EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Festival and Events Working Party

Notes of the virtual meeting held at 1400 on Thursday 15th October 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
Cllr Alex Sadiq	AS	Exmouth Town Council
Cllr Graham Deasy	GD	Exmouth Town Council (Ex-Officio)
Mark Devin	MD	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	Festival Volunteer

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

SG welcomed members to the meeting.

2. To approve the notes from meetings on the 17th of September and matters arising

NH proposed and AB seconded the accuracy of the notes from the meeting on the 17th of September 2026, all members agreed that the notes were a true record.

Members did not raise any matters from this meeting.

3. To discuss the winter festival

JM reported that preparations for the winter festival were progressing well, although there is currently a shortfall in musical performances. If sufficient performers cannot be secured, JM proposed starting the event later in the afternoon. It was noted that the latter part of the event benefits from darkness, allowing visitors to fully appreciate the lantern parade, Christmas tree and festive lighting.

Members agreed that a later start would be appropriate if there were not enough performances to fill the programme.

JM confirmed that a variety of entertainment has been booked, including stilt walkers, bouncing snowmen and a walk-in snow globe for visitors to have photographs taken. Approval was still being sought from EDDC's Events Team regarding the use of the snow globe, as it is an inflatable structure, although JM noted that it differs from a traditional bouncy castle due to its solid base.

Lantern parade preparations were progressing particularly well, with a record 249 lantern kits ordered. In addition to participation from Schools, Open Door and Esteem, a community lantern-making session will be held.

JM advised that marketing preparations were underway. Event listings have already been published on a number of websites and, once the performance schedule and timings have been finalised, the festival flyer and promotional materials will be completed and distributed.

CJ informed members that the Christmas lights will be installed during the week leading up to the winter festival, beginning on the Monday before the event. The Christmas tree is scheduled for delivery on either Monday or Tuesday of that week, with lights being installed shortly afterwards to ensure everything is ready for the festival.

LB highlighted opportunities to enhance the appearance of the Town Hall following its acquisition by ETC. Discussions are underway with James from Sound Events regarding festive lighting displays, including the possibility of draping icicle lights from the building's window ledges to illuminate the front façade. Options for projected lighting effects are also being explored, with internal projection currently considered more practical than an external display due to location constraints. Additional ideas include installing an illuminated three-dimensional feature, such as reindeer, a penguin or Santa's sleigh, on the porch roof. Looking ahead, LB noted the potential for a Christmas tree to be displayed outside the Town Hall in future years, subject to the installation of a suitable tree pit. Costings are currently being prepared, and a further update will be provided once options have been assessed.

SG commented that the Town Hall lighting display created for Organ Donor Awareness Week had been particularly effective and formally thanked MD for his work in delivering the display.

JM reminded members that volunteer marshals will be required for the festival and encouraged anyone available to assist. Marshalling duties will only be required for a short period, with volunteers helping to ensure the lantern parade travels safely along Rolle Street and through crossing points.

4. To discuss the 2027 Art Weekend

JM reported that the first Art Weekend had been a successful event and that plans for the next event are taking a more collaborative, artist-led approach. The upcoming funding deadline for the Arts and Culture East Devon Fund this Friday has helped drive early engagement with local artists and prompted a series of consultation meetings.

To date, JM has held both an evening and an afternoon session with local artists, with a further evening meeting scheduled. The purpose of these discussions is to identify who would like to be involved, gather ideas and establish areas where individuals can take ownership. Twelve artists attended the first meeting, while many others have expressed strong interest despite being unable to attend. Additional feedback has also been received through meetings, emails and comments, resulting in a good level of engagement and a range of positive ideas.

Discussions so far suggest the event is developing around three key strands. The first is an Art Takeover, described as a town-wide creative intervention involving the decoration of shop windows, the train station, the Town Hall and other public spaces, similar in spirit to the Yarn Bombers but using a variety of artistic formats. The second strand is an Art Safari, a more engaging alternative to a traditional art trail, incorporating open studios, exhibitions and opportunities for visitors to meet artists, view their work and make purchases. The third strand, Art Adventure, will focus on workshops and participatory activities, encouraging residents and visitors to take part in creative experiences themselves.

