EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Festival and Events Working Party

Notes of the virtual meeting held at 1400 on Thursday 12th February 2026 via zoom

Present

Cllr Steve Gazzard	SG	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Olly Davey	OD	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Nick Hookway	NH	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Nicky Nicholls	NN	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Graham Deasy	GD	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:

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, 22nd of January 2026 and matters arising

SG proposed and NN seconded the accuracy of the notes from the meeting on the 20th of November 2025 and SG proposed and OD seconded the accuracy of the notes from the meeting on the 22nd of January 2026. All members agreed that the notes were a true record and there were no matters arising.

3. To discuss the summer festival

JM explained that the summer festival planning has lost some momentum because she has been pulled into a variety of other tasks, leaving several programme and site-related challenges unresolved. The main difficulty lies in arranging the schedule so that the festival offers variety at any given moment without inadvertently dividing the same audience between similar events. This year's programme is proving particularly complex because the acts secured appeal to overlapping audiences, and JM wants to ensure that each performance is given the opportunity to flourish rather than compete. To move things forward, JM plans to bring together several colleagues who are involved in different aspects of the festival in the week after next, giving everyone the chance to collectively work through the areas where she is currently stuck.

JM has been undertaking sponsorship and fundraising training and hopes this will help secure additional funding, as the number of appealing artists, performers and decorative ideas she would like to include far exceeds the current budget.

OD was keen to know if there were any highlights JM was especially pleased to have secured, and JM shared several. One of the major bookings is the Fabularium, an outdoor theatre group that performs plays based on animal stories while dressed in character. Their presence is

designed not only to entertain but also to build energy and engagement among audiences. In addition to the plays, they offer a separate set of activities focused on animals that live in water and understanding the marine environment. These activities are turned into playful challenges such as seeing whether children can jump as high as a frog, helping to make environmental learning accessible and interactive. This programme will take place in the Imperial Hotel Gardens. The Four of Swords have also been commissioned, which is also planned for the Imperial Hotel Gardens, although JM is still trying to determine the most suitable time to schedule it. Another key element JM is excited about is the involvement of a choreographer travelling from Scotland who will work with dance students from the local college and perform an outdoor theatre-dance piece. On the music side, JM has secured a number of strong acts, with one of the standout bands being Honey Feet, a well-known blues-soul group.

NH suggested approaching Exmouth's three county councillors for support through their locality budgets. It was pointed out that these budgets have strict criteria but must be allocated, and that councillors often appreciate opportunities to support significant community events. JM responded that she had always understood these funds to be prioritised for residents in need and felt hesitant requesting support for cultural programming when compared with such pressing issues. NH reassured her that locality budgets are frequently used for community-benefit initiatives and gave an example from the previous year when he contributed to Budleigh Salterton's Christmas lights, which were well received and helped generate local trade. NH argued that the festival is similarly significant for the town and represents a worthy investment. Taking this on board, JM agreed to consider identifying a specific festival component that could be put forward for funding.

4. To discuss The Wild Shore

JM proposed to bring an immersive theatre production, previously performed in North Devon by the company Burn the Curtain, to Exmouth. The show, centres on wild swimming and outdoor storytelling and would involve participants swimming to a moored buoy to collect an item before returning to shore for a theatrical experience. JM explained that the event could run over the solstice weekend from the 18th to the 21st of June 2026, with two shows per day for groups of around twenty-five people. JM has already consulted with the harbour master, who confirmed that the location east of the lifeboat station would be suitable and that tides during those dates would work well. The overall cost of the event would be approximately £2,300, reducing to just under £1,000 after ticket income.

JM outlined additional requirements including EDDC permission, safety kayaks, marketing and ticketing, and noted strong local interest due to Exmouth's many sea-swimming groups. JM has contacted Exmouth Beach Rescue, and LB suggested they may provide safety support free of charge due to their existing service level grant with Exmouth Town Council. Questions were raised about insurance, particularly regarding sea activity, and JM confirmed she is awaiting the theatre company's insurance documents and risk assessments. NN suggested promotional opportunities at upcoming local events, such as a large swim in March and a paddle-out protest in May.

GD mentioned that the event coincided with Exmouth Pride, but JM felt the small audience numbers and short show duration would avoid any clash. The proposal received support, with SG moving to approve the event, OD seconding, and members unanimously agreeing for it to go ahead.

5. Any other business

SG requested an update on the Town of Culture application and asked whether the submission had been completed. JM explained that she had initially been consulting the deadlines for the City of Culture by mistake and confirmed that the Town of Culture deadline is significantly later, set for the 31st of March 2026. JM has created a structured framework however emphasised that the current version is based solely on the priorities she had individually identified and feels strongly that the application would be more robust and representative if it incorporated views gathered through local public consultation. JM's intention is to speak with creatives, councillors and other community stakeholders to understand what cultural priorities they feel should be included. JM noted that, if successful, the funding could support a wide range of cultural initiatives, so it is important to gather clear direction from the people who would both contribute to and benefit from the programme.

NN asked whether any update was available on the sculpture grant, JM advised that as nothing further has been heard it is assumed that the application had been unsuccessful. JM explained that decisions were intended to be communicated toward the end of January, and since no notification had arrived, it was likely the funders were overwhelmed with applications and not issuing individual responses.

NN expressed excitement about the art weekend and reported that there was a lot of positive discussion circulating in the town about it. JM was relieved to hear this but admitted she was becoming anxious about the tight timeframe and the challenge of bringing everything together. JM highlighted that the event was intentionally designed to be self-organised by the artists themselves rather than heavily directed by herself. This approach is meant to empower the creative community and avoid micromanagement, although it does create some unpredictability. JM outlined her plans to support the event through promotion, including producing a physical leaflet, exploring the option of embedding an information page on the festival website and using social media along with press coverage to ensure strong publicity.

NH provided an update on the Creative East Devon Fund announcing that the fund would soon be reopening for new applications and that a major publicity campaign would accompany its relaunch. This will give local individuals and groups new opportunities to apply for support.

JM introduced a developing project linked to previous work with the street artist Slam. She reminded members that during the 2024 festival she commissioned murals on Langerwehe Way and had discussed with Slam the possibility of creating a youth-focused project in Exmouth. That concept is now close to becoming a reality. The plan is for Slam to run informal drop-in workshops at the skate park in Phear Park, aimed particularly at young people who may be harder to reach and who have creative potential but lack opportunities and guidance. JM explained that these sessions would help build artistic skills related to mural-making, and the young participants would eventually contribute to creating a new mural during the art weekend. This finished piece would be intended as a permanent installation. JM provided further operational details, noting that the workshops would be delivered by Slam along with another artist he regularly collaborates with, and that they are currently seeking an accompanying youth worker. The sessions would run three times a day across three weekends in April 2026. The total cost of the project is estimated at £4,500 to £5,000, inclusive of the completed mural. JM sought members views on whether they supported proceeding with the project using the non-festival budget.

SG queried the suitability of the existing graffiti board at Phear Park and whether it would be adequate for the new mural. JM clarified that the existing board would not be used to host the final artwork, as it is deteriorating and due for replacement. Exmouth Town Council already has funds set aside to replace it and Slam had requested that the current front board be moved to the rear of the site, where it would still be accessible as a practice board for beginners or

individuals who prefer to work in a more discreet space. JM added that the new mural created during the art weekend would be placed somewhere else in the town so that it remains intact, as the skate park walls are frequently repainted with new artwork and would not provide a permanent home.

After hearing the proposal and clarifications, SG asked members whether they were happy to support the project. A unanimous vote was recorded in favour.

6. Date of next meeting 12th of March 2026

The meeting ended at 14:28