

AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM ON 15TH MARCH 2021.

AGENDA 1. Welcome and Introduction - Town Mayor, Cllr. Jill Farrow. 2. Neighbourhood Planning – Cllr. Jeremy Walden. 3. Adaptation, Innovation and Resilience – Dist. Cllr. Paul Hayward (Portfolio Holder for Economy, Asset Management and Regeneration). 4. Implementation/Delivery – Cllr. Andrea Sedgewick. 5. Summary and Conclusion of Meeting – Town Mayor.

1, WELCOME

In her welcoming remarks, the Town Mayor presented apologies from Cllr. Hall who had asked her to say on his behalf that he was very supportive of the move to restart work on the Neighbourhood Plan. He highlighted the following matters of importance going forward:

1. Opportunities for mixed housing/business development at the former Axminster Carpets site.
2. The creation of a passing loop at Whimple to deliver a half-hourly train service between Salisbury, Axminster and Exeter.
3. The importance of striving for integrated healthcare provision at the hospital site.
4. Support for local schools.

He pledged his support for the community.

Apologies were tendered also from Sarah Shepley and Deacon Becky Lovett.

2. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING.

Cllr. Walden outlined the context in which the Neighbourhood Plan would sit through its links with the National Planning Policy Framework and the Local Plan. All planning applications are considered in relation to these three documents.

He added that each development incurred Community Infrastructure Levy and parishes with a Neighbourhood Plan would get a higher proportion of this for spending within the parish. (25% as opposed to the basic 15%)

Cllr. Walden went on to outline the various stages which would have to be completed in the process of creating the Neighbourhood Plan. He said that the final stage was a public referendum. He stressed that this made it the community's plan, "owned" by them.

3. ADAPTATION, INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE.

Dist. Cllr. Hayward, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Asset Management and Regeneration, said that the town was at a metaphorical crossroads.

Central Government Funding for Adaptation, Innovation and Resilience could act as a pump-primer to attract other funding but would need co-operation between a wide range of stakeholders, individuals, businesses, and organisations. It would need effort, energy and many meetings. He said that the District Council was aware of the need for regeneration in Axminster. The Regeneration Board could be reformed to take things forward. Problems should be identified and the best areas for success identified. He urged the involvement of the private sector, which could get things done more quickly than could the public sector. He said that the Town Council has the necessary powers and should act as the figurehead and lead. A plan needs to be formulated to access the money available from numerous sources.

Cllr. Holt asked what the timescale was for accessing the £150,000 funding available. Cllr. Hayward said that the target date was March 2022 but that further guidance was expected. He urged that the sooner action was taken the better.

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY

Cllr. Sedgewick said that the full range of views of all members of the community would be sought by the Future of Axminster Group. She said that there was a finite time scale for the production of the

Neighbourhood Plan but there was also a need for a “quick response” strand to the group. The help of consultants could be used.

The following views were expressed from the floor:

- a. Axminster should be promoted as a destination where tourists would stay.
- b. Technology-related business should be attracted.
- c. An independent town planner should be employed to resolve the problems of town centre traffic and the Webster’s Garage site.
- d. Attempts should be made to improve provision of green space.
- e. The farming community should be consulted.
- f. There should be liaison regarding tree planting in the upper Axe catchment parishes.
- g. The proposed Aldi supermarket site would not bring people into the town centre and a third supermarket might endanger one of the existing supermarkets.
- h. Quick wins were needed to kick-start regeneration as well as identifying long term objectives.
- i. Online trading has changed the face of the retail and there is no going back.
- j. The future would be a mixture of some shops but also activities such as al fresco dining in Trinity Square.
- k. Traffic problems in town have an adverse effect on young people and the town centre should be traffic free.
- l. There needs to be more opportunity for young and old to mix.
- m. Quick fixes might include the provision of picnic benches on Minster Green, making the town a hub for charging of electric vehicles.
- n. Minster Green is a natural community focus.
- o. Improved signage would be a quick fix.
- p. Closed shops should be opened to community groups.
- q. The North/South Relief Road is a longer-term need.
- r. Pedestrianisation of the town centre is not good for businesses.
- s. The proposed new town maps will be helpful.
- t. AIR funding will enable economic recovery by enabling adaptation to changing conditions which will lead to an inclusive, green economy.
- u. The public rights of way network needs to be upgraded with key to provide multi-use off-road routes from one part of the town to another, including outlying parts such as Raymonds Hill.
- v. Traffic is the central issue. There is a divergence of view regarding bringing people in and keeping traffic out. A specialist Traffic Planner would be a better consultant to employ than a Town Planner. Not all through traffic is long distance. Some is from one part of town to another.
- w. Consideration needs to be given as to why people go elsewhere.

Cllr. Sedgewick thanked attendees for their interesting and informative contributions.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Town Mayor thanked everyone who had participated. She said that much further engagement would be needed to engage all interests and prepare plans for the short, medium and long term. She urged people to volunteer to help with the Future of Axminster.

Signed Date