

Axminster Neighbourhood Plan 2023 to 2040

Partial Third Draft:
In preparation for a third round of
public consultation in Autumn 2023.

Chapters 1 to 4 only

Status:

This main element of this Partial Third Draft Neighbourhood Plan is an update to Chapter 4 of the Second Draft which was produced in 2022, with a new Introduction (Chapter 1) to explain its purpose and status, and edited-down versions of Chapters 2 and 3 which omit consideration of (a) the likely scale of growth in housing provision and (b) specific green-field development sites.

Chapters 2 and 3 will have to be comprehensively re-visited once the outcome of EDDC's deliberations over its own Consultation Draft Local Plan (CDLP) for 2020 to 2040 as issued in late 2022 is known. That CDLP was consulted on over the winter of 2022/23, including a public session held by EEDC in Axminster in November 2022. A formal submission was made to EDDC by the Axminster Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group following our own public consultation event in January 2023.

The proposed Vision, Aims & Objectives and Policies (Chapter 5) currently forms a separate document.

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	4
1.1.	The purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan	4
1.2.	The coverage of this document	4
1.3.	The geographical scope of the Plan	4
1.4.	Who has drafted the Plan?	5
1.5.	The status of this draft of the Plan, and where it is going	5
1.6.	Key elements to look for within the Plan.....	5
2.	Contextual Maps.....	6
2.1.	Axminster in its wider setting	6
2.2.	Parish-level maps	8
2.3.	Maps of the town and its immediate setting.....	14
2.4.	Town centre map	18
3.	The Neighbourhood Area's Demographics and Character	20
3.1.	Population statistics	20
3.2.	Housing stock	22
3.3.	Industry and commerce	23
3.4.	Public services and social infrastructure.....	25
3.5.	How the town has grown over time	26
4.	Key Issues for Consideration	29
4.1.	Over-arching topics within the Planning system	29
4.2.	Topics which are not central to the Planning system	29
4.3.	How the priorities of local residents have been taken into account.....	29
4.4.	How land is used for buildings and public spaces in Axminster	31
	Appropriate Uses: In the Town Centre.....	31
	Inappropriate Uses: In the Town centre.....	32
	Appropriate Uses: In the Town but Outside the Town Centre.....	32
	Inappropriate Uses: In the Town but Outside the Town Centre	33
	Uses Outside the Town.....	33
	How Issues Reinforce Each Other.....	33
	Housing and Design	39
	Listed Buildings and the Conservation Area	40
	Brownfield Sites within the Town.....	40
	Greenfield Sites in the Town	42
	Greenfield Sites on the Edge of the Town	42

Open Spaces within the Town	42
Potential 'Green Corridors' Adjacent to the Town.....	45
'Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces' outside the Town.....	45
4.5. Traffic and transport (including cycling and walking)	46
Town-Centre Traffic and Through Traffic.....	46
Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging	46
Other Transport (Road, Bus and Train) Issues, including Weycroft Bridge	47
The Network of Cycleways, Footpaths and Bridleways.....	48
Town Pavements	49
4.6. The natural environment	49
4.7. Issues not central to the Planning system	49

1. Introduction

1.1. The purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan

1.1.1. The purpose of this Neighbourhood Plan (referred to hereafter as ‘the Plan’) is to influence and enhance the future shape and character of Axminster, and the quality of life of our local community; and to encourage and support all those businesses and entities which support the town and the wider parish. It focuses in particular on choices which will be made through the Town & Country Planning system over the next 10+ years. The intended life of the Plan is from its adoption (currently anticipated for later in 2023) until 2040.

1.1.2. The intention of this Plan is to complement, and not to conflict with, (a) National Planning Policy, and (b) the current and emerging Local Plan of East Devon District Council (EDDC). In producing this Plan we also acknowledge, and have sought to complement, the policies and roles of a wide range of other statutory bodies with formal responsibilities for (among other things) aspects of landscape, nature and resource management, protection and conservation. This applies particularly where these policies and roles have implications for the use and management of land.

1.1.3. Detailed guidance on why and how to produce Neighbourhood Plans, and where they sit within the Town & Country Planning system, can easily be found on, for example, the neighbourhoodplanning.org website. We have opted not to attempt to summarise that guidance here because anybody with a specific interest in the process would be better advised to go to the original source rather than relying on a partial and unofficial summary.

1.2. The coverage of this document

1.2.1. Much of the content of Chapters 2 and 3 has been widely discussed and consulted on already, and is included here because it provides helpful context for Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 5 in particular is new.

1.2.2. Chapters 4 and 5 cover two key element of any Neighbourhood Plan:

- (a) The identification of the key issues for consideration by the Plan (which reflects the outcome of consultations with residents that we have already held); and
- (b) Proposals for the vision, aims and objectives, and policies to be included within the Plan which will help to address those issues.

1.2.3. The content of Chapter 5 will constitute the primary focus of the next round of public consultation with residents, to be held in Spring 2023.

1.3. The geographical scope of the Plan

1.3.1. The ‘Neighbourhood Area’ for Axminster as designated by EDDC on 2 October 2013 is the whole parish of Axminster, an area of 2,645 hectares (26.45 sq km). As well as the town of Axminster itself this includes a number of smaller settlements and hamlets. The largest of these is the neighbourhood of Raymonds Hill, together with houses on neighbouring Cooks Lane and Pigeon’s Lane. Most of Raymonds Hill lies within Axminster parish and is therefore covered by this Plan, while the rest sits within the parish of Uplyme. Other hamlets and clusters of housing within the parish of Axminster include Wyke, Woodbury Lane and Weycroft.

1.4. Who has drafted the Plan?

1.4.1. This Plan has been drafted by members of a Steering Group brought together for the purpose by Axminster Town Council. The Steering Group includes both elected councillors and unelected residents who are contributing their time and knowledge in a personal capacity.

1.5. The status of this draft of the Plan, and where it is going

1.5.1. This draft has been influenced by the responses to earlier rounds of public consultation, held in August / September 2021 and January 2023. Reports on the outcome of those consultations will form part of the Evidence Base on which the eventual Plan will be based.

1.5.2. In due course what is known as a 'pre-submission Regulation 14 consultation Draft' will be published by Axminster Town Council and made available locally for a 6-week process of pre-submission consultation involving a range of Statutory Consultees as well as the public at large.

1.5.3. After any changes required in response to the pre-submission consultation process have been made, EDDC will publish the Plan for its 'Regulation 16 submission' process. As well as enabling all parties to see how the Plan has changed in response to their earlier comments it will give them an opportunity to raise any matters with EDDC which they would like to be considered at examination. That examination will be undertaken by an Independent Examiner appointed by EDDC.

1.5.4. The Independent Examiner's report will identify any further amendments which are required before the final version of the Plan is passed to EDDC, and submitted by them to a local referendum. If it is approved by a majority of votes cast, it will then become a formal part of the Town & Country Planning system, with the same weight as EDDC's Local Plan, and will be used to help determine all Planning Applications within the parish.

1.5.5. All of this is based on the assumption that we (the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group) can reconcile the wishes of local residents with the proposals for development in and around Axminster up to and including 2040 which are included in the final version of EDDC's revised Local Plan.

1.6. Key elements to look for within the Plan

1.6.1. This Plan proposes a Vision for Axminster (see Chapter 5), supported by a series of Aims, Objectives and Policies (also in Chapter 5). These Policies have been designed to make the achievement of those Aims and Objectives more likely.

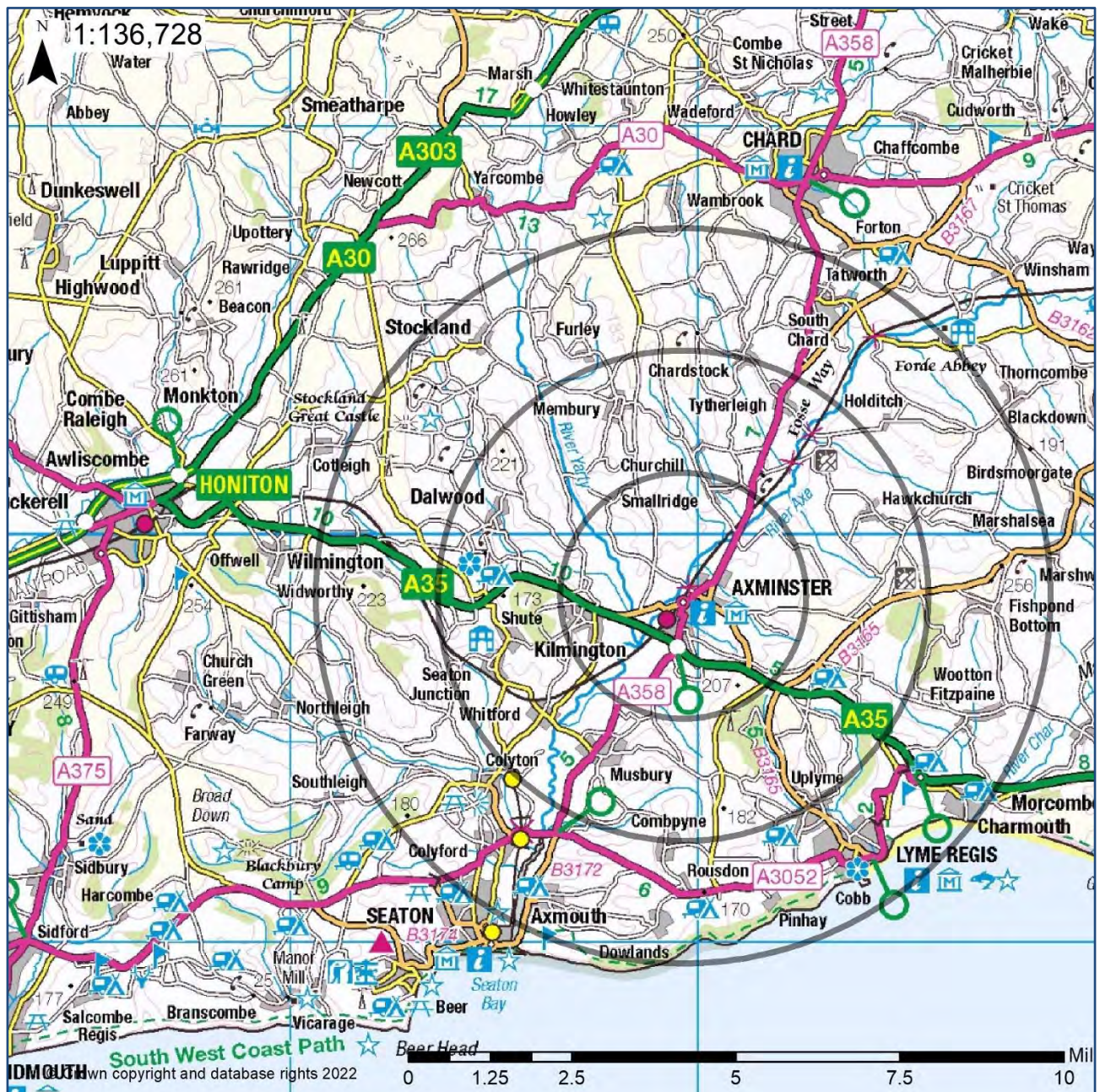
1.6.2. Although all parts of the Plan are important, Chapter 5 is probably the most important part for those who are contemplating making Planning Applications within the Parish of Axminster, because all of the Policies set out there apply to all such Planning Applications.

2. Contextual Maps

2.1. Axminster in its wider setting

2.1.1. Map 2.1 shows how Axminster is connected both to those villages (typically within around 6km) many of whose residents rely on Axminster for day-to-day shopping, employment, and services such as professional services, health and education; and to neighbouring towns like Seaton (which is of a very similar size to Axminster) and Honiton and Chard (which are both appreciably larger). In the case of Honiton the connection is by rail as well as by road.

Map 2.1: Axminster and its connections



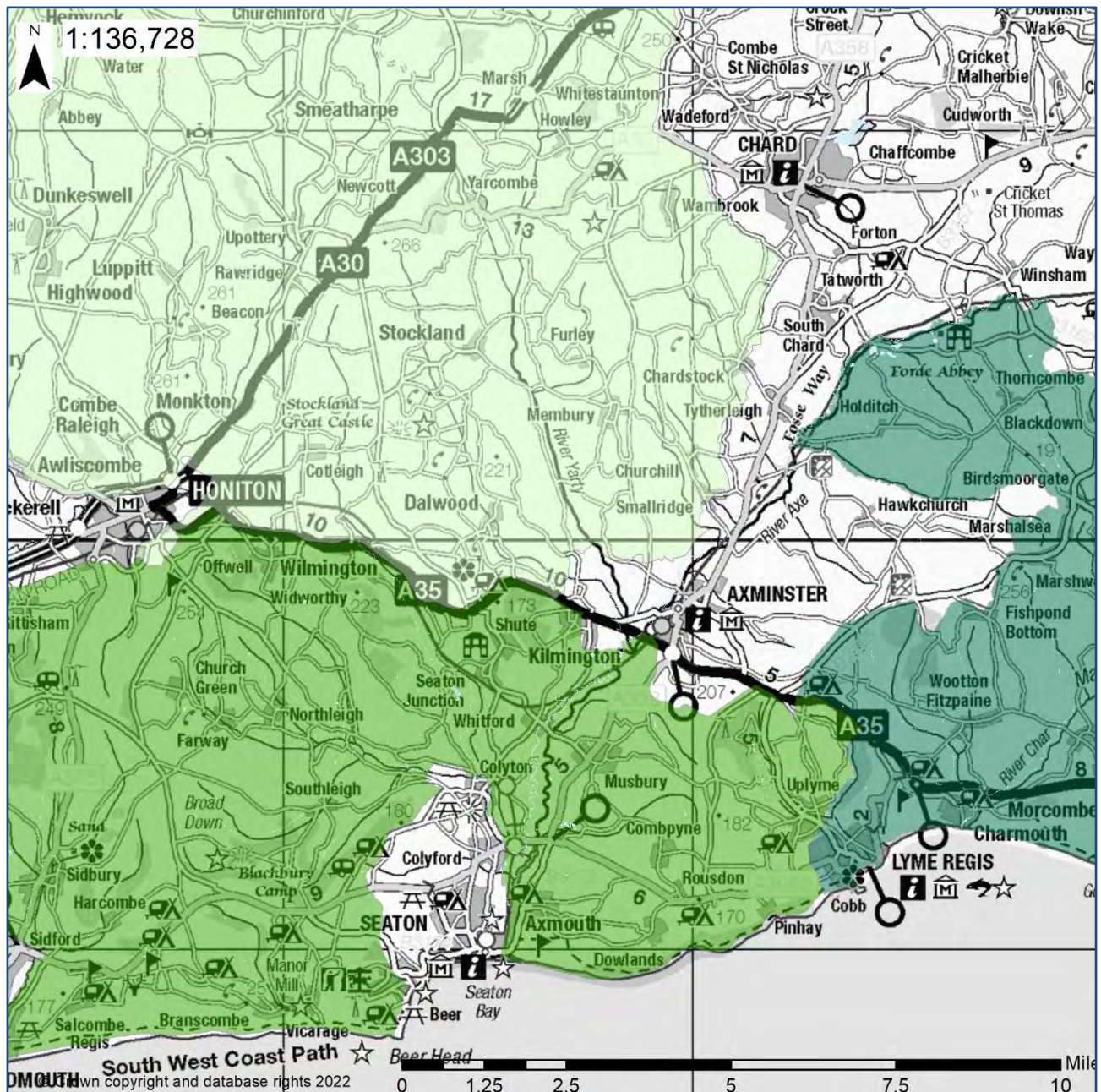
Key: The concentric circles (centred on St Mary's Minster Church, Axminster) have radii of 3km, 6km and 9km.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.1.2. Map 2.2 shows the boundaries of the three local Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), within which Development Proposals face tighter restrictions. This illustrates how development within our part of East Devon has been relentlessly focussed on Axminster, Seaton, Colyton and Honiton.

2.1.3. Even within the relatively small area of land outside the AONBs development is further constrained by the flood plain of the river Axe (see also Maps 2.5 and 2.9 below).

