

**Axbridge Town Council
Annual Report 2007-2008**

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1. Members serving from May 2007

Member	Telephone	Email
Michael Taylor (Mayor)	01 934 732688	Tay31TC@aol.com
Mrs Kate Browne (Deputy Mayor)	01 934 733208	KWBrowne@gmail.com
Dennis Bratt	01 934 732352	dennis@bratt29@googlemail.com
Christopher Byrne	01 934 732013	
Jeremy Gall	01 934 733118	Jeremy@Gall.org.uk
Mrs Pauline Ham	01 934 732062	PAHam@educ.somerset.gov.uk
Barry Hamblin	01 934 733939	rhemadev@onetel.com
Mrs Val Isaac	01934 733011	v.isaac@btinternet.com
Jim Lukins	01 934 732293	
Andrew Matthews	07708 312087	rabmatt@hotmail.com
Paul Passey	01 934 733373	paul@westmead31me17.freemove.co.uk
Mrs Elizabeth Scott	01 934 733341	scottliz@tiscali.co.uk
Mrs Jennifer Trotman	01 934 733306	Jennifer_T@hotmail.com

2. Employees and Volunteers

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

Manager of the Furlong and Changing Rooms: Mr Darren Hogarth
Sergeant at Mace: Mr Mike Day
Town Bailiff: Mr James McKay
Town Crier: Mrs Yvonne Chamberlain
Keeper of the Bells: Mr Dave Callow
Modern Archivist: Mrs Maggie Tur

3. Council Committees.

The following committees were appointed at the May meeting of the Council. The chairmen were appointed by the committee members.

	Chairman
Administration and Finance Advisory Committee	Cllr. M Taylor
Appeals Panel	-
Axbridge Promotional Advisory Committee	Cllr. P Passey
Cemeteries, Allotments and Open Spaces Advisory Committee	Cllr. J Lukins
Highways Advisory Committee	Cllr. Mrs V Isaac
Grievance and Disciplinary Panel	-
Leisure and Recreation Advisory Committee (inc Changing Rooms)	Cllr. Mrs P Ham
Planning Committee	Cllr. B Hamblin
Personnel and Protocol Advisory Committee	Cllr. M Taylor
Somerset Showcase Committee	Cllr. Mrs J Trotman
Axbridge Youth Partnership	Cllr. Mrs K Browne

4. Organisations on which the council is represented.

Axbridge Action Group
Chamber of Commerce
Farmers' Market
Help Make Poverty History
Parish Plan
Axbridge & District Museum Trust
Mendip Hills and AONB Partnership Committee
Quarry Liaison Committee
Sedgemoor Area Working Panel
Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)
Somerset Market Towns Forum
Sports and Social Committee
Town Trust/Town Council Joint Committee

5. Mayor's report

This was election year and we had a new council from May. Four councillors did not stand for re-election but four local people did apply to be councillors. As a result there was no poll but we have a full thirteen member council.

A special mention must be made of two of the retiring councillors who deserve long service medals. Mrs Priscilla Chard who served for nearly twenty years and was Mayor twice and Mrs Edith Channon who was Mayor three times. Due to work pressures we also said goodbye to Tony Wilson who did one year as mayor and Andy Bates.

The Town Council seems to be busier than ever. This is partly due to initiatives of the council and partly because of issues forced on us.

This year we have more than ever relied on the Committee structure and the work done by their members. The next section contains reports by the working committees, highlighting their achievements and work in progress so I will not give the details in my report.

We have two Standing Committees who have power to make their own decisions. These are the Planning and Showcase Committees. We have seven Advisory Committees. The busiest of these was without doubt the Highways Committee.

One issue which concerns all councillors, committees and employees is Quality Council status. The Town Council is committed to achieving this and procedures are steadily being altered and improved to comply with the requirements laid down. One major hurdle is that we need to have a clerk who has passed a Local Council Administration examination. The clerk has been on the necessary training courses and is working on her portfolio for presentation to the adjudication panel. We wish her well.

6. Committee Reports

Annual Report of the Administration and Finance Advisory Committee

The Administration and Finance Committee has met regularly. We were particularly pleased that despite the fact that we were chosen as one of the 5% of parishes to receive an in depth look at their accounts and procedures we got through the Annual External Audit with flying colours. The committee has worked hard on consolidating our procedures and rules into a single document for easy reference. The standing orders are being updated and now include new sections on financial regulations, the code of conduct and committee remits.

The committee continues to advise on the constant changes to the legislation affecting the council, monitoring the accounts and insurance cover and dealing with procedural problems. The committee is responsible for preparing the annual budget and recommending it to council.

The committee is also responsible for administering grants which this year covered repairs to the church clock mechanism, new goal posts and contributed to the restoration of the paintings in the Council Chamber. We provide an annual grant to the Town Hall to help with its maintenance and regular grants to other organisations.

