

**NOTES FROM THE BEEHIVE LOW CARBON WORKING GROUP VISIT**  
**TO AXMINSTER TOWN HALL – 27<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2025**

**Visit By:**

Andrew Pearsall

Shaun Bonetta

Steve Craddock

Robert Fowles

Stephen Kolek

**Visit Hosted By:**

Paul Hayward – Town Clerk (Also EDDC Cabinet Member & Portfolio Holder for Assets and Economy).

**Reason For the Visit:**

To look at and hear about the introduction of air conditioning, solar panels and battery storage to Axminster Guild Hall.

**The Venue**

The building dates back to its completion in 1758. In the twenty century it was used as a cinema until 1963 and was then converted into a performance venue. In 1974 it was acquired by Axminster Town Council to accommodate their offices and become their meeting venue.

Today, whilst still being used by the Council, the Guildhall is primarily an entertainments venue. In 2021 after the pandemic, the Guildhall reopened under a new manager. He is the only full-time employee. There are other employees who are part time, and like the manager are council employees. The venue is also supported by volunteers. Following refurbishment, the venue has increased its offering to as many as 70 acts, both professional and amateur, per year. There are also comedy and quiz nights. The cinema reopened after ninety years in 2024. As a community venue, the Guildhall hosts historic commemorations, charity fundraising events and well being/fitness classes.

In 2024 the Guildhall was awarded ‘Best Community Event Venue in Devon for the variety of its events and community engagement.

Being of traditional construction, there was no suitable insulation in the void between the metal roof and the fibreboard ceiling in the auditorium. The metalwork holding the fibreboard has been strengthened and high-performance lightweight insulation has been added.

The heating was gas fired boiler, supplying radiators and boxed convection units. Ventilation seemed to be provided through hot air rising through the anti-condensation grilles in the auditorium ceiling, being replaced by draughts from outside. There are no air handling facilities fitted.

### **Heating and Cooling Solution**

Paul Hayward, having been instrumental in the installation of a heating and cooling system at another local Council, wanted to work with an Axminster company. However, a local company was not available, so he engaged ACS Electrical Services Ltd. of Exeter. They are air conditioning and electrical services providers, based in Devon, with over 20 years experience according to their website. Interestingly, their stated aim is: "Our aim is to work with your budget as we understand that every penny needs to be spent wisely in these hard times." They also maintain ventilation systems.

ACS have fitted five conventional air conditioning cassettes in the auditorium. Two spaced equally along each side and one above the stage. Each cassette is run from an external air source heat pump, which provides both heating and cooling.

Due to cost, each air conditioning unit is operated separately, using a 'line of site' hand controller (think TV remote controller). The cost to link them all together and operate them remotely would have been around £10K.

Apart from not being able to please all the people, all of the time, feedback from audiences has been very positive. Sean Bonetta has seen several performances at the Guildhall and is enthusiastically complimentary about the performance of the system, to provide a comfortable environment for the audiences. Additionally, performers on stage have been complimentary about the cool environment provided for them.

During our visit, on entering the auditorium, it was cool. The system was switched on and within half an hour, it was warm enough for the Pilates class to start.

ACS pay visits to maintain the air conditioning system twice per year.

In July this year, ACS provided a quotation to the Beehive to fit 4 x 10kw MHI/Samsung heat pump units inside the JLA, linked to individual outdoor wall mounted units. Each unit would be operated with a wi-fi control. The system installation cost was £17,150 + VAT and comes with a 7-year warranty (materials 1 year). The service contract to alongside the manufacturers warranty required 2 service visits per year at £300 + VAT and in the fourth year would increase by 5% year on year.

### **The Boiler and Power Solution**

Axminster Town Council applied to EDDC for matched funding for their improvement project. In order to qualify they were required to remove the gas fired boiler, which was proving expensive to maintain and replace it with air source heat pumps to provide hot

water for heating. In order to achieve their carbon neutral situation, which they have to demonstrate to EDDC is being met in practice, they were fitted a solar power system. It comprises 48 solar panels and eight batteries, which they want to increase to 16 (or should that be 4 batteries and increase to 8).

During the visit at around 10:00am, the batteries were at 15% capacity, which is the retained charge that the system prevents from draining any lower. The day was overcast and the system was not charging the batteries, therefore the Guildhall was consuming mains electricity. However, at the height of last summer, by around 10:30am the batteries were fully charged and the rest was powering the building and being sold back to the energy supplier (Scottish Energy). Even at an export rate of 15p per unit, versus 29p per unit import charge, the system has broken even across the year.

Fully charged batteries operate the system air conditioning system and the building for about 2 hours. Hence, Axminster Town Council want to increase battery capacity to provide power for an extended period, resulting in purchasing less power during the winter and exporting more in the summer. They are currently about to sign another

The system can be controlled by Paul Hayward from an app on his phone, so that whilst at home he can check that everything has been turned off after the building has been closed.

The Beehive Working Group are grateful to Paul Hayward for the time spent with us, for his sharing of knowledge and for the offer to answer any further questions.