Map 2.2: Axminster and the three nearby Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Key: Light green = Blackdown Hills AONB. Mid-green = East Devon AONB. Dark green = Dorset AONB.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

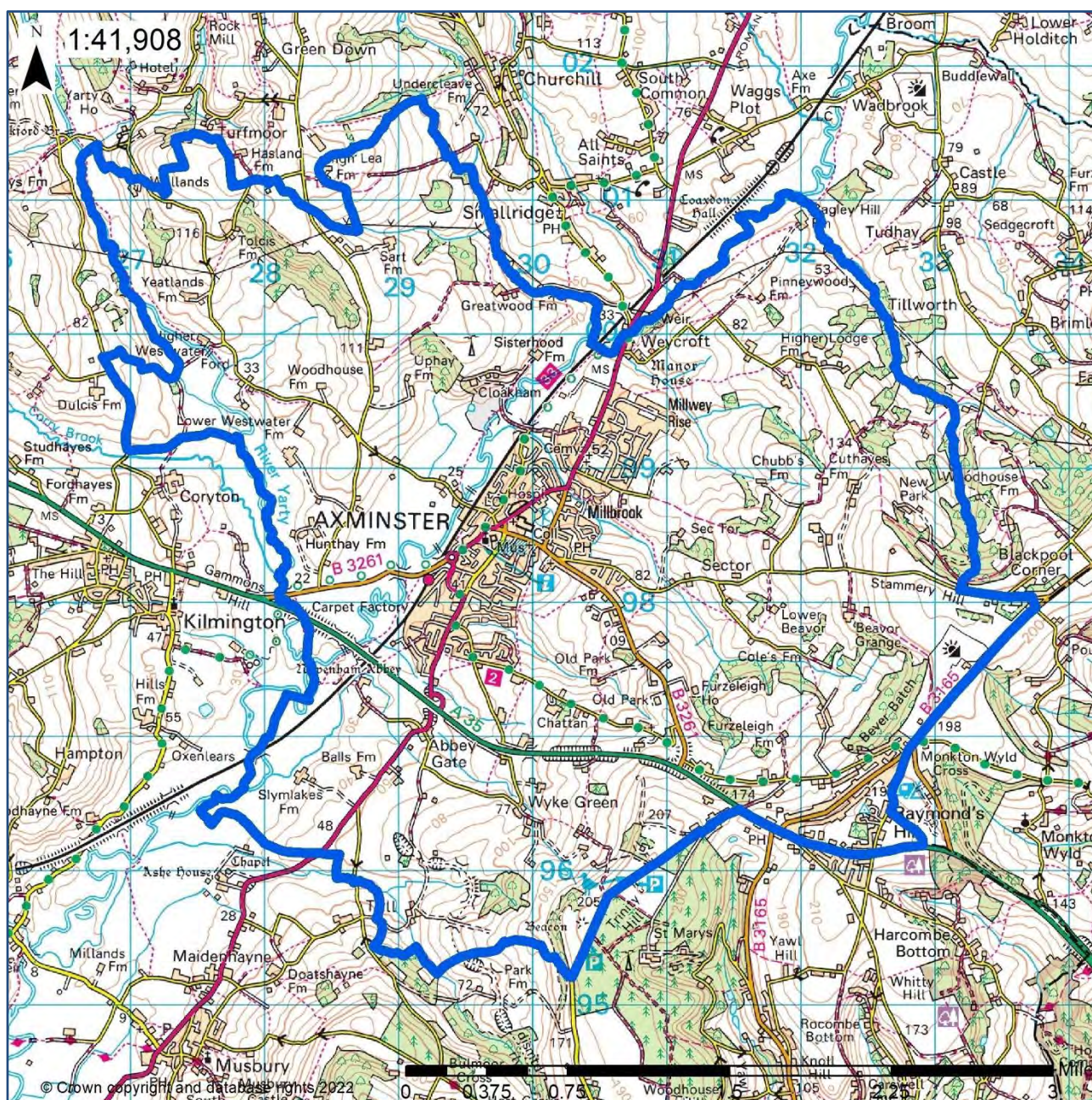
2.2. Parish-level maps

2.2.1. Maps 2.3 to 2.8 are drawn at a larger scale than Maps 2.1 and 2.2. They all show the whole parish of Axminster (which constitutes the designated 'Neighbourhood Area' to which this Plan applies), and they cover exactly the same area as each other, to facilitate comparison and cross-referencing.

2.2.2. Map 2.3 shows the parish boundary against a conventional mapping background.

2.2.3. Map 2.4 provides very much the same information as Map 2.2, but at a larger scale, which therefore covers a smaller area more closely focussed on the parish.

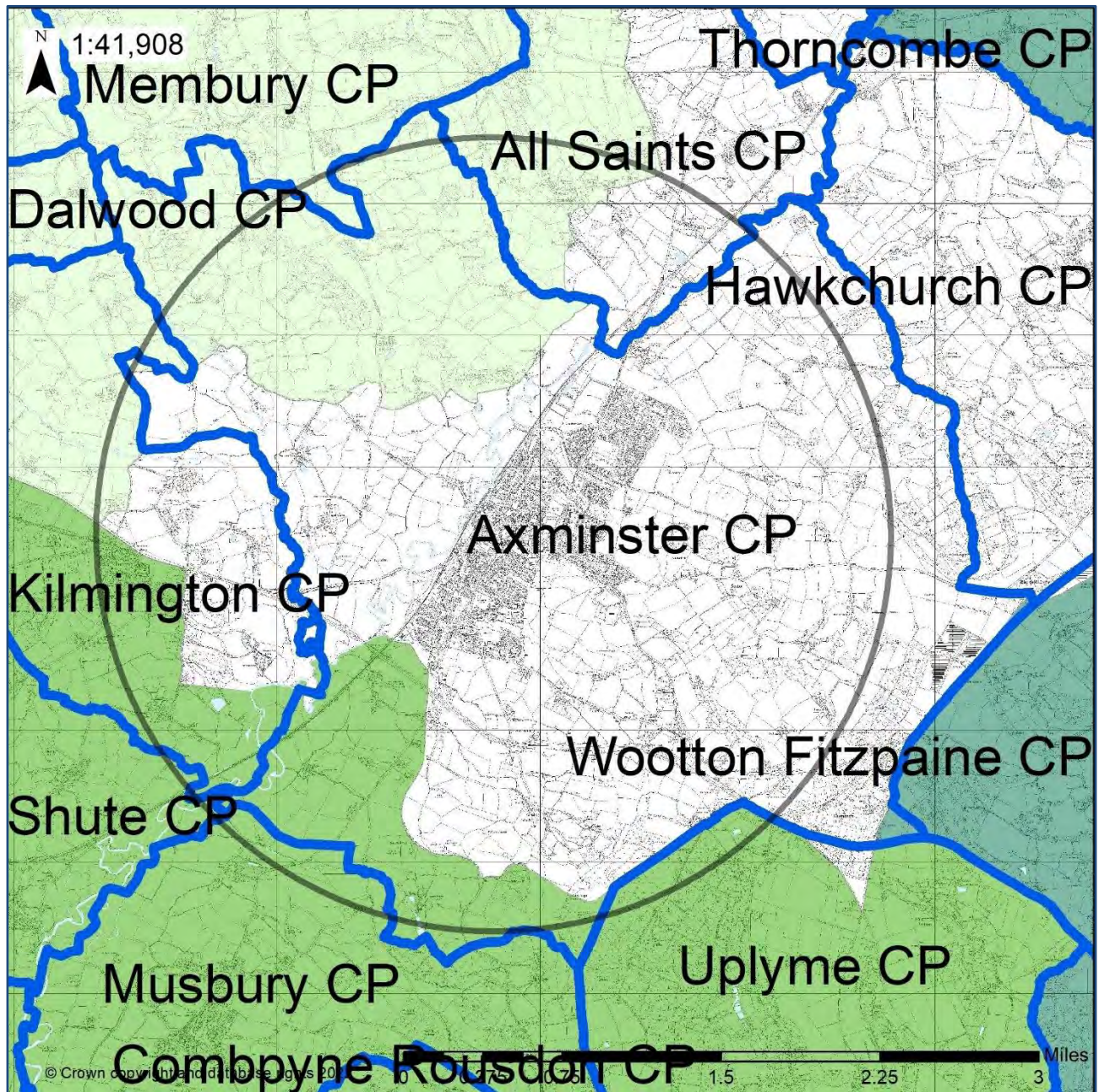
Map 2.3: Axminster's parish (and Neighbourhood Area) boundary



Key: Blue = Boundary of Axminster civil parish.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

Map 2.4: Axminster and neighbouring parishes, with AONB boundaries



Key: Blue = Civil parish boundaries. Light green = Blackdown Hills AONB. Mid-green = East Devon AONB. Dark green = Dorset AONB.

The circle (centred on St Mary's Minster Church, Axminster) has a radius of 3km.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

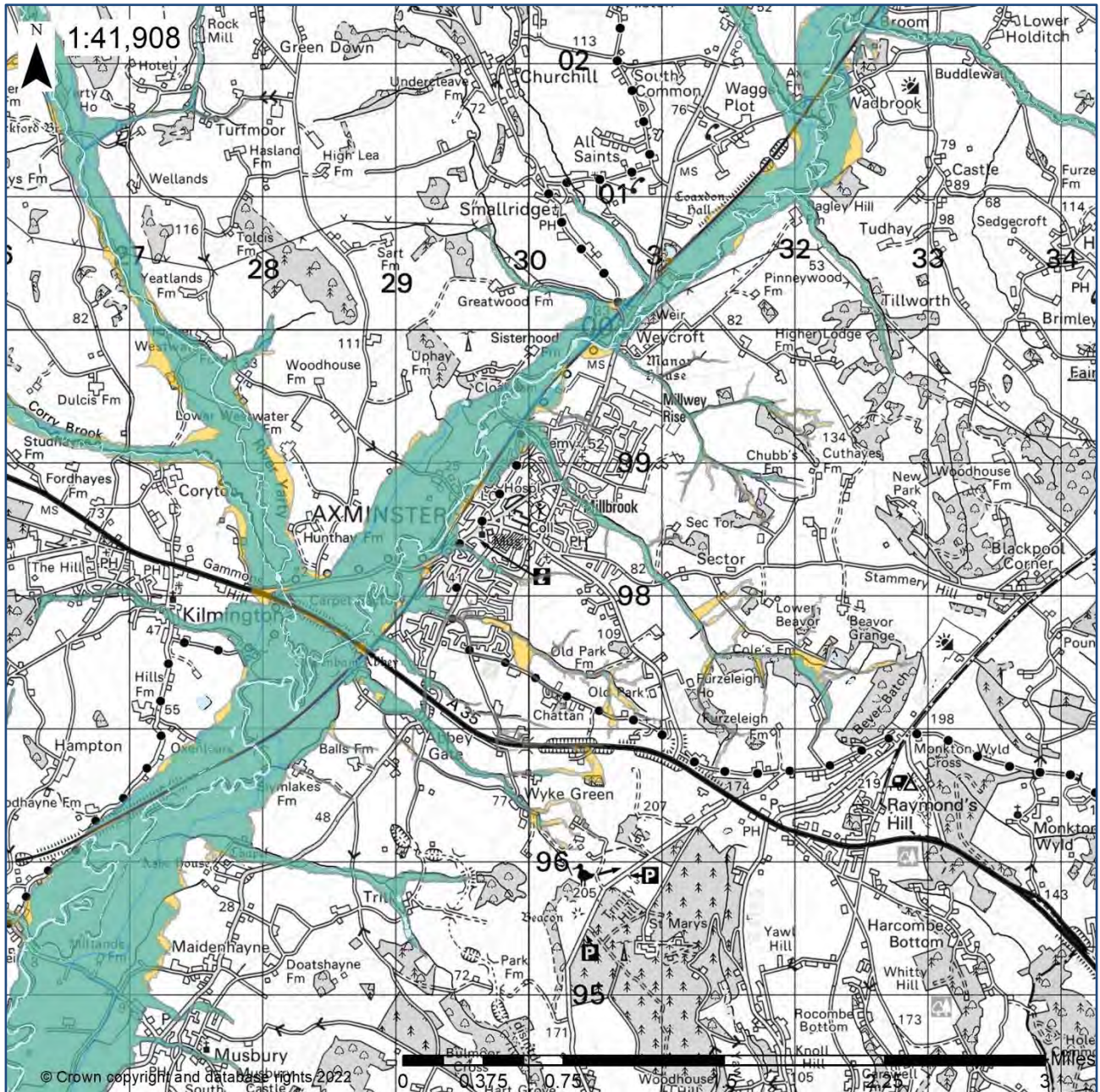
2.2.4. It should be acknowledged that there is nothing inherently less beautiful about the countryside immediately surrounding Axminster compared to the adjacent AONBs.

2.2.5. Map 2.5 uses flood risk mapping to show the extent of the combined flood plain of the rivers Axe and Yarty. The Yarty has a much steeper river bed and catchment than the Axe, and is more prone to flash flooding as a consequence. There is nothing unusual about the Axe flooding to about two thirds of the width illustrated below, and such floods can occur several times a year, in all four seasons.

2.2.6. The Axe is not tidal at Axminster, but it is tidally-affected. When the tide at Axmouth is high and/or rising it acts as a 'plug', holding back floodwater around Axminster. When the tide turns the floods can dissipate relatively quickly.

2.2.7. Many of the smaller streams which feed into the Axe are subject to flash flooding. This regularly affects certain properties, including some within the town.

Map 2.5: Constraints linked to flood risk

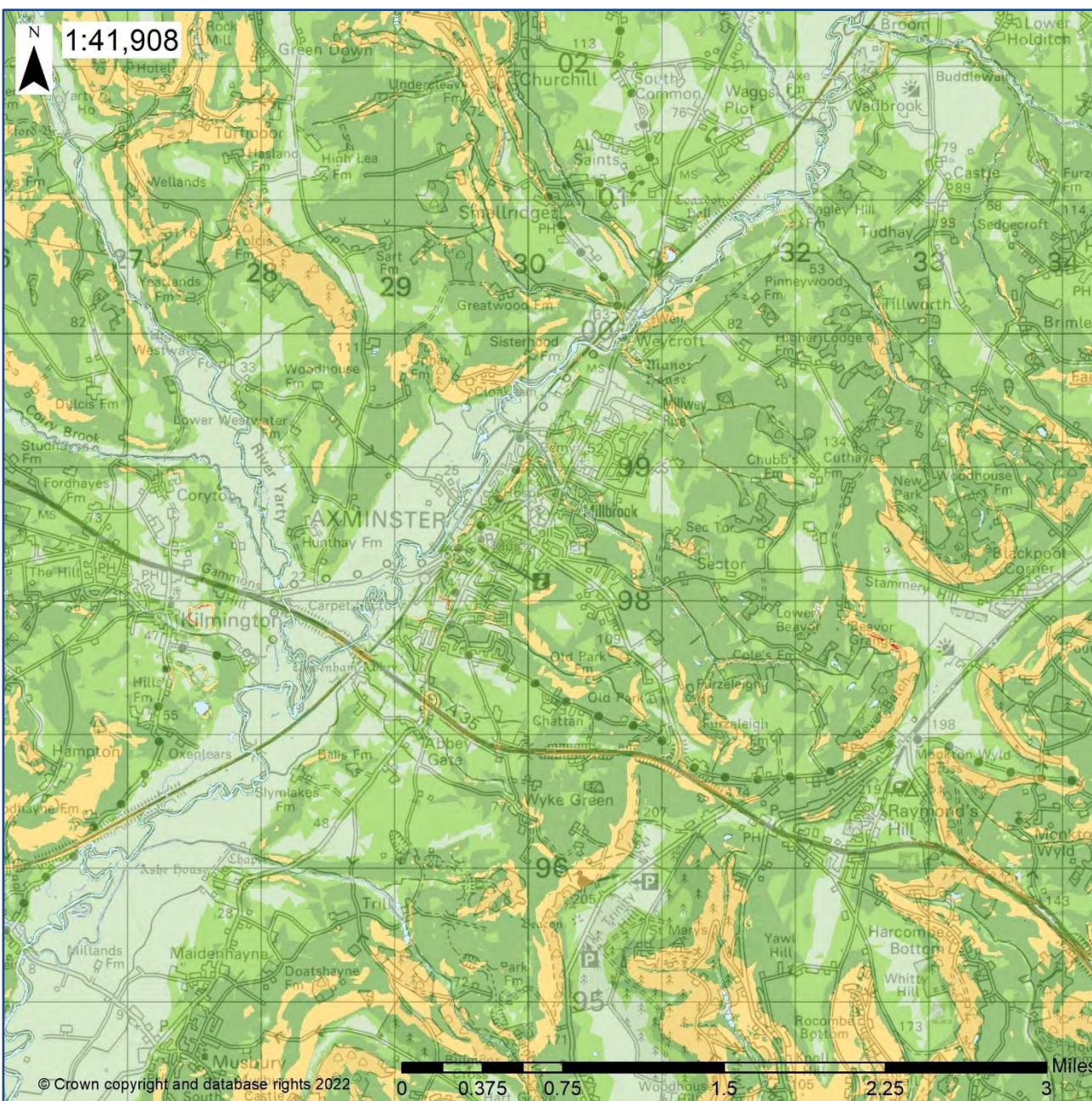


Key: Light blue = Rivers Axe and Yarty. Blue-green = Land which has been assessed as carrying a 1% risk of flooding in any one year. Yellow = Land which has been assessed as carrying a 0.1% risk of flooding in any one year. These are known as Flood Risk Zones.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.2.8. One of the key characteristics of Axminster is its topography: many parts of the parish beyond the floodplain, including parts of the town, are hilly, and there are many steep slopes. This is illustrated by Map 2.6 using different colours to illustrate not differences in altitude (as is conventional), but the relative steepness of slopes.

