



# AXBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

## ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13



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### 1: Mayor's Introduction

The Town Council is made up of 13 elected members including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. The Town Council meets in the Town Hall at 7.30pm on the third Monday of the Month. The Mayor chairs the meeting and in his absence the Deputy Mayor. The meetings are open to the public who are given the opportunity to address the Council on any matter for a period of three minutes. The Council has one full time employee who is the Town Clerk – Mrs Vicky Brice - and she is the responsible person as defined by the relevant Act. There are five honorary officers, The Sergeant at Mace, The Town Bailiff, The Town Crier, The Keeper of the Bells and The Modern Town Archivist. Because of the wide range and diversity of matters addressed by the Council there are four standing committees and six advisory groups. Two of the standing committees, the Appeals Panel and the Complaints Committee only sit when necessary. The Committees and Advisory Groups are made up of councillors who discuss matters in detail relating to certain well defined remits. They then report back to the Town Council in full session. This enables the full Council to understand and discuss if necessary a wide spectrum of issues that have been examined in detail by the various committees and groups. In addition to these committees and advisory groups the Council has representatives on many other bodies (see section 5) and also produces Oyez, manages the community table at the Farmers' Markets and looks after the website.

### 2: Members serving from May 2012:

Member	Telephone	Email
John Albone	732573	John.Albone@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Kate Browne	733208	Kate.Browne@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Margaret Crawford (from 15 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2012)	733351	Margaret.Crawford@axbridge-tc.gov.uk (no longer a member)
Jeremy Gall	733118	Jeremy.Gall@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Janet Gwinn	733856	Janet.Homewood@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Pauline Ham	732062	Pauline.Ham@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Barry Hamblin (until 5 August 2012)	733939	b.hamblin2@btinternet.com (no longer a member)
John Kendall	732103	John.Kendall@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Ian Laken ( <b>Mayor</b> )	07712043937	Ian.Laken@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Mike Taylor	732688	Mike.Taylor@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Jennifer Trotman	733306	Jennifer.Trotman@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Craig Walkling	732400	Craig.Walkling@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Dan Wookey	733212	Dan.Wookey@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Peter Yusen	733941	Peter.Yusen@axbridge-tc.gov.uk

### 3: Employees and Volunteers

Town Clerk: Ms Vicky Brice  
2 Woodview Road,  
Cheddar,  
Somerset, BS27 3NF  
Tel: 07884 264033  
Email: Vicky.Brice@axbridge-tc.gov.uk

Manager of the Furlong and Changing Rooms:	Mr Darren Hogarth
Lengthsman	Mr Andrew Laken
Sergeant at Mace:	Mr Richard Cottis
Town Bailiff:	Mrs Maggie Tur
Town Crier:	Mrs Yvonne Chamberlain
Keeper of the Bells:	Axbridge and District Museum Trust
Modern Archivist:	Mrs Maggie Tur

#### **4. Council Committees and Reports.**

The following committees and advisory groups were appointed at the May meeting of the Council. The chairmen were appointed by the committee or group members.

##### ***Planning & Licensing Committee (Councillor Taylor)***

This committee has the power to deal with small planning applications on behalf of the council and advises the full council on larger applications. Depending on the work load, it meets once or twice a month in public. The committee also considers planning enforcement matters and tree preservation orders, as well as applications for licenses for road closures, entertainment etc. Full council responds to significant planning applications and development proposals outside of the parish if they are likely to affect the Town. It is the planning committee's remit to look at the detail of these proposals and advise and make recommendations to members at full council. This year there has been much debate about the proposals for a new reservoir and two supermarkets for Cheddar. The committee also gets regular updates on Hinkley Point and the new transmission line. The committee is also responsible for starting up and overseeing the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish.

##### ***Personnel and Protocol Committee (Councillor Laken)***

The Mayor is chair of this committee which has delegated power from the Council to deal with all personnel and protocol matters except the appointment of the Clerk. The meetings are held in public session but most personnel issues are discussed with the public and press excluded. In general terms, the committee deals with appraisals, training of staff and the short listing of clerk applications with any agreed recommendations. It also initially discusses disciplinary matters recommending the appointment of the Appeals Panel if required. It also considers the well-being of members and volunteers appointed by the Council. The committee also decide on matters relating to ceremonial procedure, regalia, mayoral events, duties and associated matters. This committee has sat regularly throughout the past year and has been kept very busy not only in matters relating to personnel but also with events such as Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, the Blackberry Carnival lunch, the Civic Service and will be involved in preparations for the Mayoral banquet.

