

AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY, 2nd NOVEMBER 2021 AT 7.00 P.M. AT AXMINSTER GUILDHALL

1. PRESENT: Cllr. Walden (Chairman), Cllr. M.D.G. Spurway (Vice-chairman) Cllr. Farrow, Cllr. A.G. Sedgewick, Cllr. C.W.C Hall, the Town Clerk and the Administrative Assistant.

Also in attendance Cllr. S. Brooker and Cllr. E. Paice, Cty./Dist. Cllr. I.L. Hall and Dist. Cllr. S.L. Jackson. Cllrs. Doherty and Holt had signified that they were not able to be in attendance.

23 Members of the public, 0 representative of the press.

2. APOLOGIES: Cllr. M. Mynard and Cllr. Holt.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

CLLRS. FARROW, LEAT AND MRS. SEDGEWICK AND SPURWAY EACH DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE AXMINSTER GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEMS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL.

COUNCILLORS FARROW, SEDGEWICK AND WALDEN EACH DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP

CLLR. FARROW DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND A GOVERNOR OF AXMINSTER COMMUNITY PRIMARY ACADEMY, A MEMBER OF THE LABOUR PARTY, THE NATIONAL TRUST AND THE CO-OP, A FRIEND OF FERNE ANIMAL SANCTUARY, A VOLUNTEER COLLECTOR FOR DEVON AIR AMBULANCE TRUST AND AS A JOINT TENANT OF A TOWN COUNCIL ALLOTMENT AT WOODBURY PARK ALLOTMENTS.

CLLR. HALL DECLARED A PECUNIARY INTEREST AS BEING AN EMPLOYEE OF DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL IN ALL SITUATIONS WHEN REFERENCE IS MADE TO THIS BODY BUT IT WAS AGREED THAT HE SHOULD REMAIN IN THE CHAMBER. HE DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING A TRUSTEE OF ARC MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY.

CLLR. SEDGEWICK DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING LIAISON COUNCILLOR ON AXE VALLEY LOCAL ACTION GROUP

CLLR. SPURWAY DECLARED AN INTEREST, A MEMBER OF CO-OP FOOD GROUP, AND OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS.

CLLR. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNORS OF AXE VALLEY ACADEMY, AS A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER SKATEPARK STEERING GROUP, AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION, LIAISON COUNCILLOR WITH AXMINSTER JOB CLUB, A MEMBER OF THE LABOUR PARTY, COMMUNITY UNION, NATIONAL TRUST AND AS BEING SAFEGUARDING LEAD FOR AXMINSTER YOUTH CLUB.

4. PUBLIC FORUM: Members of the public made the following observations/requests in the aftermath of widespread local damage caused by torrential overnight rain on 20th/21st October and similarly heavy rain on the evening of 27th October:

- a. Gravel Trap on Millbrook at North Street – who is responsible for maintenance and how often is it being cleared to prevent gravel accumulating to depths then make overtopping of the stream more likely.
- b. Culvert from Foxhill to Purzebrook – who is responsible for inspecting and clearing the grid put in in 2012 to prevent logs blocking the culvert.
- c. Residents who do not subscribe to social media or are not conversant with use of the internet need to have access to more traditional ways of being able to contact the authorities.

- d. That the water did not seem able to access some areas which were intended to alleviate build-up of flood water.
- e. Not all the discharge outlets from the culvert under Willhayes lane appeared to be working.
- f. The need to upgrade the drain near the collapsed wall near Combe Close.
- g. The course of the Millbrook has altered since the construction of the houses at Flaxmeadow and Cloakham.
- h. The need for a disaster fund to support affected residents.

In response to the points made above, Cty./Dist. Cllr. Hall said that:

- i. The rainfall had been more intense than in 2012 when there had been severe summer floods and fewer houses had been badly flooded as a result of measures put in place in response to those floods.
- j. Affected residents should contact Cty. Cllr. Hall via email so that he gets a complete picture of those affected and how and he will pass these details on to the other relevant authorities so that a complete picture of what happened can be gained. He stressed that all evidence was vital.
- k. The Millbrook had burst its banks upstream from any developments at Flaxmeadow or Cloakham.
- l. All responsible bodies e.g. Local Authorities and Environment Agency were gathering evidence as to the impact of the floods so that a co-ordinated inquiry into how future response could be directed could be conducted.