Map 2.6: Constraints associated with slope



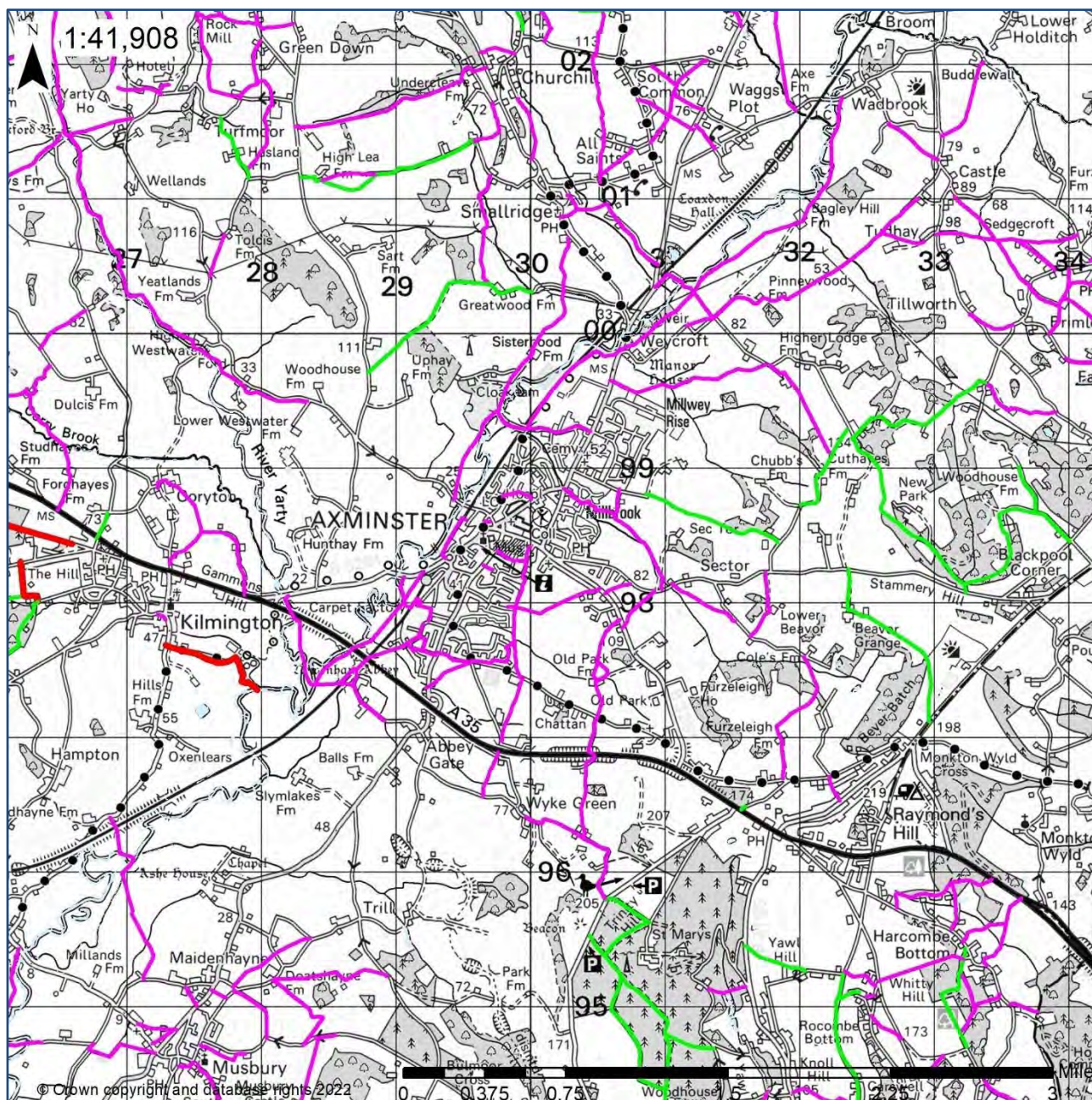
Key: This map shows different degrees of steepness, with the following zonal code:

	Almost flat: <2.5% (less than 1-in-40).
	Gentle slope: 2.5% to 5% (1 in 40 to 1 in 20).
	Noticeable slope: 5% to 10% (1 in 20 to 1 in 10).
	Steep slope: 10% to 33.3% (1 in 10 to 1 in 3).

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.2.9. Slopes notwithstanding, Axminster is surrounded by a good network of public rights of way (PROW), as shown by Map 2.7. Nevertheless, comparing Maps 2.6 and 2.7 shows clearly that many of them, including some within or right on the edge of the town, involve steep slopes.

Map 2.7: Public Rights of Way



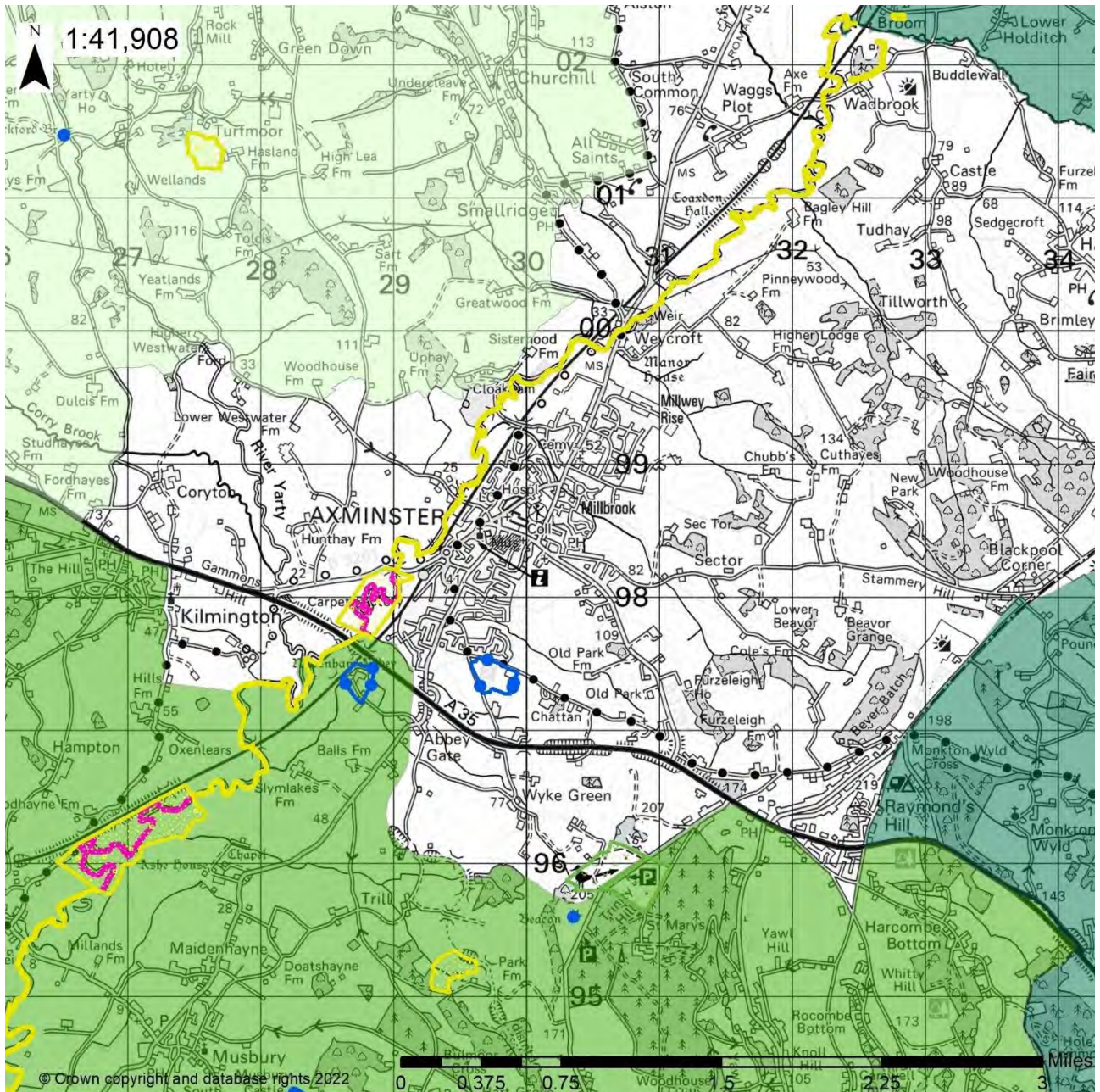
Key: Mauve = Public footpaths. Green = Public bridleways. Red = Byways.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.2.10. Map 2.8 extends the information provided by Map 2.4 (on AONBs) by including other environmental and historical designations which constitute material considerations whenever development is being considered.

2.2.11. The constraints associated with the river Axe go beyond considerations of flood risk, and include the environmental sensitivity of the river's ecology, which has recently been identified (in 2022) as being under particular strain from nutrients including nitrates and phosphates.

Map 2.8: Constraints associated with officially designated sites



Key: Three solid greens = Three AONBs (see Map 2.4 for details). Green outline (see Trinity Hill) = Nature Reserve. Yellow = Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Pink = Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Blue = Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.3. Maps of the town and its immediate setting

2.3.1. Maps 2.9 to 2.13 are drawn at a larger scale than those above. They all share the same scale and coverage as each other, which includes all of the built-up area of the town plus its immediate surrounds.

2.3.2. Some of them (including Map 2.9) provide larger-scale versions of earlier maps, so that the information on them can be better appreciated at the scale of the town itself.

2.3.3. To aid clarity several, including Map 2.9, also use different base mapping, so that the details of the flood risk zones can more easily be seen against the urban infrastructure.

Important Note:

Maps 2.9 to 2.12 were produced before EDDC's CDLP was published. The CDLP itself was produced shortly before the Government indicated that it may remove statutory housing targets. It was partly in response to the scale of those statutory targets that EDDC had included in its CDLP proposals for new housing at Axminster which extended all the way to the A35 Axminster by-pass.

We know that there is strong local opposition to the principle of extending the town that far, and the strength of that opposition was reported to EDDC following our January 2023 public consultation event.

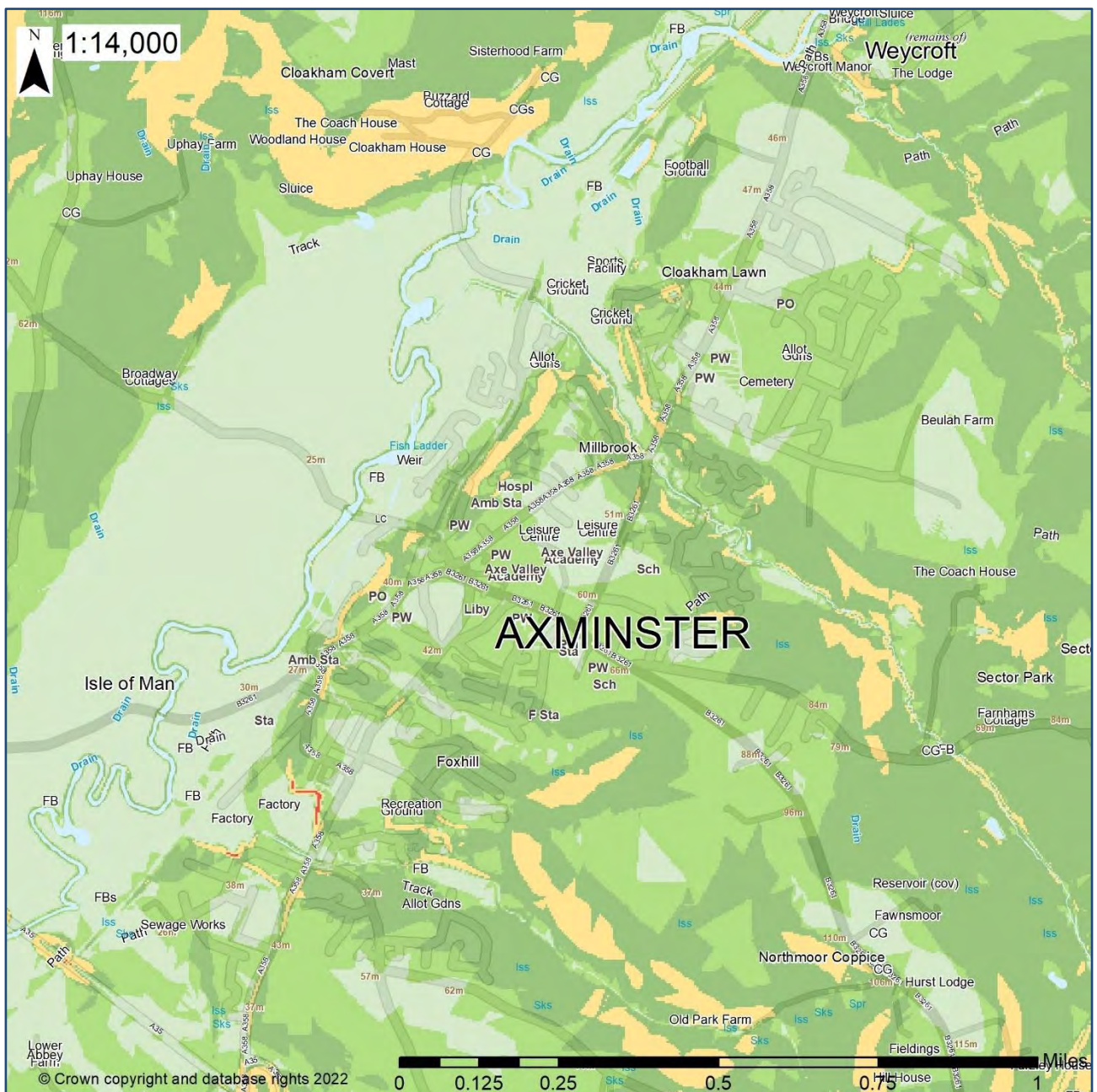
We do not yet know how EDDC will respond to any new or revised Government guidance on housing targets, but depending on their response it may be necessary to extend the geographical extent of Maps 2.9 to 2.12.

[illegible]

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.3.4. Map 2.10 re-presents the slope information from Map 2.6 on simpler base mapping, with the addition of one additional slope code which was in effect invisible at the larger scale.

Map 2.10: Constraints associated with slope



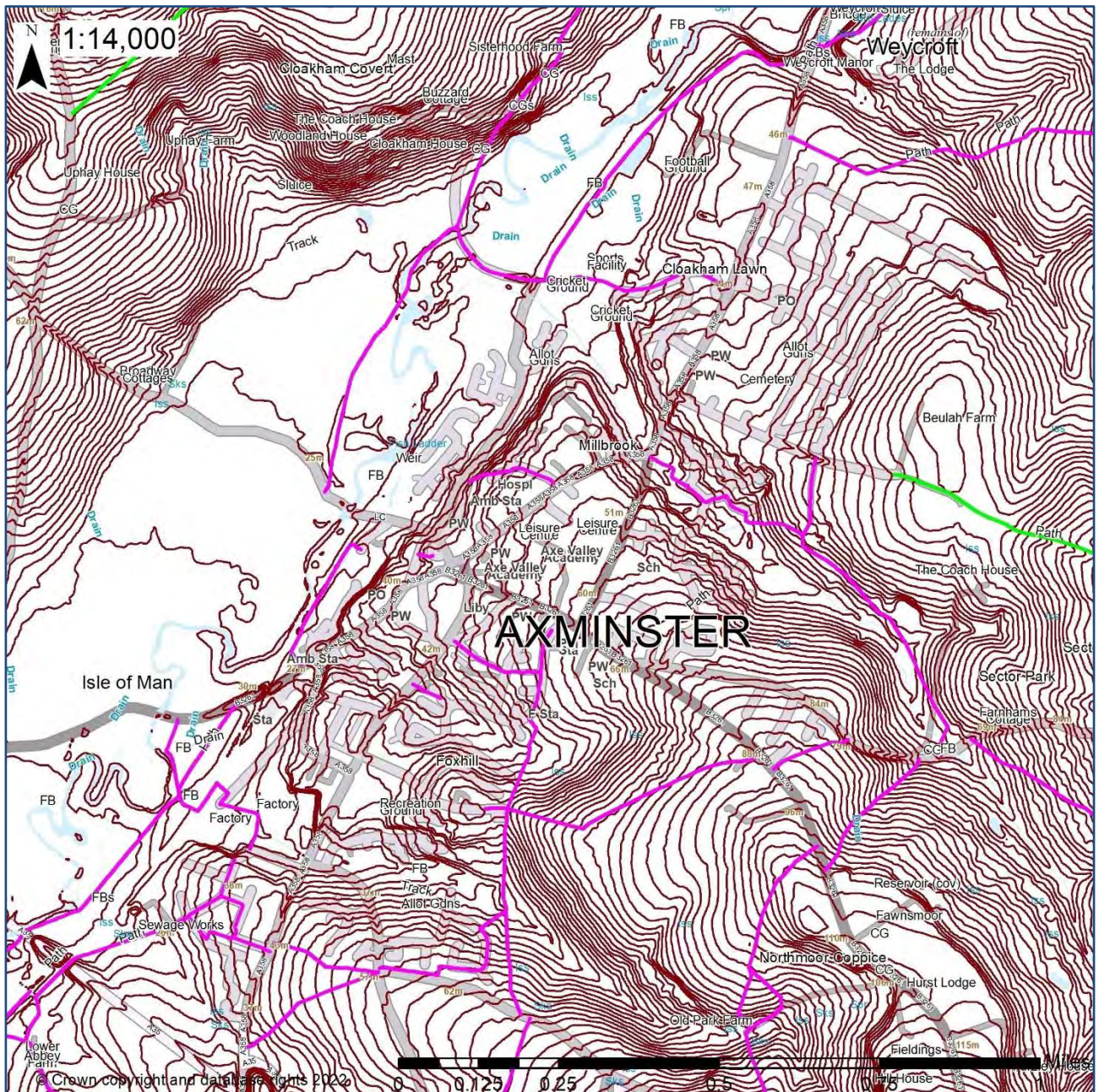
Key: This map shows different degrees of steepness, with the following zonal code:

	Almost flat: <2.5% (less than 1-in-40).
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	Noticeable slope: 5% to 10% (1 in 20 to 1 in 10).
	Steep slope: 10% to 33.3% (1 in 10 to 1 in 3).
	Almost sheer cliff: >33.3% (steeper than 1 in 3)

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.3.5. Map 2.11 re-presents the information from Map 2.7, but with simpler base mapping and the addition of contours. A comparison between Maps 2.10 and 2.11 will help to clarify that the contours and the slope maps show the same information, albeit in different ways.