Report of the Axbridge Promotional Advisory Committee

The group meets monthly to recommend actions to the full Council and to act, together with the Clerk, to identify and to carry out activities that promote both the Town Council and Axbridge in general to a wider audience.

The group is responsible for the Town Council prize winning website. The newsletter is delivered to all households each month by a band of volunteers to whom the Council is grateful.

During the past 12 months the group has been instrumental in organising the erection of stone markers at the east and west entrances to the town to commemorate the 450th. anniversary of the town's Philip and Mary Charter. The stone was donated by Bardon's quarry and funding was through grants and donations from Yeo Valley and the Parochial Charities.

Boundary markers at the four extreme corners of the parish have been erected in time for this year's Rogation Sunday "Beating of the Bounds".

A community stall has been established at the monthly Farmers' Market for use by the Town Council and any other voluntary community organisation in town that wishes to promote its activities. Closer links have also been established with the Somerset Farmers' Markets organisation that runs the monthly event.

Throughout the year, the group has worked at a scheme to provide more and better notice boards at the Town Hall for the Town Trust, the Town Council and the general public to use. This delicate issue has yet to be resolved. The group has also established the whereabouts of the banners and flags used at the Axbridge Pageant and has taken these into its care.

Report of the Cemeteries, Allotments and Open Spaces Advisory Committee

Cemeteries.

Two long outstanding issues have been resolved during the last year.

Firstly, Somerset County Council eventually agreed with us that the grass verge between the cemetery fence and the road was their responsibility and therefore had the brambles and tree branches, which were damaging our fence, cut down. (Original correspondence with Somerset C.C. began in 2004 regarding this matter.) We always knew that the fence was our responsibility but were reluctant to replace it until the brambles, ivy, etc. had been cleared. The new fence is a great improvement.

Secondly, the pedestrian access at the Axbridge end of the cemetery has been completed: many thanks to John Chard and also to Mandy Brading from the Axbridge to Winscombe Railway Walk. This access now enables those who wish to go on foot to tend graves to use the path instead of walking along the busy road to the main entrance.

Our thanks go to the contractors who cut the hedges and the grass. The cemetery continues to be a particularly peaceful area which is always at its best at this time of year when the daffodils are in flower.

Allotments.

Half of plot 8A has been handed back and let as plots 8C and 8D. Plots 6, 5A, 5B, 4A and 4B will be handed back by Mr Dyer on March 14th with his agreement. He has grazed sheep on them due to lack of demand.

We have a waiting list of 6 or 7 and these allotments will be let to these applicants. As of 18th February we have 19 tenants. Hopefully a search for a community allotment will come to fruition this weekend (Feb 23rd).

Footpaths

Cllr Lukins is the footpath liaison officer for Somerset County Council and holds a bag of small tools for clearing footpaths but they remain the property of Somerset CC.

Annual Report of the Leisure and Recreation Advisory Committee

During this year:

- Darren Hogarth was appointed as the furlong and changing rooms manager. He has been doing an excellent job and during the coming year he will be carrying out maintenance work on the changing rooms and the big slide, as priority tasks.
- In the children's play area the new 'rock n cross' see saw is being fitted as we speak, additional bark for the safety surface under the aerial runway is arriving next week and an additional bench has been ordered to provide more seating for weary parents/grandparents and carers!
- We are looking at the possibility of additional bins on the furlong and we are trying to identify the best situations. One of the suggestions we are considering is for a large bin to be secured to the changing rooms. Another dog bin has also been discussed.
- The changing rooms and pitches continue being well used, with the Saxon youth teams going from strength to strength and Axbridge Town continuing to do extremely well. They went up to division 5 this season, where they are currently top and looking set to go up to division 4 next season.
- There continue to be teething problems with changing room issues and agreements but now the facility has been in place for a couple of years our priority is to organise this for the coming year.
- Cricket nets are still on the agenda but funding them is still proving to be a problem.

The furlong recreation field is very well used by Axbridge residents. Unfortunately there is always a certain amount of vandalism, at various levels, which we try to address as quickly as possible; safety is of paramount importance.

Annual Report of the Planning Committee

Under the terms of its remit the Planning Committee has powers to make decisions on behalf of the Town Council on matters of planning and development, licensing and road closures. Where a planning application relates to multiple dwellings or if there is any contention or uncertainty about an application it is referred to the full Council for a decision.

Because of the response times required by planning legislation the Planning Committee is usually obliged to meet twice a month. There have been occasions when applications have been referred to full Council and occasionally this has required an extra meeting of the Town Council in order to comply with the response times imposed on us.

