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21 February 2024

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**ANNUAL ASSEMBLY MEETING**  
**to be held on**  
**MONDAY 4 MARCH 2024 AT 8.00PM**  
**in Axbridge Town Hall**

This is a Public Open Meeting for the Town  
**All Welcome**

**AGENDA**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2023 – to confirm as a correct record
3. Police Report
4. Report from the Town Council
5. Somerset Councillor(s) Report
6. School Governor's Report
7. Presentations and/or accounts from:

Axbridge Action Group	Pageant Committee
Axbridge Active Living	Parochial Charities
Axbridge & District Museum Trust	Rotary Club
Axbridge Community Theatre	Sports and Social Community Association
Blackberry Carnival	Town Trust
Chamber of Commerce	Village Agent
Cheddar Guides & Cheddar Valley Rangers	Warm Spaces Group
Handbells Group	Women of Axbridge Group (WAGs)
Men's Shed	

8. Other Business

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Councillor Franchesca Mitton  
Mayor of Axbridge

Note: only those who are on the current electoral roll will be eligible to vote on any proposal.

**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD ON  
MONDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2023 IN AXBRIDGE TOWN HALL**

**Meeting commenced: 8.00pm**

**Meeting concluded: 9.25pm**

**Present:** Councillor Ham (Chairman) together with 14 members of the public including: -

**By invitation:** District Councillor Mr Godwin Pearson, District Councillor Mrs Scott, PC Smith and PCSO Bonell, Mr Paine (Axbridge Action Group & Town Trust), Mrs Davies (Blackberry Carnival and Cheddar Valley Rangers) Mr Scott (Chamber of Commerce); Mr Saunders (Axbridge Pageant) and Mr Chard (Axbridge Town Trust),

**Also in Attendance:** Mrs V Brice (Axbridge Town Council Clerk and Axbridge Active Living)

**Apologies for absence:** Mr Childs (Corona and Cheddar Valley Group); Mrs Hill (Axbridge Parochial Charities), Mr Wells (Axbridge and District Museum Trust), Mrs Browne (Warm Spaces Group) and Mr Mace (Blackberry Carnival)

**1. WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed those present to the Annual Assembly meeting.

**2. MINUTES**

The Clerk read out the draft minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2022, copies of which had been made available online and sent to invitees. The minutes were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

**3. POLICE REPORT**

PC Smith and PCSO Bonell introduced themselves to the meeting. Although crime statistics for Axbridge are low the police were aware of antisocial behaviour around the toilets and car park and would encourage the community to report any concerns or incidents involving anti-social behaviour. There had also been a number shed break-ins with associated items taken. Members thanked them for being more visible and proactive in Axbridge.

At this point the Police left the meeting.

**4. REPORT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL**

Councillor Pauline Ham welcomed two new Councillors Mearns and Walkling. One councillor vacancy remained. The main council and committee meetings were meeting in person, with some advisory groups meeting via zoom. She had been Mayor at the sad time of Queen Elizabeth II passing and had read the Proclamation on the Church Steps, proud to be part of the community, where so many families met to pay their respects. The Mayor had attended (and been involved in) a number of civic events during the year including the amazing Axbridge Pageant and Blackberry Carnival. The Civic Service had been very well attended, with many seeing the High Sheriff present Jean Pickering and Alan Wells with Civic Awards and the Axbridge First School Eco Group with the Youth Award.

The Mayor outlined the structure of the Council with its various committees, groups and representatives and invited the Chairman to present their own reports – summarised below (full report attached).

The Personnel and Protocol Committee looked after the Council's three employees and oversaw the civic events and protocols. Councillor Ham thanked the Clerk and Assistant Clerk for all their hard work. The Mens' Shed had carved two new wooden maces, which were stunning and had been blessed at the Civic Service.

The Planning and Licenses Committee considered and responded to the planning authority on local planning applications and was also involved in associated matters such as licensing. In terms of the large applications, the power plant at Townsend Farm was now fully operational and the 20 affordable homes at Mendip View, Cheddar Road were fully occupied. Detailed plans for housing on Houlgate Way would be considered imminently.

The Administration and Finance Advisory Group advised on administrative and financial matters. The external audit for the last financial year went through without any auditors' comments and, with the local government changes, the Council was seeking a new payroll provider and had also signed up to a software package for the accounts.

