



# AXBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24



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### 1: Mayor's Introduction (Councillor Franchesca Mitton)

It has been a privilege to be Mayor in a year which will now celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of Axbridge Town Council. I would like to welcome two new members to the Council – Barbara Wells and Richard Willis. Anyone interested in applying to join the council to fill the remaining vacancies should contact the Clerk.

I have had great pleasure in attending a number of civic occasions and hosting our own events – the Carnival lunch and procession of Mayors, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the maces and the Civic Service. At this service the High Sheriff of Somerset presented awards to Andy Laken and Ellen Campbell on behalf of the community.

The year has not all be fun with a number of challenges particularly relating to Somerset Council's financial situation and the services they provide. Axbridge is already quite independent having responsibility for many of its assets and so a lot of facilities will be unaffected. The Town Council continues to work for the benefit of the Town and was delighted to lease the Old Station Building on a 99 year lease, which has been sub-leased to the Axe Valley Men's Shed.

The Committees and Advisory Groups meet regularly and a summary of their work is given in the council report.

### 2: Members serving from May 2023:

Member (still in post)	Telephone	Email
Kate Browne	01934 733208	Kate.Browne@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Reece Faulkner	07703 799652	Reece.Faulkner@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Pauline Ham (Deputy Mayor)	01934 732062	Pauline.Ham@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Jo Jenkins	07539900368	c/o Town Clerk
Tony Jordan	01934 844723	Tony.Jordan@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Frankie Mitton (Mayor)	07863 163568	c/o Town Clerk
Graham Page	07974 970691	Graham.Page@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Michael Taylor	01934 732688	Mike.Taylor@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Sarah Thomas	01934 732072	c/o Town Clerk
Barbara Wells	07766 343611	Barbara.Wells@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
Richard Willis	07980 316060	Richard.Willis@axbridge-tc.gov.uk
<b>Former Members during 2023/24</b>		
Ben Ferguson (until 31 October 2023)		
Andrew Mearns (until 16 April 2024)		

### 3: Employees and Volunteers

Town Clerk: Ms Vicky Brice  
Axbridge Town Council,  
The Council Offices,  
Church Rooms, Church Steps  
Axbridge, BS26 2AP 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:  
Sergeant at Mace:  
Town Bailiff:  
Town Crier:  
Keeper of the Bells:  
Modern Archivist:

Darren Hogarth  
Vacant (James Roper until 1 Dec 2023 )  
Andres Bolado  
Nigel Scott  
Tricia Clark  
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 Frankie Mitton – Chair)**

The council employs 3 people; The Clerk, The Assistant Clerk & Facilities Manager. The Committee looks after council staff, pay and protocol including civic events. The Mayor thanked the officers for their support over the year. She also thanked the honorary officers for their attendance and support at various events. There was a vacancy for a mace bearer, following the resignation of James Roper. The Mayor particularly enjoyed the 400th Anniversary of the Maces and the blessing of the new maces, which had been beautifully carved by the Men's Shed.

##### **Planning and Licences Committee (Councillor Jo Jenkins - Chairman)**

The Committee is made up of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and interested Councillors. Meetings are held when planning applications and related business dictate which can be once or twice a month. They are usually held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of each month. If there is urgent business, items can be included in the Full Council meeting each month or a specially convened meeting.

The committee members have dealt with applications regarding the mast on Frys hill, the gas powered energy generator facility, extensions, works to listed buildings and plans in a conservation area on a regular basis to name but a few. Applications for tree works are delegated to the clerk.

The 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 surveys, questionnaires & consultations.

Large developments have to be considered by full council but they take into account the recommendations of the committee, who looks at the plans in detail. There is currently a significant planning development underway, that being The Lavender Fields by the developers Bellway, which is to comprise of 53 homes and is located on Houlgate way. The site has been cleared and main road frontage path laid, new street lighting is to be reinstalled from March onwards as a rough estimate of works commencing, but no definitive date has yet been given. Yellow lining is yet to be installed along the length of the site perimeter. A 2m wooden construction fencing is currently being installed to replace the mesh harass fencing, this will allegedly minimize noise pollution from the site. There is also potential for the southern perimeter of the open green space to be planted prior to development and this would allow for green areas to mature, enhancing the visual appearance of the site. Building work is yet to commence and will not be starting in the near future due to a number of factors.