5. TOWN COUNCIL RESPONSE TO FLOODING EVENT: The Town Mayor thanked Cllr. Walden for the report he had prepared. She looked forward to discussing future plans based on what the Town Council had learned from the recent events. The view was expressed that a member of the office staff should have been on duty to respond to any telephone calls into the office. There needed to be some way of identifying those who were most vulnerable, both in general terms of being flooded but also least able to cope and/or not users of social media/internet by which much information is now disseminated. The locum Deputy Clerk will be asked to investigate locations around the town where sandbags could be stored. Cllr. Hall asked that an early meeting of the Resilience Committee be called. The Mayor cautioned that care was needed about managing public expectations. An Emergency Planning Working Party will be convened to which all Councillors will be invited.

6. APPOINTMENT OF SNOW WARDEN: this was deferred to the meeting of the full Town Council on 8th November.

7. MATTERS AND ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING:

8. UPDATE ON SECTION 106 PROJECTS:

- a. Raymonds Hill Play Area – the public planning consultation process was now under way.
- b. Skatepark – Councillors enquired whether the District Council had budgeted for this project to be undertaken in the coming financial year. Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Walden, proposed that Standing Orders be suspended to enable Dist. Cllr. Jackson to speak. Agreed. Dist. Cllr. Jackson said that capital allocations can be spent only on District Council assets and as the land transfer from Cloakham Lawns to the District Council had not yet been completed this had not been done but she had spoken to the relevant finance officer. The Mayor asked that Dist. Cllr. Jackson impress upon all those at the District Council that this matter needed to be pushed as a matter of urgency to avoid the risk of losing the Section 106 funding.
- c. Fun Trail – this will be put in place as part of the refurbishment of the Millway Rise Play Area.

9. UPDATE ON VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGNAGE: The Town Clerk said that she had been advised that the equipment would be delivered within the next five to six weeks.

10. UPDATE ON TOWN SIGNAGE: Cllrs. Walden had been unable to progress this because of pressure of work over the past month and will report as soon as possible.

11. UPDATE ON JUBILEE FIELD:

CLLR. SPURWAY DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING RESIDENT IN AN ADJACENT PROPERTY BUT IT WAS FELT THAT THIS INTEREST WAS NOT PECUNIARY BUT ONLY PERSONAL ON THIS OCCASION SO HE REMAINED IN THE CHAMBER.

Following discussion, it was agreed that discussion of the proposals for “dog” and “no dog” areas be placed on the Town Council agenda for 8th November when Cllr. Holt would be there to explain his proposals.

Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Walden, proposed that Standing Orders be suspended to allow Dist. Cllr. Jackson to give an update on progress with the hand over of this field to the Town Council. Agreed. Dist. Cllr. Jackson said that the Heads of Terms had been agreed. The Town Clerk will contact the Town Council’s solicitor to find out whether they have had any contact from the District Council.

12. PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY:

- a. Update on FP 69 – there had been no change in the situation regarding the problems in getting a contractor to quote for the works needed.
- b. Maintenance – the Town Clerk said she would continue to rely on Councillors to identify any problems with vegetation impeding the “urban” footpaths.

13. STREET FURNITURE – ITEMS ADJACENT TO PUFFIN CROSS IN TRINITY SQUARE: in response to a request from Devon County Council the planter which was obstructing their access to service this equipment had been repositioned. Cllr. Walden was concerned that the flower seller was encroaching onto and obstructing the pavement outside River Cottage and the sweet shop.

14. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS: the Town Clerk said that the contractor would be working on the lights in line with the quote approved.

15. ARRANGEMENTS FOR HYBRID MEETINGS: three options were discussed, using zoom, using zoom and social media and using zoom, social media and live-streaming. It was agreed that a paragraph on each of the options should be prepared for consideration at the next meeting.

16. DEFIBRILLATOR PROVISION IN AXMINSTER: the outdoor bowls club’s surface having been rendered unusable as a result of the recent flooding, Cllr. Hall, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, proposed that the defibrillator earmarked for that location be deployed to either of the police/fire station or the railway station, subject to permissions being obtained, rather than sitting unused in the office. Agreed.

17.