JM noted that, in order to ensure the project is delivered effectively and fairly, she is seeking funding to provide paid support roles rather than relying solely on volunteers. Two individuals have already been identified who could provide valuable support with artist communications, programme development, information gathering and overall event coordination.

Overall, JM expressed confidence in the project's development, highlighting the strong level of interest from the local creative community and the willingness of artists to contribute their time, energy and ideas to help shape the event.

5. Feedback from the Cardboard Monumental Construction

JM provided an update following her visit to see the Cardboard Monumental Construction project. While the concept was extremely impressive and exciting, the visit highlighted the sheer scale of the operation involved. Prior to attending, JM had reviewed the technical specification documents and quickly realised that the project requires significant resources and organisation. In Weston-Super-Mare, North Somerset Council had commissioned the project through a cultural organisation called Super Culture, which employed several part-time staff members to facilitate workshops, recruit participants, support volunteers and assist directly with the construction process.

The project was based in a large vacant unit within a shopping centre, which served as the main assembly space. Thousands of cardboard boxes were processed into specially designed components through cutting, folding and taping. The operation relied on a substantial workforce, and organisers needed to ensure they had enough staff and volunteers available to complete the build, even if public participation was lower than expected. JM explained that the scale of the undertaking was considerable, with even the smaller version requiring around 13,000 boxes. As the boxes were assembled into components, the space required for storage increased dramatically, resulting in an entire warehouse being filled with materials.

Although JM did not see the final structure being built, photographs of completed projects demonstrated the impressive impact of the finished installation. However, having seen the practical requirements first-hand, JM concluded that the project would be too large to deliver alongside the Exmouth Festival. The level of staffing, storage space and logistical planning required would place too much pressure on existing resources. JM suggested that the project should instead be considered as a longer-term opportunity, potentially for 2028.

JM shared information about the project with Sarah Elgady at EDDC to explore whether there might be opportunities for partnership working. Sarah responded positively and indicated there could be scope for a joint funding bid in the future. While both agreed that the project is highly engaging and has significant potential, they recognised that several major challenges would need to be addressed, particularly securing suitable creation and storage facilities. While such space had been readily available in Weston-Super-Mare through vacant shopping centre units, finding a comparable venue in Exmouth would be considerably more difficult.

JM remains interested in pursuing the concept and believes that partnership working with EDDC could provide a more realistic route forward. This could involve jointly bidding for funding, commissioning the construction and developing a detailed delivery plan. Since her visit, JM has remained in contact with the artist behind the project, who has offered to connect her with other organisations that have hosted similar installations. These discussions will help provide a better understanding of the resources, planning and infrastructure required. It was noted that the project attracted a dedicated community of supporters, with some participants travelling significant distances, including from the United States, specifically to take part in the construction process.

Others had previously participated in similar installations elsewhere in the UK, highlighting the project's ability to attract enthusiastic visitors and generate interest beyond the local area.

NH thanked JM for undertaking the research and agreed that the investigation had demonstrated the project to be significantly larger than originally anticipated. He recognised that ETC currently lacks access to the size of warehouse space required and suggested that any future proposal would likely need to operate on a district-wide scale. NH expressed strong support for the concept, particularly because of its potential to attract visitors and boost tourism. He referenced recent discussions at EDDC, where the importance of initiatives that generate tourism and economic benefit had been highlighted, and suggested that the project could be well positioned for future funding opportunities.

NH also noted the environmental and sustainability aspects of the project, particularly its connection to recycling and reuse, which could attract support from other areas of EDDC. NH agreed that the project has significant long-term potential and recommended continuing discussions with Sarah Elgady and other stakeholders to explore future opportunities for development and partnership working.

6. Any other business

SG thanked JM for circulating the feedback from the Summer Festival. He noted that the feedback was extremely positive and highlighted the improvement in donation levels.

NH provided an update on EDDC's new leisure contract with Everyone Active. The transition process is currently underway, with LED gradually demobilising from sites it operates on behalf of EDDC while Everyone Active mobilises ahead of the official contract start date of the 10th of January 2027. Further communications and press releases are expected during this period. The new contract delivers a more sustainable financial model for EDDC, including the ability to reclaim VAT, which will improve their financial position and potentially create opportunities for future investment in services and facilities. Investment is planned across all EDDC-owned leisure facilities. Improvements will include upgrades to front-of-house areas, toilets and gym equipment, alongside enhanced leisure services, greater activity provision, stronger community outreach and increased social value. The contract is also intended to be more flexible and responsive to local needs.

