

Axminster Chamber of Commerce

Management Committee - Monday 16 October 2023 - 6.30pm

at Axminster Tools new store, Weycroft Avenue

Present: Jane Rockett (Chair), Karen Hussey (Vice Chair), Barrie Hedges (Secretary), Sandie Draper, Karen Dowdeswell, Francesca Dowdeswell, Alison Hayward, Colin Hayward, Ellis Holt, Steve Holt, Matt Smith.

Minutes

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mark Dowdeswell, Miranda Woodman, Barry, Searle and Dr Govender

2. Minutes

The minutes of the Management Committee held on 18 September 2023 were approved as a correct record.

Proposed: Steve **Seconded:** Ellis

3. Matters arising

(a) **Shared Banking Hub** - staff interviews were taking place in the next few days and a tentative November opening date had been set but was subject to completion of the branch fit-out. The committee expressed enthusiasm for what it would bring to the town.

(b) **Model railway** - work was moving quickly, with the base under construction and modellers getting underway with their input. The project was attracting much community enthusiasm. Plans are in hand for an opening event on 9th December. Sandie expressed interest in postcards of both the railway and other local scenes - **to be explored at next meeting.**

(c) **Town Centre facelift opportunities** - With Boots closing, it seemed unlikely that the 'blue door' would be painted - **Colin will explore the potential for volunteer input.** Meanwhile, the South Street Co-op had now been painted. **Jane will write to land owners re painting of railings in the lower part of West Street and Trafalgar Way.** Ellis listed road signs in need of cleaning / graffiti removal on the Chard side of town in particular - **Jane to write to Ian Hall seeking action from DCC.**

(d) **Banners update** - Banners had now been taken down for their winter clean up and storage. Meanwhile plans were being considered to add South Street to the coverage in

2024. Consideration to be given to the Masonic Hall as a potential location. The committee expressed thanks to all those who had driven the project through another successful year.

4. Correspondence

None

5. Finance & memberships

(a) **Update on finances** - Jane updated - current account £2911.99; savings account £1665.44.

(b) **Appointment of Treasurer** - work commitments had made it necessary for Stuart Carrington to relinquish the position of Treasurer. Alison, who has been doing much of the finance work over recent months, had kindly agreed to take over as Acting Treasurer. She will meet with Barrie and Jane to update herself on the details.

Proposed: Jane **Seconded:** Barrie

(c) **Appointment of Membership Secretary** - Ellis offered to fill the position of Membership Secretary. He will pick up contact with WBB in particular and generally follow-up other potential and outstanding memberships. Members were reminded of the need to identify a candidate for the role of Secretary which Barrie has advised he needs to vacate in May.

Ellis' appointment proposed: Jane. **Seconded:** Sandie.

(d) **Update on memberships** - the total paid-up membership stood at just over 50

(e) **Fund raising** - as outlined at previous meetings, the Chamber is able to use the Coronation celebration carpets provided by Axminster Carpets for public display in May to raise funds. Barrie outlined the options 1: raffle; 2: online prize draw; 3: work with Axminster and Lyme Cancer Support on a shared proceeds basis and offer the carpets in an Auction of Promises at Uplyme Village Hall on 17 November. On his recommendation, option 3 was chosen, with the Chamber portion of proceeds being devoted to its community projects. He will first double check that Axminster Carpets are happy for the auction route;

Proposed: Barrie **Seconded:** Colin

6. Tourism

Barrie reminded members of the presentation at the last meeting in relation to Axminster potentially becoming part of the 'Coast Meets Country' tourism project involving other East Devon towns. He said grants could be available to cover the base costs. Committee members were concerned about longer term costs for future years and felt that the few local businesses for whom the 'membership' option might be relevant would not want the associated individual cost.

