

Axminster Renewal Forum

Meeting: 12 July 2023, 1.30PM

Venue: Axminster Guildhall

MEETING NOTES

Attendance:

- Cllr Paul Hayward Chair: Portfolio Holder Finance and Assets, EDDC (meeting Chair)
- Cllr Matt Hall - East Devon District Council, Portfolio Holder for Economy
- Josh Dutfield – Axminster Carpets/ Carpets site
- Jane Rockett – Axminster Printing
- Keir Duffin, Devon County Council
- Alison Hayward, East Devon District Council

Apologies: Cllr Ian Hall, Cllr Nick Hookway, Cllr Sarah Jackson, Cllr Jill Farrow, Kelly Apps, Barrie Hedges,

1. Axminster Quick Win Project – E-bikes

Great Western Railways has advised that the bid for £50,000 is successful. DCC has offered £5,000 which has contributed to surveys regarding ownership of the site. Keir now has confirmation from DCC Legal that the site is not owned by DCC. As Axminster Town Council has been maintaining the land, it is seeking to claim possessory title. Surveys have been undertaken seeking any evidence of ownership elsewhere. JD suggests that ATC could do a statutory declaration regarding ownership. PH to explore.

ATC awaiting feedback from Co-Bikes regarding their interest in running the e-bike scheme, given that they are the operators in nearby towns which can be accessed by train. However, since the meeting we are now aware that Co-Cars (and Co-Bikes) is ceasing trading from 14 July.

2. Business Case - Websters Garage Site

Hardisty Jones Associates have concluded work on the Business Case for the redevelopment of this site to deliver the scheme identified in the Axe Valley Study (April 2022). AH provided a summary.

Note - the owner has applied for planning permission last autumn which remains undetermined. The phosphates issue is proving to be a constraint in terms of the scheme content.

The objectives for the site are to achieve a scheme offering employment, housing, open space and opportunities that would tie-in with eco-travel.

The Business Case sets out the long list of options for delivery of the site, including the owner bringing forward its proposed scheme; the council acquiring the site and delivering

the owner's scheme, or the Council acquiring the site and delivering the scheme proposed in the Axe Valley Study. The AV Study scheme is not commercially viable and has a viability gap in excess of £3m, so would require public funding, however, it delivers a scheme that better meets the strategic objectives for the site as set out above and in the AV Study.

The funding gap would need to be met through grant funding. The Business Case determines that the benefit cost ratio (a key assessment for funders) would be good/acceptable depending on the extent of site redeveloped.

The council is in contact with the site owner regularly for updates on their progress with the planning application and will consider what options are available for enabling progress on delivering development here.

Temporary Use of Site – market use

Cllr Hall, in discussion with the site owner has proposed that the Town Council engages in discussions to see if the existing town market could operate from the Websters site – e.g. on a weekly basis. Members of the forum identified some issues in relation to this including the market charter which is privately owned; is this an additional market on another day or the relocation of the existing one; what is the viability for traders at this location compared to the current one; is the catchment area large enough for a market; would there be competition with existing shops which are already struggling; would there be sufficient traders to create a significant draw to this location.

Further information is required, specifically whether there is a cost implication for the Town Council. AH/PH to pick up with Cllr Hall.

3. Feedback on Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid.

AH reported on the feedback received from DHLUC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). The bid was relatively strong with clear strengths within the strategic fit and economic case with the link between Seaton and Axminster. However more data could have been provided in some areas and more information on procurement.

The Project Team that prepared the bid documents welcome the feedback, although for some information, it was not possible to provide more detail due to word limits or the inability to provide attachments. That said, the feedback is detailed and helpful to the council for future funding bids.

JD suggested Exeter University – Professor Lee Elliot Major, is a member of the Social Mobility Commission – useful local contact for demographic data on social deprivation indices.

A copy of the feedback is provided.

As a reminder on the way forward now, EDDC is reviewing the feasibility of the employment sites – Harepath and Colyford Road both in Seaton and Cloakham Lawns in Axminster and

will propose a way forward and recommendations to Cabinet i.e. EDDC invest in development of the site, **or** take to open market. The Moridunum site in Seaton is being marketed.

4. Update on Renewal Strategy Projects

Landlord vacancies database. Jane updated.

The Chamber has collated the data. Josh Dutfield to provide information on Axminster Carpets. There are now fewer vacancies.

Transport Issues in the town.

Keir updated on feedback from DCC Highways.

At **Stoney Lane** in Axminster, design work is progressing for a widening project at the southern end of Stoney Lane to make provision for a footway.

Axminster LSWIP Lite. There is a proposal for a high level walking and cycling network plan for Axminster to identify routes that could be improved in the future for sustainable connectivity. However, only limited funding for the strategy for this. It would require developer/government contributions to deliver.

Following the **town centre traffic count survey work** undertaken by DCC Highways, it has been determined that the best remaining solution for the town is a Relief Road at some time in the future. Adaptations within the town centre will not be effective (e.g. one-way systems).

Marketing training workshop. Chamber has interest for this. Keir to pick up to consider support for funding the training.

Business rates relief. Barrie Hedges has discussed with EDDC. JD reported that signposting to EDDC website had raised some issues for Axminster Carpets. Cllr Hayward to follow up at EDDC.

5. Terms of Reference and Future Meetings

AH advised that she is discussing Terms of Reference with the Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the opportunity for support from Democratic Services for future meetings to ensure the meetings are following best practice and appropriate governance – e.g. declarations of interest. Also to review membership.

6. A.O.B.

Date of next meeting will be **moved from 6 September**. Sarah Rogers in PAC Service will be in touch.