Map 2.11: Public Rights of Way (with contours)

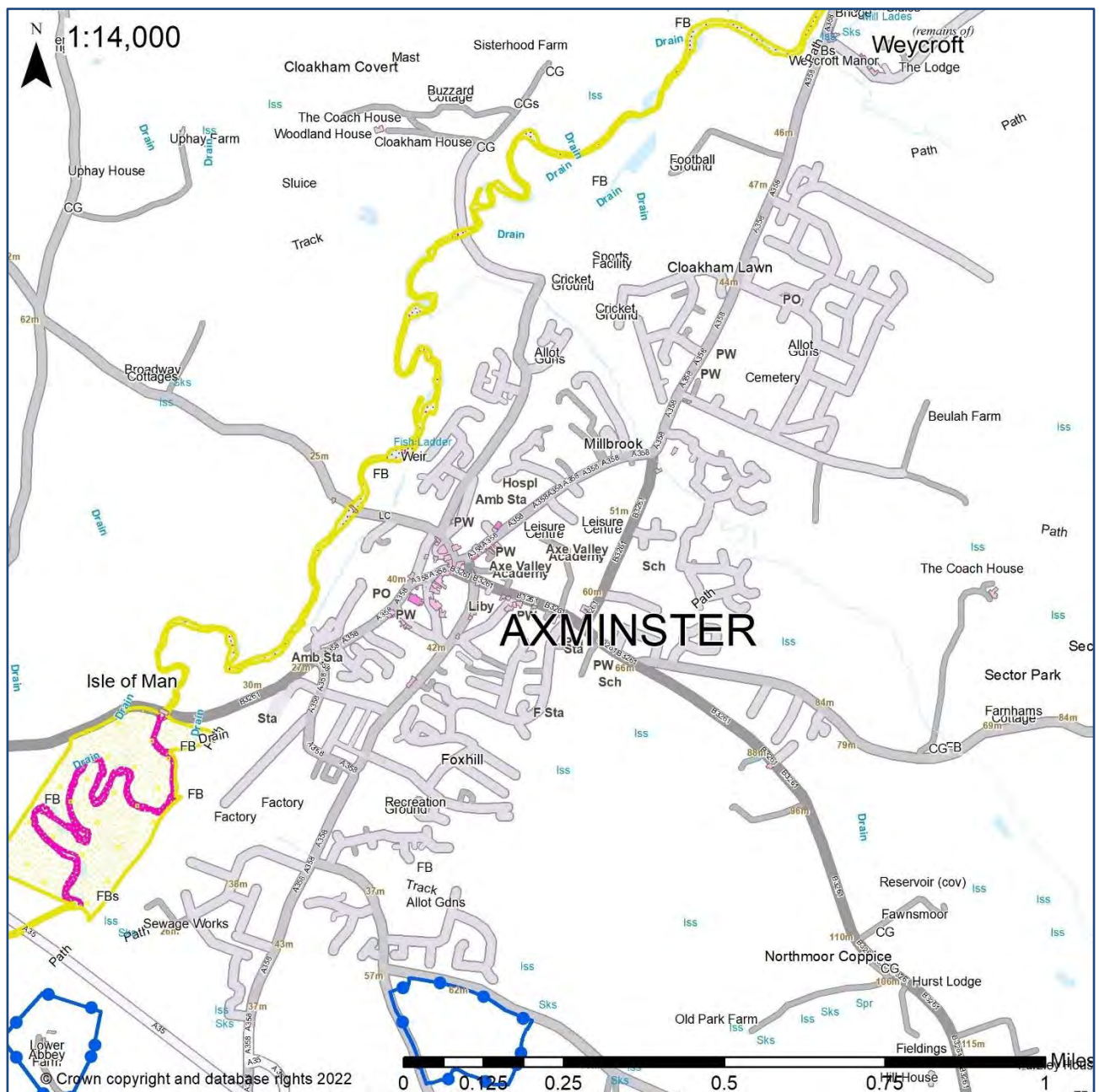


Key: Mauve = Public footpaths. Green = Public bridleways. The contours shown are at 2m intervals.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.3.6. Map 2.12 re-presents the non-AONB information from Map 2.8 at the level of the town itself.

Map 2.12: Constraints associated with officially designated sites (other than AONBs)



Key: Yellow = Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Pink = Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Blue = Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Source, and acknowledgements: EDDC.

2.4. Town centre map

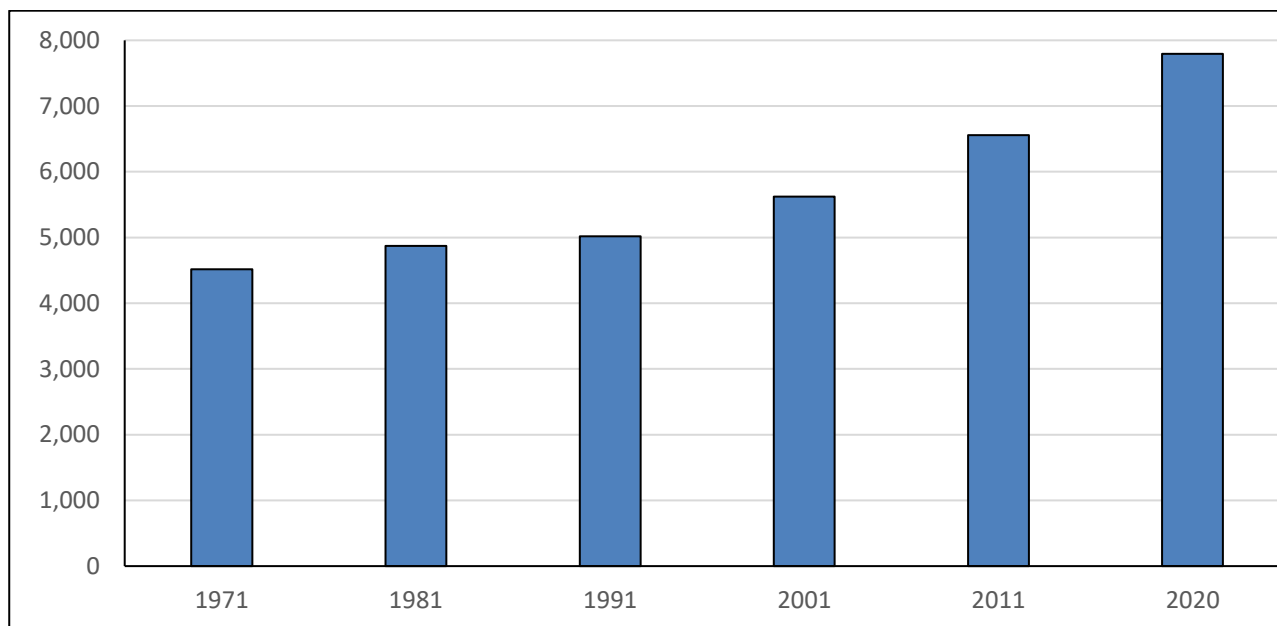
2.4.1. Map 2.13 shows the town-centre Conservation Area and Listed Buildings which appear on the list compiled by Historic England (including Stoney Bridge and the War Memorial, which are Listed structures but not buildings). There are no other instances of designated heritage assets in Axminster town centre.

3. The Neighbourhood Area's Demographics and Character

3.1. Population statistics

3.1.1. The population of Axminster has grown by almost 75% over the past 50 years. In 2011 the town accounted for 88% of the population of the parish as a whole, and over the years most of the growth attributable to the parish has been accounted for by expansion of the town. The annual rate of growth has been accelerating in recent years, as Figure 3.1 shows.

Figure 3.1: Growth of population in Axminster parish over time



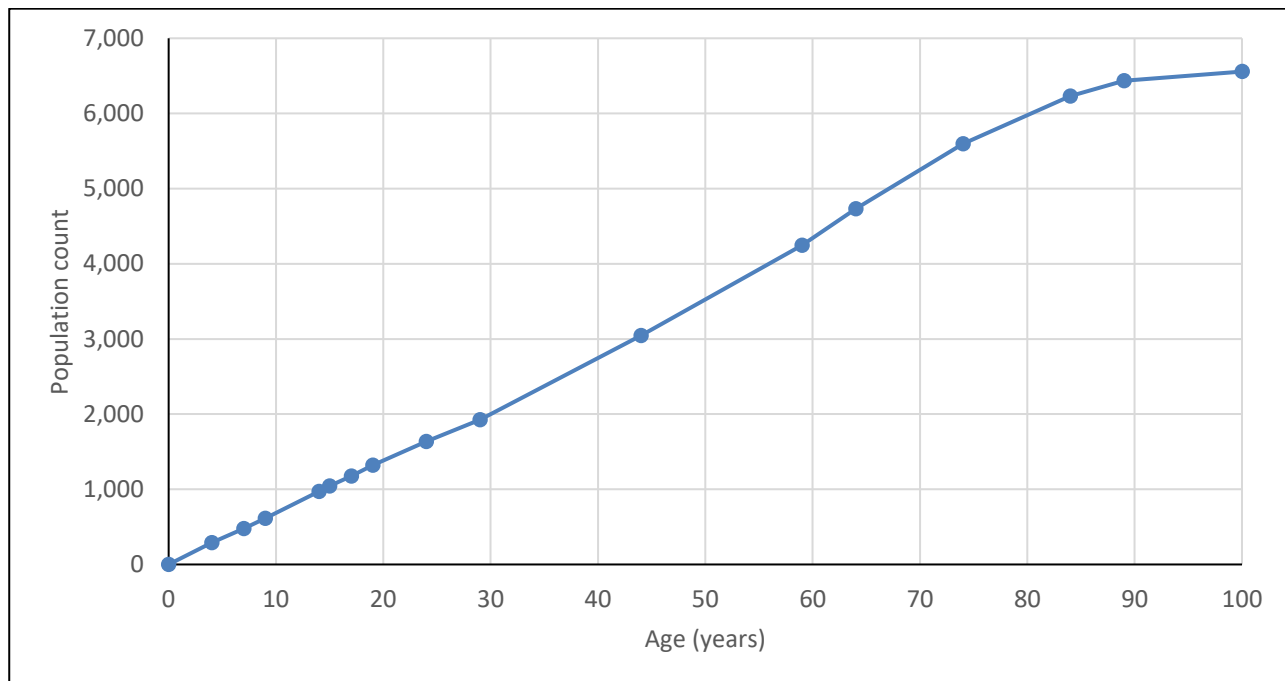
Source: Census data, 1971 to 2011; plus estimate for 2020.

3.1.2. At the time of writing (early-2023) results from the 2021 census are not available at the level of individual parishes. The estimate for 2020 which is used here is based on a combination of inter-census estimates from the Office for National Statistics and 2020 housing data, and is fully explained in the Evidence Base (see Chapter 6 for details). Our estimate is also entirely compatible with the 2021 population counts at district level which were released in June 2022. These show growth of 13.8% between 2011 and 2021 in the area covered by EDDC. As a consequence of previous policy choices, most of that growth occurred in the main towns, rather than being evenly spread across the district.

3.1.3. Between 1971 and 1991 the population of the parish grew from just over 4,500 to just over 5,000: equivalent to an annual growth rate of 0.53%. After 1991 the annual growth rate accelerated appreciably, averaging 1.53% each year between 1991 and 2020, with the highest average annual growth rate (1.94%) occurring between the census of 2011 and 2020. As a consequence Axminster's population had reached 6,557 in 2011 and is estimated to have reached almost 7,800 by 2020.

3.1.4. The 2011 census provides data on the age structure of the population at that time, which is illustrated by Figure 3.2. There is no reason to believe that the pattern which is illustrated there has changed in any material way since then.

Figure 3.2: Population of Axminster parish of the specified age (or younger), 2011



Source: 2011 census

3.1.5. Because parishes vary so much in terms of their urban-rural balances, when making comparisons which will primarily be used in connection with changes to the towns rather than the rural hinterland, it is sensible to compare statistics for the built-up areas only.

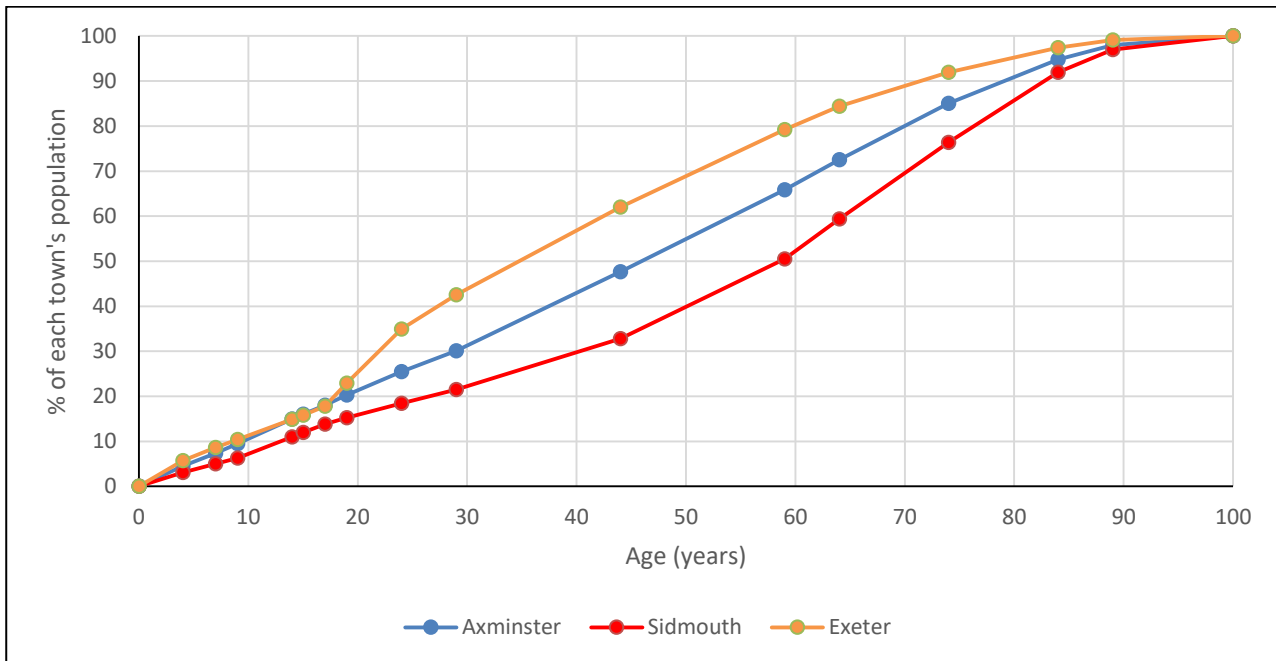
3.1.6. On census day 2011 the average (or arithmetic mean) age of residents of Axminster's built-up area was 45.6, while the median age was 46. To visualise what the median age represents, simply imagine all the residents of the town lined up from youngest to oldest, and the age of the person half-way along that line gives the median age. Put another way, half of the residents of Axminster were 46 or younger in 2011, and half were 46 or older.

