EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Festival and Events Working Party

Notes of the virtual meeting held at 1400 on Thursday 21st May 2026 via zoom

Present

Cllr Steve Gazzard	SG	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Nick Hookway	NH	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 Olly Davey	OD	Exmouth Town Council
Joy Whipps	JW	Exmouth Town Council

1. To elect a new chair

The meeting was not quorate, elect a new chair was postponed to the next quorate meeting.

2. Welcome, introductions and apologies

SG welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies.

3. To approve the notes from the meeting on the 23rd of April 2026 and 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 23rd of April 2026 was postponed. Members did not raise any matters from this meeting.

4. Wash up on the art weekend

JM was pleased with the strong level of public engagement despite the weather disrupting parts of the weekend, especially on Saturday afternoon and throughout Sunday, the enthusiasm of attendees remained high. Saturday morning saw especially strong footfall, with many people visiting the market and then using the festival maps to explore exhibitions and activities across the town. JM noted that the workshops were a standout success, attracting consistently high participation and suggesting that expanding the workshop programme would be beneficial in future years.

While exhibitions drew steady visitor numbers, they did not generate the level of sales artists had hoped for, in contrast to the market stallholders, who reported good sales and felt the event had been worthwhile even though rain cut the trading day short.

JM thanked Councillors Olly Davey, Joe Whibley, Nicky Nicolls, and Peter Habgood from the Town Maintenance Team for their help setting up and dismantling gazebos, emphasising how much easier their support made the event. JM explained that running the festival had taken significantly more of her time than anticipated, encroaching on the summer festival workload, and that a more structured support network would be essential in future to share responsibilities and improve efficiency.

JM believes that it would be valuable to make this an annual event and will gather feedback from artists and councillors on whether it should remain on a bank holiday weekend. Although the long weekend offers the option of programming into Monday, many artists were away and Monday's schedule was relatively light, so a standard weekend may prove more practical.

JM acknowledged that to reduce the pressure on her role, some of next year's budget may need to be allocated to paying individuals to deliver specific organisational tasks. JM explained that this year's budget had been used strategically to create impact in the festival's first year, including commissioning a 3D pavement artwork that generated the highest online engagement the festival has ever seen, and hosting a nature artist from Yorkshire whose three-day presence attracted strong interest both in person and on social media. JM also described the challenges of coordinating the Imperial Hotel exhibition, which began with 22 artists but ultimately reduced to 9 due to conflicting commitments, an issue she noted is common when working with large groups of artists.

5. Update on the summer festival

JM shared that she had successfully secured two separate funding awards from EDDC: the Festival Fund, aimed at attracting visitors into East Devon, and the ACED grant, which will support a dance element within the festival. JM explained that the Festival Fund application had been shaped by discussions at the previous meeting, but ultimately the proposal focused on the festival's strengths, particularly its sustainability, environmentally friendly approach and accessibility by train. Using these strengths, JM developed a marketing strategy targeting towns that are within easy rail reach of Exmouth but lie outside East Devon, including Okehampton, Totnes, Weston-Super-Mare and Barnstaple. The plan is to run both physical advertising in those communities and online campaigns to encourage new visitors. The funding will also cover professional filming at the festival to create video assets for the website and future marketing, as JM noted that although strong photography already exists, audiences increasingly respond to video content on social media and digital platforms. Unfortunately, the application to the East Devon National Landscapes fund had been unsuccessful due to a high number of bids and a weaker alignment with their objectives. Although the funding would have supported activities linked to the Pebblebed Heaths and the wider landscape, she confirmed that these activities will still be delivered, just without the formal partnership.

JM is continuing to pursue sponsorships with support from her mentor, including discussions with the National Trust Southwest, and she expects a partnership with GWR to be confirmed. Under this arrangement, the festival would promote GWR as its transport partner in exchange for GWR printing large-format posters for display at stations along the Avocet Line and at Cullompton and Exeter. Because sponsorship conversations have taken longer than expected, JM has delayed printing banners and posters to ensure sponsor logos are included, which has left her slightly behind on marketing timelines.

LB reported to members that after seeking specialist advice ETC learned that some of its existing activities technically require VAT registration, even though overall turnover is below the usual threshold. Historically, sponsorship income was low enough to avoid scrutiny, but the festival's efforts to grow sponsorship now bring the issue to the forefront. LB explained that if VAT must be applied retrospectively from the start of the financial year the festival budget could lose around 4–5K, representing 20% of the income from sponsorship, ticketing and stallholder fees. ETC does have reserves to cover this if necessary. For now, it was decided not to issue invoices that include VAT, as traders were quoted prices excluding VAT and it would feel unfair to add it later. If required ETC will make internal adjustments with HMRC rather than complicating the festival's external invoicing. LB also highlighted that registering for VAT has wider consequences, because all business classified activities would then need to be VAT

compliant, potentially increasing the workload for the Finance Officer. This uncertainty is why LB previously advised JM to pause sponsorship efforts until the implications were clearer.

NH queried whether compostable toilets would be used again, JM confirmed that they would be placed in Manor Gardens and at the Imperial Hotel. NH noted that last year's instructions were unclear, JM agreed that clearer guidance will be provided.

JM raised concerns about the condition of the festival's tables, which are now old and damaged and wondered whether gazebo, chair and table hire income could be used to pay for new tables. Members discussed whether to buy new ones or hire them as needed, with LB and CJ pointing out that storage and weather exposure are ongoing problems, particularly when equipment is packed away wet. CJ added that rental income for gazebos is minimal with hire charges only enough to cover transportation costs to keep community hire affordable, tables and chairs are free. CJ suggested that, as with previous gazebo replacements, it may be necessary to seek grant funding for new equipment.

JM queried with NH about applying for Locality Budget funding. NH advised starting with the DCC website, which outlines the criteria and process, and to speak with either himself or Devon County Councillors Trail or Brown, before submitting an application. LB noted that she had already submitted a small locality budget request to Councillor Trail to professionally clean the War Memorial in conjunction with EDDC and Councillor Trails Locality Budget, but clarified that this should not prevent JM from applying for festival related support, as long as she discusses it with him as part of the process.

6. Any other business

NH explained that he had spoken with local artist Garth, who is enthusiastic about creating a sculpture of Nancy Perriam at the Powder Monkey. NH felt this would be a strong addition to the town's maritime heritage and mentioned the sculpture trail JM has previously discussed and encouraged Garth to get in touch with JM so they can discuss it in more detail.

7. Date of next meeting 18th June 2026

The meeting ended at 14:38