##### ***Administration and Finance Advisory Group (Councillor Taylor)***

The members of the group have met regularly throughout the year. They monitor the accounts and liaise with the clerk on all financial matters including the very important annual audit. The preparation of the budget, part of the group's remit, gets more complex each year as the council takes on more responsibilities such as toilets and car parks. The group also advises the council on grants, insurance, asset and risk management and communication (Oyez, the Annual Report and the web-site). As a result of the increased work load being undertaken and the regular changes in the law the council's standing orders are constantly under review by members. This year the effects of the localism act have taken up a lot of time, particularly the new standards regime and the knock on effects of the abolition of the government's council tax benefits scheme. Next year the group will need to consider how the abolition of the audit commission and the requirement for transparency of financial transactions are going to affect the council's procedures.

##### ***Highways Advisory Group (Councillor Gall)***

The Group was very pleased to see long-awaited improvements to Meadow Street finally take shape on the ground: thanks must go to County Councillor Dawn Hill for help with the funding to put down new blocks to extend the surfacing of the Square along Old Church Road. This has greatly improved the walkway between Axbridge Town Car Park and the Square, and is something which we have persistently pursued over more years than we care to think. This improvement has also extended the Square parking restrictions further along Old Church road.

The resurfacing of Old Church Road at the same time has given the area a big lift. The Town Council is aware of the remaining problems with the verges along that stretch, and will in due course do its best when funds permit to improve those as well.

The Highways Group has continued to oversee Axbridge Town Car Park: hedges and trees have been trimmed, and gulleys cleared when required. But perhaps more importantly, the enforcement of the parking regulations has been on the agenda. The Town Council has been aware that some residents feel that cars overstay their allotted time, although the number doing so has been fewer than people perceive.

Nevertheless, with the imminent purchase of Moorland Street car park, and with the much improved parking control in the Square and on the roads, we now have the opportunity to bring together the main elements of parking in the town so that they complement each other and serve both the needs of residents and visitors to the town. The consistent enforcement of fair regulations will be the most significant change to parking in the town in recent years, and details will be well communicated when various contractual negotiations are nearer conclusion.

We also look forward to the completion in the coming year of the recently commissioned new lighting on Cheddar Road, and also await the results of a survey promised after the recent flooding which should once and for all plot out the various culverts and gulleys under the Square, and identify whether any remedial work is required by any of the organisations responsible.

### ***Cemetery, Allotment and Open Spaces Advisory Group (Councillor Albone)***

The advisory group was set up to amalgamate the work of several different individuals and advisory groups. The key function of which is to maintain the upkeep of the Cemetery, Allotments and Open Spaces within the town. The work in the last year has included:

#### Cemeteries

Maintenance and clearing of the boundary hedge and opening up the site to allow more light and to enhance the view across the levels. This work is continuing. A design has been created to enhance the landscaping of the garden of rest, to make the site more inviting to visitors. This will incorporate a seating area that will take advantage of the views and relocating the new seat donated by the Mayor and Mayoress of Axbridge.

We have agreed a formal inspection of the site twice a year to ensure maintenance is being undertaken and to agree future action to enhance the site.

#### Allotments

Instigating a site inspection rota to ensure that all allotments are being substantially cultivated and maintained within the rules set down by the town council. Allocated five allotments to new tenants as these sites became available. This included two new plots created from land previously allocated to the Axbridge Community Allotment Association. They are putting their efforts into the main site, developing a Forest Garden with an information point detailing the activity of the ACAA and the merits of growing in a Forest Garden environment.

#### Open Spaces

We defined ownership and responsibility for the separate open spaces within the town between County, District and Town Council and are putting in place a register of communications to District and County to track complaints when received.

Tree Management. Recommendations are being prepared to formalise the process of tree management and risk assessment of trees on council property. This is to ensure the safety of all concerned and to make sure all required maintenance is completed.

Key Issues have included litter and dog mess following numerous complaints from residents. The dog warden has been asked to undertake surveillance and where required to prosecute dog owners who do not clean up their dogs mess. This matter has been raised in OYEZ on a consistent basis but the problem still exists. A high profile prosecution now appears to be the only option to resolve the matter.

### ***Leisure and Recreation Advisory Group (Councillor Mrs Ham)***

The Leisure and Recreation Advisory Group continues to fulfil its remit of repair and maintenance on the Furlong Field and children's play area. The incredibly wet weather has hampered activities but, overall, the field is in good condition. The hedges have been cut back and the grass cutting continues to be up to its usual high standard.

- The outdoor gym equipment has struggled with various problems but these finally appear to have been rectified. Replacement instruction signs on the correct way to use the equipment will follow soon.
- An order has been issued for the Perspex replacement to the Youth Shelter to go ahead and for fresh bark on the safety surface under the aerial runway.
- Various other remedial works will also continue to be carried out on the play equipment in the children's area.
- We intend to monitor the use and condition of the cricket nets area at the bottom of the field.

