Fund to install a commercial solar panel array and battery storage system at the Guildhall. Thankfully, our application was successful and we were awarded £20,000 towards the costs of this exciting project.

Axminster Town Council contributed the balance of around £5,000 from our Eco-Fund (this money was awarded to the town by levies from a solar farm development nearly 10 years ago). The new system was commissioned in Autumn and installed in December of last year.

The solar panels produce free energy from the sun, and store any surplus within the batteries for use at a later time. This saves considerable amounts of money and will make the venue more financially secure in the years to come. It also reduces the demand upon town taxpayers who support this important community building, which not only hosts some fantastic events, but provides a low cost venue for numerous community groups and charitable initiatives.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the system will dramatically lower the Guildhall's carbon footprint and save up to 5 tonnes of CO2 each year. We are now actively looking for additional grant funding to extend the project to upgrade the heating, and even cooling, of the building. This will further reduce our reliance on fossil fuels to regulate the temperature in the hall.



## Grow Your Own. Allotments available!

Calling all green-fingered residents! Ever fancied growing your own fruit and veg, but don't have the space at home?

We have allotment plots available at Woodbury Park and very short waiting lists for Millwey Rise and North Street allotments. To find out more; email, call, or pop in to see us at The Council Office in the Guildhall.

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Understanding your Council Tax 2024–2025



Town Mayor, Cllr Jill Farrow

Message from the Mayor

Axminster Town Council held its Annual Parish Meeting on 4 March, earlier than usual so that we could explain the Budget and Precept Statement for the next financial year. There were fascinating presentations from EDDC and the Environment Agency on flooding issues and emergency planning, both emphasising the need for community involvement.

We were sad to lose Sarah Birnie and Becky Lippett as Councillors but delighted to welcome Wayne Hurren and Jenny Bull. It's very affirming to have strong candidates for co-option. Being a Town Councillor can be quite hard work for a voluntary role, and it's great to have diverse views and opinions shared by people with very different backgrounds and life experiences.

There is much to be proud of in this town. May I take this opportunity to recommend [whatsinaxminster.co.uk](http://whatsinaxminster.co.uk), a new web page aiming to showcase every business, community group and event in the town, for the benefit of locals and visitors.

There is also much to look forward to. Gate To Plate, for example, returns for its second year, this time on 27 May, closely followed by the "D-Day 80" Celebration on Minster Green on 8 June. As is tradition, the Raising of the Glove on 20 June marks the start of the week-long Cherry Fayre and the Axe Vale Show returns to the Axminster showground from 22 to 23 June.

I said at the Annual Parish Meeting that I was proud of the hard work of all Town Council staff. That's worth repeating to a wider audience here. They all go above and beyond what they are paid to do in support of town residents. And I repeat my thanks to those members of the public who attend Council meetings. Their support and comments are greatly valued.

Clerk's Corner – Your Council Tax Explained

Council Tax pays for all manner of essential public services, but how is it calculated, where does your money go, and how is it used each year?



Paul, the Town Clerk

All Councils in the UK are operating under a challenging set of budgetary rules, with increasing costs and a rising demand for services. In addition, the smaller local authorities (essentially, the town and parish councils) are having to provide services and facilities that used to be delivered by the higher tier authorities, such as East Devon District Council and Devon County Council, both of whom are facing even more severe budgetary constraints laid down by central government.

The Town Council is almost entirely reliant on what we refer to as the Council Tax "precept" – our small share of the overall Council Tax bill that every household receives around this time each year. The pie chart opposite shows the situation clearly. Of every £1 that you pay in Council Tax (whatever band your property falls into), just 6p is received by the Town Council to deliver all of the services and amenities shown below, and many, many more.

The lion's share of the annual bill gets paid over to Devon County Council (71%) and then the Fire and Police Service collectively get just under 16%, with EDDC being allocated the remaining 7%. So, you can see that what the Town Council asks you for is a tiny part of your entire bill – 6%.