##### **Administration and Finance Advisory Group (Councillor Mike Taylor - Chair)**

The Group membership is the Mayor and Deputy, interested councillors and the Town Clerk. It is a purely advisory body and has no powers. However, its work is 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 on them.

In its administration role, the Group advises on grants, insurance, the larger and long-term contracts, asset and risk management, the office facilities and communications. They also review changes in legislation and advice to see how this may affect operation of the Council.

Group members liaise with the Town Clerk on all financial matters including the payroll, the budget, the accounts, Vat, and the annual audit. The accounts are checked by group members every month and a summary report of the accounts is presented to Council quarterly, to keep all Councillors informed, and for Council to consider and adopt.

The annual 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 comments from the external auditor. We must record a thanks to the clerk for her continued accuracy in record keeping and the commitment to a achieving this result.

As reported last year, Somerset Council has decided not to take over the Town Council's payroll from Sedgemoor. The payroll has now been outsourced to PATA who provide the required information for the clerk to pay employees, the pension providers, and HMRC. This change has given the office staff a lot of work and continues to do so. Thanks go to them from the Council for taking the extra responsibility.

Budgeting. This has been a major item of debate in Council. At the moment, this Council is not certain which non-statutory services will continue to be delivered by Somerset Council or at what level they will be supplied. Because of their financial problems, it is almost certain that the budget restraints on Somerset will mean that Axbridge Town Council will need to take on or financially support certain existing services. This Council has therefore increased its budget and precept to enable it to cover the additional costs which will be incurred with the administration and supply of some services currently provided by Somerset.

Scribe software is now in use to record and manage the accounts. The Council is also using the system to record assets and manage other facilities such as the cemeteries. This means a lot of data has to be transferred from existing systems giving the clerk and her assistant a lot of work. Thanks again to them.

### **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

The children's play area continues to be well used. This year, thanks to money raised from the filming that took place in the town, we have been able to add a Cradle Swing in the space freed up when the new Agility Trail was fitted. After a few teething problems when it was initially fitted, this inclusive piece of equipment is proving to be a big success.

We continue to inspect and monitor the play area and equipment on a weekly basis and an annual external inspection, carried out on behalf of The Playing Fields Association, takes place in the late spring/early summer. We address any recommendations they identify, on a scale of urgency.

#### Main field and car park

The furlong field is looking in good condition. Obviously, the wet weather we have experienced this year has caused problems for the football clubs.

The fence to the furlong car park has finally been damaged beyond repair. Over the years various repairs have been carried out. However, the recent damage has shown that a new fence is required. The work is planned soon.

#### Changing Rooms

Darren continues to maintain the facility to a good standard. Various works and servicing have been carried out during this year:

- The boiler has been serviced.
- The external metal box, housing electric sockets, has been replaced.
- Legionnaire testing has taken place. Darren will continue to test the hot water on a regular basis.
- A fixed wiring inspection has been carried out. We are awaiting the report but we anticipate some remedial works will be required.

Darren will be painting the facility in the coming year, when the weather permits, and will be carrying out some repairs to the fascia boards.

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

#### Public conveniences

The overall standard of cleanliness continues to be acceptable, with only the occasional hiccup. During the current incredibly inclement weather there has been a problem with the doors to the cubicles swelling in the rain. We will keep an eye on the situation to ensure they shrink back as they dry out.

- The back wall into the car park has been cleaned. Darren will be painting the facility soon.
- Work is planned to repair and replace the external lighting of the facility.

- A fixed wiring inspection is also due to be carried out.
- The hand washing facilities are serviced twice a year.

Unfortunately, the drinking fountain sited by the conveniences is still out of action but a repair is being considered.

### **Highways Advisory Group (Councillor Pauline Ham – Chair from November 2023)**

#### **Weather**

The Highways Group is an advisory body to Axbridge Town Council with responsibility for highways related business.