The dog mess, both in the furlong and around the town, continues to be a major problem. Over the coming months we intend to launch a high profile campaign to reduce, and in a perfect world, eradicate the problem.

- There will be posters designed by local children that will start to appear around the town, asking owners to “pick up the poo”!
- We will issue ‘dog fouling’ stickers for householders to apply to their wheelie bins, to highlight the problem on bin days.
- “Post boxes’ will be supplied in businesses around the Square so that individuals can post information of offenders. This information will be absolutely confidential but will enable us to build up a picture of the worst affected areas and the most regular offenders.
- Prosecutions will be made: the dog warden will be asked to target identified areas at identified times. We are also considering using a private company.

We ask all dog owners to be responsible. Dog mess is not just unpleasant it can spread disease.

### ***Facilities Advisory Group (Councillor Mrs Trotman)***

The aim of the Group is to source facilities such as land, buildings, equipment or services which are required to fulfil policies established by the Council and advise on the future use of facilities already owned, leased or managed by the Council as specified in the remit shown below. The Facilities Advisory Group meets monthly and is currently working on three main issues

- The purchase of the public toilets at the top of Moorland Street from Sedgemoor District Council. Contracts have been exchanged and completion is planned for March 28<sup>th</sup>. The cleaning/maintenance of the toilets is currently out to tender and with the aim being to have a new contract in place with the successful bidder by the beginning of May at the latest.
- The acquisition of office facilities in Axbridge, for use by the Town Clerk, which we are currently pursuing.
- The purchase of the land at the top of Moorland Street from Sedgemoor District Council (comprising the car park and substation, and the land on which the Children’s Centre and Busy Bees nursery sits). This was agreed at last year’s Annual Assembly. The purchase is now being progressed, albeit slowly, involving as it does solicitors and legal issues, but we hope to complete the purchase this year.

### **Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Group (The Mayor – Councillor Laken)**

The Neighbourhood Plan advisory group has been created in the last year following the introduction of legislation outlining the process to allow local residents to have more say in the future development of their town. A neighbourhood plan will become a legal planning document, used to determine the suitability of future developments. It is subject to referendum, so will need to involve the people of Axbridge and gain majority approval to come into effect. The Group has a defined remit, essentially to act as a hub, collecting views of the residents, working with all local groups and interested parties to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. The plan must co-ordinate with the requirements of the Sedgemoor District Council Core Strategy, matching the same timeframe covering the period up to 2027 and need to reflect the status of Axbridge as a Key Rural Settlement. The Advisory Group may invite additional specialist members to join to assist in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan as required and reports regularly to the Planning and Licensing Committee and ultimately to Axbridge Town Council when appropriate. Work so far has included completing the application to Sedgemoor District Council and gaining approval to undertake the task of writing a neighbourhood plan and agreeing the geography to be covered by the plan as the Parish Boundary of Axbridge. It has also undertaken displays at the Farmers Market to start the process of communication and engagement with the town.

Work in progress includes holding a public consultation event in the town hall on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2013. This is being designed to inform and provide the people of Axbridge with an opportunity to have their say in what is important to them for the future of the town. We will be writing to all key organisations within the town, inviting them to engage with the advisory group and to nominate people who are willing to assist in writing the plan, gaining approval of the residents.

### **Emergency Planning (The Mayor - Councillor Laken)**

The Emergency planning advisory group is made up of councillors and other representatives from the community. It has devised and written an emergency plan that will be implemented on an occasion that is so serious that the normal emergency services and agencies would be initially overwhelmed or unable to attend. A number of Emergency Rest Centres have been identified within the Town should it ever become necessary to evacuate people from parts of the Town.

**Axbridge Community Partnership (Councillor Mrs Trotman) (Town Council is a member of ACP)**

The Axbridge Partnership brings together representatives of community organisations throughout the town, and has been in existence for over a year now. Current core partners are Axbridge First School, the Axbridge Action Group, the Chamber of Commerce, Axbridge Town Council, and the Town Trust. Other groups represented included Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset County Council, Axbridge Church, SANE (Sustainable Axbridge Network) and the Sports & Social Club. Bringing together all these groups helps to facilitate projects, aids communication between the groups, and also promotes better relationships between them.

This year the Axbridge Community Partnership has supported the application for funds for a boiler by the Church, and also the acquisition of the Public Toilets and the land at the top of Moorland Street by the Town. The Partnership was also instrumental in ensuring that the improvements between Axbridge Town Car Park and the Square were implemented. Currently the Partnership is working towards progressing improvements arising from the Streets of Axbridge Plan, and will be taking part in the Somerset Towns Forum "Making our Town Centres Better Places" network event on March 12<sup>th</sup>, at the Oakhouse in Axbridge.

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April at 8:00pm in the Oakhouse.