A significant development for Exmouth is the inclusion of Exmouth Pavilion within the contract. Everyone Active already operates theatres elsewhere and will manage the Pavilion in line with EDDC's Cultural Strategy. A key objective of the strategy is to develop the Pavilion as a creative hub for young people and broaden its appeal to a wider audience. NH expressed his hope that the Pavilion will become Exmouth's principal cultural centre, operating throughout the day and evening.

NH advised that JM and Sarah will meet with representatives from Everyone Active and the dedicated theatre team in due course to discuss opportunities for collaboration. He encouraged engagement with the new operator and suggested that there should be greater opportunities to use the Pavilion for cultural events and festival activities. Sarah will continue to monitor the contract's delivery and responsiveness.
Responding to a question from AB regarding the Pavilion's limited catering offer, NH suggested that LED may be reducing services as part of its wind-down process. He clarified that staff are protected under the transfer arrangements and significant redundancies should not be expected. He also noted that LED Enterprises will continue to operate Ocean and may explore opportunities elsewhere on the seafront.

NH added that visitors should begin to see physical improvements at the Pavilion from January onwards, including enhancements to front-of-house facilities, toilets and potentially the kitchen facilities. He said that Everyone Active is expected to take a more flexible and supportive approach and encouraged future discussions around how the Pavilion might support festival activities, including providing shelter or quiet spaces during events.

AB asked whether the Pavilion lawn could be levelled, as it is currently uneven. NH confirmed that he would raise the matter with the relevant EDDC teams, noting that any safety concerns should be addressed to prevent trip hazards.

JM reported that following discussions with Lucien from the Imperial Hotel, the proposed redevelopment of the site will not commence before summer 2027. As a result, the venue will once again be available for use during the Summer Festival. JM is now considering how best to utilise festival venues across the town. The Imperial Hotel is keen to host additional activities and has expressed interest in featuring a music stage. Consideration is also being given to activity locations within The Strand, although shade and high temperatures remain factors that need to be addressed.

JM shared updated figures from Barnova, which included commission in addition to its pitch fee for the Summer Festival. The income exceeded that of the previous year and represents a significant contribution to festival finances. Although alternative options will still be explored, the current arrangement continues to provide strong financial returns.

LB provided an update on the Gate to Plate event taking place on Sunday the 25th of October, which is sponsored by ETC. ETC will have two stall spaces, with the tuk-tuk forming a key part of its presence at the event. ETC will be working alongside Mushroom Food Network, which will be running cookbook and kitchen utensil swaps to complement the event's food and drink theme. LB explained that there is an opportunity to use the remaining stall space for community engagement activities and promotion of council services. Current ideas include focusing on community resilience, winter preparedness, volunteering opportunities through the Community Resilience Team, Festival volunteers and the Green Team, as well as distributing "Who Does What" information leaflets explaining local council responsibilities. LB also anticipates receiving questions regarding Local Government Reorganisation.

LB advised that councillors would shortly receive an email seeking volunteers to help staff the ETC stand throughout the day and welcomed suggestions for additional activities or information that could be promoted.

AB asked whether staff had noticed any changes in atmosphere since ETC took over the Town Hall. LB reported a significant positive change, describing a growing energy within the building. LB highlighted the contribution of Propeller, which has taken space on the top floor, as well as the increasing number of community groups regularly using the building. Current users include photography groups, U3A, the Exmouth Art Group, social services and the Deaf Academy. The Exmouth Art Group has already booked a two-week exhibition period for next year. Open Door is also beginning to occupy space on the ground floor, meaning both the ground and second floors are now fully occupied.
LB advised that only limited desk space remains available on the first floor and that a potential tenant is under consideration. If this progresses, the building will be fully occupied. LB also noted an increase in bookings resulting from higher venue hire charges at Ocean. Several groups and organisations that previously used Ocean facilities have moved their activities to the Town Hall due to affordability considerations. LB suggested that this increased use of the Town Hall would also contribute positively to town centre footfall.

7. To note that the next meeting will take place on the 5th of November 2026

The Meeting ended at 14:28