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13 JAN 2023

Axminster Neighbourhood Plan

Update, January 2023

If we are to have a Neighbourhood Plan, it must by law be fully consistent not just with national planning policy, but also with East Devon District Council's Local Plan. It is therefore very important that your views on EDDC's Consultation Draft Local Plan (CDLP) are heard by them, which is why their proposals rather than ours are at the heart of this phase of the consultation process.

What EDDC's Consultation Draft Local Plan says about Axminster

The next four pages (with the **Red Headings**) are taken from EDDC's CDLP. The wording has not been changed, but the list of sites and areas which EDDC is considering for development as part of the plan-making process has been moved to the end, so that it follows the description and analysis of the town.

The Axminster Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group's response to EDDC's Consultation Draft Local Plan

The second part of this handout (with the **Green Headings**) summarises the Axminster Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group's response to EDDC's CDLP. After some brief statements of principle, it provides short site-by-site comments on all of the sites and areas considered for development in the CDLP.

It has been designed to enable residents to record and submit their own views to EDDC, which must be done by 15 January 2023 at the very latest. **If you insert your own comments and either return this handout to us at the Update meeting on 10 January, or deliver it to the Town Council's office in the Guildhall by 16:00 on 12 January, we will ensure that it reaches EDDC on time.**

You can, of course, respond directly to EDDC if you prefer, either by letter or by using their on-line consultation tool.

Axminster

6.1: The Local Plan strategy establishes Axminster as a Tier 2 settlement and as such as an appropriate location for future growth and development. Plan policy sets out land allocations for development and these are shown on the policies map along with other policy boundaries that are at the town.

What the settlement is like

6.2: Axminster is the fifth largest settlement in East Devon with a population of around 6,800. About 30% of residents are aged 65 or over (the East Devon average), with 16% aged between 0-15. There are some 2,800 economically active people and an employment density of 1.03, which shows that there is a good balance of jobs and workers. In terms of where Axminster residents work, two thirds are within East Devon, 44% of which work in Axminster itself, showing the settlement is relatively self-contained. 11% of workers travel across the border to West Dorset to work, and 10% to South Somerset. Not surprisingly, given its location near to the boundary, these are the highest proportions of people travelling to work in Somerset and Dorset of any of the East Devon settlements, indicating a reasonably close commuting relationship with these counties. The majority (over two thirds) drive a car to work, although walking accounts for a significant proportion (44%) in the town itself.

6.3: Axminster is one of only three East Devon settlements that has a full range of services and facilities with a secondary and primary schools, a variety of shops, sports facilities, a library, GP, hospital, railway station and regular bus service. The A35 Trunk runs just to the south of Axminster and the A358 runs through the town centre. The routing of heavy goods vehicles through the narrow winding streets of the historic town centre erodes its environmental quality and can cause traffic management issues.

6.4: Axminster is set within the beautiful Axe valley, with the East Devon AONB to the south of the town and the Blackdown Hills AONB to the north and west. There is a significant degree of inter-visibility between the town and the AONB landscapes. Land to the west of the town is constrained by a wide floodplain and there are smaller floodplains in the town itself.

6.5: Axminster is an attractive and long established market town with an historic core of great architectural value. There are significant archaeological remains to the south of the town that provide evidence of a Roman fort, and the crossroads of strategic Roman roads. There is also a significant group of listed buildings focused to the north of the town around Weycroft Hall.

Key messages from the Neighbourhood Plan for the area

6.6: Axminster has a reformed Steering Group which since early 2021 has been actively developing a neighbourhood plan for the town and parish. Previous work on a neighbourhood plan had stalled in 2018 due to the on-going uncertainty regarding the

proposed eastern urban extension and associated relief road. An initial public consultation for the renewed neighbourhood plan work was held over summer 2021. The results of this, together with on-going evidence gathering, have informed an early working draft neighbourhood plan. Published results highlight a key concern being to ensure any new development is matched with improvements in infrastructure and facilities provision, and for traffic issues in the town centre to be addressed and not exacerbated. Support for new development was primarily limited to more employment, commercial and community uses, as well as affordable housing.

6.7: A further public consultation to test and refine the draft neighbourhood plan prior is being planned currently. Undertaking this work as the new Local Plan emerges is clearly more challenging, and there is on-going liaison between the Neighbourhood Plan Group and district planning officers.