The centre of Axbridge has been designated as a conservation area and the town has a very high density of listed buildings. The policy of the Town Council is to ensure that the visual amenity of the town's conservation area is maintained and listed buildings are protected. However, being mindful of the need to create employment and economic well-being in the town, any planning application which promotes business within the town is supported, provided it complies with conservation policies.

Some applications have been opposed by the Planning Committee and the Council because they do not comply with our stated policies. When necessary a member of the Planning Committee or the Clerk has attended meetings of the Sedgemoor District Council Development Control Committee at Bridgwater to present our case. Whilst we have been successful in opposing some inappropriate planning applications there have been others where Sedgemoor District Council has imposed unwanted development on the town. Because of the uncertainty of planning applications it has been decided that the town should have clearly stated policy in the form of a design statement. There is a great deal of work and public consultation required but this will be carried out over the coming months and it is hoped that the outcome will be a document which will be accepted as a basis of planning guidance and which will preclude inappropriate development in our town.

In the past year there have been cases where the work of the Planning and Highways committees has overlapped. Fortunately four councillors (The Mayor, Councillor Mike Taylor, the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs Kate Browne, the Chairman of Planning, Councillor Baz Hamblin and the Chairman of Highways, Councillor Val Isaacs) serve on both committees and there has been a coordinated effort on these matters. In spite of their efforts of these committees we are still waiting for satisfactory resolution of the re-instatement of the road and footpath in front of the Old Butchers' Yard development and the street lighting planned for the Church steps and the path to the Youth Club. In both cases departments of Somerset County Council have failed to meet reasonable time scales in their work.

Annual Report of the Personnel and Protocol Advisory Committee

The committee met regularly, often discussing confidential matters relating to conditions of employment, salaries and annual assessments of employees. The committee also advises on protocols for ceremonial occasions. The Mayor Making procedure has been reviewed.

Annual Report of the Highways Advisory Committee

The group meets monthly to recommend actions to the full Council and to act, together with the Clerk, to identify works required to be done by Somerset Highways and other agencies responsible for roads, footways and parking within the parish. The group also carries out a monitoring role of works requested.

The group regularly reviews and updates the Council's Public Transport Policy and its Parking Policy, both of which are submitted to higher authorities to support Town Council views.

During the year there have been numerous requests for street-lighting repairs. A new scheme has been requested of Somerset County Council for the lighting of the pathway from the Church to the Youth Club.

A scheme has been recommended and is awaiting Planning Permission to create new, and amend the old handrails on the Church Steps.

The footway in Meadow Street, fronting the Old Butcher's Yard development has been on the group's agenda for many months and is now with the enforcement section at Sedgemoor District Council.

The positive and robust approach by the group to improving the bus-stop provision in town has resulted in a proposal for new stops at Townsend and in Cheddar Road.

A new road layout and new signs have been put in place at the Townsend Junction, in a low-cost effort to improve safety. Only time will tell how effective this will be.

The group has set up a monitoring system for residents of Hillside to inform the Council of any "near-misses or other traffic problems on the by-pass at the Hill-side turning. Efforts to persuade Somerset Highways to create a central reservation at that junction were rejected by the authority.

The group has held meetings with Axbridge Action Group which requested Town Council support for its proposal to employ an independent Traffic Management Consultant to look at traffic and parking issues in town. The group and the Council as a whole is insistent that any such consultant must demonstrate previous experience, competence and a truly independent approach.

Several joint meetings have been held with Compton Bishop, Weare and Cheddar Council members to draw together data and local information which might persuade Somerset Highways to make improvements to the Cross lane Junction with the A38.

A review of street signs in the parish is being undertaken with a view to “de-cluttering”. Also the group is monitoring Somerset Highways’ “Yellow-line” review of parking regulations throughout the town.

Finally, and most recently the group has taken the lead in discussions and investigations in respect of Sedgemoor’s proposal to offer Meadow Street car-park for sale. The final outcome of this is not yet known.

Annual Report of the Somerset Showcase Committee

Showcase 2007 was a great success. The weather was a huge improvement on that of 2006, which undoubtedly also made a huge difference to how well things went. The greatest noticeable improvement was the ability to have the evening entertainment outdoors in the Square again. This also meant that we did not have to use the Town Hall during the evening, freeing it up for preparation for the Harvest Home on the following Sunday. However the Town Hall was a great venue for the Craft Stalls during the day, and then the Children’s Disco in the early evening.

Feedback from everyone has been very positive. The Stallholders did very well, and the street entertainers were fantastic. As in 2006, the Beer Festival was very popular, as were the Face Painters. The evening entertainment was well received, and the fireworks were even better than the year before. Many local residents have made a point of saying how much they enjoyed the event. The Street Market, organised by the Axbridge Chamber of Commerce, added a great new element and was very popular both with the residents having stalls, and those shopping at them.

