



AXBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

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1: Mayor's Introduction (Councillor Kate Browne)

The Council have been sorry to receive 6 resignations during the past year from Councillors Liz Foster, Sam Chadwick, Harry Mottram, Richard Tiffin, Emily Goodman & Helen Bridgman. We have co-opted three new councillors Reece Faulkner, Jo Hogg & Ben Ferguson. At the last meeting of the Council on Monday this week we also co-opted another councillor Frankie Mitton. This means we currently have two vacancies on the council. It has been a very strange with Zoom meetings every 2 weeks in order to keep up with the changing rules and to ensure that the business of the Council is conducted in a timely fashion. Most of the advisory group and committee business was done in these meetings rather than in the usual way. I only attended 3 functions all year. The service for the swearing in of the new High Sheriff in Wells, Remembrance Service on the steps by the memorial in The Square in November and the farewell service for Rev Tim Hawkins on the 11th April. Very different to the previous year. There were no Mayor making ceremonies, no civic services, no carnival procession, no Somerset awards, no Mayor's Banquet... In fact I hardly had a sausage roll all year. I am sure that when it comes to the Civic Awards this year there will be a larger than usual number of nominations thanks to all the help and support provided to the community by so many of the people of the Town. It is in the tough times that we find the good in people shining out. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have gone above and beyond to help over this past year.

The Council is structured currently with two regular committees and a number of advisory groups. The committees meet in public and are the Planning and Licencing Committee and the Personnel & Protocol Committee. The advisory groups are; Administration and Finance, Cemeteries Allotments and Open Spaces (CAOS), Emergency Planning, Highways, Leisure and Recreation Strategic Planning Advisory Group and Sustainable Axbridge Group (since renamed Axbridge Climate Emergency Group). The Council also has representatives on a number of local organisations.

2: Members serving from May 2020:

Member (still in post)	Telephone	Email
Kate Browne (Mayor)	733208	Kate.Browne@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Reece Faulkner (from 17 th August 2020)	07703 799652	c/o Town Clerk
Ben Ferguson (from 7 th Sept 2020)	07789016830	benjamin.ferguson@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Pauline Ham (Deputy Mayor)	732062	Pauline.Ham@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Frankie Mitton (from 26 th April 2021)	07863 163568	c/o Town Clerk
Graham Page	07974 970691	Graham.Page@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Michael Taylor	732688	Mike.Taylor@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Sarah Thomas	732072 or 07519 101813	Sarah.Thomas@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Former Members during 2020/21		
Helen Bridgeman (until 16th March 2021)		
Andy Corp (until 30 th July 2021)		
Liz Foster (until 23 rd June 2020)		
Emily Goodman (until 24 th March 2021)		
Jo Hogg (7 th Sept 2020 - 24 th May 2021)		
Harry Mottram (7 th Sept 2020 – 21 st Oct 2021)		
Richard Tiffin (until 15 th March 2021)		

3: Employees and Volunteers

Town Clerk:
Axbridge Town Council,
PO Box 1184
Axbridge, BS26 2WJ

Ms Vicky Brice

Tel: 07884 264033 Email: Vicky.Brice@axbridge-tc.gov.uk

Assistant to the Town Clerk: Ms Caroline Harris
Address (as above) Tel: 07834 811404 Email: Caroline.Harris@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Facilities Manager: Darren Hogarth
Town Maintenance Contractor Andrew Laken
Sergeant at Mace: John Hawkins
Town Bailiff: Frank Ferguson
Town Crier: Nigel Scott
Keeper of the Bells: Tricia Clark
Modern Archivist: Vacant

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.

Personnel and Protocol Committee (Councillor Kate Browne – Chairman)

The council employs 3 people; The Clerk, The Assistant to the Clerk & Facilities Manager. The Personnel Committee has only had one meeting this year and that was held to do the annual staff appraisals via zoom in March. There were no official functions this year and so there was no need to review them. Any other business that this committee would usually have done was dealt with at full council meetings.