This completes my report on the activity of the Town Council. Councillor Ian Laken (Mayor)

**5. Organisations on which the council is represented.**

Axbridge Action Group
Axbridge Community Partnership
Axbridge & District Museum Trust
Chamber of Commerce
Cheddar Valley Cluster Group
Environmental Group
Farmers' Market
Mendip Hills and AONB Partnership Committee
Quarry Liaison
School Governor/Town Council representative
Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)
Somerset Towns Forum
Somerset Youth Service – Sedgemoor Area Youth Office
Sports and Social Committee
Town Trust/Town Council Joint Committee

## 6: Summary of Accounts

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
<b>General Account</b>			

INCOME			
Precept	55,500.00	60,565.53	65,249.84
Bank Interest	25.51	171.71	209.62
Cemetery Charges	712.00	897.00	1,380.00
Allotments Rents	425.00	397.50	392.50
County Council Grants	0.00	0.00	0.00
District Council Grants	0.00	0.00	0.00
Recreation Ground Grants	5,909.55	7267.50	0.00
Walking Bus Shelter Grant	--	--	3,547.50
Youth Shelter refund	--	250.00	674.80
Jack Todd Bequest Grant for Changing Rooms	7,800.10	7,800.10	7,800.10
Sound box grant	--	525.00	--
Jubilee Medals donation			114.55
Salt Bin donation			143.50
Other	90.00	100.00	224.43
VAT refunds	3,840.25	1,639.09	3,030.04
<b>Total Income :</b>	<b>74,302.41</b>	<b>79,613.43</b>	<b>82,766.88</b>

EXPENDITURE	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
<i>Revenue items</i>			
Clerk's Salary and Administration	22,263.60	21,620.74	23,148.82
Mayor's and Town Crier's allowances	1,475.00	1,475.00	1,530.00
Changing Rooms loan repayment	7,800.10	7,800.10	7,800.10
Car Park loan repayment	10,402.06	10,402.06	10,402.06
Public Convenience Contract		2,500	5,008.75
Recreation Ground management and maintenance	8,723.58	7,562.88	7,273.32
Cemeteries maintenance	1,724.75	1,772.12	1,823.73
Allotments lease and maintenance	390.78	476.31	240.00
Town maintenance contract	2,985.00	2,656.25	2,242.50
Promoting Axbridge	512.18	858.99	833.11

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
<i>Capital items</i>			
Church Steps/Back Lane lighting & safety proj.		7,123.25	
Cricket Nets	3,380.21		
Sports Wall	5,909.55		
Clerk's course	1,282.29	1,935.93	2,564.39
Play area roundabout and spinning equipment		6,006.95	
Sound Box		518.20	
Salt Bin		149.65	143.50
Street Lights			2,416.54
Outdoor Gym Equipment			5,963.50
Walking Bus Shelter			3,547.50
Land at Moorland Street			960.00

Laptop			800.00
Other	86.84	80.05	20.23
<i>Grants made</i>			
Town Hall – general maintenance	3,640.00	3,640.00	3,640.00
Planters in the Square	300.00	0.00	300.00
Axbridge and District Museum Trust	1,100.00	1,100.00	1,200.00
Christmas trees and lights	1,175.00	1,200.00	1,458.00
Jubilee Celebrations			364.55
Church Boiler			200.00
Others	625.00	425.00	500.00
VAT paid	2,555.77	2,371.90	3,382.84
<b>Total Expenditure :</b>	<b>76,331.71</b>	<b>81,675.38</b>	<b>87,763.44</b>

SUMMARY of General Account			
Opening Balance	47,374.84	45,345.54	43,283.59
Total Receipts	74,302.41	79,613.43	82,766.88
Total Payments	76,331.71	81,675.38	87,763.44
Transfer from closed accounts			
Closing Balance	<b>45,345.54</b>	<b>43,283.59</b>	<b>38,287.03</b>

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
<b>Car Park Account</b>			
<b>INCOME</b>			
Precept	1,500.00	3,752.55	3,850.00
PWLB Loan			
SCC grant	5,681.40		
Vat Refunds	0.00	82.99	416.75
Business Rates refund		637.15	0.00
Misc.	150.00	150.00	150.00
<b>Total Income:</b>	<b>7,331.40</b>	<b>4,622.69</b>	<b>4,416.75</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
Car Park purchase			
Tax and fees			
VAT Paid	0.00	433.54	181.31
Development Fund		1,957.00	
Maintenance Fund		5,000.00	
Running costs		1351.55	984.03
<b>Total Expenditure:</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>8,742.09</b>	<b>1,165.34</b>

Other Accounts - Closing Balances			
Changing Rooms Operating Account	-2,532.08	1,130.07	1,942.68
Changing Rooms Maintenance Fund®	5,192.09	10,192.09	10,592.09
Axbridge Active Living (managing account only)			608.10
® = Reserved Fund.			