The Cemetery, Allotments and Open Spaces Group looked after the town's cemetery, Shortlands (a field next to cemetery), hillside allotments, two areas of land at Chestnut Avenue and open spaces matters within the town. The tree policy had been reviewed and the Council continued to ensure that memorabilia at the cemetery is kept to the base of the headstone to facilitate workings at the cemetery.

The Highways Advisory Group continued to enjoy good working relationships with local community groups. The Chairman thanked all of those involved in the completion of the Traffic Management Study. The continuation of the 126 bus route from Wells to Axbridge was welcomed and efforts would continue for the route to be extended. The importance of the bus route in rural areas was noted. Discussions were taking place in relation to the Old Station Building and bypass and the group looked forward to working with the new Somerset Council.

The Leisure and Recreation Group covered the changing rooms, furlong recreation field, play area and the public conveniences. The agility trail had been replaced and members were grateful for local grant funding to secure this. The group also wished to thank the footballers and Facilities Manager – with the pitches well used and maintained. There were some ongoing maintenance works with the changing rooms and the public conveniences were generally well maintained although the Council was aware of some mis-use of this facility and was considering how best to address this.

The Strategic Planning Advisory Group's remit was to progress and monitor large projects and Town Council initiatives. The Council had agreed a Vision and Mission Statement for Axbridge Town Council and the main focus of the group had been on work to secure the leasing of the Old Station Building, with a sub-lease to the Men's Shed.

The Axbridge Climate Change Emergency Group had identified two major elements in the Town's carbon footprint – Transport and Housing. The creation of the Eco-Garden had been a great success and the Council thanked David Parkin, who had recently stepped down as Chairman, for all his hard work.

## **5. COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT**

County Councillors Pauline Ham and Ben Ferguson advised of the hard work behind the scenes in preparation for Vesting Day, when the new Somerset Council would come into being. The Council would face many challenges, not least budgetary, but also represented an opportunity to improve areas. Items relevant to Axbridge would include work regarding the Old Station Building, the Furlong Recreation Field lease and an initiative to create a safe cycle-route along the bypass. Work towards carbon neutral objectives continued as did efforts to retain and extend the bus service. The matter of enforcement was raised and Councillors hoped that the enforcement service would continue to be vigilant and take action as appropriate in rural areas.

## **6. DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT**

District Councillor Liz Scott was stepping down after being a member of Sedgemoor District Council since 1995. She outlined her key work and involvement over this time and advised that the District Council had been very successful, financial well managed and had received several awards. She had been proud to serve both Sedgemoor District Council and the community of Axbridge – with all working hard to ensure a seamless transition. She thanked the community for their support. District Councillor Godwin Pearson had also enjoyed his time on the District Council and wished the community well. The Council thanked District Councillor Scott and District Councillor Godwin-Pearson for their hard work and commitment over the years.

## **7. SCHOOL GOVERNOR'S REPORT**

Mrs Browne, Town Council representative on the governing body of Axbridge C of E First School Academy updated the meeting on the school year. She reported on the pupil numbers and possible future difficulties in accommodating children on the site given the level of large developments approved in the area. It has been a more usual year, following the pandemic, with a wide variety of activities from a visit to Carymoor Environmental Centre, to a football festival

and a "Break the rules" day. The Eco-Group had been delighted to receive the Youth Award, Ofstead had rated the school as "Good" and the PTA continued to work hard to raise funds. The school continued to provide excellent curriculum in a safe environment.