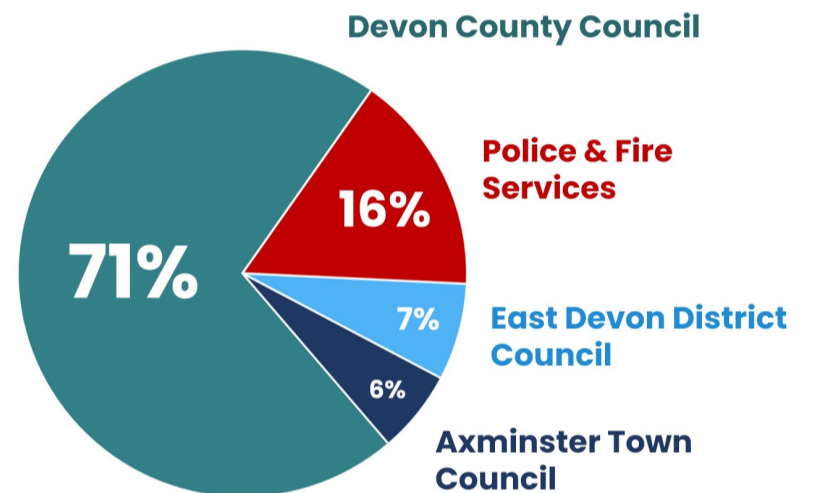
For a typical Band D property, that 6% costs you forty-two pence per day (or the equivalent of half a four-finger KitKat) but 7 out of every 10 properties in the town are in Band C or below, and so they will pay less than this. Below are just some of the services and amenities Axminster Town Council provides for that 42p per day (depending on your property banding)

Unlike many other East Devon towns, Axminster Town Council owns several key heritage assets such as The Guildhall, the Old Courthouse Complex and the Town Cemetery and whilst these amenities add to the range of services we offer residents, they do come at a price, both in terms of their maintenance and their day-to-day operation & governance.

Ever changing legislation, risk management, licensing compliance and visitor safety regulations means that significant investment in these assets is inevitable and unavoidable. The Town Council has to take a long-term approach to such expenditure, looking ahead 5-10 years, but faces budgetary pressures, both inflationary and regulatory, here-and-now.

In the future, additional housing development in the town may come forward and this would reduce taxes for the existing residents by spreading the precept burden over a wider pool of taxpayers. But those new residents will also want first-class amenities and so the financial pressures upon this Council will remain constant; this is the challenge that Councillors face when deciding their budget each year.

Your Council Tax Bill % Breakdown



Just a few things Axminster Town Council does.



36 publicly accessible meetings



4,500+ enquiries each year



Maintains 11 life-saving AEDs

1 Guildhall hosting 861 events



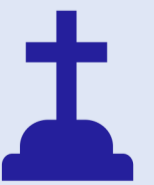
Help maintain 37.8km of public footpaths



4 bus shelters & 60+ public benches



1 cemetery with 8,000+ graves



1 community orchard with 40 fruit trees



Provides 3 public green spaces



Manages 3 allotment sites hosting 120+ plots



Town centre CCTV for your safety

Current affairs

**Hayley Widger is recognised as the Robin Cross Citizen of the Year 2024**



Each year, Axminster Town Council recognises one of our community champions in memory of the late Robin Cross, who demonstrated unwavering commitment and service to Axminster as a Police Special Constable among other roles.

On 8<sup>th</sup> January, Axminster Town Council proudly announced Hayley Widger as the 2024 Citizen of the Year and we were delighted that Lin Cross was able to join us to see the presentation of the award that bears her late husband's name.

Upon receiving the award, Hayley expressed her gratitude, saying,

*"I am incredibly grateful to be the 2024 recipient of the Robin Cross Award. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who nominated me and Axminster Town Council for sponsoring the award".*

Hayley's commitment to community service has been exceptional, making her a standout candidate. As part of the award, a £100 donation is given to a charity of the recipient's choice. Hayley has selected Seaton Hospice at Home as the beneficiary.

**The Axminster Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Update**

We are making a Neighbourhood Plan to give us some say in the future development of Axminster and its surrounding villages. Without a plan, we have less influence over how the planning authority allocate housing growth and the accompanying infrastructure. The steering group writing the Neighbourhood Plan is made up of both residents and councillors.

The Plan has moved forward since the last update. Thanks go out to residents who completed the Draft Policies Consultation. We had around 140 responses which was less than our previous survey, but still gave useful feedback for us to be able to adjust the policies to more accurately reflect the concerns of residents.