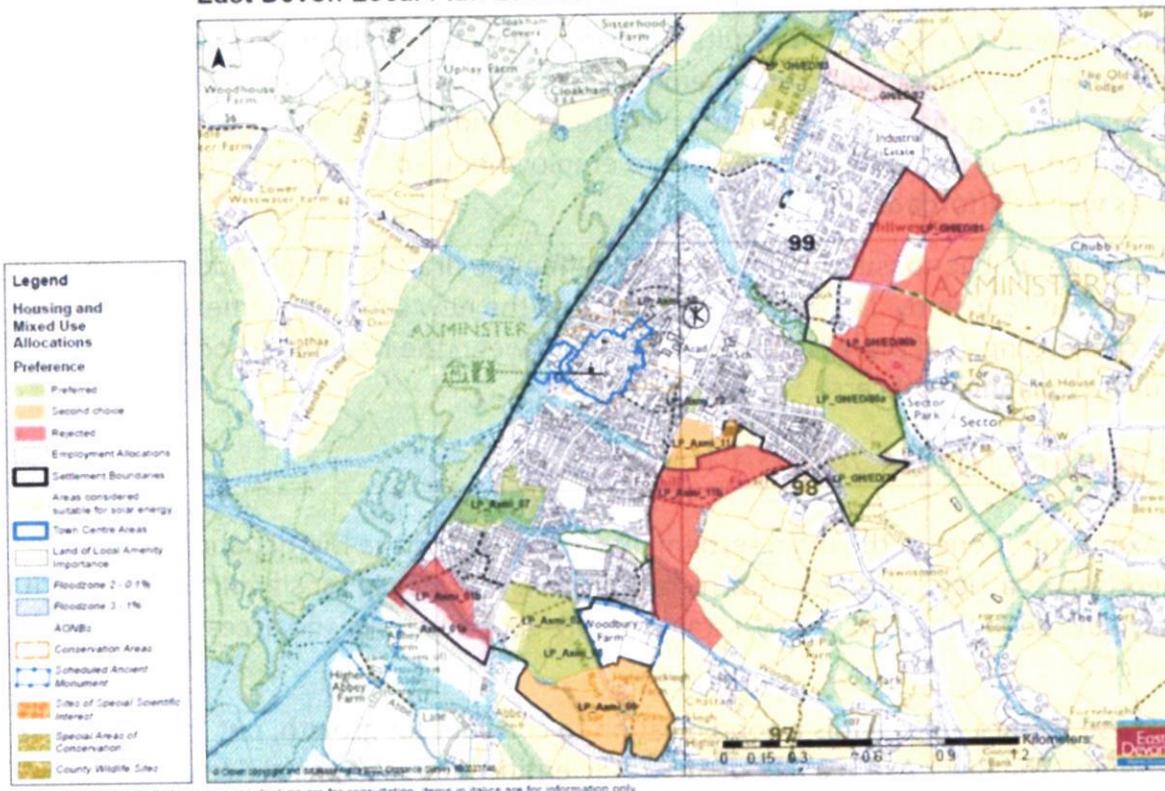
Suitability for development

6.8: Axminster is one of the main settlements in the east of the District and has been categorised as a Tier 2 settlement, which is suitable in principle for significant growth. It is largely outside of the AONB's, has a train station, good bus links and access to the road network.

6.9: These factors suggest it is a good location to consider for growth, but there are also constraints. The River Axe is a Site of Special Scientific Interest/Special Area of Conservation and further housing development could exacerbate existing nutrient management issues. Development in Axminster will need to be able to mitigate any detrimental impact on nutrient levels on the River Axe and work is ongoing on how this can be achieved. There is a wide floodplain to the west of the town and an important group of historic assets to the north. To the south there is a further floodplain, the A30 Trunk Road, the East Devon AONB and two Scheduled Ancient Monuments, one of which may mark the site of a Roman fort and crossroads: it is likely that further Roman remains extend beyond the designated area. There is attractive hilly land to the east, some of which has limited potential for road access.

6.10: The currently adopted local plan allocates a strategic site to the east of the town as an urban extension and this includes provision for an Axminster relief road. A masterplan envisaged the delivery of up to 850 houses, a school, employment land and a distributor road. However, there are very significant viability issues concerning the delivery of the relief road which would require in the region of £15 million of public money to deliver. It is very unlikely that such funding will become available, and it would not be possible to demonstrate that allocations requiring the relief road are viable and deliverable. It is not recommended that the new local plan includes policy for a relief road to the east of Axminster because we cannot demonstrate that it could be implemented.