Planning and Licences Committee (Councillor Mike Taylor, Chairman of the Committee)

The Committee is made up of the Mayor and Deputy and interested councillors. Normally meetings are held when planning applications dictate. This can be once or twice per month. During the period of the 2020 Regulations imposed by government because of the pandemic, Council and Committee meetings have been held using zoom. In order to reduce the number of zoom meetings many applications and other of the committee's items have been considered at full council meetings. As there is no further opportunity to use zoom after 7th May this year the previous pattern of in-person meetings will be resumed.

The committee members have dealt with extensions, tree works, works to listed buildings and plans in the conservation area. Recently, the clerk has been delegated to deal with applications relating to trees in domestic gardens. This should stop the need to arrange a meeting just to consider such an application.

Large developments are considered by the full council, taking into account recommendations made by the committee. Two significant applications are still of concern. The proposed power plant at Townsend Farm has gone to appeal. The Council made strong representations opposing the application. The outcome is awaited. Also, plans for the housing on Houlgate Way appear to be being progressed by the developer. The Council will be monitoring the situation closely.

The estate of 20 affordable houses on Cheddar Road are now being built. The Council attempted to get the street name changed from Mendip View Gardens but without success. (There are too many "Mendip" street and house names locally!)

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 and questionnaires and liaise with the Neighbourhood Planning Group.

Administration and Finance Advisory Group (Councillor Mike Taylor - Chairman)

The Group is made up of the Mayor and Deputy, keen councillors and the Town Clerk and it is purely advisory. However, its work is important to the day to day running of the Council. Members of the group meet monthly to consider routine items and new issues that come up, and then report back to Council making recommendations by putting forward items for the agenda. The Group now meets by zoom.

In its administration role, the group advises on grants, insurance, contracts, asset and risk management, the office facilities and communications. This year, Oyez, our very successful newsletter, has had to be suspended during the pandemic. We hope it is not long before it can be reinstated. The Council is increasingly using mapping software to record data about assets and facilities in the town.

Members of the Group are constantly reviewing the standing orders, the rules by which the council operates, and monitoring changes in legislation to see what effect they might have. We are in the process of rewriting the Standing Orders using a new model produced by the National Association of Local Councils to make them easier to read, reference and update. This task has, however, had to be halted because of the pandemic when the 2020 Regulations were introduced by the government. Much planning had to go into running the council business during this period. Zoom meetings were introduced and the pattern of the meetings had to be altered. We are now in the position of reversing many of the changes made as in-person meetings need to be reinstated as the 2020 regulation period soon ends.

Members of the group liaise with the clerk on all financial matters including the payroll, the budget, the accounts, community infrastructure levy, business rates and the annual audit. The accounts are checked by advisory group members every month and a summary is presented to Council every quarter for adoption. The external audit is the item which probably concerns the group most, but I am happy to report that for the last financial year the audit went through without comment, which is the best you can hope for!

Leisure and Recreation Committee (Councillor Pauline Ham – Chairman)

This has been the strangest year that any of us have lived through. The facilities within the town were closed down to conform to government guidelines and to help in the fight to return to a perceived normal.

When it became possible the Council was very conscious of the need to enable people to access the outdoors. The public toilets were re-opened, to provide a facility for residents, walkers and cyclists. The previously purchased and planned drinking fountain, with the facility to fill water bottles, has been fitted by the public toilets and additional signage has been agreed for the wall of the pharmacy, to direct people to this facility. The children's play area was opened as soon as the government directive allowed.

Maintenance continues at the play area. A small part of the agility trail collapsed during lockdown, primarily due to age. The trail is an original piece of play equipment that was erected in the play area when it was moved to the furlong in 1995 and it was already prioritised for replacement, hopefully during the coming year. However, we have, also, highlighted the need to repair the ground by the ball wall, as this has become very worn away and use of the wall has become increasingly hazardous. The Council will need to identify available funding, grants and donations.

New swing seats have been fitted and the play equipment has been painted and maintained. Various ongoing repairs will continue.

The changing rooms still remain closed but maintenance of the facility has continued.

The bin next to the youth shelter, which was attached to the fence of the school field, has disappeared. We are in the process of getting this replaced.

Highways Advisory Group (Councillor Ben Ferguson - Chairman)

Brief.