We are now working on the final draft of the Plan, and getting ready to send it to East Devon District Council for their feedback before we are ready to submit it for assessment.



You can view the current draft, along with our updates, on the dedicated Neighbourhood Plan page of the Town Council website.

**Lights, Camera, Action!**

Will Axminster ever have a cinema again? We are working on bringing the magic of the movies back into the heart of Axminster!

For a number of years, a group of keen movie-goers and film enthusiasts have been looking at ways to bring a cinema back to our town. Those who have lived here all their lives may well remember when the Guildhall (and maybe even The Regency) was filled with excited audiences, watching their idols on the silver screen.

Thanks to the fundraising efforts of our staff, and the incredible generosity of several community-spirited residents, we are on the cusp of launching our very own Guildhall Film Society – a community cinema for all to enjoy, both in the daytime, and in the evenings.

We are waiting for a break in the hall's busy schedule to install the new equipment, but soon you will be able to grab some popcorn and settle back for some fantastic movie magic!



**The Great Outdoors**

**A warmer welcome to train travellers**

In the past, the area next to the train station was cared for by some enthusiastic volunteers. Unfortunately, at some point, despite their best efforts, caring for this site become too much and it had become overgrown with brambles. That had a negative impact on biodiversity but also resulted in an increase of antisocial behaviour.

This area is the first thing visitors see when arriving in Axminster by train or bus and, for many years, the Council has had ambitions to improve this small wedge of land. This Spring, we have undertaken some works including the removal of some (not all) of the bramble as well as some dead and diseased Cherry trees which had become a risk to passers-by. We will improve the site in the future with new amenities, planting to encourage richer biodiversity, reducing antisocial behaviour and creating a warm welcome to those arriving by public transport.

**Trees, and a word of thanks**

A sincere thanks to Higgler Coffee for replacing the Jubilee Field Lime tree that was snapped earlier this year and to an anonymous member of the public who kindly replaced three of the four newly planted orchard trees which were vandalised shortly after planting. A true demonstration of community spirit!

**Hearing our concerns about flooding**

Following the recent extreme rainfall, some residents contacted the Council about the impact flooding in the area has had on them. The Council invited Chris Khan from the Environment Agency to come and present to the public about flooding in the River Axe catchment area at the Annual Parish Meeting. David Whelan from EDDC also attended to talk about how communities can develop an emergency plan.

Emergency plans are owned by the community, rather than by the Council, but the Town Council has initiated the process for developing a plan and would like to invite residents, particularly those frequently affected by flooding, to get involved. Please contact us if you would like to participate.

**Bikes, Boots and Hooves**

We look after around 38km of public rights of way, bridlepaths and cycle ways in collaboration with Devon County Council and help from a great many land-owners across the parish.

We do all we can to keep the routes traversable, prioritising the most travelled routes, but we cannot be everywhere at once, so we are grateful to those of you who highlight when a footpath needs attention. If you are a keen walker, who would like to help us with this, and explore some new walking routes in the process, please get in touch!

**Welcome to Axminster!**

A "heartwarming" refresh has been given to our town's welcome signage with four new signs.

The illustration featured in the design depicts the Minster Church, our most recognisable physical feature, surrounded by a heart shape. This heart represents our town's community spirit, echoes the shape of our town centre on a map, and comprises two blue lines that symbolise the Yarty and Axe rivers, which converge within our parish.

In our commitment to inclusivity, we are replacing the outdated directional fingerpost signs from the late 1990s with new, dementia-friendly ones. The new signs, along with our town map, will help everyone navigate our streets with ease. As our town evolves, these upgrades reflect our dedication to both preserving our heritage and embracing the future.



**Back by popular demand!**

2023 saw the first ever Axminster Gate To Plate event on the Minster Green. Over 7,000 visitors ate, drank, shopped and enjoyed our famous town hospitality. We thank East Devon District Council for funding the first annual Axminster Gate To Plate event.

In 2024, we are delighted to be co-sponsoring another free-to-attend culinary extravaganza in the heart of our town with EDDC. Last October, we were very lucky to have glorious sunshine, but this year the event will take place in May which we hope will be just as lovely.