East Devon Local Plan 2020-2040 - Axminster



Strategic Policy – Axminster and its future development

The sites/areas listed below are potential sites for allocation at Axminster as shown on the Policies Map. On the policies map sites are colour coded to indicate whether they are preferred or 2nd choices sites and we also show sites that have been assessed and at this stage rejected as possible choices for allocation for development.

- Land east of Lyme Road (**GH/ED/79**) and Pestaller Farm, Beavor Lane (Part of GH/ED/80 – shown as **GH/ED/80a** on the Policies Map) – The endorsed Axminster Masterplan provides guidance for how this site should come forward. This site is allocated for 293 dwellings and 1 hectare of employment land. This is a preferred allocation.
- Land east of Chard Road (**GH/ED/82**) – This land was proposed for employment uses in the endorsed Axminster Masterplan with an extensive landscaping buffer in the northern part of the site. It is allocated for 2 hectares of employment land. It is a preferred allocation for employment use only.
- Land west of Chard Road (**GH/ED/83**) – this land is proposed for 150 dwellings and 0.6 hectares of employment land. This is a preferred allocation.
- Land west of Musbury Road (part of **Axmi_01**) – the southern part of this site that lies outside of the floodplain is allocated for 2 hectares of employment land. This is a preferred allocation for employment use only.

- Land east of Musbury Road (**Axmi_02 and Axmi_08**) – this land is proposed for 168 dwellings and 0.6 hectares of employment land. This is a preferred allocation.
- Land at Axminster Carpets (**Axmi_07**) – this land is allocated for mixed-use redevelopment to retain the existing employment use and accommodate 50 dwellings plus additional employment uses. This allocation will need to be supported by further flood risk assessment and a comprehensive masterplan to secure pedestrian, environmental and other improvements. This is a preferred allocation. The site is already in employment use and the land will not be included in the amount of employment land allocated in the plan.
- Scott Rowe Building, Axminster Hospital, Chard Road (**Axmi_10**) – this land is allocated for 10 dwellings. This is a preferred allocation.
- Land at Lea Combe, Field End (**Axmi_12**) – this land is allocated for 9 dwellings. It is a preferred allocation.
- Great Jackleigh Farm (**Axmi_09**) - this land is allocated for 270 dwellings and 1 hectare of employment land. This is a ‘second choice’ site.
- Land east of Lyme Close (Part of Axmi_11 – shown as **LP_Axmi_11a** on the Policies Map) - this land is allocated for 100 dwellings and 0.4 hectares of employment land. This is a ‘second choice’ site.

In the event that all preferred allocations and 2nd choice sites being consulted on were allocated this would lead to the following:

- Total new homes proposed for allocation at Axminster = 1,050
- Total land area proposed for employment at Axminster = 7.2 hectares

The views of the Axminster Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Infrastructure

Previous analyses have identified a critical need for new infrastructure as a pre-requisite for expanding Axminster's housing stock. A proposal to deliver a North-South Relief Road and 800+ houses founded when grant funding for the road was withdrawn. Since then several hundred more houses have been built or approved. The present CDLP proposed to add a further 1,050 dwellings without any mention whatsoever of new infrastructure.

It is not just the local roads which are overloaded. The local healthcare and educational facilities are struggling to cope with the current population, let alone a major expansion.

Do you agree with the above?

Yes / No

Do you wish to add anything further?

We do not have the right infrastructure to support the housing we already have. With the lack of facilities and a struggling Drs and dentists these will cope with so many more dwelling planned.

Accessibility

We do not believe that assessing a site's accessibility simply by asking whether it is <1,600m as the crow flies from the town centre is enough. In Axminster, as in many other Devon towns, considerations of slope and pavement quality (including width) should be considered, alongside the actual walking distance, taking particular account of the homeward walk.

Do you agree with the above?

Yes / No

Do you wish to add anything further?

Density

We believe that housing densities should be both planned and delivered in line with the Government's 2021 'National Model Design Codes'. We think that the default target density for Axminster should be 40 dwellings per ha (dph), and that any proposal offering less than 30 dph should not even be registered by EDDC, as a matter of policy.

Do you agree with the above?

Yes / No

Do you wish to add anything further?

