

MINUTES OF AN EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING OF THE AXMINSTER TOWN
COUNCIL

Held at the Guildhall, on Thursday 27th September 2018 at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Town Mayor: Cllr. J.W. Walden
Councillors: S. E. Clarke, P.G. Hayward, D.R.H. Hull, D.J. Moore,
Mrs. S.R. Spiller, B.R. Watson,

The Town Clerk (Miss H. Kirkcaldie) and the Deputy Town Clerk (Mrs. Z. Adamson-Drage).

Cty./Dist. Cllr. Hall and Dist. Cllr. Moulding were in attendance.

Over 100 Members of the public. 0 representative of the Press. 0 representative of the Devon and Cornwall Police.

2018/0366 APOLOGIES: Deputy Mayor Cllr. A.L. Young, Cllrs. G. Alderson, A.E. Bourner, C. A. Doherty, Mrs. S.L.N. Leat, M. Mynard, L.A. Rowe, A.J.E. Seward.

2018/0367 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS:

CLLRS. HULL AND WALDEN EACH DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE.

CLLR. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNORS OF AXE VALLEY ACADEMY AS A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER SKATEPARK STEERING GROUP, AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND AS BEING SAFEGUARDING LEAD FOR AXMINSTER YOUTH CLUB.

CLLR. HAYWARD DECLARED A PECUNIARY INTEREST AS CLERK TO ALL SAINTS, CHARDSTOCK AND NEWTON POPLEFORD PARISH COUNCILS AND IN RESPECT OF HAVING A SPOUSE WORKING WITHIN THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (IN RESPECT OF WHICH LAST HE HAS A DISPENSATION TO SPEAK)

CLLR. HULL DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING A GOVERNOR OF THE ROYAL DEVON AND EXETER HOSPITAL.

THE TOWN MAYOR SET THE LENGTH OF TOWN FORUM AT ONE HOUR AND THE TIME ALLOCATED TO THE DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCILLORS TO SIX MINUTES. ALL OTHER SPEAKERS WERE ALLOWED THREE MINUTES

2018/0368 TOWN FORUM – DIST. CLLR. MOULDING: The following were among points raised:

- a. That development east of Axminster had been in the Local Plans since 1995.
- b. That the North/South Relief Road had been in the Local Plan since 2013

- c. That a Masterplan was being drawn up for the area because the landownership was with more than one party.
- d. That a time-limited grant of £10 million to facilitate the up-front provision of the road had been secured from the Housing Infrastructure Fund.
- e. That the Transport Report commissioned by the Town Council as part of the Neighbourhood Planning Process had confirmed the viability of the eastern relief road and had also set it in the context of the other options available including a western bypass which would, in his opinion, not be supported financially by the District or County Councils or by Highways England because of the flood zone category of the Axe Valley and the proximity to the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty if a route away from the flood zone were to be considered, particularly as the eastern relief route provided an alternative.
- f. That the issue of Weycroft Bridge should not delay the eastern relief road.
- g. That consideration of a western relief road would condemn the town to 15 more years of central congestion.

2018/0369 TOWN FORUM – COUNTY COUNCILLOR HALL: the following were among points raised:

- a. That the £10 million Housing Infrastructure Funding was not transferable to another route in Axminster and would give forward delivery of the road to enable opening up access to the housing area whilst removing heavy goods vehicles from the town centre.
- b. That opportunities would then be made for the pedestrianisation and regeneration of the town centre.
- c. That town centre pollution from traffic would be reduced.
- d. That increased population would give a boost to pupil numbers in the schools and make sixth form provision sustainable.
- e. That the town would be helping the national housing crisis.
- f. That he was working to see how the problems at Weycroft Bridge and at the junction of Lyme Road and the A35 could be overcome.
- g. That a western bypass could not be justified in the present financial climate.
- h. That the eastern relief road is the keystone to unlocking the future of Axminster.

2018/0370 TOWN FORUM – POINTS RAISED BY RESIDENTS:

- a. That the western route was straight and level and eliminated the Weycroft bottleneck.
- b. That the eastern route was not a relief route as it would simply transfer the problem from an older housing area to a newer housing area.
- c. That the western route would be good value for money.
- d. That the £10 million should be directed towards provision of the other infrastructure

and not to fund access roads to the housing development for the benefit of the developers.

- e. That the pollution from the heavy goods vehicles travelling along the eastern relief road would pollute the valley.
- f. That a western route alongside the railway would result in pollution being blown into the town on the prevailing winds.
- g. That a fly-over would have to be constructed for Castle Hill.
- h. That flooding would be a major issue in engineering and construction terms.
- i. That people move to Axminster from other areas to escape from pollution.
- j. That congestion in Axminster does not bear any comparison with that in other areas.
- k. That concern should be given to the impact of any developments on the ecology of the area.
- l. That there is much Facebook frenzy about the matter.
- m. That the number of houses could not be increased without planning permission but assurances should be sought that appropriate traffic management measures are built in.
- n. That it is encouraging that the issues at Weycroft and the Lyme Road are being investigated.
- o. That the £10 million should not be jeopardised when the viability of a road to the west has been ruled out.
- p. That there is no need for vast numbers of new houses or for employment land, given the number of houses for sale and the empty commercial properties.
- q. That the western route needs to be costed properly.
- r. That routing the eastern relief road from the railway bridge behind Weycroft Manor would resolve the Weycroft problems and any problems arising from the fact that the Axe Valley is a flood plain.
- s. That the suggestion by the traffic consultant that the western route would join the A35 at Abbeygate rather than Gammons Hill seemed strange.
- t. That a full cost-benefit analysis of all the options is needed. The line of the route should be determined in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- u. That Axminster does not want to be the next Cranbrook.
- v. That a western route would be more fuel efficient and represent good value for money in the long run while freeing up infrastructure money for other things.
- w. That there has been an enormous increase in the traffic at Weycroft in the last 30 years and another route needs to be found.