3.1.7. The figures for Axminster were very similar to those found in Honiton (45.0 average and 46 median respectively), Ottery St Mary (43.5 and 45) and Exmouth (44.5 and 46); but quite different from those of Colyton (50.0 and 54), Seaton and Beer (53.1 and 59), and Sidmouth (53.5 and 59), all of which have significantly older populations. Of the nearby conurbations only Exeter (38.2 and 35) displayed a conspicuously younger age profile than Axminster, and the fact that Exeter's median age is appreciably lower than its mean is explained by the large population of students who live there.

3.1.8. Figure 3.3 illustrates this point for Axminster, Sidmouth and Exeter. In Figure 3.3, as in Figure 3.2, ages are shown along the bottom of the graph, but the vertical axis shows the % share of each age group within the conurbation concerned, rather than the absolute number, so that three very different-sized populations can be compared. The median ages are shown by where the curves for each town cross the 50% horizontal line.

3.1.9. Exeter's 'student bulge' can very clearly be seen on Figure 3.3. By contrast the fact that Sidmouth has a smaller share of young people than Axminster (and Exeter) is equally obvious. Using the graphs in Figure 3.3 in a different way (using the vertical line representing 60 years old) we can see that roughly 80% of the residents of Exeter were aged 60 or younger in 2011, compared to about 68% of Axminster's residents, and 52% of those of Sidmouth.

Figure 3.3: Age structures of Axminster, Sidmouth and Exeter compared, 2011



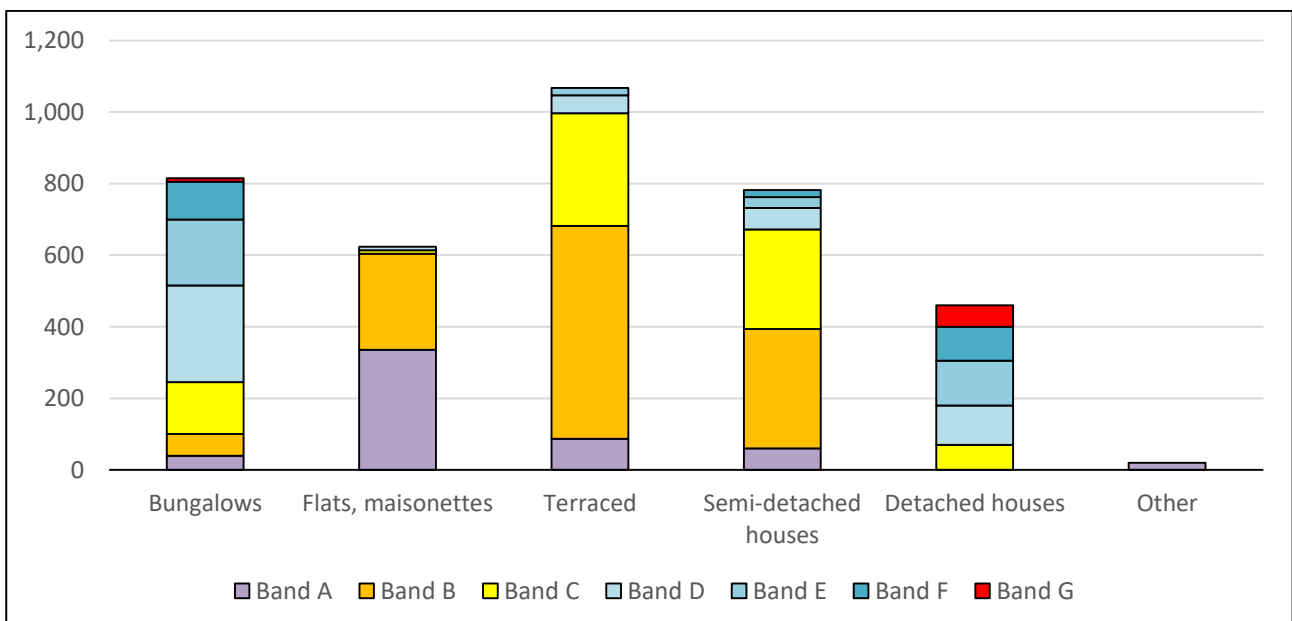
Source: 2011 census

3.2. Housing stock

3.2.1. In 2011 the census recorded just over 3,000 dwellings as being occupied in Axminster parish. The way in which census returns were recorded then did not distinguish between houses and bungalows, of which Axminster has a considerable number.

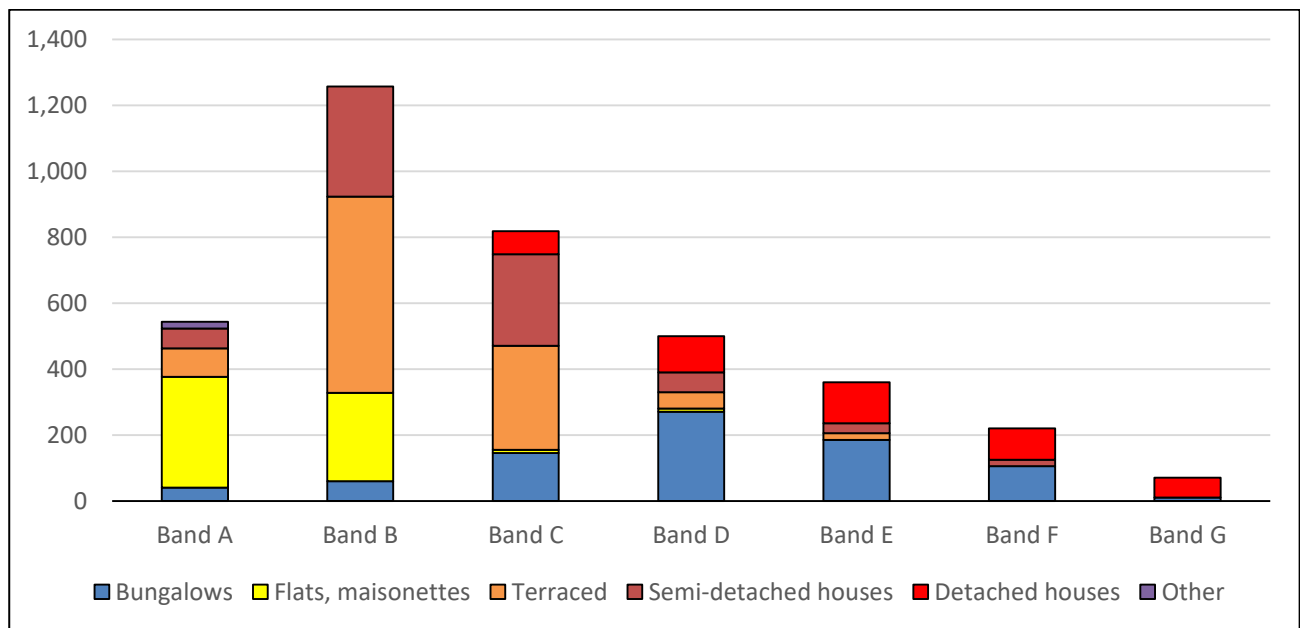
3.2.2. More recent data, published by the Valuation Office in September 2020, have been used to create the following two charts, which are not just more up-to-date (showing almost 3,800 dwellings: an increase of a quarter in 9 years), but which also characterise more clearly the types and relative values of the housing stock of the parish.

Figure 3.4: Axminster's housing stock, by type (and Council Tax band), 2020



Source: Valuation Office

Figure 3.5: Axminster's housing stock, by Council Tax band (and type), 2020



Source: Valuation Office

3.2.3. For reasons of data privacy the Valuation Office omits small numbers of properties from its published data. Although they are not quantified, it is understood that there is a small number of Band H properties locally. Their omission from these charts does not in any way distort the general picture that can be drawn from them.

3.2.4. EDDC has investigated the extent of short-term rentals (holiday lets) and second home ownership, and more detailed information on this may become available. As regards second homes, this is understood to be most significant in a small number of coastal parishes.

3.3. Industry and commerce

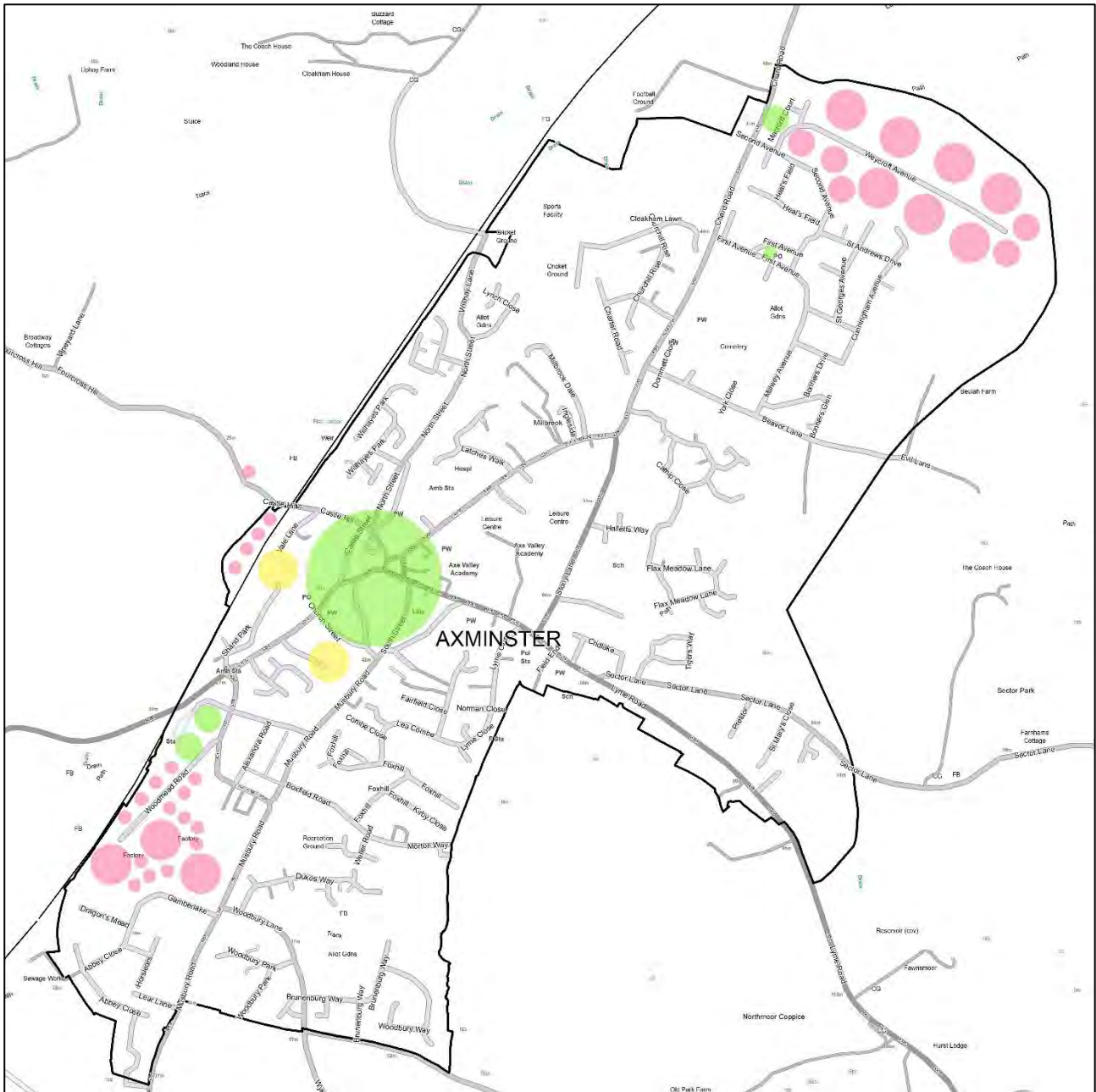
3.3.1. Axminster has been recognised as an important home to manufacturing industry for well over a century, as well as a market town with a range of shops which serve a substantially wider area than the parish itself.

3.3.2. Most shop-based businesses and professional service offices (solicitors, estate agents, accountants etc) are located within the town centre, or to the SW of the town in the direction of the railway station. The main locations for industrial, non-retail and non-professional services employment in or close to the town are:

- (a) At the foot of Castle Hill (the former town mill and brush factories); and beyond the level crossing at the town end of the Membury Road.
- (b) Adjacent to and near the railway station, including on Woodmead Road, extending as far as Gamberlake Cross. This includes Mole Avon, Bradfords, the Axminster Carpets factory site and the BT exchange, plus a range of companies which occupy sheds and spaces formerly owned and used by Axminster Carpets, but now separately owned.

- (c) On the two industrial estates at Millway (where there is a wide range of mostly custom-built unit sizes, and a wide range of businesses). This is by a long way the main employment centre in Axminster.

Map 3.1: Indicative locations of the main industrial and commercial premises within the town



Note: Sizes and locations of symbols are indicative only.

Key: Green = shops, other retail (other than supermarkets) and offices. Yellow = supermarkets. Pink = Industry and similar.

Source: Axminster NP Steering Group (using base mapping from EDDC).

3.3.3. Other nuclei of non-retail and non-professional services employment outside the town can be found just off Hunthay Lane, and close to the A35 at the eastern end of the by-pass.

3.3.4. The Evidence Base (see Chapter 6) contains a wide range of detailed Census-derived employment data from 2011 referring to people who live in Axminster, split between residents of the town and residents of the rest of the parish. Although many of those residents also work in Axminster, some do not, and many of the jobs which are located in Axminster are done by residents of other parishes.

3.3.5. In terms of the sectors in which Axminster residents were working in 2011, either as employees or self-employed, the Evidence Base shows that the four biggest sectors were:

- (a) Wholesale and retail trade, and repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles: 17.8% of jobs (compared to 19.1% across East Devon as a whole).
- (b) Manufacturing: 15.1% of jobs (compared to 4.8% across East Devon as a whole).
- (c) Human health and social work activity: 14.2% of jobs (compared to 10.6% across East Devon as a whole).
- (d) Construction: 9.0% of jobs (compared to 6.4% across East Devon as a whole).
- (e) Other sectors: 43.9% of jobs (compared to 55.5% across East Devon as a whole).

3.3.6. In 2011 over half of the male residents of Axminster who were in work were working in manufacturing, wholesale and retail etc or construction (in that order of importance). Over 60% of working female residents were involved in health and social work, wholesale and retail etc, education or manufacturing (in that order of importance). Just under 10% of working males were employed part time, compared to 43% of working females.

3.3.7. We do not (currently) have access to an alternative source which can provide official / authenticated employment data for all of the companies which are based in the town, but the statement which can be found in paragraph 8.2 of the 2013 to 2031 EDDC Local Plan describes Axminster as "... one of the key manufacturing employment centres of East Devon, with some 75,000 SqM of employment floorspace, which accounts for about 12.5% of all of the district's employment floorspace. Most of this is made up of factories, with some offices and warehousing." This statement remains very substantially true, and is broadly consistent with the picture painted by the data in the Evidence Base.

3.4. Public services and social infrastructure

3.4.1. Axminster benefits from a range of providers of public services which have physical premises within the town, and which will require those premises or similar if they are to continue to provide comparable services in future.

3.4.2. These premises include the mainline railway station, a large GP-led medical practice, a hospital which hosts multiple out-patient clinics, two dental practices, a secondary school, two primary schools, a fire station (which also acts as a base for some elements of the police service), a Postal sorting office, a sub-post office, a public library and a centre (Pippins) which provides accessible facilities for a range of clubs and organisations which provide social support.

3.4.3. Axminster also has a range of churches, local charities, green spaces and play areas, several allotment sites, a cemetery, several sports clubs and their associated pitches and facilities, an indoor swimming pool, cultural clubs and societies, a Heritage Centre and a job club (based at Pippins). The Guildhall provides the performance space on which some of those clubs and societies depend. There are other meetings rooms available for hire (such as the Masonic Hall, the parish rooms and the Millwey Rise community centre).

3.4.4. All of these entities may from time to time require additional space, or a change of premises, and this Plan seeks to include sufficient flexibility that those needs can wherever possible be met, but without developing specific policies related to each.

3.5. How the town has grown over time

3.5.1. The area around Axminster was settled in the Bronze and Iron Ages. The Romans established a 'fortlet' close to a crossroads, and left a few scattered villas, but did not establish a settlement at Axminster. A church where Axminster's Minster now sits was established in Saxon times, close to a strategically important crossing over the Axe. A first market charter was granted in 1204.

3.5.2. From Medieval times until the 20th century Axminster occupied a small plateau of land overlooking the Axe which is bounded by two relatively steep valleys carved by small streams which flow into the Axe. Map 2.9 (in Chapter 2) shows the Millbrook and Purzebrook streams, and Map 2.10 shows the very modest extent of the plateau between their valleys, which largely coincides with the Conservation Area, as illustrated by Map 2.13 (though the Conservation Area includes Castle Hill, which is notably steep). Beyond the town-centre plateau the slopes are relatively steep in most directions.