This year has seen the Highways Advisory Group (HaG) establish clear ambitions to meet the concerns of residents and the challenges of the Town as a whole. To this end the HaG has issued a mission statement and is looking forward to then communicating with residents about what opportunities and issues Axbridge will be facing.

Within the advisory group itself we have continued the work started by former chair Richard Tiffin of formally accounting for; road traffic incidents, complaints, road safety issues, car parking issues, road maintenance and accessibility etc. This is to strengthen any issues or cases the Town Council may have to take up in the future.

Points of Interest

Townsend Report

Both Full Council and the HaG have accepted the work produced. The report gives several options and their feasibility, allowing the Council to act in a much more informed manner. We look forward to using this to both raise issues and defend the best interests of residents.

A371 (Bypass)

Speeding and anti-social driving is becoming an ever-pressing issue on the bypass and the Town as whole. The HaG has taken several steps to mitigate this. Issuing a letter outlining concerns to Sedgemoor District Council as they pursue the possibility of legal action against the anti-social driving taking place within the area. The HaG is also pursuing a reduction in the speed limit on the bypass as a longer-term solution. As of writing this there has been no response from the relevant authorities. The HaG is entirely committed to achieving this goal and will follow through this process until achieved.

Parking

The HaG is very conscious of the value of parking within Axbridge. The HaG is identifying areas for future parking spaces that best fit in with the demands and needs of residents. Longer-term, the HaG has been working with the Sustainable Axbridge Group to install electric charging points in our Town. This is in the exploratory phase, but both groups are working closely together to achieve this.

Car Parking – Covid 19

The HaG has been working closely with full Council to make our car parks work in the most feasible way possible during the Covid-19 pandemic. As lockdown eases, and hopefully ends, the HaG looks forward to working with full Council on these issues and relaying the concerns of residents.

Addendum

In my short time as Chair, I would like to thank the former chair Richard Tiffin for his hand over process – it has saved me and thus the group many hours of work. Lastly, I would thank all the community groups within Axbridge helping me both directly and indirectly. Navigating how Axbridge solves our highways problems without the community groups would be nigh-on impossible. I look forward to the HaG continuing to work with them.

Cemetery, Allotments and Open Spaces Advisory Group (Councillor Reece Faulkner – Chairman)

The group has been chaired for most of the year by former councillor, Helen Bridgeman and then, since her retirement, by Councillor Reece Faulkner. 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 group will be holding a headstone safety inspection at the cemetery soon, which has also seen the addition of a memorial bench. The allotments have been able to remain open during the pandemic and the group has endeavoured to improve communications with allotment tenants, has reviewed the rents and are making improvements to water supply. The group worked alongside the Leisure and Recreation Group to support the Mens' Shed project at Shortlands

Strategic Planning Advisory Group (Councillor Kate Browne)

The Strategic Planning group is the new name for the Development Group. We have a short list of possible projects and will be asking all committee/group chairs again this year to advise on specific projects for funding. We will also be looking for suitable grant pots and advising when these become available.

Sustainable Axbridge Group Annual Report (Councillor Jo Hogg – Chairman)

Introduction: The Environment Group formed in October 2020, in response to a growing need to respond to the climate emergency and ensure the town's long-term sustainability. The enormity of tackling the climate emergency felt overwhelming when the group first formed, there are so many important actions that need to be taken and so many changes we all need to make. The Council and the group recognise that as a small town, we may not be able to make large infra structure changes without higher government intervention, but we are committed to doing everything we can in order to make our community, carbon neutral and truly sustainable.

In November 2020, the Town Council declared a Climate Emergency in order to provide leadership in working with the local community to deal with the threat of and solutions to the climate crisis. The declaration states the Council's intention to support local citizens, to learn more about the climate emergency and work together to take all possible actions. Actions that will include short term goals as well as setting ambitious longer-term targets underpinned by the 'One Planet Principles'.

Local Survey in November 2020, the group carried out an online survey to gage the concerns and interests of local people to the climate emergency. There was an enthusiastic response to this survey with more than

150 respondents. Feedback told us that there are many local people with knowledge and skills who are willing to get involved if opportunities for learning about the climate emergency and ways to participate are made available to them. Fifty people volunteered their contact details and wish to become involved in future opportunities for local action.

