EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Festival and Events Working Party

Notes of the virtual meeting held at 1400 on Thursday 17th September 2026 via zoom

Present

Cllr Steve Gazzard	SG	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Nick Hookway	NH	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Aurora Bailey	AB	Exmouth Town Council
Mark Devin	MD	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
Lisa Bowman	LB	Exmouth Town Council

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

SG welcomed members to the meeting.

2. To approve the notes from meetings on the 18th of June and matters arising

SG proposed and NH seconded the accuracy of the notes from the meeting on the 18th of June 2026, all members agreed that the notes were a true record.

Members did not raise any matters from this meeting.

3. Summer festival wash up

Members reflected positively on this year's festival, with SG expressing his thanks to JM, the festival team and volunteers for delivering what was widely regarded as a highly successful event. JM noted that feedback had been exceptionally positive this year, with attendees particularly appreciating the strong sense of community, the diverse cultural programming and the favourable weather conditions.

JM highlighted the addition of the third site at the Imperial Hotel Gardens as a success, particularly the large tent programme which attracted strong audiences and demonstrated the value of incorporating more cultural elements into future festivals.

Financially, the festival is expected to finish on budget, with final accounts still being completed. JM reported that donations had been particularly encouraging, including several generous individual contributions, which further supported the event's success. Feedback from visitors is still being collated and will be circulated once complete.

Several operational changes introduced this year were reviewed positively. The addition of a secondary performance area in Manor Gardens helped distribute audiences across the site, encouraged movement between spaces and created a popular, informal atmosphere beneath the trees. JM indicated that this concept is likely to be developed further in future years.

The extreme heat experienced throughout the weekend was identified as a significant challenge. JM raised concerns about the conditions on the Strand, where traders, performers and volunteers were exposed to prolonged high temperatures. She stated that careful consideration would need to be given to how the site is used in future. SG, speaking from the perspective of a trader, agreed that conditions had been difficult and noted that there were several incidents involving people becoming unwell due to the heat. He commended the rapid response of the festival's first aid and medical teams when assistance was required.

From the information point perspective, CJ reported an overwhelmingly positive atmosphere throughout the festival, with no significant incidents despite the challenging weather conditions. She highlighted the importance of providing adequate drinking water at future events, noting that although a water bowser had been available through funding from SWW, awareness of its location could have been improved. Members praised SWW for the grant of £1,500 which enabled free drinking water provision during the weekend.

Discussion also focused on the success of the Imperial Hotel Gardens site. When asked by AB whether it had worked better than the previous year's location at Sideshore, JM confirmed that it had been significantly easier to manage and more convenient for visitors due to its proximity to the main festival area. CJ described the gardens as an attractive and spacious venue, suggesting that it could be developed further in future years as a dedicated relaxation or wellbeing space. SG added that organisers of Armed Forces Day had visited the site during the festival and, having seen its benefits, intended to relocate their event to the Imperial Hotel Gardens next year.

4. Report on Art Explora event

JM received positive feedback on the recent visit from the Art Explora Mobile Museum, which was hosted in Exmouth for three days in early August as part of its South West tour. The exhibition, themed around the sea and featuring works from the Government Art Collection, attracted exceptional public interest. Organisers reported that Exmouth achieved the highest number of tour bookings and visitor footfall of any location on the tour, with approximately 250 visitors per day. The strong attendance demonstrated a clear appetite for arts and cultural activities within the town, and the organisers indicated they would strongly consider returning with a future exhibition due to the success of the event.

It was noted that, although the event was very well received, there were some challenges relating to street drinkers in the area. As a result, the organisers arranged for security support, as they felt their staff should remain focused on welcoming visitors rather than managing such situations. The air-conditioned exhibition space was particularly appreciated during the hot weather, providing visitors with a comfortable environment in which to explore the collection.

JM reported that the event represented excellent value for money for ETC, with costs kept to a minimum. As the project was externally funded, ETC's contribution was limited to obtaining permission from EDDC to use the Strand, providing barriers and arranging toilet facilities for the driver overnight. This enabled the delivery of a high-quality, free cultural experience for both residents and visitors at very little cost.

SG suggested sharing the success of the event with the EDDC Art and Cultural Forum. It was agreed that JM would send an update outlining the positive outcomes, particularly the high visitor numbers. It was also suggested that the forum's newsletter could feature the event, especially if photographs were available. JM reported that Art Explora had promised to supply photographs and had also indicated that they intended to publish their own newsletter covering the events that took place during the tour.

5. To discuss the winter festival

JM shared plans for this year's Winter Festival, which will follow a Winter Wonderland theme. Performers, choirs and other entertainment are currently being booked. Proposed entertainment includes bouncing stilt snowmen and frosty spirits, while consideration is being given to either bringing back the large snow globe featuring the ice queen, used in 2023, or introducing an inflatable snow globe that visitors can enter for photographs. Members favoured the inflatable snow globe, highlighting its appeal for family photographs and the fact that it would be available throughout the event rather than for a limited time.