3.5.3. By the 17th century some houses had spread SE up the adjacent slope (along what is now Lyme Road, and the leat which carried the town's original water supply). However, the bulk of the town did not start to grow far beyond its original plateau until shortly after 1900.

3.5.4. In order to avoid the steepest slopes, growth has mostly been along a SW-NE axis (roughly parallel to the river). The sequence of development over the 20th century was broadly as follows:

- (a) From 1900 to the 1930s new housing was added along Musbury Road and between it and the railway line, and (in the 1920s) the first Council houses were built on Boxfield Road. King Edward Road was created in 1907. Council houses were also built along North Street, at Cridlake (off Lyme Road) and at Prestor (off Sector Lane). In 1937 the modern Axminster Carpets factory was built near the station.
- (b) In the late 1940s and 1950s the former US Army Hospital at Millwey Rise was developed for Council housing. At that time there was open countryside between it and the town. More private housing was built around Gamberlake and Horslears (west of Musbury Road), and additional Council housing was built at Foxhill.
- (c) By this stage although most of the housing (other than Millwey Rise) was within reasonably easy walking distance of the town centre, Foxhill in particular involved some steeper slopes.
- (d) In the 1960s and 1970s private housing estates were built at Woodbury Park, Brunenburg Way, Woodbury Way and Abbey Close, to the SW of the town. This new housing was increasingly distant from the town centre and (in several cases) involved much steeper slopes. Development started at Willhayes Park (between North Street and the railway line). Foxhill was expanded, and several smaller developments were built (e.g. along Sector Lane).
- (e) Not many new houses were added during the 1980s, other than by in-filling. Since 1990 the main focus of growth switched to the far end of North Street (The Cricketers) and the Chard Road (Cherry Tree Drive, Flax Meadow Lane and Cloakham Lawns) These developments in particular have occupied sites which include

significant slopes. Another important initiative was the development of the Millwey industrial estates (one of which, accessed from Weycroft Avenue, is by far the larger of the two).

3.5.5. What this has produced is a strikingly linear town with a centre which is ill-adapted to modern traffic and particularly to heavy goods vehicles. Expansion is constrained to the NW by the London-Exeter railway line and the floodplain of the river Axe, and to the SE by ground which rises, sometimes steadily and sometimes steeply. Furthermore, as clearly illustrated by the maps in Chapter 2, the hillside to the SE is not a simple slope, but is itself divided by a series of streams, almost all of which have carved out gullies on their different ways to the Axe. As well as constraining the town's growth to the SE, this has posed very great challenges to anyone seeking either to design a relief road to take traffic off the A358 Chard-to-Axmouthe road, which runs from NE to SW through the centre of the town; or to devise an alternative route close to the town centre which could reduce the adverse impacts of heavy traffic.

3.5.6. The Evidence Base (see Chapter 6) includes detailed information on the length and steepness of many of the principal walking routes which link the town centre both to current residential areas and to some of the potential green- and brownfield development sites.

3.5.7. The last houses at the 'top end' of Lyme Road are almost 1.25km from Trinity Square and 60m higher. Perhaps surprisingly, no section of Lyme Street / Lyme Road involves a slope greater than 7.0% (1 in 14). To put this into context, an 80m stretch of the famously steep Castle Hill includes a slope of 12.5% (1 in 8).

3.5.8. As the Evidence Base shows, many residents of other parts of the town (e.g. Millwey Rise, Cloakham Lawns, Flax Meadow Lane, Brunenburg Way and Abbey Close all have to walk, drive or be driven appreciably further than 1.25km to reach the town centre, and most face stretches which are considerably steeper than 7.0% along the way. Flax Meadow Lane, Foxhill Road (close to Kirby Close) and Woodbury Lane (as it passes the allotments) all contain particularly steep sections which discourage walking and cycling amongst residents who live beyond them.

3.5.9. Linearity has another unavoidable effect on accessibility, which is that any new developments which are added at the NE or SW ends of the previously developed area add appreciably more to the distance that new residents have to walk, cycle or drive to reach the town centre compared to a more 'efficient' circular town of a comparable size.

3.5.10. This can be quantified as follows using the well-known formula 'Area = $\pi \times \text{radius}^2$ ' (though some readers may choose to skip the proof and move straight to the next chapter).

3.5.11. A circular town with an area of 2km² has an outer radius of about 800m. Assuming that the town's population density is consistent across its area, the 'average resident' (who lives on the outer edge of a circle covering half of the area, or 1km²) has to travel about 565m to reach the centre. If the town expands by 25% (to cover 2.5km²), the outer radius grows from 800m to 890m, and the 'average resident' now has to travel about 630m (which is the radius of a circle covering 1.25km²) in order to reach the centre.

3.5.12. If, by contrast, the town is semi-circular rather than circular, then a semi-circle covering 2km² will have the same radius as a full circle covering 4km² (i.e. 1,130m). The 'average resident' has to travel about 800m to reach the centre. If this semi-circular town now expands by 25% to cover 2.5km², the outer radius grows from 1,130m to 1,260m (which is the radius of a 5km² circle), and the 'average resident' now has to travel 890m in order to reach the centre.

3.5.13. From this we can see that the average resident of a semi-circular 2.5km² town has to travel just over 40% further to get to the centre than the equivalent resident of a circular town of the same size (890m vs 630m). The same is true for those who live on the outer edge of the town (1,260m vs 890m).

3.5.14. If the town is 'lozenge shaped' rather than semi-circular, the effects of expansion on accessibility (as compared to the 'circular ideal') are even greater. If the effects of added steepness are also considered, the impacts are greater still, and the probability that residents will choose to drive into town rather than walk are proportionally higher.

4. Key Issues for Consideration

4.1. Over-arching topics within the Planning system

4.1.1. There are three over-arching topics which lie at the heart of the Town & Country Planning system:

- (a) How land is used for buildings and associated non-transport facilities and services.
- (b) How land is used for and by traffic and transport systems, including for cycling and walking.
- (c) The interactions between the full range of land uses and the natural environment.

4.1.2. There is inevitably a degree of overlap between these topics, but on balance using them to categorise and group those issues which are prioritised under this Plan does aid clarity.

4.1.3. If adopted, this Plan will become part of the Planning system, and a material consideration affecting all subsequent applications submitted to EDDC for approval under the Town & Country Planning Act and associated policy, legislation and regulations. All schemes and proposals which require Planning approval will then either have to comply with the Policies contained within this Plan, or their sponsors will have to justify to EDDC why those Policies should be set aside.

4.1.4. Within this Plan we deal with most aspects of sustainability (which cover environmental, social and economic considerations) in connection with the issues which generate those considerations, rather than as a parallel process.

4.2. Topics which are not central to the Planning system

4.2.1. The Planning system deals with the allocation of land for agreed uses, but so long as the physical facilities as described in Planning applications are built as agreed, it does not control many of the ways in which those uses are subsequently organised or delivered.

4.2.2. Notwithstanding the centrality of the Planning system to the way in which this Plan will be used, the residents of Axminster have identified important aspirations which set the context within which this Plan should be interpreted. These are dealt with at the end of this Chapter.

4.3. How the priorities of local residents have been taken into account

4.3.1. During August and September 2021 a formal process of public consultation was carried out which collected information both on-line (resulting in 287 responses) and by using a paper-based survey form (56 responses). The purpose was both to discover the public's priorities for the future development of the town, and to gain a clearer understanding of how broad and how deep such support was. A detailed report on this round of consultation forms part of the Evidence Base (see Chapter 6).

4.3.2. The survey was open to all, but as well as asking respondents' opinions about possible Plan options, approaches and priorities, we asked for enough basic information about where they lived and their ages to be able to compare respondents (as a group) to the actual physical and demographic character of the parish as established by the 2011 census and comparable official sources. This enabled us to determine whether the results which we collected needed to be re-weighted to give a better representation of the actual local population.

4.3.3. The response rate from under 18s was extremely low. Figure 4.1 shows the relationship between the responses from other age groups and the share of those age groups in the local population.

Figure 4.1: Comparison of survey responses and 2011 census age distribution



Source: Axminster NP Steering Group

4.3.4. A comparable check between respondents' postcodes and the physical distribution of postcodes within Axminster and neighbouring parishes showed that there were neither any significant gaps (i.e. clusters of postcodes with no respondents at all) or hotspots (clusters of postcodes with disproportionately high response rates). The response rate was lowest for rural postcodes outside the town itself (< 0.5 respondents per postcode) and highest for Cloakham Lawns (> 2 respondents per postcode).

4.3.5. Respondents were asked for their views on 16 possible outcomes which might be influenced by the Neighbourhood Plan process. The survey form made it clear that the Neighbourhood Plan alone would not deliver these outcomes, though it could smooth the path to their delivery by third parties.

4.3.6. Specifically, they were asked "How important do you feel the following outcomes are for the town over the next 10 years?", with four options from which they could choose for each possible outcome, namely 'Not at all', 'Not very', 'Quite' or 'Very'. Some respondents did not express an opinion on some topics, and this was interpreted as being equivalent to 'Not at all'. We then applied weighting factors of 0, 1, 2 and 3 to these choices and calculated the average score for each possible outcome from each age group. Finally, we re-weighted these average scores to increase the relative weights attributable to under-represented age groups (18-30 and >75) and to decrease the relative weights given to over-represented groups (31-45, but particularly 46-60 and 61-75).

4.3.7. In fact the differences between the priorities as expressed by the different age groups were not very great. Many older respondents placed an importance on facilities which would benefit younger residents, and vice versa. Figure 4.2 shows the outcome of this re-weighting process.

Figure 4.2: Age-adjusted priorities

Description of outcomes, as given in the survey form	Adjusted score	Adjusted ranking
Expanding the range of local employment opportunities	2.62	1
Expanding the range of shops in Axminster	2.55	2
Matching health and social care provision to the changing needs of residents	2.47	3
Expanding the range of local education provision	2.34	4
Adding new facilities to the town	2.32	5
Protecting the most valuable and attractive elements of our natural and historic environment	2.26	6
Reducing traffic congestion in the town centre	2.01	7=
Increasing the leisure and sports facilities	2.01	7=
Making it easier to get into the countryside for exercise and relaxation	1.97	9
Improving facilities for cyclists and pedestrians within the town	1.85	10
Reducing traffic congestion more generally	1.84	11
Expanding the facilities for arts and culture	1.77	12=
Increasing the local supply of affordable housing	1.77	12=
Expanding the range of pubs and restaurants in Axminster	1.67	14
Improving parking provision around town	1.41	15
Increasing the local supply of other housing	0.94	16

Source: Axminster NP Steering Group

4.3.8. The most striking result is the low level of support expressed for new housing provision. Increasing the local supply of affordable housing (which we recognise is a term which means different things to different people) got a score of 1.77 and a ranking of 12th= out of 16; whilst increasing the local supply of other housing got a score of 0.94 and a ranking of 16th out of 16. The gap in support between 15th and 16th places was also strikingly wide.

4.4. How land is used for buildings and public spaces in Axminster

Appropriate Uses: In the Town Centre

4.4.1. The Axminster Conservation Area (see Map 2.13 in Chapter 2) was defined many years ago. Within this Plan the Conservation Area is treated as being a sensible proxy for the town centre.

4.4.2. The largest green open space within the Conservation Area is the Minster Green. Adjacent, and to its north, is Trinity Square. In combination, these two public spaces constitute both the historic and the current centre of the town. This is where most of the stalls associated with the weekly market are to be found, and where the majority of public events and celebrations take place. On such occasions some restrictions are placed on traffic access and parking within Trinity Square.

4.4.3. The Old Courtyard garden provides a further area of green public space within the town centre.

4.4.4. The primary (and most appropriate) land uses within the town centre are:

- (a) Public spaces, including green spaces.
- (b) Residential uses, including flats above shops and other comparable ground-floor uses.
- (c) Hospitality and tourism services and activities.
- (d) Relatively small-scale retail businesses and 'personal services' (e.g. hairdressing).
- (e) Office-based service businesses.
- (f) Public services and other public buildings.
- (g) Arts, entertainment and cultural venues.
- (h) Health care provision.
- (i) Residential care homes.
- (j) Some limited off-street public car parking.

Inappropriate Uses: In the Town centre

4.4.5. Uses which would not normally be encouraged in the town centre are:

- (a) Manufacturing.
- (b) Activities which involve a need for on-street parking or disruptive day-time deliveries, especially those requiring HGV-based traffic.
- (c) Large-scale public car parking.

4.4.6. The text above should not be read as a desire to remove from the town centre any existing businesses or uses which are already established. Rather it is to signal that future businesses as described in paragraph 4.4.5 would be encouraged to establish themselves elsewhere within the town or Parish.

Appropriate Uses: In the Town but Outside the Town Centre

4.4.7. Maps 2.9 to 2.12 in Chapter 2 show the current extent of the town, from the town centre to the urban edge.

4.4.8. The primary (and most appropriate) land uses within the town (but outside the town centre) are:

- (a) Residential uses.
- (b) Hospitality and tourism services.
- (c) Larger retail and service businesses.
- (d) Wholesale and distribution businesses, including builders' merchants and similar.
- (e) Education.
- (f) Health care.
- (g) Residential care homes.

- (h) Industrial businesses (in the widest sense of the term).
- (i) Parking to service the town centre.

Inappropriate Uses: In the Town but Outside the Town Centre

4.4.9. Uses which would not normally be encouraged within the town (but outside the town centre) are:

- (a) Activities which involve a need for on-street parking or disruptive deliveries, especially those requiring HGV-based traffic.
- (b) Activities which generate noticeable levels of noise, dust, air pollution or other nuisance.

Uses Outside the Town

4.4.10. Where there are other clusters of more than 10 dwellings within the Parish (such as at Raymonds Hill), the most appropriate land uses are residential, and other activities which are, or can be made to be, compatible with predominantly residential areas.

4.4.11. The rest of the parish is rural in character, and can be divided into three parts:

- (a) Land within the East Devon AONB.
- (b) Land within the Blackdown Hills AONB.
- (c) Land which is not in either AONB.

4.4.12. In broad terms, roughly one third of the Parish lies within one or other of the two local Devon AONBs, with the remainder (including most of the land to the east of the town, up to the county boundary) sitting between these two AONBs and the Dorset AONB (which abuts the Parish boundary between the A35 at Raymonds Hill and the parish boundary with Hawkchurch).

4.4.13. The primary (and most appropriate) land uses within the remainder of the parish are:

- (a) Farming, food production, forestry and countryside management.
- (b) Residential uses (much of it either currently or historically associated with farming).
- (c) Hospitality, leisure, sporting and tourism services.
- (d) Some activities (including quarrying, power generation and waste management) which are inappropriate to urban areas.

4.4.14. Uses which would not normally be encouraged in the rural hinterland involve activities whose adverse effects cannot be contained within their immediate surrounds, and which do (or would, if allowed) adversely affect the rural character of the surrounding area.

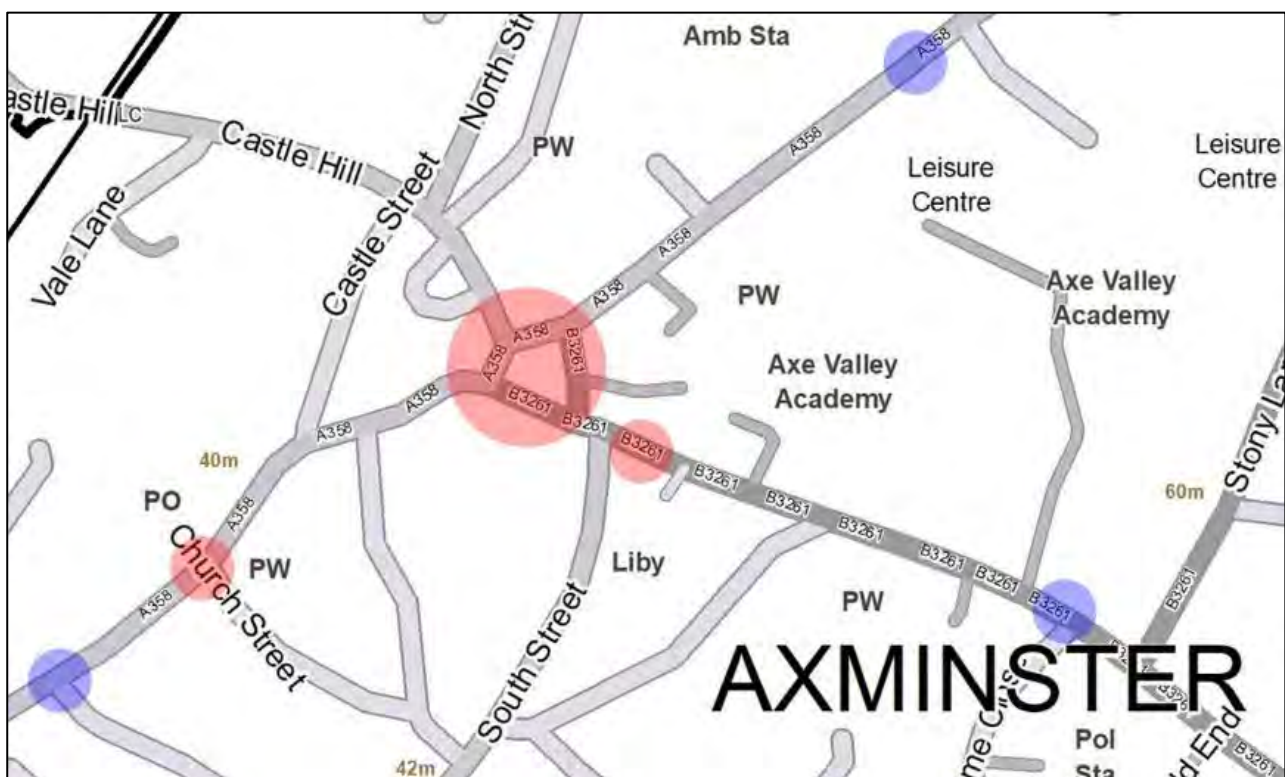
How Issues Reinforce Each Other

4.4.15. The biggest single challenge facing the town centre is how to accommodate vehicular traffic, and particularly HGV traffic. Whilst considerations relating to traffic management are dealt with later, the traffic itself has consequences for many town centre buildings.

