

# Axminster Urban Renewal Forum 27.07.22

## Attendees:

- Cllr Ian Hall - DCC
- Barry Hedges – Axminster Chamber of Commerce
- Cllr Andrew Moulding - EDDC
- Cllr Nick Hookway - EDDC
- Cllr Andrea Sedgewick – Axminster Town Council
- Cllr Steve Holt – Axminster Town Council
- Cllr Sarah Jackson - EDDC
- Cllr Paul Hayward – EDDC (Chair)
- Josh Dufield – Axminster Carpets
- Simon Smith – The Waffle House
- Alison Hayward - EDDC
- Linda Perry - EDDC
- Zoe Smith - DCC
- Keir Duffin- DCC
- Gareth Jones – HJA
- Isabel Compton – HJA

Apologies: Cllr Jill Farrow - Mayor of Axminster, Jane Rocket - Chamber of Commerce.

## 1.2 Appointment of Cllr Paul Hayward as Chair of Axminster Urban Renewal Forum

### 1.3 Presentation by Hardisty Jones Associates

1.3.1 Gareth Jones presentation – process of urban renewal

1.3.2 Clarification of the difference between ‘urban renewal’ and ‘regeneration’. The board is named ‘Urban Renewal Forum’ but the process is about broader economic regeneration.

1.3.3 Discussion of the phosphate issue and potential impact this may have on the Urban Renewal strategy and the delivery of projects. The issue has halted all new housing developments, but commercial and retail developments can go ahead. The impacts of this could be reflected in the strategy, potentially through creating an alternative set of projects should the issue persist in the long term.

1.3.4 It is important to set out the objectives of the board so it has a clear direction from the start. Alison Hayward to send out the Terms of Reference containing a list of objectives for the Urban Renewal Programme.

### 1.4 Traffic, transport and accessibility

1.4.1 Initial ideas include moving the bus stops and town centre memorial to improve traffic flow; introducing a one way system in the town centre; pedestrianisation of some parts of the town centre; encouraging and enabling active travel (Stop Line Way); eco transport solutions.

1.4.2 Relief road is the long-term and ultimate solution for traffic and accessibility issues in Axminster town centre, however it is not currently deliverable. In the short to medium term, we could focus on deliverable sensible solutions to alleviate the problem. For example, moving the monument and identifying pinch points on the pavement which are unsafe for those with mobility issues may be potential interim solutions.

1.4.3 Active travel initiatives may reduce traffic and will also contribute to Net Zero ambitions. A traffic survey would evidence the need for changing the flow of traffic in town centre. Another option is to implement a time window banning HGV’s on certain roads e.g. not between 12pm – 2pm.

1.4.4 There is a genuine concern about safety relating to the road. A safety/risk assessment of the road may help evidence the need for a relief road. This is a Highways England issue, but it could be included in the strategy.



1.4.5 It is important to consider the terminology in the strategy around transporting people to and from Axminster. We are looking to encourage transport to Axminster, not away from. Although we do need to appreciate links between towns and improved access in both directions is important.

1.4.6 There may be benefits to linking Seaton and Axminster together, via the Stop Line Way, but also through identifying shared themes in transport and accessibility to make a stronger case for funding. The fortunes of Axminster are linked to Seaton, Chard and other rural towns. A collegiate approach to regeneration will help tackle complex issues like accessibility.

### 1.5 **Employment and economy**

1.5.1 There is a site in ownership of EDDC which Aldi and Lidl have shown an interest in. This site is allocated for housing, however due to the phosphate issue there can be no developments at the moment. The site is in the north of the town near a residential area so we need to consider the impacts of this on traffic through the town as well as potential impacts of footfall reduction on town centre retailers. The Tesco in Seaton may be a good case study for investigating potential impacts of this.

1.5.2 In terms of other employment growth opportunities, demand for industrial sites is very strong. Essentially, if these sites can be delivered then they will be filled. Axminster area gets the overspill demand from coastal areas like Lyme Regis and Seaton which have very few sites available. There is strong employment growth in industrial sectors, but demand for offices is fairly weak.

1.5.3 The town centre economy has suffered some recent blows, including the closure of River Cottage. The Lloyds Bank is due to close meaning that there will not be a bank to deposit cash in Axminster. This will affect small businesses that deal in cash.

1.5.4 It would be good to gain a greater understanding of why retail units are empty. Is there potential for a landlord database to get an insight into reasons for this and to identify landlords that will engage with council to maintain buildings and offer more affordable rents.

1.5.5 The strategy should promote apprenticeships as well as skills training for all ages.

1.5.6 Business support could be provided to start ups through access to grants or business rate holidays for the first two years. DCC could help deliver this.

1.5.7 There are ambitions to expand the Axe Valley Sixth Form and local primary schools are increasing their capacity.

### 1.6 **Opportunities for young people**

1.6.1 Project ideas include the delivery of remote training, which will retain people in the town to complete training as opposed to sending people out.

### 1.7 **Town Centre vitality**

1.7.1 Footfall in the town centre has declined since the closure of River Cottage, which was a big draw for visitors from Seaton, Lyme Regis and other nearby seaside resorts.

1.7.2 Potential ideas include grants to encourage new retailers to set up in town centre, grants for shop-front improvements, support for outside shelters for hospitality businesses and events and markets to draw visitors into the town.

### 1.8 **Housing affordability**

1.8.1 Need to identify the potential for affordable housing for local residents- discuss this with DCC.

### 1.9 **Next steps**

1.9.1 Work with a smaller sub-group across two/three meetings to work up project details and refine objectives. Members to email Alison with interest in sub-groups.



- 1.9.2 The Neighborhood Plan is going to public consultation in October. We could take themes/projects from Urban Renewal Forum to those consultations to gauge public opinion.
- 1.9.3 Alison to send out Terms of Reference, Case studies of good practice examples of town regeneration and findings from Urban Renewal Phase 1.