So, please join us on **Bank Holiday Monday, May 27<sup>th</sup>** for a festival of food, fun and friendship.



LOCAL FOOD AND DRINK

**Easter Holiday Colouring Activity!**

Pop in to the Council office, pick up one of our colouring-in sheets and show us how you would decorate your welcome signage. Send it back to us to see it on display at the Guildhall and be in with the chance of winning some lovely colouring-in supplies.



Dates for your diary

Headline acts at Axminster Guildhall this summer

These event listings were true at the time of publication but are subject to change. Visit the website for the full and up to date listings including our community groups and classes.

If you would like to contact the Guildhall for more details about anything, including volunteering, booking tickets, or to find out more about hiring the Guildhall for a private function, class or ticketed event, please contact the Guildhall Manager, Leigh:

-  [www.axminster-guildhall.co.uk](http://www.axminster-guildhall.co.uk)
-  [facebook.com/theaxminsterguildhall](https://facebook.com/theaxminsterguildhall)
-  [info@axminster-guildhall.co.uk](mailto:info@axminster-guildhall.co.uk)
-  **01297 333 33** (enquiries)
-  **0333 666 33 66** (tickets)

Scan this QR code to sign up 



**March**

- 29** Kiss the Teacher ABBA tribute - music
- 30** RWS Wrestling - entertainment

**April**

- 06** Peter Kay Tribute - comedy
- 12** Hal Cruttenden - comedy

**May**

- 05** Absolutely Dragulous - entertainment
- 12** Tommy Blaize - music
- 15** Johnny Rotten - spoken word
- 31** Giant Giggle at the Guildhall - comedy

**June**

- 06** Forbidden Nights - entertainment
- 09** Seriously Collins - music tribute
- 14** Burnt Out Wreck - music
- 23** Michael Jordan's Magic and Marvels

**July**

- 19** Cheesy Bingo - entertainment
- 20** Wrong Jovi - music tribute

Council meetings coming up

You can find the latest Full Council agenda on the noticeboards at Millwey Rise, Woodbury Park, Raymonds Hill and the Guildhall. You can also find these on our website, along with the agendas for our smaller committee meetings.

All meetings start at 7pm in the main hall at the Guildhall, unless stated otherwise. Members of the public are invited to speak at the start of the meeting in public forum, but are most welcome to stay for the duration of the meeting.

**April**

- 08** Operations Committee
- 29** Strategy & Finance Committee

**May**

- 13** Annual Meeting of the Council

**June**

- 10** Operations Committee
- 24** Strategy & Finance Committee

**July**

- 08** Full Town Council

Please note, the date and time of meetings is subject to change. Please check our website or call our office for confirmation or to let us know if you would like to speak in public forum.

Want to speak to someone from Axminster Town Council?

We run a Town Council surgery most Thursdays from the Community Waffle House where you can chat to one of the Town Councillors about your concerns. Alternatively you are welcome to visit the Town Council office at the Guildhall.

Contacting "The Council"

Stick me on your fridge!

To help you reach the right Council, we have included contact details for Devon County Council and East Devon District Council as well as our own.

If you are unsure about which of the three you need, please feel free to call us or visit our office at the Guildhall and we will be happy to advise.

If you have any questions, concerns or suggestions for us, please get in touch.

**Axminster Town Council**

**Office Address**

The Guildhall  
West Street  
Axminster  
EX13 5NX

**Opening Hours**

Monday - Thursday, 9AM - 4PM

**By Phone**

01297 32088

**By Email**

enquiries@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk

**Website**

axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk

**East Devon District Council**

**Office Address**

Blackdown House  
Heathpark Industrial Estate  
Honiton  
EX14 1EJ

**Mobile App**

Search for East Devon District Council in your mobile App Store

**By Phone**

01404 515 616

**Website**

eastdevon.gov.uk

**Devon County Council**

**Office Address**

County Hall  
Topsham Road  
Exeter  
EX2 4QD

**Customer Service Line Hours**

Monday - Friday, 8AM - 5PM

**By Phone**

0345 155 1015

**By Email**

customer@devon.gov.uk

**Website**

devon.gov.uk