2018/0373 TOWN FORUM – TOWN COUNCILLORS’ RESPONSES TO ABOVE COMMENTS:-

- a. That the £10 million would be set aside specifically for developing the road and would be subject to financial scrutiny.
- b. That the Local Plan set out that there should be 650 houses to the east of Axminster.
- c. That housing was needed to support the town’s move from a market town to a small industrial employment centre.
- d. That Town Council would work to ensure that the roads which link into the relief road will have proper traffic management.
- e. That a cost benefit analysis would be sensible.
- f. That housing quality is a nationwide problem not simply confined to Axminster but buyers need to play their part by not buying substandard houses.
- g. That the draft Neighbourhood Plan stipulated that 25% of all houses should be affordable.
- h. That houses are needed to encourage younger people to live in the town.
- i. That scrutiny of the relative costings of the routes is crucial.
- j. That the housing and the relief road are two separate issues.
- k. That the original bypass was put in the wrong place 40 years ago.
- l. That the advantage of a cost-benefit analysis is that it considers impacts such as pollution as well as basic costs.
- m. That developers are not properly held to account and forced to adhere to their original planning conditions, as evidenced in respect of the development at Cloakham Lawns.
- n. That it is likely that developers will plead that they need ever more numbers of houses to fund the requirement for the relief road.
- o. That vital information is withheld from the Town Council.

2018/0374 TOWN COUNCIL’S POSITION REGARDING ROUTE OF RELIEF ROAD:
other points made included

- a) That many people, including Councillors, preferred a western alignment for a relief road or bypass.

CLLR. ROWE DECLARED A PECUNIARY INTEREST AS BEING A LANDOWNER WHOSE LAND WOULD BE AFFECTED BY ANY WESTERN ROUTE.

- b) That the parishes of All Saints and Chardstock would be starting a public campaign to change the minds of those who wanted the relief road to join the A352 south of Weycroft Bridge to eliminate the problem of vehicles travelling through the narrow lanes in those two parishes when the bridge was impassible due to flooding.
- c) That the bypass should have been built on a north-south alignment 20 years ago.

- d) That the housing was seen as a means to getting the relief road.
- e) That it would be better to wait longer and get it right.
- f) That the western route would be better environmentally as it would be away from the housing.
- g) That the lack of funding for the western route was regrettable.
- h) That a public meeting chaired by the Member of Parliament to discuss the issue should be held.

It was agreed that a special meeting of the Town Council be called to discuss this matter before the next Town Council meeting as it is such a key concern.

- i) That the Town Clerk would circulate a link to the minutes of the Strategic Planning Meeting when these become available.
- j) That growth in Axminster is being development led and will result in loss of farmland.

2018/0374 REVIEW OF TOWN COUNCIL POSITION REGARDING ROUTE OF RELIEF

ROAD: Cllr. Walden outlined the back ground to the Council's present position, confirmed in January, which was one of support for the principle of a relief road routed through the proposed area of 650 new houses to the east of Axminster, though without any particular pathway through that area having been put forward. That position had been confirmed in order to support the application by East Devon District Council for a £10 million from the Housing Infrastructure Fund to support the forward construction of the relief road pending discussions about the housing.

He referred to the views set out in the Transport Issues document prepared by the Traffic Consultant and pointed out that the land was not in the highest categories of agricultural land. He said that the environmental impact of the western route would be great given its proximity to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the need to ensure that it would not be compromised by flooding or affect waterflow on the flood plain. He said that to change the Council's view at this point would undermine its credibility with the District Council and have an adverse impact on delivering a Neighbourhood Plan. Without a Neighbourhood Plan the parish would receive 10% less money from the Community Infrastructure Levy, payable by developers, to be spent in the town.

While supporting the need for a solution to the Weycroft Bridge problem, Cllr. Walden said he felt it would be foolhardy for the proposed development to grind to a halt until a solution was found but that a corridor would need to be left in the housing area to allow for the future possibility of a link from the railway bridge or further east. He outlined other conditions which the Town Council should ask to be put in the Strategic Masterplan which is being worked on at the moment.

He wished to propose that the Town Council reconfirm its support for the eastern relief road, push for an acceleration of plans for Weycroft Bridge and seek to ensure that plans are put in place to ensure that heavy goods traffic is removed from the town centre.

Cllr. Hull said that he supported what Cllr. Walden had said.

Cllr. Hayward said that he felt that there were not enough Councillors present to make such an important decision and that the decision should be deferred. Cllr. Hull said that he

saw merit in this suggestion. Cllr. Walden said that the Neighbourhood Plan could not go against the Local Plan.

Cllr. Mrs. Spiller said that people may feel that the Neighbourhood Plan was not democratic if it contained policies which people did not support.

Cllr. Walden said that the draft plan would be subject to further comment from the public and East Devon and would need to be re-structured in the light of comments received. It would then be subject to scrutiny by an independent Inspector who would approve, amend or reject and once approved by the inspector would go to Axminster residents for their vote.

Cllr. Hayward said that the Town Council was making decisions on behalf of residents which was why he wished to proposed that the Town Council's position on the route of the relief road be deferred to the October meeting of the Town Council. Cllr. Mrs Spiller seconded the proposal. Agreed.

Signed Date.....