## 8. PRESENTATION FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

- a. Axbridge Action Group – The group had had a busy year, working on the Traffic Management Study, launching the Heritage, Childrens' and Geo-Cache Trails and continuing with the Good Neighbourhood Scheme.
- b. Axbridge Active Living – This social group for the over 50's had continued to meet on alternate Wednesday afternoons and had enjoyed a talk on an Edwardian Coronation, singing songs from the 1940's, playing boccia and going out for lunch. The group was grateful to Somerset Community Foundation for a grant and to its volunteers who made it all possible.
- c. Axbridge Community Partnership – this group was not active at the present time.
- d. Axbridge and District Museum Trust – The museum had opened for 5 days a week during 2022 and the key highlights were mentioned including free entry to all, the setting up of online donations, recruitment events, school exhibit boxes and 4305 visitors during the year.
- e. Blackberry Carnival – a fantastic carnival had been held on 24 September with everyone keen to be involved following the Pageant. Fundraising efforts had been greatly appreciated with thanks to all who had supported and participated in the event.
- f. Chamber of Commerce – The AGM had been held in June 2022 with officers appointed and fund raising events planned. The Chamber of Commerce had sponsored events in the town, had prepared a Presentation about the direction of the group (available upon request), including a membership recruitment plan and would like to assist/support transport/bus issues
- g. Corona and the Cheddar Valley Group – no report at the time of the meeting [apologies had been received subsequently with a note to say that whilst the group was no longer operational as an organisation it could be re-activated if necessary. The facebook group was still active with many friendships remaining].
- h. Cheddar Guides and Cheddar Valley Ranger – Unfortunately Axbridge Guides were no longer in operation due to a lack of volunteers but it was hoped it would be resumed at a later date. Cheddar Guides met regularly with 20 girls who had been involved in the Civic Service and they groups had several trips planned.
- i. Mens' Shed – The Mens' Shed was going from strength to strength and it was hoped that the Old Station Building could be utilised as a venue in the near future.
- j. Axbridge Pageant – The Pageant had been an incredible event, in great weather, watched by 1700 people and live streamed reaching 2000 more! The pageant was grateful for the grants and donation/sponsorships obtained, had received National Recognition and thanked all involved. The group was looking forward to the next Pageant in 2030.
- k. Parochial Charities – these accounts were made available at the meeting.
- l. Axbridge and District Rotary Club – This group met regularly to help with charitable, social and community projects and was still going strong.
- m. Axbridge Sports and Social Community Association – The Fun Day in the summer had been an enjoyable day. Father Christmas Night had been a cold but clear night with an amazing atmosphere (despite issues with the main tree!). The Coronation celebrations in The Square would be held on 7 May 2023 and the group had been pleased to make donations towards the ability trail and to the Mens' Shed. The Chairman wished to thank all the committee members, helpers and residents who came along and enjoyed the community events.
- n. Town Trust – The officers and clerk had been appointed. The Town Trust continued to maintain the Town Hall (which had been busy with bookings), the fabric of the town square including the planters and street furniture and had developed its social media / website presence. An event to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the maces would be held on 25 June and the Trust continued to run the 150 scheme. The accounts were available upon request.
- o. Village Agent – Lina Curiale-Hopkinson was now the Village Agent covering the Axbridge area and continued to assist individuals in the community and local community groups.
- p. Warm Spaces Group – the group had started as a response to the energy and cost of living crisis in November 2022 providing a warm space and company to a number of residents of mixed ages. It had been a successful venture and, given the support it offered, it had been decided to open a café on a Monday Morning serving bread and soup hot drinks and cake.

The accounts of the Town Council were made available for inspection.

## 9. OTHER BUSINESS - none

## 10. CONCLUSION OF MEETING – The Mayor thanked all those present for attending.

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Town Mayor

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Date

## **Appendix A**

### **Axbridge Annual Assembly – Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023 Report of Axbridge Town Council**

#### **Mayor's Introduction - Councillor Pauline Ham**

We are pleased to have welcomed two new members this year, Councillor Andrew Means and Councillor Craig Walkling, but this still leaves one vacancy on the Council.

We have returned to face to face for all public meetings this year, following covid, but some advisory groups are still meeting via Zoom.

While not being totally back to pre-covid times, Civic Services and other services of celebration have started to take place around the county and it continues to be pleasure to represent Axbridge at these occasions.

It was my honour to be Mayor at the sad time of Queen Elizabeth II passing. Reading the proclamation on the church steps, was a very special moment and I was proud to be part of our community, where so many families met in The Square to pay their respects. It is an occasion I will never forget.

It was also my pleasure to be Axbridge mayor for the delayed event of the Pageant, even though the mayor roles I played involved an intricate and thick costume which was immensely hot!! The High Sheriff of Somerset attended the Sunday performance and was impressed "beyond words".

The Civic Service was held in March 2023 was a lovely occasion with the Civic Awards being presented to Jean Pickering and Alan Wells and the Youth Award being presented to the Eco Team at Axbridge C of E First School.

I was also host to neighbouring mayors for the first carnival since covid. Visiting Axbridge, for events such as this, is something they look forward to and I take pride in the knowledge that Axbridge is so well thought of in the County.

