EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Festival and Events Working Party

Notes of the virtual meeting held at 1400 on Thursday 23rd April 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 Alex Sadiq	AS	Exmouth Town Council
Joy Whipps	JW	Festival Volunteer
Chetna Jones	CJ	Exmouth Town Council
Jess Magill	JM	Exmouth Town Council
Lisa Greenway	LG	Exmouth Town Council

Apologies:

Lisa Bowman	JW	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Nicky Nicholls	NN	Exmouth Town Council
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 meeting on the 12th of March 2026 and matters arising

OD proposed and NH seconded the accuracy of the notes from the meeting on the 12th of March 2026, all members agreed that the notes were a true record.

3. Update on the art weekend

JM confirmed that the art weekend will begin on Friday the 1st of May, with printed programmes and posters already distributed. JM outlined the publicity work she has done, including an interview on BBC Radio Devon, a piece in the Exmouth Journal, and a PR campaign with Muddy Stilettos, which achieved a strong reach. It was noted that more than 50 artists were involved, though a few have had to withdraw, which JM sees as fairly typical for events of this scale. Some concerns about turnout were expressed and members were asked to help spread the word with the emphasis that it's the kind of event people can dip in and out of.

JM highlighted a logistical issue for Saturday's car boot setup on the Strand, as only one member of the Town Maintenance Team is available to help with gazebos. A call has been put out for marshalling support, with Councillor Joe Whibley already volunteering, along with a helper for the art exhibition and possibly another person. JM hoped this would be enough to manage the limited setup window. Olly Davey offered to volunteer on Saturday morning to assist with marshalling traders onto the Strand and into position. JM accepted OD's offer of help and thanked him for his time.

4. Update on the summer festival

JM explained that she had met with Maisie from the Beach pub, along with Derek from the Exmouth Shantymen, to discuss a potential event at the marina during the Exmouth Festival

weekend. Maisie, who already runs many fundraising events for the RNLI and has recently taken over The Point, wants to raise the profile of the marina as a working fishing dock and attract more visitors. JM reported that Maisie was keen to host a Sunday afternoon of shanty groups and maritime-themed entertainment but was aware that the festival has limited budget and capacity. Maisie and the Shantymen were willing to take on most of the work and costs, leaving the festival responsible only for a small amount of staging and providing one storytelling act suited to the setting. JM added that they hope the event could grow into something larger in future years, possibly under the name “Fish Stock,” though JM noted that they would need to consider whether it should remain on the festival weekend or become a standalone event.

Members responded with unanimous agreement that the proposal would be a positive addition for Exmouth.

JM noted that the festival normally sends bucket collectors to all sites, but Marina events traditionally raise money for the RNLI. Members discussed whether festival buckets should be used at the marina and concluded that a couple of festival buckets could be placed there alongside QR codes for donations, with boards promoting other festival events around the town.

JM confirmed that Maisie has significant experience running events at the marina, including attracting around 1,000 people for Carols on the Quay. Plans are for a small, low-key stage beside the pub, decorated with maritime props, and they already have someone who can provide a PA system, meaning no extra pressure on the festival’s production team or budget. JM added that she still needs to confirm licensing arrangements but explained that the land is privately owned and that Maisie already works closely with local businesses to agree road closures in that area.

JM updated members that £3000 funding has been successfully secured from the EDDC Arts and Culture Fund to bring in a choreographer to work with dancers in Exmouth. A new EDDC fund has just launched, aimed specifically at marketing festivals and events to audiences beyond East Devon, with a tight deadline at the end of next week. JM intends to apply, noting that audience surveys from the Exmouth Festival showed that around 84% of attendees live within a five-mile radius. While the priority is always ensuring local residents, whose taxes help fund the festival are aware of the event, JM emphasised the value of attracting visitors from further afield to support the town’s economy and raise the festival’s profile. JM invited ideas on how best to reach audiences outside the area and shared that her initial step was speaking with Rons Boatman, who recommended working with Jo Butler and Visit South Devon due to their strong mailing lists and PR reach. JM is exploring whether they can produce a proposal to help promote the festival more widely. SG suggested advertising through Stagecoach and GWR’s onboard poster spaces, which JM agreed could be effective within the constraints of the fund’s modest size. AS proposed encouraging local B&Bs and hotels to share festival content on their social media channels to help draw tourists; JM acknowledged this as valuable but noted that time pressures close to the festival often make it difficult to engage hospitality businesses directly, so she may collaborate with Rons to strengthen those connections earlier in the process.

JM mentioned that the East Devon National Landscapes Fund has reopened. Last year it supported the Sideshore sea-safety theatre project with around £2,000, and this year she is considering applying to bring in a composer who creates music using electrodes attached to mushrooms and plants, which she felt could be an intriguing addition to the programme.

JM updated members on sponsorship work, explaining that progress has stalled due to a significant VAT liability question raised by tax accountants. The issue concerns whether the council would need to become VAT-registered for all business activities, and until this is

resolved the sponsorship initiative is on hold. JM noted that if the work completed so far cannot proceed, some costs may need to be covered from reserves, though recent underspend contributions mean this would not cause a difficult financial position.

JM shared with members that a group of local opera singers has expressed interest in performing in the Imperial Hotel Gardens during one of the festival evenings, which she feels could be a lovely addition, an update will be provided as plans progress.

5. To discuss the street art project

JM explained that two of the three planned workshop days at Phear Park have now taken place, offering young people and some adults the chance to design street art and learn spray-painting techniques, including guidance on responsible and appropriate practice. Attendance patterns showed that the 10am sessions were empty because teenagers tend not to arrive that early, while the later sessions were busy and well received. For the final day, the schedule has been adjusted so the last session runs from 4–5.30pm to encourage better turnout. It's still unclear whether the activities have reached the harder-to-engage young people, as the participants so far have mostly been typical local kids accompanied by parents, though they were enthusiastic and enjoying themselves. The project will culminate in a mural on the usual Langerwehe Way wall, with some of the young participants helping to create it, supported by the site owners who continue to welcome the artwork.

6. Any other business

JM described the Gate to Plate event on the 19th of April as a major success, with exceptionally high footfall, traders overwhelmed by demand, and all food vendors selling out. The atmosphere was praised and Eat Festivals were commended for their organisation and the cleanliness of the site afterwards. Exmouth Town Council promoted the event on social media to reinforce its role in supporting it. SG mentioned that a concern was raised by a councillor at a recent Full Council meeting about meat being sold unrefrigerated during the event which took place on a hot day. JM explained that while Eat Festivals are known to vet traders carefully, they do not provide electricity on site, but cool boxes should be used when required. It was noted that traders may have been using cool boxes out of sight but JM will follow up on the matter.

The planned Wild Shore wild-swimming show, originally hoped for June, has been postponed due to workload pressures and unresolved water-safety questions, with a new date likely in September.

JM has had a meeting with Pip Piper regarding the Film Festival, which will run in the third week of November under the Town Council's financial umbrella. The festival is expected to require minimal council capacity because it is largely volunteer-run, and the newly available Town Hall may allow for additional screenings. This led to a wider reflection on whether Exmouth's growing number of festivals would benefit from a unified "Exmouth Festivals" brand to bring coherence and support future events such as Fish Stock.

The Mayor's Garden Party scheduled for the 10th of May has been cancelled with hopes of rescheduling later in the year.

7. Date of next meeting 21st of May 2026

The meeting ended at 14:47