4.4.16. Unlike its competitor towns (such as Bridport, Chard and Honiton), Axminster's town centre is relatively small, has no wide main shopping street, and lacks a 'grid pattern' of streets. As a consequence most commercial (and residential) premises lack accessible rear service entrances.

4.4.17. As identified above, the physical and topographical constraints of its setting also make it inevitable that almost all through traffic is channelled through Trinity Square, via a series of traffic bottlenecks, some of which involve curves and right-angle junctions. The two main such physical / permanent bottlenecks (see Map 4.1 below and the photographs which follow) can be found all around the George Hotel, and at the junction between West Street and Church Street. A separate organisational / temporary bottleneck is created by having bus stops directly opposite one another on the A358 as it passes through Trinity Square. All north-south through traffic has to negotiate one or more of these bottlenecks. In the case of Lyme Street, the bottleneck extends almost as far as the Red Lion.

Map 4.1: Traffic bottlenecks in the town centre



Key: Blue = Main traffic routes approaching Axminster town centre. Pink = Key bottlenecks.

Source: Axminster NP Steering Group (using base mapping from EDDC).

4.4.18. There is a separate bottleneck on Stoney Lane, close to the junction with Lyme Road. This is important, but for the purposes of this discussion, it is not considered to lie within the town centre.

Photograph 4.1: A358 Northbound, at the West Street / Church Street Junction (1 of 3)



This shows two light vehicles on West Street (A358), just south of the junction. The building to the right is Grade 2 Listed with a narrow pavement on West Street. On the other side the pavement narrows considerably between the bollards and the shop window.

Photograph 4.2: A358 Northbound, at the West Street / Church Street Junction (2 of 3)



This shows how any vehicle turning south out of Church Street would affect, and be affected by, northbound traffic.

Photograph 4.3: A358 Northbound, at the West Street / Church Street Junction (3 of 3)



This illustrates how one HGV passing the junction using the A358 in either direction will bring traffic going the other way to a stop. Tail-backs in both directions are regularly caused by buses, waste-collection vehicles, tractors, delivery HGVs and caravans.

Photograph 4.4: A358 Northbound, passing The George (1 of 2)



This section of the A358 is two-way. Northbound traffic is approaching the camera. The red car has come from the Castle Hill direction (behind the camera), and is waiting to turn right (south) into Trinity Square. It has to wait in a position where it influences the swept path of any traffic turning towards the camera from either Trinity Square or the Lyme Road direction. All of the buildings painted white are Grade 2 Listed. Most of the pavements are narrow.

Photograph 4.5: A358 Northbound, passing The George (2 of 2)



This short section of the northbound A358 (approaching the camera) is one-way. Costa Coffee (in the centre of this photograph) was also in the previous photograph. All northbound traffic passing through Axminster approaches the camera from Costa, and exits this photograph to the north (right on this photograph), onto Chard Street.

Photograph 4.6: A358 Southbound, passing The George



This short section of the southbound A358 (approaching the camera) is one-way. All southbound traffic using the A358 comes to this junction, and either turns south (left on this photograph) to stay on the A358; or north (right on this photograph) to join Lyme Street; or goes roughly straight ahead, onto South Street (a one-way shopping street). The George and the building at the far right (foreground) of this photograph are both Grade 2 Listed (as are some others in the background).

Photograph 4.7: B3261 Southbound, Approaching The George (1 of 2)



This shows how, as it approaches the junction with the A358 (and South Street), the B3261 (Lyme Street) narrows significantly. Two HGVs meeting on this stretch cannot easily pass.

Photograph 4.8: B3261 Southbound, Approaching The George (2 of 2)



This shows how narrow the pavements are, on both sides of the road.

4.4.19. This has real consequences for the buildings which create the bottlenecks, and for the pavements which adjoin them. Several of the buildings concerned are Grade 2 Listed, and some of them have been repeatedly damaged by traffic over many years. Heavy vehicles are sometimes forced to mount the pavements, creating danger to pedestrians.

4.4.20. Although several town-centre businesses have occupied their present premises for many years, there is a considerable turn-over of users and uses within the town centre as a whole. There are also some premises which over time have become significantly less likely to be occupied. These issues are explored in more detail in the context of post-Covid recovery within the Evidence Base (see Chapter 6).

4.4.21. The growth of the town, and constraints caused by the floodplain of the Axe (to the NW) and the steepness of some of the adjacent terrain (to the SE), were described above in Section 3.5, and are not repeated here.

4.4.22. Maps 2.4 and 2.8 (in Chapter 2) show the extent within Axminster parish of the two AONBs, and of other significant areas of land designated for its environmental or similar value.

Housing and Design

4.4.23. Although many aspects of the layout of the town date back to Medieval times, only the Minster church pre-dates the Civil War (all the rest of the town having been burned down in 1644). As a consequence of a long history of fires, only a handful of buildings to be found within the town pre-date 1800 in whole or substantially. Most were built during the 19th century.

4.4.24. As described in Chapter 3, Axminster currently offers a range of housing types. Over the past 120 years or so much of the new housing has been delivered as a series of homogenous estates, though as the scale of developments has increased over the past 30 years this has become less pronounced, with greater mixing of private and social housing.

4.4.25. There has also been a noticeable increase in the role of volume housebuilders over recent years, with very few opportunities for new 'self-build' housing. EDDC's report on self-build covering the year 2020/21 lists five locations within the town of Axminster and five more elsewhere in the parish where planning applications for self-build work have been made. Four of the applications within the town and two (involving three dwellings) outside it have resulted in construction work being started. Several of these applications and starts involve the conversion of existing structures, and most are on land already owned by the applicants. The report also shows that in 2020/21 six persons were seeking serviced plots on which to self-build within the parish of Axminster.

4.4.26. It is only in the town centre itself, on Stoney Lane, and along the southern side of Lyme Road, that specifically local architectural styles and features are to be found. Some of the older buildings (particularly non-residential ones) employ Blue Lias and Chert stone, and in the 18th and 19th centuries bricks were made locally. Generally, though, there is not a dominant Axminster style of building.

Listed Buildings and the Conservation Area

4.4.27. Most of the Listed Buildings to be found in the town itself are located within the Conservation Area (see Map 2.13 in Chapter 2). The dominant reason for their listing appears to be their age rather than their architectural merit or wider historical significance.

4.4.28. All of the most challenging bottlenecks and junctions within the town centre (see Map 4.1 above) involve Listed Buildings on one or both sides of the road.

Brownfield Sites within the Town

4.4.29. Within the present town there are several sites which merit particular attention, which may well be best addressed via site-specific Objectives and Policies. Other brownfield sites will present themselves from time to time, but can be dealt with via the general principles which are already embedded within the Planning system.

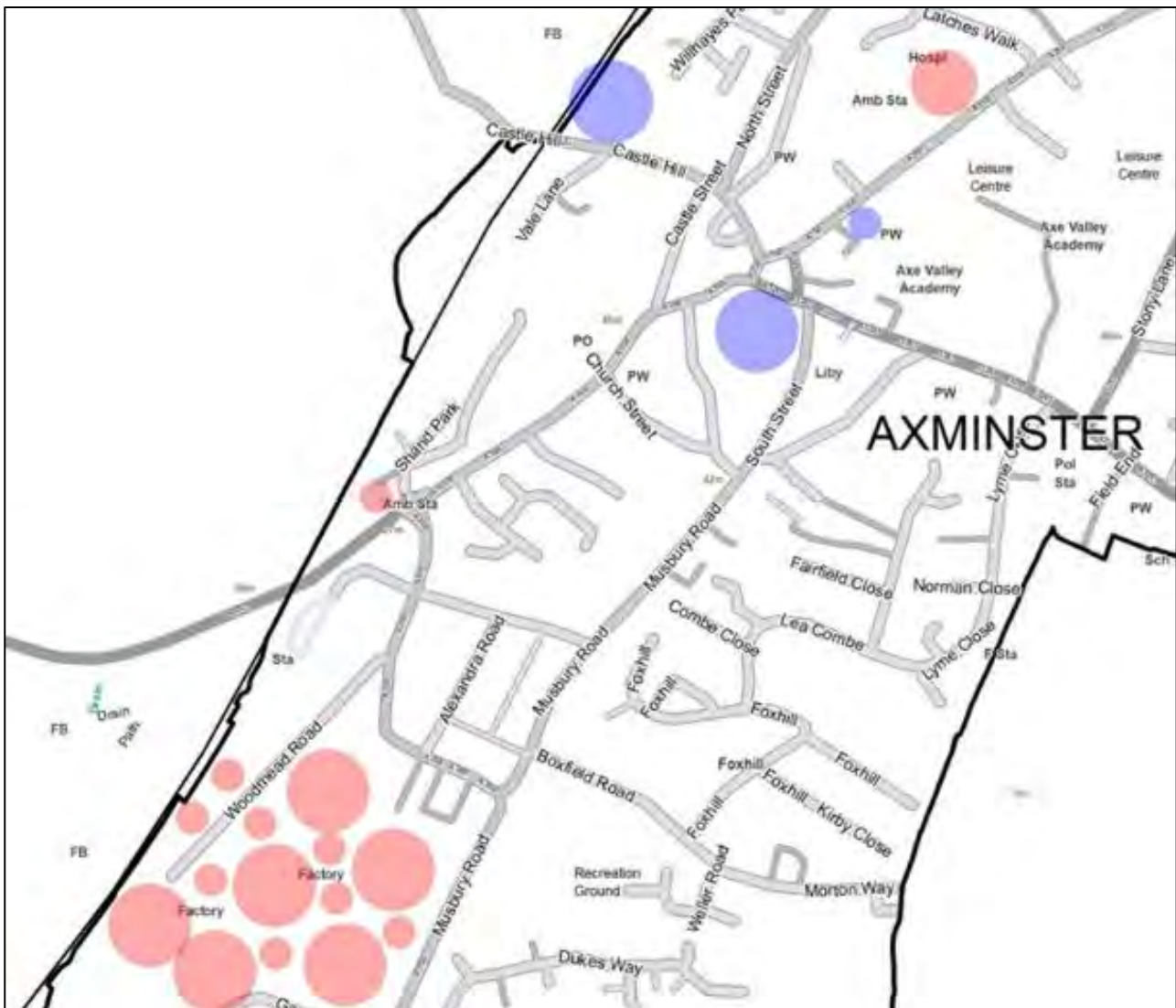
4.4.30. Within the town centre, this includes the following Significant Brownfield Sites (which are also marked on Map 4.2):

- (a) The site between Lyme Street, South Street and Trinity Square which is currently largely used for carparking and a gym. The majority of the site was formerly known as the Webster's Garage site, and has been unused (other than for parking) for several decades; but it also includes the adjacent gym premises and the EDDC-operated South Street carpark. It is (in Spring 2023) the subject of an outline Planning Application for a new retail building with flats and associated ground-level open parking.
- (b) The site of the former Axe Vale Social Club on Chard Street, which has been vacant for many years (and is also a Listed Building).
- (c) The two former brush factories at the foot of Castle Hill, one of which is used by Jaffé et Fils Ltd, while the other is derelict and becoming increasingly so as time passes.

4.4.31. Outside the Conservation Area this includes the following Significant Brownfield Sites:

- (a) The Axminster Carpets site, which spans Woodmead Road and adjoins Musbury Road and Gamberlake Road. As well as the carpet factory itself, parts of this site currently support a mixture of other industrial and commercial uses. It could well become available (in whole or in part) for co-ordinated re-development over the life of this Plan. For the avoidance of doubt, the adjacent sites currently occupied by Mole Avon, Bradfords and BT are separately owned.
- (b) The former St John's Ambulance site, at the northern end of Trafalgar Way, which occupies a strategic and highly visible 'gateway location' on the western approach to the town.
- (c) The former Scott Rowe building on the site of Axminster Hospital with associated green space, which is currently being marketed for sale and re-development.

Map 4.2: Significant Brownfield Sites



Note: Sizes and locations of symbols are indicative only.

Key: Blue = Town centre sites. Pink = Other sites within the town.

Source: Axminster NP Steering Group (using base mapping from EDDC).

Greenfield Sites in the Town

4.4.32. There is one significant empty and currently unallocated greenfield site remaining within the town, namely the field east of Chard Road and north of the Town Cemetery (and its associated cemetery expansion land) where Millwey Rise FC used to play its matches. This site, which belongs to EDDC, is about 0.92 ha in size.

Greenfield Sites on the Edge of the Town

4.4.33. This important part of the Plan awaits the outcome of EDDC's review of its CDLP. It is not considered that it would be helpful to speculate here what may or may not be taken forward by EDDC by way of proposals for new development.

Open Spaces within the Town

4.4.34. In 2012 EDDC carried out an Open Space Study, which was updated in 2014, to identify and categorise open spaces of various sorts across the district. The spaces in Axminster which were listed in that report were as follows.

Figure 4.7: Open Spaces within the Town (EDDC, 2014)

Category	Name	Size (ha)
Amenity open space	Former St Mary's Hospital Playing Field (now Jubilee Field)	1.16
Amenity open space	Former Millwey Rise Football Pitch	0.97
Amenity open space	Belle Vue Walkway (West Street to Tesco)	0.19
Amenity open space	First Avenue Greens	0.17
Amenity open space	Foxhill Green	0.10
Amenity open space	Musbury Road Green	0.08
Amenity open space	Lyme Close Green	0.07
Amenity open space	Sub-total	2.74
Civic space	Trinity Square	0.06
Civic space	Coombe Lane carpark	0.22
Civic space	Sub-total	0.28
Outdoor sport	Cloakham Lawn SC Cricket Ground 1	1.59
Outdoor sport	Millwey Rise FC Football Pitch (Cloakham Lawn SC)	1.54
Outdoor sport	Cloakham Lawn SC Bowling Green	0.15
Outdoor sport	Cloakham Lawn SC Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA)	0.11
Outdoor sport	Axminster FC Pitches (first)	0.76
Outdoor sport	Axminster FC Pitches (second)	0.54
Outdoor sport	Axminster FC Pitches (junior)	0.41
Outdoor sport	Foxhill Recreation Ground Football pitch	0.24
Outdoor sport	Sub-total	5.34
Parks & recreation	North Street park (excl play area)	0.41

Category	Name	Size (ha)
Parks & recreation	Foxhill park (excl courts and play area)	0.25
Parks & recreation	Loretto Road park (excl play area)	0.17
Parks & recreation	Sub-total	0.83
Children's play space	North Street children's play area	0.02
Children's play space	Foxhill children's play area	0.15
Children's play space	Loretto Road children's play area	0.02
Children's play space	First Avenue children's play area	0.08
Children's play space	Bonner's Drive children's play area	0.04
Children's play space	Lynch Close children's play area	0.03
Children's play space	Sub-total	0.34
Youth facilities	Skate park beside Cloakham Lawn SC	0.06
Youth facilities	Cloakham Lawn SC basketball court	0.03
Youth facilities	Foxhill ball court	0.05
Youth facilities	Sub-total	0.14
Allotments	Woodbury Lane allotments	2.24
Allotments	North Street allotments	0.47
Allotments	Millwey Rise allotments	0.44
Allotments	Sub-total	3.15
Cemeteries, churchyards	Town cemetery, Chard Road	2.43
Cemeteries, churchyards	The Minster Green	0.29
Cemeteries, churchyards	Sub-total	2.72
Total		15.54

Source: Axminster NP Steering Group, based on EDDC 2014 report.

