

My job for nearly thirty years has been assessing the commercial and residential health of towns across the West Country. The result is that I'm unwittingly possibly uniquely qualified to comment on the Local Plan and its draft strategies for my home town of Axminster.

When a town is commercially 'treading water' or perhaps even on a bit of a 'down cycle' due to factors beyond its control such as changing shopping habits, the nettle has to be grasped that quite simply, the existing shops (not to mention any potential new ones) need more shoppers to survive, not to mention to thrive.

I don't believe that a few hundred more homes will replace the volume of lost 'household spends' that Axminster has suffered from in recent years and indeed will continue to further suffer from in the future, unless the problem is addressed.

It's often quoted that many existing services are at full stretch and that's a reason to resist major growth. Let's say that they're running at 130% of optimum working capacity.

Pretty well all the services that anyone would say are overstretched these days in Axminster wouldn't attract another 'service provider' because the proprietors need a reasonable chance of at least achieving a break-even position from their investment.

If they'd only be fighting for a portion of the existing 'population pie' then there just isn't enough to go round to warrant taking that 'leap of faith' with our town. What dentist, doctor, school places provider, what *anything* would come to our town to satisfy a 30% demand for what they have to give ?

However, if there are sufficient new residents scheduled to be coming, the probability of achieving a position of viability becomes much more likely. As someone once said, "Build them and they will come."

Finally, it's worth remembering that absolutely everyone reading this is living in a home that once.....was brand spanking new ! This applies if the home in question was built in the 1820's, the 1920's or the 2020's. Take the land on which Hillhead Terrace sits, it was once a field, so was the land where Millwey Rise sits and more recently, Latches Walk too. What right would any of us have to go back in time and stop those homes being built, lived-in and loved ?

So it follows, what gives us the right to stop new streets of Axminster being built for people who would cherish and value being a resident of our town to add in their own way to its journey to becoming a prosperous and bustling community, the envy of the District.