The Showcase receives a huge amount of support from local businesses and organisations as well as from the whole community. Without that support – both financial and otherwise – it would be impossible to run the event. Last year we were lucky enough to receive around £900 in sponsorship to go with the funding from Sedgemoor District Council. As funding becomes increasingly scarce, such sponsorship is even more vital than ever. Inevitably the costs of putting on the Showcase grow each year.

As with all events there are always changes and improvements to be made, and these will be carried forwards to this year’s Showcase.

This year’s Showcase is currently planned for Saturday 6th September 2008.

Annual Report of the Axbridge Youth Partnership

The Axbridge Youth Partnership committee have a remit to look at all youth opportunities in the Town. This year it was suggested that a ‘Drop in Centre’

should be set up in the Church rooms, running weekly on a Friday night. Unfortunately, due to lack of demand this was cancelled. It was suggested that local schools should be contacted in order to establish the needs of young people (from 9 – 13 years old) in the Town. A visit to the local middle schools is planned but it will be necessary to provide additional adult support to facilitate any suggested activities. CRB checks are necessary for any volunteers – it is possible to get funding to pay for these checks from Somerset County Council or Sedgemoor District Council. The youth club has had a major re-fit during the year and now provides a meeting room facility which is available to other local organisations as well as to the young people of the area. The Youth shelter is progressing still – during the year we gained additional grant funding from Biffa, Axbridge Town Council, Axbridge Parish Plan and a promise of LED lighting donated by Les Stanley. The BMX track is still getting little use. It has been suggested that the BMX youths could help to re-build it to a level they would be able to use regularly. The Youth Open Day was well attended by local youth organisations wishing to recruit new members. A number of young people also attended the event held in the Town Hall on the 5th May 2007. We hope to deliver the Youth Shelter as soon as possible – there have been increased material costs and so additional funding is now required. Anyone wanting to talk about Youth issues should contact Cllr Mrs Kate Browne 01934 733208.

7. Summary of Accounts

	2006-07	2007-08
General Account		
INCOME		
Precept	£37,500.00	£46,000.00
Bank Interest	£476.23	£1,106.74
Cemetery Charges	£1,092.00	£1,338.00
Allotment Rents	£195.00	£200.00
County Council grants	£2,589.00	£1,667.00
District Council grants	£2,779.42	£1,419.78
Recreation ground grants	£18,633.51	£8,377.49
Jack Todd Bequest grant (for Changing Rooms)	£7,800.10	£7,800.10
Other	£215.00	£130
VAT refunds	£5,924.60	£1,797.24
Total Receipts :	£77,204.86	£70,946.35
EXPENDITURE		
<i>Revenue items</i>		
Clerk's Salary and Administration	£17,715.48	£19,506.61
Mayor's and Town Crier's allowances	£1,100.00	£1,100.00
Changing Rooms loan repayment	£7,800.10	£7,800.10
Recreation ground management & maintenance	£7,912.35	£7,974.31

Promoting Axbridge	£2,262.06	£610.25
Allotments lease and maintenance	£185.00	£175.00
Cemetery maintenance	£1,839.43	£1606.12

Capital items

Play area fencing	£8,388.51	
"Baboon" play equipment	£10,245.00	
Springy Toys play equipment		£992.00
"Rock and Cross" play equipment		£8,840.46
Town marker and boundary stones		£1,923.00
Church Clock striking mechanism		£1,900.00
Benches (High Street/West Street and Bypass)		£1,376.75
Parish Plan	£1,161.51	£82.51
Other	£735.50	£519.00

Grants made

Town Hall - general maintenance	£3,640.00	£3,640.00
Town Hall - disabled access	£1,667.00	
Town Hall – paintings restoration		£1,000.00
Planters in Square	£300.00	£300.00
Xmas trees and lights	£877.16	£1,141.97
Others	£300.00	£325.00

VAT paid	£4,592.76	£3,784.90
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Total Payments : **£70,721.86** **£64,597.98**

SUMMARY

Opening Balance at 1 st April	£13,535.94	£20,018.94
Total Receipts	£77,204.86	£70,946.35
Total Payments	£70,721.86	£64,597.98
Transfer (Changing Rooms Build A/c closed)		£3,702.69
Closing balance at 31 st March	£20,018.94	£30,070.00

Other Accounts

CLOSING BALANCES:

Changing Rooms Operating Account	-£572.08	-£1,121.41
Showcase Account	-£58.60	£0.00
Changing Rooms Build Account	£3,702.69	£0.00
Changing Rooms Maintenance Fund ®	£5,000.00	£5096.75
Town Crier's Account®	£233.80	£233.80
Pageant Fund®	£3,435.60	£3,565.35

® = Reserved Fund
Councillor Mike Taylor
Mayor of Axbridge
April 2008.