



# 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.