JM reported that for the past two years, the Little Bighorns have led the parade and have been very well received. However, there was debate about whether to continue with the same group or introduce a different act, such as Street Heat Samba, who had previously performed. Members noted that the Little Bighorns had been particularly effective when the Deaf Academy previously took part, as participants were able to feel the vibrations of the music. It was therefore suggested that the Little Bighorns should lead the parade again this year, particularly as the Deaf Academy and their Deaf Signing Choir are expected to participate in the festival.

LG is currently contacting schools and community groups regarding participation in the lantern parade. Hello Exmouth will be unable to take part this year due to the timing of student availability, meaning they will not be carrying the large puppet lanterns; however, the Deaf Academy may be interested in carrying the puppet lanterns.

Members reviewed the lantern parade route and agreed that it should remain the same as last year. Alternative routes had been considered but were found to be impractical, either requiring significant road closures or passing through areas with limited public engagement. Members agreed that there was no strong reason to alter a route that had worked successfully in previous years.

Last year the parade was divided into three sections to help maintain traffic flow, and this approach was considered successful. No complaints were received from the public regarding traffic delays, and spectators were generally happy to wait while enjoying the procession. Members agreed that if participation numbers are similar this year, the parade should again be divided into sections, with consideration given to appointing a leader for each section to improve coordination and communication during the event.

6. Update on the Exmouth festival 2027 30th anniversary event

JM discussed early plans for the 2027 Exmouth Festival, which will mark its 30th anniversary, explaining that planning is already underway due to the need to submit an Arts Council application before Christmas. A key consideration is whether to operate across two sites or reintroduce a third site at the Imperial Hotel Gardens, as previously anticipated building works may not take place. While the Imperial Hotel Gardens proved to be a successful venue for cultural programming such as dance, theatre and opera, there was strong support from members for retaining the Strand as a festival location because of its prominence and visibility within the town.

To address concerns about extreme weather and the future use of the Strand, JM proposed investigating the installation of a large stretch tent to provide shade and shelter for a stage and audience area. Members agreed that retaining a presence on the Strand was important, although NH advised consulting EDDC's events team at an early stage to ensure any large tent structure met safety requirements.

Ideas for celebrating the festival's 30th anniversary focused on recognising its history and community involvement. Suggestions included inviting popular local acts and performers with longstanding links to the festival, creating a photographic and artistic exhibition showcasing 30 years of festival history, producing a special anniversary flag, and working with Devon Air Radio to commemorate its first outside broadcast from the festival 20 years ago.

Members also discussed involving schools through projects such as creating bunting and potentially recreating elements of the first festival, including inviting former child performers back to take part.

Further anniversary concepts included themed activities reflecting different decades of the festival's history and the possibility of hosting a celebratory afternoon tea event at the Imperial Hotel Gardens. Members felt these ideas could add a distinctive and community-focused element to the anniversary celebrations.

JM updated members on operational matters, highlighting the contribution of Charlie, who had supported the festival this year as a trader's manager and operations manager. His expertise in event safety, licensing, security and first aid had significantly reduced pressure on JM, and he has already been booked for next year.

Following feedback about high prices, insufficient staffing concerns and service issues from this year's bar provider, Charlie suggested that the festival could potentially take responsibility for operating the bar itself. JM explained that between Charlie, The Odd Corp and local drinks suppliers there is enough equipment and knowledge to pull a setup and a team together, doing this could allow for lower prices, increased income for the festival and possible contributions to local charities or community projects. Members agreed that this proposal was worth exploring further and requested that the potential costs and benefits be investigated.

7. Any other business

JM shared an idea for a future community arts project inspired by a French artist who creates large-scale cardboard constructions with the help of local volunteers. These projects involve people working together over several days to build enormous structures, sometimes up to five storeys high, based on a detailed blueprint. The final construction is assembled in a public space and can take different forms depending on the community's vision, such as towers, temples, or other landmark structures. Once displayed, the installation remains for a short period before being dismantled and recycled.

JM explained that the artist is currently working in Weston-super-Mare on a cardboard pier project and that she plans to visit the sessions to learn more about the process, costs, and practicalities. While she felt the scale and expense would make it difficult to incorporate into the current festival programme, she believed it would be an excellent future project for Exmouth, potentially as part of a wider community consultation or visioning exercise. JM highlighted its ability to bring people together through a shared creative goal and described the quality and ambition of the constructions as remarkable.

SG asked JM to take photographs and share information at the next meeting. JM agreed and said she would circulate the artist's website, noting that previous projects included particularly innovative designs, such as a floating cardboard structure supported by a helium-filled sphere.

SG queried whether the project would be vulnerable in bad weather, JM explained that protective plastic sheeting is used during construction and that weather would only become a significant issue in cases of severe rainfall.

8. Date of next meeting 15th of October 2026

The meeting ended at 14:50