



# AXBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

## ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

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**1: Mayor's Introduction (Councillor Pauline Ham)**

We are pleased to have welcomed two new members this year, Councillor Andrew Means and Councillor Craig Walking, 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 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 CofE 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.

**2: Members serving from May 2022:**

| <b>Member (still in post)</b>              | <b>Telephone</b> | <b>Email</b>                         |
|--|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Kate Browne                                | 733208           | Kate.Browne@axbridge-tc.gov.uk       |
| Reece Faulkner                             | 07703 799652     | c/o Town Clerk                       |
| Ben Ferguson                               | 07789016830      | benjamin.ferguson@axbridge-tc.gov.uk |
| Pauline Ham (Mayor)                        | 732062           | Pauline.Ham@axbridge-tc.gov.uk       |
| Jo Jenkins                                 | 07539900368      | c/o Town Clerk                       |
| Tony Jordan                                | 01934 844723     | Tony.jordan@axbridge-tc.gov.uk       |
| Andrew Mearns (from 15 August 2022)        | 07793 463036     | Andrew.mearns@axbridge-tc.gov.uk     |
| Frankie Mitton (Deputy Mayor)              | 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           | Sarah.Thomas@axbridge-tc.gov.uk      |
| <b>Former Members during 2022/23</b>       |                  |                                      |
| Craig Walking (20 June 2022 – 13 May 2023) |                  |                                      |

### **3: Employees and Volunteers**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Town Clerk:<br>Axbridge Town Council,<br>PO Box 1184<br>Axbridge, BS26 2WJ | Ms Vicky Brice<br><br>Tel: 07884 264033 Email: Vicky.Brice@axbridge-tc.gov.uk            |
| Assistant to the Town Clerk:   | Mrs Katie Weir   |
| Address (as above)   | Tel: 07834 811404 Email: assistant.clerk@axbridge-tc.gov.uk                              |
| Facilities Manager:  | Darren Hogarth   |
| Town Maintenance Contractor<br>Sergeant at Mace:                           | Andrew Laken<br>John Hawkins (until 23 January 2023)<br>James Roper (from 24 April 2023) |
| Town Bailiff:  | Andres Bolado (from 4 July 2022)   |
| 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 Pauline Ham – Chair)**

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 Licences Committee (Councillor Mike Taylor - 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 (Councillor Mike Taylor - Chair)**

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.

### **Leisure and Recreation Committee (Councillor Pauline Ham – Chair)**

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.

### **Highways Advisory Group (Councillor Ben Ferguson - Chair)**

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.

### **Cemetery, Allotments and Open Spaces Advisory Group (Councillor Jo Jenkins – Chair)**

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 continue to ensure that memorabilia at the cemetery is kept to the base of the headstone to facilitate workings at the cemetery.

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

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) – (David Parkin - Chair)**

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.

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

| <b>Formally represented:</b>                  |
|---|
| Axbridge Community Partnership                |
| Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) |
| Sports and Social Committee                   |
| Town Trust/Town Council Liaison Committee     |

|   |
|---|
| <b>Council Representation and Liaison:</b>  |
| 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**

|   | <b>Actual</b>    | <b>Actual</b>     | <b>Actual</b>     |
|---|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|   | <b>2020/21</b>   | <b>2021/22</b>    | <b>2022/23</b>    |
| <b>GENERAL ACCOUNT</b>                                |                  |                   |                   |
| <b>RECEIPTS</b>                                       |                  |                   |                   |
| Precept received                                      | 88500.00         | 93,000.00         | 99,000.00         |
| Precept transferred out to other accounts             | -5140.09         | -                 |                   |
| Precept transferred to other accounts                 | -                | 3,349.51          | 19,514.40         |
| Grants  | 962.00           | 3,189.64          | 4766.00           |
| Other income  | 5658.80          | 8,642.31          | 11,015.90         |
| <b>Total:</b>   | <b>89,980.71</b> | <b>108,181.46</b> | <b>134,296.30</b> |
|   |                  |                   |                   |
| <b>PAYMENTS</b>                                       |                  |                   |                   |
| <b>Revenue Expenditure</b>                            |                  |                   |                   |
| Administration & Finance                              | 66581.27         | 66,513.84         | 74,147.10         |
| Cemetery, Allotments & Open Spaces                    | 3387.07          | 2,613.73          | 2,383.70          |
| Highways  | 0.00             | 0.00              | 7,306.71          |
| Leisure & Recreation                                  | 8250.31          | 9,429.33          | 17,460.13         |
| Personnel & Protocol                                  | 33.00            | 242.14            | 2,019.59          |
| Planning & Licences                                   | 0.00             | 0.00              | 0.00              |
|   | <b>78,251.65</b> | <b>78,799.04</b>  | <b>103,317.23</b> |
| <b>Capital expenditure</b>                            |                  |                   |                   |
| Administration & Finance                              | 1714.00          | 0.00              | 832.50            |
| Cemetery, Allotments & Open Spaces                    | 410.00           | 5,479.97          | 216.60            |
| Highways  | 5023.25          | 846.88            | 1,604.48          |
| Leisure & Recreation                                  | 36.00            | 0.00              | 7,969.00          |
| Personnel & Protocol                                  | 0.00             | 0.00              | 81.90             |
| Planning & Licences                                   | 159.98           | -251.99           | 0.00              |
| <b>Total:</b>   | <b>7,343.23</b>  | <b>6,074.86</b>   | <b>10,704.48</b>  |
|   |                  |                   |                   |
| <b>Grants</b>   | <b>7,718.00</b>  | <b>8,839.64</b>   | <b>8,350.00</b>   |
|   |                  |                   |                   |
| <b>Other expenditure</b>                              | <b>3703.86</b>   | <b>3,155.68</b>   | <b>6,416.39</b>   |
|   |                  |                   |                   |
| <b>Changing Rooms &amp; Pitches Operating Account</b> |                  |                   |                   |
| Receipts (including precept)                          | 1085.76          | 161.68            | 1,420.81          |
| Payments  | 1449.19          | 4,521.29          | 1,515.24          |
|   |                  |                   |                   |

|  |                  |                  |                  |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Car Parks &amp; Moorland Street Land Account</b>      |                  |                  |                  |
| Receipts (including precept)                             | 6713.21          | 2,386.99         | 0.00             |
| Payments   | 4690.19          | 4,698.68         | 1514.40*         |
|  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>Maintenance Fund</b>                                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Receipts (including precept)                             | 1000.00          | 0.00             | 0.00             |
| Payments   | 0.00             | 0.00             | 18,000.00*       |
|  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>SUMMARY OF ALL ACCOUNTS</b>                           |                  |                  |                  |
| Opening Balance  | 79613.06         | 75,236.62        | 79,877.56        |
| Receipts   | 98779.68         | 110,730.13       | 135,717.11       |
| Payments   | 103156.12        | 106,089.19       | 149,817.74       |
| <b>Closing Balance:</b>                                  | <b>75,236.62</b> | <b>79,877.56</b> | <b>65,776.93</b> |
|  |                  |                  |                  |
| * separate accounts closed – transferred to main account |                  |                  |                  |