Axminster's housing allocation

We believe that allocating a further 1,050 dwellings to be built in Axminster and the adjacent countryside is wholly disproportionate to the town's capacity to absorb new residents, and out of all proportion to the equivalent burdens being asked of other towns in East Devon.

The proposed expansion of 70% in the town's housing supply over 30 years (from 2011 to 2040) will, if delivered, transform everything about the town, other than its ability to support its residents, and those of neighbouring villages who rely on Axminster as their primary urban centre.

Do you agree with the above?

Yes / No

Do you wish to add anything further?

The town and the neighbouring villages
can not cope with such a vast
expansion.

Site-by-site comments

The sites are listed in the order in which they appear in EDDC's CDLP.

GH/ED/79&80a

What the CDLP says	Land east of Lyme Road (GH/ED/79) and Pestaller Farm, Beavor Lane (Part of GH/ED/80 – shown as GH/ED/80a on the Policies Map) – The endorsed Axminster Masterplan provides guidance for how this site should come forward. This site is allocated for 293 dwellings and 1 hectare of employment land. This is a preferred allocation.
What we say about GH/ED/79	We agree that this site can be delivered without the proposed N-S Relief Road, with vehicular access via Lyme Road and multiple pedestrian access points. It is still the subject of a full Planning Application (19/0150/MFUL), including 104 houses. Although we do not like several aspects of the application as lodged, the principle of development on this site is not challenged.
What you think about GH/ED/79	<p>Do you agree with us? Yes / No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p>
What we say about GH/ED/80a	Much of this site is very steep. Providing effective flood mitigation from 200 new houses and employment land to protect a stream with a history of increasingly serious flooding would be extremely challenging. Inadequate mitigation would make a bad situation much worse. We regard vehicular access from Sector Lane (particularly for employment land) as unacceptable, and access via GH/ED/79 (involving the closure of Sector Lane, as per the N-S relief road scheme) as impractical. If the development spreads down the slope towards the stream, pedestrian and cycle access will also become challenging.
What you think about GH/ED/80a	<p>Do you agree with us? Yes / No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p>

GH/ED/82 (employment land)

What the CDLP says	Land east of Chard Road (GH/ED/82) – This land was proposed for employment uses in the endorsed Axminster Masterplan with an extensive landscaping buffer in the northern part of the site. It is allocated for 2 hectares of employment land. It is a preferred allocation for employment use only.
What we say about GH/ED/82	<p>We agree that this site can be delivered without the proposed N-S Relief Road, with vehicular access from Chard Road. However, it will inevitably contribute to existing HGV pressures on Weycroft Bridge and the town centre.</p> <p>Although the site itself is relatively flat, we are also concerned about the inevitable impacts of further development on the adjacent stream.</p> <p>Any further narrowing of the gap between Axminster and Weycroft Hall (Grade I listed) will need to be very carefully managed.</p>
What you think about GH/ED/82	<p>Do you agree with us? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p>

GH/ED/83

What the CDLP says	Land west of Chard Road (GH/ED/83) – this land is proposed for 150 dwellings and 0.6 hectares of employment land. This is a preferred allocation.
What we say about GH/ED/83	<p>We regard this site as two distinct parts: N and S of Tiger Way.</p> <p>We understand the logic of including the land S of Tiger Way, but we believe that EDDC should not allow any more housing on the N side of Axminster without including much better food retail provision. This would help to relieve town centre congestion, and serve many existing residents better. We believe this should take priority over employment use in this location in the absence of another dedicated retail site.</p> <p>We regard the N side of Tiger Way as less suitable for development, not least because of its distance from the town centre.</p>

What you think about GH/ED/83	<p>Do you agree with us?</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further? This land should not be considered at all. Lots of families take walks along the pathways. It's a safe place away from housing. It is far too close to our river system and will make a detrimental impact on the neighbouring villages and the main road in and out of the town. i.e. Wyecroft.</p>
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Axmi_01a (employment land)

What the CDLP says	<p>Land west of Musbury Road (part of Axmi_01) – the southern part of this site that lies outside of the floodplain is allocated for 2 hectares of employment land. This is a preferred allocation for employment use only.</p>
What we say about Axmi_01a	<p>We agree that this site is well suited to employment use, given its excellent connection to the A35 by-pass, via the existing interchange. We believe that the constraints are capable of being satisfactorily addressed, and that it will reduce traffic noise levels at existing housing.</p>
What you think about Axmi_01a	<p>Do you agree with us? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p>