Axbridge Council is structured currently with two regular committees and a number of advisory groups. The committees are the Planning & Licencing and Personnel & Protocol. The advisory groups are; Administration & Finance, Cemeteries, Allotments & Open Spaces (CAOS), Strategic Planning (SPAG), Highways and Leisure & Recreation.

#### **Personnel & Protocol Committee report – Councillor Pauline Ham (Chairman)**

The council employs 3 people; The Clerk, The Assistant Clerk & Facilities Manager. The Committee looks after council staff and follows the Somerset pay scales and holiday requirements for Council Employees.

The committee also oversees civic events and protocols.

We carried out interviews for a replacement Clerk to the Town Council during the year but we are very pleased to say that, following the interview process, our current clerk, Vicky Brice, agreed to remain in post on an amended contract. The assistant clerk also agreed to begin the required training to facilitate the possibility of her taking on the position of clerk, at a future date. Both decisions were ratified by full council. At this point I need to express our thanks for all the hard work done by both the Clerk and assistant.

#### **Planning and Licensing Committee – Councillor Frankie Mitton (Chairman)**

The Committee is made up of the Mayor and Deputy and interested councillors. Meetings are held when planning applications and related business dictate. This can be once or twice per month. They are usually held on the fourth Monday of the month but if there is urgent business, items can be included in the full council meeting or a specially convened meeting. The

committee members have dealt with extensions, works to listed buildings and plans in the conservation area on a routine basis. Also, applications for tree works, delegated to the Clerk for a response, are ratified.

This committee has a duty to comment on licensing issues such as road closures and premises opening hours. These are seldom controversial. The members also deal with various relevant surveys, questionnaires and consultations.

Large developments have to be considered by the full council, but they take into account the recommendations made by this committee which looks at the plans in detail. Two previous significant large applications are now completed. The power plant at Townsend Farm is fully operational and Mendip View comprising of 20 affordable houses on Cheddar Road is now fully occupied. Detailed plans for the housing on Houlgate Way have been submitted to the planning authority and are being considered imminently. This committee will be monitoring the situation closely and take action as appropriate to ensure the development proves an enhancement to the community.

### **Administration and Finance Advisory Group report – Councillor Mike Taylor (Chairman)**

The Group is made up of the Mayor and Deputy, interested councillors and the Town Clerk. It is purely advisory and has no powers. However, its work is very important for the day to day running of the Town Council. Members of the Group meet monthly, generally by zoom, to consider regular items and new issues, and a report goes to every full Council meeting, summarising the work done by the Group, putting forward items for the Council agenda and making recommendations.

In its general administration role, the Group advises on grants, insurance, contracts, asset and risk management, the office facilities and communications.

Group members liaise with the Clerk on all financial matters including the payroll, the budget, the accounts, VAT, business rates and the annual audit. The accounts are checked by advisory group members every month and a summary report is presented to Council quarterly for the members to consider and adopt. The external audit is the item which probably concerns the group most, but I am glad to report that for the last financial year, the audit went through again without any auditor's comments.

Currently we are looking at our computer systems to make sure they are resilient and fit for purpose. Recently the Group has overseen the purchase of a new computer for the clerk and a new office printer. The Council has agreed, in principle, to sign up for the Scribe software package for the accounts, replacing the in-house built excel system. This could also help to manage other parts of the business such as the cemetery and the allotments.

Members of the Group are constantly reviewing the standing orders, the rules by which the council operates, and monitoring alterations to legislation to see what effect they might have. The changes to the organisation of Local Government are causing some issues for the Town Council with the establishment of the new Somerset Council unitary authority. Most notably, we had been assured that our payroll would be managed by the new authority as it had been by Sedgemoor District Council. However, we were informed recently they would not take on this role, so the Group is now looking urgently for a payroll management provider.

### **Cemetery, Allotments and Open Spaces Group – Councillor Jo Jenkins**

The group looks after the town cemetery (along Axbridge bypass), Shortlands (the adjoining field), the allotments at Hillside, and two areas of land at Chestnut Avenue as well as overseeing general open spaces matters within the town. The tree policy had been reviewed and the Council continued to ensure that memorabilia at the cemetery is kept to the base of the headstone to facilitate workings at the cemetery.

### **Highways Advisory Group – Councillor Ben Ferguson (Chairman)**

This year the Highways Advisory Group made good progress on many issues

We have continued to enjoy good working relationships with local community groups in Axbridge. The highlight being the completion of the traffic management study. This committee, and the wider Town Council, welcomed the effort put in and the framework delivered by the report. The committee is continuing to seek and find ways to use this report to further the broader aims of the committee and Town. I, as Chair, would also like to extend thanks to every resident involved in producing the report; this has been a huge effort to try and improve our Town.

