

Axminster Chamber of Commerce

Management Committee - Monday 15th January 2024 - 6.30pm

at Axminster Tools, Weycroft Avenue EX13 5PH

Present: Jane Rockett (Chair), Karen Hussey (Vice Chair), Alison Hayward (Acting Treasurer)
Barrie Hedges (Secretary), Mark Dowdeswell, Colin Hayward, Matt McCauley, Miranda Woodman,
Sandie Draper

Minutes

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Steve Holt, Laura Joyce, Francesca Dowdeswell, Karen Dowdeswell, Gemma Moore and Barry Searle.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 were approved as a correct record. **Proposed:** Karen - **Seconded:** Alison

3. Matters arising

- (a) **Town centre facelift opportunities** - Jane reported no reply yet from Tesco. The former Santander had been painted and was up for letting. Alison confirmed that painting of railings at the former Axminster Tools store was on the company's work list.
- (b) **Axminster Gate to Plate** - a meeting planned with Axminster Town Council to discuss involvement of local businesses had yet to take place. Subject to that meeting, plans can be made for a possible Chamber stall and for a publication promoting local businesses.
Action: Jane (meeting with ATC)
- (c) **Tourism strategy** - Barrie reported that the 'What's in Axminster' website (www.whatsinaxminster.co.uk) developed by Waffle was about to go live and he was impressed by both its style and content. While initially directed mainly at the community, it had considerable potential to contribute to tourism. Barrie had been asked to provide business liaison and was happy to do so and to generally support a valuable initiative. He had to date been unable to source funding to get digital support from the 'Visit Devon' site for a town video but would persist. **Action:** Barrie
- (d) **Light Up Axminster** - Jane reported on changes in the committee running Light Up Axminster. It was agreed that Kara Burrough should be invited to a future Chamber meeting to explain the plans **Action:** Jane

4. Correspondence

- A recent feature in *Devon Life* piece was praised as positive for the town
- Barrie had confirmed that our insurance relating to community benches would cover Plastic Free Axminster's use of the advertising hoardings
- Concern was expressed over the pre-Christmas closure of South Street
- Suzie McFadzean had made a special offer to members for photography which would be covered in our next newsletter. **Action** - Barrie

5. Finance & memberships

(a) **Update on finances** - Alison provided a detailed update which showed a surplus for the year to 31 January 2024 of £843.98. Total income was £8,348.36; expenditure £7,504.38. Total balance at the bank is £3,406.64 of which £1,239 is ring-fenced for banners.

(b) **Update on memberships** - There had been no changes since the last meeting. Ellis Holt had now relinquished his role as Membership Secretary (see next item). Several further businesses were highlighted as having membership potential.

6. Key Chamber roles

(a) Jane explained that Barrie's plan to stand down as secretary in May would leave a gap that needed advance planning to fill. Barrie went through the different aspects of the role: administration; implementation of Chamber decisions (projects); and communication including newsletter, websites and social media. The role was capable of being broken down in those ways and he was happy to assist still on the projects front. Steps will be taken to find one or more person willing to take on or share the role. **Action:** Jane / Barrie

(b) Appointment of Membership Secretary - to be considered alongside the above

7. Axminster Town Council report

Councillor Mark Dowdeswell (also a Chamber committee member) provided a summary of recent activity, which had been focused in recent weeks on: precepts and finances; availability of sandbags; and operation of the Guildhall, which now had the benefit of solar panels and was generating more than it was using.

8. Shop Local initiatives

(a) **Xmas trail** - Jane reported that many more cards had been in circulation this year but that still only 38 had finally been submitted. It had proved particularly difficult to persuade participating traders to be active in pushing the cards and offering loyalty stamps. Winners had been notified.

- (b) **Xmas music** - Barrie reported on the two Saturday sessions in Trinity Square. Week 1 (9 Dec) had been difficult due to windy conditions and there was little obvious support in terms of footfall in the town. Week 2 (16 Dec) had been rather better on both fronts. He praised the support received from Waffle and the musicians they had sourced plus the few volunteers who had assisted with staging. He felt it was an initiative certainly worth considering for future years but at least six months planning time was needed on the staging front.

9. Training initiatives

Jane provided an update on planned training sessions funded by a £1,500 award from from Devon CC: ChatGPT training on 18 January and getting the best from phone cameras on 15 February. It was agreed that funding should be made available for a further session by Becki Lippett on ways to improve your online presence. **Action:** Jane

10. Model railway project

Barrie provided an update on the 'For the Love of a Railway' project, which went live at the former River Cottage on 9th December. Now filling a long empty prime business window, it had been much enjoyed through the Christmas period. There was no immediate time limit on it remaining there and the volunteers were now exploring ways in which it could be further enhanced, plus opportunities to involve schools through an education pack and modelling group for children. Barrie had submitted a grant application to the South Western Railway Community Fund to cover the additional cost.

11. Breakfast meeting with the Bank of England

Jane provided details on a planned business meeting on 13th February as part of an initiative through which the Bank of England can engage with rural businesses. More details awaited.

12. Banners 2024

Barrie provided an update on the preliminary plans for the street banners project in 2024. As advised previously, the aim was to increase the total banner 'fleet' from the current 26 to 36 and to introduce them additionally to South Street.

{Additional update on banner designs planned for 2024. One banner design each had been sought from Axminster Primary School, St Mary's Primary and Axe Vale Academy. Other designs being developed by local artists: The MInster; coaching days; tools industry; wildlife park; remembrance and the RBL; walking / cycling.}

Action: Barrie

13. Date of next meeting

Monday 19th February 2024 6.30pm - George Hotel.