

## Axe Valley Project Group Meeting

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Held online at 11.00 am

### Axminster Renewal Strategy

1 Attendance: Alison Hayward (AH) East Devon District Council  
Paul Hayward (PH) Axminster Town Council  
Keir Duffin (KD) Devon County Council  
Jasmine Jones (JJ) Devon County Council  
Marie Ainsworth (MA) East Devon District Council

Apologies: Jane Rockett, Axminster Chamber

### 2 Purpose of the meeting:

Alison Hayward introduced the meeting and explained that the purpose of the meeting is to report on progress and issues arising with the various projects that are identified in the Axminster Renewal Strategy. This will enable signposting support to be offered where relevant, and for DCC to monitor progress for the Revitalising Devon's Towns Programme (formerly Devon Urban Renewal programme). The list of projects serves as an agenda to explore these project opportunities but there is no requirement for the Stakeholders to deliver on these.

### 3. Axminster Renewal Strategy Projects, (Ref points taken from the Axminster Urban Renewal Strategy):

Ref point	Summary of task	Update	Action
6.1	Delivery of vocational skills training aligned with skills needs of local businesses in the Axe Valley. Employability support to be offered to	PH reported that Axminster Town Council (ATC) are covering this with Axminster Chamber. The Town Council will contact <b>KD</b> for bespoke IT training for businesses if required.	

	students alongside this. Initial suggestions include the delivery of manufacturing and catering skills training. Ensuring that the training is accessible to all. DCC is currently promoting a digital skills training programme, so is well placed to deliver further training.		
6.2	After the landlord data base is established (see 7.3 and 7.4), there is potential to identify an empty units to lease and offer to new businesses/pop up shops.	This project is not currently being progressed.	
6.3	Business support services, including support to improve online presence.	<b>PH</b> reported that this is in hand as a Quick Win project.	
6.4	Ensuring sufficient allocation of employment sites in strategic locations, specifically for industrial premises and workspaces. Implementing an effective mechanism to ensure employment is delivered on allocated sites. Set up meeting between renewal Forum and EDDC Planning Policy team.	<b>AH</b> reported that Cloakham Lawns is being reviewed as a council owned employment site by the Economic Development Team. This is part of a wider focus considering other employment sites owned by the Council and is a priority for the new Place Directorate to deliver on.	
6.5	Potential for a Business Improvement District (BID) covering the industrial areas of the town as well as town centre. Need to understand whether there is interest in this from local businesses.	This project is now closed	
7.1	Events and Markets to draw visitors into town. Need to identify suitable location for outdoor market, including the provision of shelters for market stalls. Potential to involve local businesses with this. Combine local events with Seaton i.e. stalls rotate between towns on weekly basis.	<b>PH</b> explained that the Town Council will join 'National Association of British Markets' (NABMA) to enable the relevant advice to be sought to better understand the market opportunities for Axminster. There is a small cost to this, and external funding support would be welcome. <b>JJ</b> will explore opportunity from DCC sources and report back.	<b>ALL seek funding</b>

7.2	<p>Potential for mixed-use development at Webster Garage site.</p> <p>The phosphate issue is slowing these plans as residential development is included in the scheme.</p>	<p><b>AH</b> reported that the owner of the site now has a planning permission in place for conversion of the former Lawson's building to become a small supermarket. EDDC are keeping in touch with the owner on progress.</p>	
7.3	<p>Create a landlord database to identify landlords that will engage to maintain buildings and offer affordable rents. This will help provide transparency to those looking for units.</p> <p>Potential next stage is to encourage landlords to join Chamber of Commerce to encourage community engagement.</p>	<p>This project is not being progressed.</p>	
7.4	<p>Research into reasons for empty retail units. Potentially a landlord forum to help understand reasons. Potential for property agents to be involved in this e.g. Axminster Property</p>	<p><b>PH</b> concluded that many of the empty properties were in one or two ownerships, empty units not necessarily caused through a lack of interest. The Post Office are looking to relocate into the town centre, but parking could be an issue.</p> <p>Rumours that Costa was due to close are unfounded, the owners confirmed this is not the case.</p>	
7.5	<p>Potential to appoint a Branding and Marketing consultant to review the brand and prepare a strategy for promoting this locally and more widely.</p> <p>Create links form Axminster Town Council Website to local community groups and use website to promote the brand of Axminster.</p>	<p>A number of local businesses have come together to create a new website 'What's in Axminster' to promote the town and its offer and activities.</p> <p>Questions had arisen regards Axminster becoming a coach friendly town, to enable more tourists to visit.</p>	
7.6	<p>Better signage for the entrance to Axminster.</p>	<p><b>PH</b> reported that this is now completed. All new signs have been installed, as designed in-house by the Town Council, including the town twinning information.</p>	
8.1-8.5	<p>Traffic related items – move bus stops in town centre (Jubilee Fountain), introduce one way system, divert HGV's to bypass, pedestrianise parts of town centre, raise awareness of</p>	<p>The Town Council remains concerned that there is no current project that is seeking to address the traffic problems in the town centre. The Town council considers that much of the town's growth will rely on the road network being remodelled. It is keen to conduct a traffic survey with traffic modelling for a one way system. DCC feedback suggests this is not a priority for DCC currently. The TC will keep this issue on the agenda and continue to</p>	

	integrated transport options, Impose time window for HGV accessing the town centre.	press DCC to progress. It will consider funding sources that will enable a survey to be undertaken to fully understand issues and options. <b>PH</b> reported that the Town Council still has £50k in funds from the rail company. <b>PH</b> is awaiting feedback to see if there is a possibility of redirecting this from the initial EV Bike scheme for other travel related priority projects at points 8.8-8.9.	
8.6	Completing the Stop Line Way for improved links between Seaton and Axminster. DCC committed funding to deliver Seaton to Colyford element of SLW next year. Kilmington to Axminster section is missing. Potential for some of this to be delivered temporarily along quiet lanes.	As previously discussed, the challenges (multiple ownership of land, funding etc) of exploring this project are such that it is not being progressed at this time.	
8.7	Long-term ambition to deliver a relief road	This is no longer being progressed.	
8.8-8.9	Encourage Active Travel i.e. walking, cycling within Axminster and from other places to Axminster. Develop the Stop Line way as discussed at 8.6. Eco-transport solutions i.e. E-bikes and scooters. Coordinate with Co Cars and Co bikes. DCC to provide 'Quick Win' funding for technical support to develop this project. ATC to prepare a terms of ref for this.	This is no longer being progressed.	
9.1	DCC support available through One public Estate and Homes England to deliver affordable housing. Potential support for sites acquired by public organisations. Can any potential sites be identified? Joined-up approach between Axminster and Seaton?	The delivery of new homes remains an issue due to the lack of consents being granted due to the nitrates issue and mitigation requirements. Affordable housing for Axminster will remain a key requirement. Nitrate mitigation could be enabled through new Government bills. Await further updates from the new Government.	

	This is discussed in the work undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan.		
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4. **Quick win Funding: Devon Renewal Programme and Quick Wins.** **KD** gave an overview of the on-line programme monitoring portal that has been created to record information on each town. He highlighted that Minehead is a benchmark town. The portal is going live in August. **KD** will share a link with the District and Town Councils. **KD** agreed to resend the offer of Quick Win funding, projects must fit the criteria and be ready to go due to short timescales. **JJ to send out information.**

The meeting ended at approximately 12pm. Date and time of next meeting will be communicated in due course.