The group welcomes the continuation of the 126-bus route, as provided through funding from Somerset County Council (soon to be Somerset Council). The route however only functions within the County boundaries of Somerset. We look forward to and support efforts for the 126 route to be extended or integrated into other routes. I would like to thank the residents of Axbridge in helping me hand out 100s of bus timetables to increase usage on the newly funded route. These activities are so important to keeping services in our Town.

The group looks forward to working with the new Somerset Council from vesting day. We hope to still enjoy the same access to officers and advice that we received from the old County Council this year.

Finally, I'd like to thank other members of the group and our outstanding clerks for their continued support and work on Highways issues. It has been a busy year for me and their advice, work, and good graces have been vital in keeping our work moving forward.

### **Leisure and Recreation Advisory Group report – Councillor Pauline Ham (Chairman)**

The Leisure and Recreation Group is an advisory body with responsibility for the furlong recreation field, the changing rooms, the children's play area, and other associated recreation matters and for the public conveniences.

#### Play Area

This year, as part of continued maintenance, we have carried out repair work to the safety surfaces that were in need of attention and we have replaced the "accessible to all" swing seat.

I am very pleased to say that we have now replaced the wooden activity trail with a new colourful metal one. Unfortunately, the safety fencing was still in place around the new equipment for the half term holiday because the company doing the work had seeded where the ground had been disturbed and they wanted to give it a few days grace.

We were very grateful to receive a £2,000 grant from the Axbridge Sports and Social Committee and £1,000 from the Parochial Charities Fund towards the cost of this equipment. We also received £1,500 from the RLT2 fund, money available from building projects in the area.

Further maintenance work is due to be carried out on the aerial runway and to the safety surfaces for this, the roundabout and the slide.

We are constantly monitoring the play area to try and maintain standards. There continues to be further work which we are looking at and, when/if funds become available, following the fitting of the new activity trail, there is a space where another piece of equipment could be added.

#### Main field

The condition of the furlong itself is good but continues to be a difficult task, due to the heavy use it receives. Thanks go to the football clubs and to Darren Hogarth, our Facilities Manager.

The hedgerow was cut back this year. The recent tree survey has identified 2 dead trees and another group of trees, all of which are due to be removed before the birds start nesting.

#### Changing Rooms

Darren continues to maintain the facility to a good standard. There has been a problem with the boiler overflowing: we will be having the boiler serviced.

The metal box, housing the electric sockets, was very corroded and a potential danger: it has been replaced.

The football clubs continue from strength to strength, providing an important facility for Axbridge.

#### Public conveniences

Overall this facility is well maintained. There is a problem of “improper” use, which results in low level damage and, sometimes an unwelcoming atmosphere; we are considering a way forward to try and prevent this.

Unfortunately, the drinking fountain sited by the conveniences has suffered from damage. We are actively looking at what repairs are possible.

#### **Strategic Planning Advisory Group - Councillor Frankie Mitton (Chairman)**

This committee was regenerated this year after a hiatus. The group's remit is to progress and monitor large projects and town council initiatives including applications to funding bodies and arranging of works as necessary.

The group has written, and Council has ratified, a vision and mission statement for Axbridge Town Council. This document outlines our mission, vision for Axbridge as a strong and thriving community, the values by which we operate and our strategic objectives. This document will shortly be available on the Town Council website.

The main focus of the group has been to explore the acquisition of the Old Station Building as a community asset, specifically for use of the Men's Shed. The building is owned by Somerset County Council and will transfer to the new unitary authority shortly. The Town Council intend to lease the building from Somerset Council and sub-lease to the Men's Shed for their permanent location in Axbridge.

#### **Axbridge Climate Emergency group (ACE)**

This Group has been chaired by David Parkin. The group carried out a survey in the Town and has been actively working on two major elements in the town's carbon footprint – Transport and Housing. The Eco Garden has been completed – being a pleasant and visible meeting place and a focus for climate change information. The Eco-Church project is continuing with a display in the Church from 16 – 23 April 2023. David has recently stepped down as Chairman and the Town Council would like to thank David, in particular, for all his hard work in leading the group and hope to ensure group continues to operate, going forward.