- As we are all very aware the wet weather has had an over-riding effect this winter. We have been liaising with Somerset Highways Department, who have sent someone out to record and investigate the situation. The drains are running free but, unfortunately, volume of water has been a problem.
- The amount of rain and lying water has also created an increased number of pot holes. We have been reporting those we are aware of. Individuals are also able to go to the Somerset web-site, search for report a pot hole.

#### **Road Safety**

- We are currently looking at creating gateways into the town, to emphasise the need to reduce speed and drive safely.
- We have a very active “Speed Watch Group” who are working hard to keep the speed down.
- With the Speed Watch Group we are currently working to find a way to enable us to get Speed Indicator Devices for Axbridge without incurring a cost to the town. This making slow progress at the moment but, hopefully, we will be able to find a way forward.
- We have sent a letter of support from Axbridge Town Council to the Cross Footpath Group which will enable them to have the support of an officer from Somerset to approach the land owner reference their footpath plans.
- We are compiling a list for Somerset Highways to refresh the current road markings around the town and to add new, where and if required. The white lines in the Square will be refreshed as soon as the weather permits, hopefully this week. We need to identify where to site a “disabled parking only” sign by the disabled space to make it legally enforceable.
- We are in conversation with the developers reference the street lighting that needs to be replaced in Houlgate Way.

#### **Car Parks**

- We are in the process of renewing the parking signs that were damaged, in the Meadow Street/Old Church Road car park. We will use this opportunity to update the other information the signs contain.
- A white line needs to be added by the disabled parking space in the Moorland Street car park.

### **Cemetery, Allotments and Open Spaces Advisory Group (Councillor Tony Jordan – Chair)**

Whilst generally paying attention to open spaces matters within the town, the group concentrates on the cemetery (at the bypass) and the allotments (at Hillside). In particular, inspections take place to ensure that there is consistency with cemetery memorabilia and to achieve an equitable standard of plot care within the allotments. There is also a focus on both sites on maintenance of safe access to each (avoiding moss, subsidence etc).

### **Strategic Planning Advisory Group (Councillor Pauline Ham - Chair)**

The remit of the Strategic Planning Advisory Group (SPAG) is to progress and monitor large projects and town council initiatives: to investigate potential income streams and to arrange work as necessary.

The main focus of the group this year has been to complete the acquisition of the Old Station Building as a community asset, specifically for use by the Men's Shed. A 99 year lease was achieved; Axbridge Town Council signed the lease with Somerset and followed this by signing the under-lease with Axe Valley Men Shed. Somerset Council was very supportive in this venture, offering help and advice along the way. Our solicitor was equally as supportive with all the legalities involved in the transactions both for the main lease and the under lease. The work was completed at a substantially reduced rate!

The Men Shed group are now working extremely hard to restore the building to its former glory and, I am told the Station will become a listed building in the near future. The group is currently discussing potential projects for the coming year.

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

<b>Formally represented:</b>
Local Community Network
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
Batts Combe Quarry Community Liaison Committee
School Governor/Town Council representative

#### **6: Summary of Accounts**

The Council recently changed from Excel to a new accounting system called Scribe. The first table shows the summary of costs for 2020–2023 using the previous accounting system. The second table shows a summary of costs for 2023-2024 using Scribe.

<b>TABLE 1</b>	<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

<b>TABLE 2</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
<b>Cost Centre</b>	<b>Receipts (£)</b>	<b>Payments (£)</b>
General Income	121,737.04	-
Staff and Training	376.80	60,468.81
Administration		27,741.93
Office		6,655.13
Grants		9,030.40
Civic Events and Regalia	200.00	2,581.53
Allotments	1,145.00	1,186.61
Cemetery	1,885.00	1,454.16
Open Spaces	100.00	166.70
Changing Rooms and Recreation	1,095.84	6,586.69
Car Parks and Highways	150.00	3,404.46
Public Conveniences		9,830.59
Projects	5,150.00	12,602.70
VAT	9,232.68	6,260.52
<b>GROSS TOTAL</b>	<b>141,072.36</b>	<b>147,970.23</b>

<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>65,776.93</b>
Receipts	141,072.36
Payments	147,970.23
<b>Closing Balance</b>	<b>58,879.06</b>