Axmi_02&08

What the CDLP says	<p>Land east of Musbury Road (Axmi_02 and Axmi_08) – this land is proposed for 168 dwellings and 0.6 hectares of employment land. This is a preferred allocation.</p>
What we say about Axmi_02&08	<p>We agree that these can helpfully be considered as a combined site. It lies beyond a long-established and clear natural boundary (the S edge of Woodbury Park / Athelstan Close). If developed for residential use it would inevitable constitute a 'bridgehead' for further housing.</p> <p>There is currently no safe pedestrian access to this site via Musbury Road (a constraint which cannot easily be overcome), and access from the town centre via Wyke Lane involves some steep slopes as well as a considerable distance. Taken together, these constraints mean that few residents would be likely to walk into the town centre.</p>

	<p>Although not technically part of any AONB, and despite the existence of the A35 by-pass, this combined site is (1) attractive countryside in its own right; (2) clearly visible from large swathes of the East Devon AONB in a way that the town of Axminster is not at present; (3) good quality agricultural land; and (4) in an area that is used for recreational walking by a large number of residents of the S half of Axminster.</p> <p>The amount of environmental mitigation which would be essential to prevent its effects being adjudged as 'significantly adverse' would inevitably erode the number of houses which could be delivered.</p>
What you think about Axmi_02&08	<p>Do you agree with us? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes / No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p>

Axmi_07

What the CDLP says	<p>Land at Axminster Carpets (Axmi_07) – this land is allocated for mixed-use redevelopment to retain the existing employment use and accommodate 50 dwellings plus additional employment uses. This allocation will need to be supported by further flood risk assessment and a comprehensive masterplan to secure pedestrian, environmental and other improvements. This is a preferred allocation. The site is already in employment use and the land will not be included in the amount of employment land allocated in the plan.</p>
What we say about Axmi_07	<p>We welcome the inclusion of this site, which is well-connected to the town centre, and could provide much improved pedestrian and cycle access from Gamberlake X.</p> <p>As Axminster grows, much of this site will become increasingly appropriate for higher-density residential rather than employment use, and we would like to see significant parts of this site (plus all or parts of adjacent ones, if possible) allocated to high density housing (terraced housing or flats).</p> <p>If / when the main carpet factory building becomes available, consideration should be given to delivering a road connection from the by-pass slip road to Axminster station, alongside further high density housing.</p>

	<p>Flood concerns could be mitigated by raising floor slab levels, possibly combined with under-croft parking and roof gardens.</p> <p>We regard the reference to 50 dwellings as inappropriate to a plan running all the way to 2040.</p>
What you think about Axmi_07	<p>Do you agree with us?</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p>

Yes No

Axmi_10

What the CDLP says	Scott Rowe Building, Axminster Hospital, Chard Road (Axmi_10) – this land is allocated for 10 dwellings. This is a preferred allocation.
What we say about Axmi_10	<p>Whilst regretting the loss of any facilities on the hospital site, we know that this site is being marketed for residential use.</p> <p>Although there is a case for building 4-5 bungalows (as in Hilary Gardens and Latches Walk) with small gardens, given the proximity to the town centre we agree that a significantly higher density development (town houses or even flats, as at nearby Poplar Mount) is preferable. With good architecture, a 3-4 storey building with excellent long views might be acceptable.</p>
What you think about Axmi_10	<p>Do you agree with us?</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p> <p>If we are to have more housing surely having a medical hub on the existing site would help ease the pressure? Dr + Dentists are in great need.</p>

Yes No

Axmi_12

What the CDLP says	Land at Lea Combe, Field End (Axmi_12) – this land is allocated for 9 dwellings. It is a preferred allocation.
What we say about Axmi_10	We agree that this well-located site is suitable for housing, but we would prefer to see it developed in combination with Site Axmi_11a (and the two small 'orphan' plots adjacent to 11a, both of which belong to Devon County Council).

