EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Festival and Events Working Party

Informal notes of the virtual meeting held at 1400 on Thursday 22nd January 2026 via zoom

Present

Cllr Steve Gazzard	SG	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Olly Davey	OD	Exmouth Town Council
Lisa Bowman	LB	Exmouth Town Council
Chetna Jones	CJ	Exmouth Town Council
Jess Magill	JM	Exmouth Town Council
Lisa Greenway	LG	Exmouth Town Council

Apologies:

Cllr Alex Sadiq	AS	Exmouth Town Council
Joy Whipps	JW	Festival Volunteer
Cllr Cherry Nicholas	CN	Exmouth Town Council

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

SG welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies.

2. To approve the notes from the meetings on the 20th of November 2025 & matters arising

As the meeting was not quorate the meeting proceeded on an informal basis for information only, and the approval of the previous meeting notes from the 20th of November 2025 was postponed. Members did not raise any matters from this meeting.

3. Winter Festival 2025 wash up

Members agreed that the festival was well-received, with strong attendance and a lively atmosphere throughout the day. Feedback from the public was overwhelmingly positive, and the addition of the churros stall and the Christingles craft activity helped created a sense of variety and energy.

The return of the Christmas tree to its original position was widely appreciated. Several residents commented to SG that they were pleased to see it back where it traditionally stands. However, concerns were raised about the size and condition of the tree's ground socket, which appears too large and may have caused the tree to shift. CJ confirmed that this should be addressed before the next winter festival to ensure the tree was held in place securely. CJ suggested the Town Council may wish to formally acknowledge and thank King's Garden Centre for donating the tree each year. JW added that although the business was recognised as a sponsor in the winter festival promotional material perhaps, they could be presented with a framed photograph of the mayor standing in front of the tree, which they could display at the garden centre. Members agreed that would was a very good suggestion.

Although participation in the Lantern Parade was slightly lower than the previous year, it was still considered a healthy turnout and, if anything, made the parade feel easier to manage. Operationally, the Lantern Parade ran smoothly, but a few practical improvements were identified. It was sometimes difficult to see where the end of the parade was, and a suggestion was made to use a tall flag or marker to improve visibility for both participants and marshals.

Entry into the Strand became congested, partly due to a shortage of marshals in that area, strengthening stewarding at this point of the route was noted as a priority for next year.

4. 2025 review (see below)

JM presented the 2025 Festival and Events Year in Review, outlining the extensive programme of activities that Exmouth Town Council either organised or supported throughout the year. It was highlighted that 2025 had been particularly demanding due to the inclusion of VE Day commemorations, the introduction of the new Dinosaur Day event, and the continued delivery of Gate to Plate. The combination of these events created a packed calendar that required significant coordination and resources.

OD raised a question regarding the funding arrangements for Gate to Plate, recalling that the council had previously been on a sliding scale of financial responsibility. JM confirmed that Exmouth Town Council now covers the full cost of the event and explained that although the council funds it entirely, the overall cost reduces each year because as the event becomes more established, the organisers require less expenditure on marketing and promotional activity.

JM updated members on future planning, noting that Eat Festivals had requested confirmation of dates for the 2027 events. The organisers plan their calendar well in advance and had proposed Sunday the 11th of April and Sunday the 24th of October. JM pointed out that the April date falls on the final Sunday of the Easter holidays, which she felt could be beneficial, as it would likely capture remaining holiday visitors while avoiding a period when many local families might be away. Members considered the proposed dates and agreed they were appropriate.

CJ invited JM to revisit an earlier discussion about the event's branding, specifically whether to continue using the name Gate to Plate or switch to the Eat Festivals brand. JM explained that the Gate to Plate name originated from EDDC, which had developed the brand initially for Honiton before extending it to Axminster and Exmouth. At one stage, there had been conversations about adopting the Eat Festivals name, but EDDC had preferred to retain Gate to Plate at that time. Now that Exmouth Town Council fully funds the event, the decision rests locally. After further discussion, members agreed that the Gate to Plate name should be retained.

5. To discuss Town Culture 2026

JM outlined the Government's new Town of Culture scheme and asked members if they would support her in submitting an expression of interest on behalf of Exmouth. JM described the process: an initial submission due by the 8th of February 2026, followed by a shortlist of six towns that each receive £40–60k to develop a full bid. The eventual winner would receive £3.5 million to deliver a year-long cultural programme. JM noted that the application requires a clear narrative about the town, its strengths and weaknesses, a vision, leadership details, and plans for delivering that vision.

Members were invited to discuss their views on themes or cultural assets that could strengthen Exmouth's case.

Members were supportive. SG endorsed the idea, emphasising Exmouth's cultural potential. Suggestions included highlighting the town's maritime heritage, drawing on Exmouth's artistic history, active visual arts and photography communities, and vibrant music scene. Members also discussed the value of involving Exmouth Museum and noting recent interest from film companies.

Questions were raised about whether funding could support infrastructure as well as events. JM confirmed that the scheme appears flexible and could potentially support a temporary arts centre to test demand, with the possibility of evolving into a permanent venue. JM noted that large-scale cultural programmes typically require staffing and overheads, so restrictions are unlikely to be tight. The group agreed that an arts or community space would be a valuable addition.

JM will provide an update in the next meeting.

6. Any other business

JM is beginning a 12-week fundraising training programme led by a specialist in festival and event fundraising. JM has already had an introductory call and hopes the course will strengthen her ability to secure additional funding for the festival.

JM confirmed the dates for the 2026 art weekend, running from the 1st to the 4th of May 2026. The weekend will centre on open studios and will connect with a separate street-art and mural initiative funded outside the festival budget. As part of that project, the local artist Slam—who regularly works with young people will lead a mural on the skate park wall during the art weekend. JM hopes this will inspire creativity, build pride in local spaces, and show young people that street art can be a legitimate, skilled and even financially viable path rather than tagging.

7. Date of next meeting 12th of February 2026

The meeting ended at 14:52