- a. General Maintenance – the stone pillar by the pedestrian gate needs attention as a matter of urgency as the masonry is cracked. Arrangements for the cutting of the grass are working well.
- b. Vandalism and other Problems – a letter had been received from a member of the public expressing concerns about the adverse effect on those visiting the cemetery of the debris being tipped over garden fences from houses adjoining the top of the Cemetery. The letter had referred also to instances of items placed on graves being damaged, stolen or displaced. The handyman had reported frequent finding of golf balls and had concerns about possible injury to those who were visiting the Cemetery. He noted that there had been an increase in use of the cemetery as a dog walking area and that the dogs were not being kept on leads and owners were not clearing up after them. Cllr. Walden suggested that a notice requesting that dogs be kept on leads be put on the gate Cllrs. Walden and Hall undertook to investigate these matters further. The Town Clerk will make the local Neighbourhood Policing Team aware of the concerns.

18. MATTERS PERTAINING TO THE ALLOTMENTS:

- a. Visibility Splay at Lower Gate at Woodbury Lane – Cllr. Walden said that the hedge would be lowered as and when time permitted.
- b. Tree Matters – comparative quotes will be obtained from local tree surgeons for the work detailed in the report from the tree surveyor.
- c. Gate at North Street – representations will be made to Western Power Distribution requesting that they return to site to make good the trench they backfilled following the incident at the gate. It was suggested that the gate be moved further into the allotments to get it away from the cable area and that a contractor be employed to do the work and to check with the contractor regarding cable positions before work was commenced.
- d. Poultry Welfare Arrangements – a response had been received from the local veterinary practice seeking more detailed information regarding the Town Council's requirements. A further response is awaited following supply of the information requested.
- e. Allotment Rent Collection and Tenants' meeting – the Administrative Assistant said that the rents were beginning to come in. Some tenants were giving up which would enable those on the waiting lists to be allocated plots. Cllr. Walden reported that the two main items raised by tenants were the need for improved water supplies at North Street and Millwey and a strong sense of frustration that they were being prevented from having bonfires.
- f. Allotment Regulations – the Administrative Assistant said that these needed to be overhauled and it would be easier to start again from scratch.
- g. Allotment Rent for 2022-2023 – Cllr. Farrow declared a pecuniary interest as being the partner of an allotment holder and left the chamber for this item. Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Hall, proposed that the rent for a half plot be set at £26, for a full plot £44 and for a large plot £48. Agreed. In response to a question, Cllr. Walden explained the rent was set at a level which, averaged out, would cover the running costs of the allotments, setting aside special projects.

19. MATTERS PERTAINING TO BUILDING REPAIRS:

- a. Guildhall - remedial electrical work had just been done. Major works forthcoming included the redecoration. Items highlighted in the Health and Safety Audit will be addressed.
- b. Old Courthouse – the central heating will be switched on again at a background level. The gate will revert to being locked at 16.00 hours at weekends once the clocks go back and tenants will be reminded that if they are the last people out then they will be responsible for locking them. Works on the Arts Café are progressing. A completion date of 13th December had been given and the tenants had been so advised.
- c. Cemetery Chapels – a check will be made on the Cemetery chapel roof to see whether any tiles had come off during the storm.

20. HEALTH AND SAFETY: the management of the cutting of the grass at the North Street Junction with Old North Street had been reviewed following recent incidents when cars had been damaged.

21. HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE: the rewording had yet to be done but will be done by the next meeting. A meeting for the committee will be arranged.

22. MATTERS OF URGENCY: None.

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. Spurway seconded the proposal. Agreed.

23 SALE OF TRACTOR: Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, proposed that an offer to purchase the smaller of the two tractors for the sum of £6000 be accepted. Agreed.

25 REMEDIAL WORKS TO CHRISTMAS LIGHTS ON MINSTER GREEN TREES: Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Walden proposed that the quote to undertake this work for the sum of £465 be accepted. Agreed.

26 PLANTING ADVICE FOR JUBILEE FIELD: Councillors rejected a quote to give advice as arrangements had been made already with the District Council.

27 CEMETERY MATTER: following discussion of a comment received regarding what was felt to be encroachment of a stone from one grave area to an adjoining grave area, measurements had been taken and the stone in question was within the size specified by the regulations. The Administrative Assistant will seek views from various local masons.

Signed Date

DRAFT