	If it must be dealt with on its own, we believe that a terrace of more than nine houses should be considered. This is a prime site within easy walking distance of the town centre.
What you think about Axmi_10	<p>Do you agree with us? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further? <i>(If linked with 11A)</i></p> <p>This field will, I believe a good location, in some respects as the land has not been used for many years. I do feel however this should not link up with 11A.</p>
Axmi_09	C
What the CDLP says	Great Jackleigh Farm (Axmi_09) - this land is allocated for 270 dwellings and 1 hectare of employment land. This is a 'second choice' site.
What we say about Axmi_10	<p>All of the considerations which apply to Sites Axmi_02 & 08 also apply to Axmi_09, which although technically not part of the East Devon AONB is indistinguishable from it in landscape quality terms, and very visible from significant parts of both of the local AONBs.</p> <p>Because of its distance from the town centre, Axmi-09 would be a totally car-dependant satellite suburb. We think it likely that once in their cars, residents heading for a supermarket will go to Seaton rather than Axminster. We would therefore simply be trading open countryside for housing which should be elsewhere.</p> <p>It would be a different matter if this site (or Sites Axmi_02 & 08) was also to provide new facilities (e.g. a GP surgery, educational facilities or a retail food outlet). Even so, that would represent a very substantial change to the character of Axminster.</p> <p>Of all of the sites in the Consultation Draft Local Plan, this is the one which appears to be least defensible in planning policy terms, and can be expected to attract the strongest opposition.</p>
What you think about Axmi_10	<p>Do you agree with us? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p> <p>We need to have additional GP Surgeries, Dentists and a school to provide for this amount of housing along with a supermarket.</p>

Axmi_11a

What the CDLP says	Land east of Lyme Close (Part of Axmi_11 – shown as LP_Axmi_11a on the Policies Map) - this land is allocated for 100 dwellings and 0.4 hectares of employment land. This is a 'second choice' site.
What we say about Axmi_11a	<p>Of all the sites in the CDLP which are able to accommodate over 10 dwellings, this is the one with the best access to the town centre. If combined with Axmi_12 it would be accessible from both Lyme Close and Lyme Road.</p> <p>It also offers the opportunity to build in much-needed flood mitigation measures with the potential to relieve flash flooding pressure on the Purzebrook, which has repeatedly flooded downstream properties on Musbury Road.</p> <p>We would support the provision of high density affordable housing on this site.</p>
What you think about Axmi_11a	<p>Do you agree with us? Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p> <p>This land adjoins on to the local primary school and will cause absolute disruption to the school and the surrounding properties. This proposal will surround the whole school grounds potentially causing risk to the children and staff there. One of the schools selling points is the beautiful surroundings it is in this will ruin this. Their woodland area was recently broken into and vandalised. If this were to then housing all around it, I fear this would become worse. There is a tributary at the bottom of the very steep hills and I fear that pollution will feed from this into our very delicate River Axe.</p> <p>Please do not build here it will be upsetting for all staff, pupils and parents, and for those walkers who use it on a daily basis to get their daily exercise.</p>

About you

Please indicate your age group by ticking the relevant box:

17 or under	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 to 29	<input type="checkbox"/>
30 to 44	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
45 to 59	<input type="checkbox"/>
60 to 74	<input type="checkbox"/>
75 or over	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please enter your postcode:

EX13 7LU

Thank you

If you wish us to provide feed-back to EDDC using your answers to the questions in this booklet, please ensure that you return it either to the Town Council's office in the Guildhall, or to the place where you got it,

By 16:00 on Thursday 12 January 2023 at the latest

Two other sites not in the CDLP

Webster's Garage site

What the CDLP says	The former Webster's Garage site is not mentioned in the CDLP.
What we say about Webster's Garage	This town centre site has been the subject of several planning applications over a period of about 40 years, but has remained resolutely empty. The absence of any comment or policy in the CDLP seems inexplicable. We think that EDDC owes it to Axminster to ensure that this site does not remain vacant until 2040.
What you think about Webster's Garage	<p>Do you agree with us? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further? <i>Would be great to have an Aldi there or on the co-op site.</i></p>

Former Millwey Rise FC field

What the CDLP says	The former Millwey Rise FC football field (0.95 ha) belongs to EDDC, but is not mentioned in the CDLP. However, it appears in a separate EDDC document which proposes a very modest number of affordable homes on this site, at a density of 20-30 dwellings per ha.
What we say about the former Millwey Rise FC field site	<p>If affordable homes are to be provided, they should be at a density consistent with Government guidance – at least 50 homes, but possibly more.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan team would favour using this site to provide a new food retail outlet to serve N Axminster, quite possibly with some affordable homes as well.</p>
What you think about the former Millwey Rise FC field site	<p>Do you agree with us? <input type="radio"/> Yes / <input checked="" type="radio"/> No</p> <p>Do you want to add anything further?</p>