In November and December 2020 our group worked on a detailed bid submission to the **Somerset County Council Climate Emergency Fund**. This involved close partnership working with some local Axbridge people who have particular environmental expertise, St John the Baptist Church also lent its support. Sadly, the fund was massively over-subscribed and bids amounting to £3.5 million were submitted to the £1 million funding pot. Despite being unsuccessful, the exercise enabled us to identify some priorities and goals, as well as the need for an Action Plan. The bid process also brought together a group of individuals committed to driving forward our response to the climate emergency. As a result, the Environment Group changed its remit to include the church and some local people who have specific skills, and we are now called the

Sustainable Axbridge Group. The group plans to explore a range of environmental projects and initiatives some large and ambitious (such as electric vehicle charging), some small and easier to achieve. We are also linking with other Somerset groups in order to learn and share ideas and have joined the Somerset Climate Network.

Donate I.T Scheme is one such initiative that the group has helped to launch in Axbridge. Run by the company RICOTECH, the scheme recycles unwanted I.T equipment donated by local people and then recycled laptops are donated back to the local community. This project will officially launch in early May 2021 and is supported by the church and Axbridge pharmacy who will provide Drop-Off sites for residents wishing to donate their unwanted I.T equipment.

We hope to see many more such projects springing up in Axbridge in the coming year. Whilst the actions required to mitigate the climate emergency are far reaching and set us all a huge challenge to the group and our town, we also embrace the belief that if everyone makes a few small changes, we can make a much bigger collective change.

5. Organisations on which the council is represented.

Formally represented:
Axbridge Community Partnership
Cheddar Valley Cluster Group
Neighbourhood Plan Group
Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)
Sports and Social Committee
Town Trust/Town Council Liaison Committee

Council Representation and Liaison:
Axbridge and District Museum Trust
Cross to Axbridge Safe Path Group
Farmers' Market
Pageant
Parish Path Liaison
Quarry Liaison Committee
School Governor/Town Council representative

6: Summary of Accounts

	Actual	Actual	Actual
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
GENERAL ACCOUNT			
RECEIPTS			
Precept received	81500.00	85450.00	88500.00
Precept transferred out to other accounts	-1000.00	-2585.86	-5140.09
Grants	8700.00	930.40	962.00
Other income	8876.69	6169.20	5658.80
Total:	98076.69	89963.74	89980.71

PAYMENTS			
Revenue Expenditure			
Administration & Finance	58539.83	65023.50	66581.27
Cemetery, Allotments & Open Spaces	1747.18	2185.73	3387.07
Highways	0.00	71.97	0.00
Leisure & Recreation	7865.74	8039.76	8250.31
Personnel & Protocol	1656.22	1845.84	33.00
Planning & Licences	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total:	69808.97	77166.80	78251.65
Capital expenditure			
Administration & Finance	2474.42	250.00	1714.00
Cemetery, Allotments & Open Spaces	87.49	0.00	410.00
Highways	179.00	226.95	5023.25
Leisure & Recreation	9896.00	4818.51	36.00
Personnel & Protocol	250.00	0.00	0.00
Planning & Licences	576.48	119.43	159.98
Total:	13463.39	5414.89	7343.23
Grants	7568.00	8068.00	7718.00
Other expenditure	3980.53	2412.45	3703.86
Changing Rooms & Pitches Operating Account			
Receipts (including precept)	3295.62	1829.16	1085.76
Payments	2228.36	2666.86	1449.19
Car Parks & Moorland Street Land Account			
Receipts (including precept)	2458.65	4706.08	6713.21
Payments	4193.88	5091.92	4690.19
Maintenance Fund			
Receipts (including precept)	-	-	-
Payments	1000.00	280.00	1000.00
SUMMARY OF ALL ACCOUNTS			
Opening Balance	80067.17	83655.00	79613.06
Receipts	104830.96	96778.98	98779.68
Payments	101243.13	100820.92	103156.12
Closing Balance:	83655.00	79613.06	75236.62