4.4.35. The most surprising inclusion / categorisation is the Coombe Lane carpark, which is categorised as 'civic space'. In 2014 there were recycling bins permanently located within the carpark, but they only occupied a very small percentage of the total parking area, and have now been removed.

4.4.36. The categorisation of the Minster Green as 'Cemeteries, churchyards' is entirely rational, though it should be recognised that the Minster Green plays a central role in the civic space of Axminster, as well as providing the largest publicly-accessible green open space in the town centre.

4.4.37. It should also be recognised that the two largest categories in Table 4.7, namely 'outdoor sport' facilities (5.34 ha) and 'allotments' (3.15 ha), which between them account for over half of the total area, are not freely accessible to the general public. The Town cemetery is

open to the public, and is valuable for its openness and for the public benefit which it provides, but it is not in any sense a leisure space.

4.4.38. With the transfer of the Jubilee Field to Axminster Town Council in June 2022, some minor re-categorisation is required, to reflect the addition of the formal children's play area, and the dog-free sitting area.

4.4.39. Figure 4.8 below lists a range of comparable spaces, some of which have emerged since 2014, but others of which were there all along, but were not included in the EDDC study. The sizes of the various sites are indicative only.

Figure 4.8: Potential Additional Publicly-Accessible Open Spaces within the Town

Category	Name	Approx Size (ha)
Amenity open space	Old Courthouse Garden, Church Street	0.02
Amenity open space	Open spaces beside Green Lawn Way, Cloakham Lawns	0.20
Amenity open space	Open spaces facing Chard Road at Cloakham Lawns	0.50
Amenity open space	Open space at Cloakham Drive / Churchill Rise, Cloakham Lawns	0.02
Amenity open space	Open space between Charter Road and Petre Street, Cloakham Lawns	0.04
Amenity open space	Open space at Brewer Avenue end of Charter Road, Cloakham Lawns	0.04
Amenity open space	Green Space beside Mill Brook (Cloakham Lawns side of Chard Road)	0.75
Amenity open space	Field between Cloakham Lawn SC & Axminster FC	0.50
Amenity open space	Sub-total	2.07
Parks & recreation	Green Space beside Mill Brook (Cherry Tree / Flax Meadow side of Chard Road)	0.75
Parks & recreation	Sub-total	0.75
Cemeteries, churchyards	Catholic Church Cemetery, Lyme Road	0.07
Cemeteries, churchyards	United Reform Cemetery, Chard Street	0.07
Cemeteries, churchyards	Sub-total	0.14
Total		2.96

Source: Axminster NP Steering Group

4.4.40. The Steering Group needs to consider whether some or all of the above sites should also be given some level of listing / protection. [??? Are there others which have been missed ???]

Potential 'Green Corridors' Adjacent to the Town

4.4.41. 'Green corridors', which may be, but do not need to be, publicly accessible, can bring elements of the countryside into or close to the town, and may also provide environmental services such as temporary flood storage (as is already done at, for example, the Millbrook stream to the SE of the Stoney Lane roundabout).

4.4.42. Another location, on which further housing has been mooted, which might be considered for formal protection, but not necessarily public access, is the land immediately adjacent to the Gamberlake stream, between the Woodbury Lane allotments and Dukes Way, and further up-stream towards Old Park Farm.

4.4.43. A similar role is played by the wedge of land SW of the railway station, between the main line and the former Lyme Regis branch line. This is right on the edge of the town, but is divided by a public footpath (No.66) which leads from Woodmead Road to the Axe floodplain.

'Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces' outside the Town

4.4.44. The 2014 EDDC Open Space Study referred to above also lists 12 locations outside the town which are described as 'natural and semi-natural green spaces', totalling 146.12 ha. Eleven of them are woodland or copses, ranging in size from 2.46 ha to 28.46 ha. Seven of these 11 were listed as 'not accessible' in 2014.

4.4.45. The four sites which were listed as publicly accessible were: Beaver Batch (26.99 ha); New Park Coppice (14.33 ha); The Moors and Furzeleigh Coppice (16.29 ha); and Trinity Beacon (17.53 ha, mostly comprising rough grazing rather than woodland).

4.4.46. The reality of that public access is as follows. Public bridleway No.9 runs briefly along a short edge of Beaver Batch, but there is no other public right of way (PROW) into the body of the wood. By contrast, public bridleway No.12 includes a substantial length through New Park Coppice. There is no PROW into either The Moors or Furzeleigh Coppice, though public footpath No.21 does pass through a copse which has grown up adjacent to The Moors. The permissive footpath which gave access to the Trinity Beacon area has subsequently had its permission withdrawn.

4.4.47. One of the seven sites which was listed as being inaccessible in 2014, namely Rag Coppice (2.46 ha), is adjacent to (but not accessible from) public bridleway No.12. Similarly, public bridleway No.46 runs along a short edge of Greatwood Covert (5.26 ha) and the top edge of Cloakham Covert (8.46 ha), while public footpath No.45 runs along the bottom edge of Cloakham Covert.

4.4.48. None of the remaining five woodland sites on EDDC's 2014 list are traversed by, or adjacent to, any PROW. They are (in declining size order): Cox's Wood (28.46 ha); Pennsylvania Coppice (10.25 ha); Chubb's Coppice (6.28 ha); Great Trill Coppice (6.24 ha); and Long Lea Copse (3.57 ha).

4.4.49. By contrast, public bridleway No.8 passes through and beside some unnamed woodland between Pennsylvania Farm and New Park (on the way towards Hawkchurch parish).

4.5. Traffic and transport (including cycling and walking)

Town-Centre Traffic and Through Traffic

4.5.1. East-west through traffic can avoid the town by staying on the by-pass, but north-south traffic has little option but to pass through the town centre. This applies both to through traffic (e.g. Chard to Seaton) and to some locally-generated traffic (e.g. from housing and factories located off the Chard Road to Seaton).

4.5.2. Much of the north-east traffic (e.g. Chard Road to Bridport) avoids the town centre by using Stoney Lane, but this involves passing between the primary and secondary schools (and appreciably closer to the primary school), before negotiating a bottleneck at the southern (Lyme Road, or B3261) end of Stoney Lane.

4.5.3. Although a north-south relief road for Axminster (from Millwey to the top end of Lyme Road) was proposed (via EDDC Planning Applications 19/0150/MFUL and 19/1074/MOUT), in association with a large number of new houses, it was not found to be economically viable, and there is no reasonable prospect that other sources of funding will be found in the foreseeable future. It made no provision for a roundabout or controlled junction at the junction between the Lyme Road (B3261) and the by-pass (A35). Without that, the right-hand turn from Lyme Road onto the westbound A35 is challenging, and would inevitably deter drivers from using this route even if it was built, which would undermine its primary stated purpose, and mean that it was only (though this is not trivial) relieving Stoney Lane and Lyme Road, and not the town centre. In summary: a north-east relief road would not be entirely without value, but would still in all probability leave much of the north-south traffic using the town centre.

4.5.4. Due to the continuing growth of housing to the north of the town centre, the majority of residents who want to drive from their homes to either of the town's two supermarkets have no realistic option but to drive through the town centre in both directions.

4.5.5. The 2021 public consultation process (see Section 4.3) asked respondents about their shopping habits, and in particular about shopping for food and regular household supplies. Of the 334 answers that were given to that question, 16 respondents stated that they buy nothing in Axminster; 85 buy 20% of their needs by value, 48 buy 40%, 53 buy 60%, 78 buy 80% and 54 buy everything they need here.

4.5.6. In answer to a question about where else respondents shop in person, the town most frequently mentioned was Seaton (which has a larger Tesco than Axminster's, with a wider range of products). Fifty seven respondents stated that Seaton is the only other place to which they regularly go for household shopping, while a further 127 mentioned Honiton (29 sole responses, and a further 104 in combination with other towns); Chard (15 and 80 mentions respectively); and Bridport (nine and 63 respectively). Some of these journeys will require residents to drive through the town centre en route to their destination of choice.

4.5.7. As documented in Section 4.4 (from paragraph 4.4.15 onwards), most of the town centre streets are narrow, and many of the junctions are constrained. Several of the buildings which sit adjacent to those junctions have been repeatedly damaged by HGV traffic over many years. Some of these are Listed Buildings.

Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging

4.5.8. Axminster town centre is currently well-supplied with off-street paid-for parking spaces, though this will change when the largest of the brownfield sites within the town (see

above) is re-developed. There are no parking meters in the town. Evidence that residents are satisfied with the current level of provision can be drawn from the public consultation process carried out in 2021 (see Section 4.3 above), in which 'improving parking provision around town' was ranked as the 14th priority out of 15 potential outcomes which respondents were asked to consider.

4.5.9. EDDC operates six carpark, as follows (with the information below taken from their website in July 2022):

- (a) Poplar Mount carpark, off Chard Street: 76 spaces (including 2 for disabled drivers). All-day charge: £3.00.
- (b) Lyme Street carpark (formerly Webster's Garage): 60 spaces (including 3 for disabled drivers). All-day charge: £2.20.
- (c) South Street short-stay carpark: 37 spaces (including 3 for disabled drivers). All-day charge: £10.00.
- (d) Coombe Lane carpark: 86 spaces (including 3 for disabled drivers). All-day charge: £3.00.
- (e) West Street short-stay carpark: 109 spaces (including 7 for disabled drivers). All-day charge: £10.00.
- (f) West Street long-stay carpark: 34 spaces. All-day charge: £3.00.

4.5.10. The railway station has its own paid-for carpark, and a large carpark beside the Tesco supermarket provides free parking for its customers for 2 hours, with charges applying after that period expires.

4.5.11. Despite this relatively good provision, there is always pressure on the more modest supply of free short-term on-street parking close to many shops, including some in Trinity Square, which contributes to traffic congestion.

4.5.12. As noted above, there is currently a Planning Application on the Lyme Street carpark which will reduce its public parking capacity, and EDDC, as owner of both Poplar Mount carpark and Coombe Lane carpark is considering the viability of applying (to itself) to build housing on one or both of those locations.

4.5.13. There has been a trend in recent years for more and more private homeowners to convert their front gardens to car parking spaces. Very few such spaces are based on permeable paving, and on balance they contribute to higher and faster rates of rainfall run-off than was formerly the case, as well as presenting a much more urban aspect that was formerly delivered by traditional front gardens.

4.5.14. As of March 2023 there are six publicly-accessible electric charging points in the process of installation in the West Street short-stay carpark, and one in the West Street long-stay carpark. A growing number of residents have installed their own.

Other Transport (Road, Bus and Train) Issues, including Weycroft Bridge

4.5.15. For decades one driver of demand for housing in Axminster has come from older residents of the surrounding villages wishing to move into the town to be closer to shops and public services (particularly health-care services).

4.5.16. The network of lanes which connects Axminster to its rural hinterland includes many stretches which are narrow and lacking in passing-places, and not always well maintained. With the growth in the size of farm machinery, significant stretches are becoming problematic for walkers as well as drivers. Where modern tractors are so large that both rear tyres brush up against the hedges simultaneously, the lanes could be deemed to be no longer fit for purpose.

4.5.17. Although this is primarily a matter for others to address, some existing hedgerows which could be affected by change are of real ecological and landscape value, which has to be balanced against wider social and economic factors, and this is therefore an issue one on which this Plan can take a view.

4.5.18. One other road-related issue which has arisen repeatedly over recent years concerns the capacity and resilience of Weycroft Bridge, which carries all vehicular traffic between Axminster and Chard (and on to the M5). The north-south relief road which was proposed in 2019 (see EDDC Planning Applications 19/0150/MFUL and 19/1074/MOUT) would not have provided any relief to Weycroft Bridge. As with the question of the network of lanes, although this is primarily a matter for others to address, it is one on which this Plan can take a view.

4.5.19. Where public transport is concerned, Axminster values and relies on its place as a transport hub for both rail travel and buses. Both networks need to be protected, and proper provision made (in terms of land use planning) to ensure their continued viability.

The Network of Cycleways, Footpaths and Bridleways

4.5.20. Axminster lies on two national long-distance cycle routes, NCN 2 (Dover to St Austell) and NCN 33 (Bristol to Axminster). These are the only marked cycle routes in the parish, though many of the roads and lanes are used for both functional and recreational cycling.

4.5.21. Axminster lies at the heart of an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways, most of them managed by Devon County Council as public rights of way (PROW), plus a small number of permissive footpaths. The accessibility of this network has been significantly improved over recent years through a programme of replacing stiles with small gates, and by installing 'gates within gates' which save walkers from having to open and close heavy farm gates.

4.5.22. Within the town some paved footpaths have been provided as part of housing schemes. On the whole, however, little attention has been paid to integrating new housing schemes into the wider network. A particularly regrettable example concerns the development of Flax Meadow Lane, in which pedestrian access from houses at the top end of Flax Meadow Lane, which are within a few metres of Loretto Road, requires residents to walk all the way down to the Stoney Lane / Chard Road roundabout before heading into the town centre, rather than being able to access the same destination via Loretto Road and Lyme Road. The route that they are required to follow is roughly twice as long as the un-provided alternative, and involves up-hill as well as down-hill sections. The walk back from town includes a much steeper climb than any section of Lyme Road.

4.5.23. There are two locations where the absence of a footway makes walking particularly dangerous:

- (a) On Musbury Road, between Gamberlake Cross and the junction with Abbey Close.
- (b) On the B3261 between Hurst Lodge and Woodbury Lane.

Town Pavements

4.5.24. Some of the town centre pavements have a long history of traffic damage and consequent trip hazards; and some (e.g. the pavement between Trinity Square and Victoria Place) are too narrow for pedestrians to pass each other comfortably, even if neither is using a baby buggy (or similar). Some pavements are too narrow to be used safely by mobility scooters or aids.

4.5.25. Some streets (e.g. Lyme Street immediately to the east of the South Street junction) have narrow pavements on both sides (see Photograph 4.8 above). Residents on the north side of that stretch of Lyme Street walk out of their front doors with minimal separation from passing traffic. The same applies at several locations on the eastern side of Musbury Road, between South Street and King Edward Road.

4.6. The natural environment

4.6.1. The high and diverse quality of the local environment, the town's location close to (but not on) the coast, and its easy access to three nearby AONBs are central to the appeal of Axminster for residents and visitors alike. Most of the land which provides the immediate environmental setting for the town sits within the Parish, and is therefore covered by this Plan. As reported in Section 4.3 above, 'protecting the most valuable and attractive elements of our natural and historic environment' was ranked 6th (out of 15) in the public consultation process carried out in 2021.

4.6.2. Whereas the Planning system is primarily concerned with proposals to make changes to how land is used, the monitoring and preservation of environmental quality falls to a wide-ranging mixture of bodies: some national and others local; some from within Government and others established at arms' length; some professional and others voluntary; some focused on delivering on statutory obligations, others on achieving voluntary goals.

4.6.3. Given the independence and primacy of several of these bodies when it comes to policy setting and resource management, it is hard to set Aims and Objectives or design Policies which are appropriate to the Planning system and which will necessarily achieve our general goal of protecting and enhancing our local environmental quality.

4.6.4. However, we anticipate that we will often have to try to realise this goal via one-off initiatives and by responding to proposals which have been launched by others.

4.7. Issues not central to the Planning system

4.7.1. There is considerable scope for greater local provision of tourism and leisure services, but whilst some of these (e.g. any proposal for a new hotel) will be matters for determination through the Planning system, others (such as, for example, the establishment of a hire point for electric bicycles linked to an information point on local routes and destinations) may well not. Nevertheless, such initiatives would be welcomed in principle.

4.7.2. In an era of change and adjustment to the funding and regulatory mechanisms applicable to farms, there is likely to be a particular need for farmers to make changes to how they manage their land, including through further on-farm diversification. Some changes will fall under the Planning system, but others may not. Irrespective, there is a need for this Plan to retain a high degree of flexibility which does not unintentionally rule out changes which have not yet been anticipated.

4.7.3. It is recognised that the type of health and education services which residents will require over the period of this Plan are likely to evolve. There has long been a desire, for example, to see Axminster Hospital return to providing in-patient bed spaces, and for sixth-form education to be provided in Axminster. Whereas it is not the role of this Plan to propose or promote particular potential solutions – that is for the NHS and County Council to consider in these particular instances – every effort should be made to accommodate flexible solutions to well-founded proposals that meet identified needs.

4.7.4. In the public consultation process carried out in 2021 (see Section 4.3 above), ‘matching health and social care provision to the changing needs of residents’ was ranked 3rd (out of 15 potential outcomes) by respondents. ‘Expanding the range of local education provision’ was ranked 4th. In this connection, Axminster Town Council recognises the work currently under way (in March 2023) to expand the Axminster Community Primary Academy school on Stoney Lane.