Matt (Smith) and Francesca presented details of Waffle's 'What's In Axminster' community focused website, which is quickly taking shape and which they hope may be in place by Christmas. It was felt that much of the planned content would be appropriate to tourists and that more could potentially be added. Matt explained that the new site could be digitally linked to the 'Visit Devon' website in order to maximise its visibility. This would involve a subscription at different levels ranging from £265 to £1,050pa. It was agreed (Proposed by Karen, Seconded by Steve) that the Chamber would support this option and fund the base £265 cost. Matt and Francesca will provide further updates at future

meetings. Meanwhile, Matt McCauley will ask whether the Axminster Tools video team would be able to assist in the production of a promotional video.

7. **Axminster Town Council report**

The Town Council has not met since our last meeting.

8. **Axminster Neighbourhood Plan**

Steve updated the Committee on the current stage in the production of the Neighbourhood Plan, which was now out to consultation. He explained that comments were being sought from individuals rather than businesses, so Chamber engagement is not relevant. Businesses were asked to encourage the public to take part in the consultation, which runs until 5 November.

9. **Shop Local initiatives - updates**

(a) **Axminster Gate to Plate** - Jane summarised feedback on the first Axminster Gate to Plate on 7 October. Public enthusiasm had been strong and it was felt that the event had been well run and provided a general 'feel good' factor for the community. Jane also detailed individual responses from businesses to our request for feedback. The majority were positive and some had seen increases in footfall and revenue. A few hospitality businesses had questioned whether bringing outside food traders to Axminster was the right thing to do as they saw them as being in competition with them. The committee felt that on balance the festival was very good for the town and was likely to encourage those who attended it to return.

It was understood that EDDC had indicated its willingness to contribute half of the support cost for a 2024 event and that Axminster Town Council was being asked to consider meeting the balance. It was agreed that our support in principle for the event returning should be made known to the Town Council. Any financial implications for the Chamber would have to be considered at the next meeting. It was agreed that we should pass on our thanks to Emma of The Vending Shed for her substantial support on the day.

(b) **Magic Tenner** - Barrie reported some 30 participating retail and food traders. A lot of work had gone into social media promotion (over 2,000 views of one video). Jane said that several traders had reported good sales of their £10 offers.

(c) **Xmas music** - Barrie provided an update on the plans for live music in Trinity Square on 9th and 16th December. Approval was awaited from DCC Highways to close parking spaces. A smaller 24-foot curtain-sided trailer had been secured. It was agreed that Chamber members would be offered the opportunity to provide stalls to support the music - one drinks, one savoury food and one sweet food.

(d) **Extended Xmas opening hours** - it was agreed that traders be encouraged to stay open until 4pm on the Xmas Music days.

(e) **Xmas Trail** - Jane reported that more outlets had been identified for Xmas Trail loyalty cards. It was agreed that the event would run from 25 November until 23 December, with prize vouchers valid until the end of February.

10. Networking events

More work was needed to find participants for the planned inaugural breakfast networking event on 31 October as none had responded to the early publicity. It was understood that Stuart from Westcotts was still willing to do the main presentation and fund breakfasts for members. It was agreed that **Steve and Barrie would further discuss pre-event publicity**. Colin, Karen and Jane indicated that they would attend.

Note: After further discussion it is evident that we cannot guarantee sufficient numbers to make this a viable event. It has now been postponed for further consideration.

11. Training initiatives

Jane outlined plans for a series of training events that it was hoped would be funded by DCC:

- * 'Use of Canva' for design to be run by Becky Lippett on 30 October. To be promoted asap.
- * Two sessions in January /February run by BIP / Cosmic. One re how to take good photos for use in websites and social media, and the other re high quality copywriting for posts including use of AI to compose.

Action: Jane will conclude the arrangements. Barrie to promote.

12. Newsletter

Ellis detailed his ideas for the introduction of a printed quarterly Axminster Newsletter which would be run by the Chamber, funded by advertising and circulated to specific postcodes by Royal Mail. Ellis said he was prepared to do the leg work. He detailed a range of potential editorial content and **asked those present to send him their own ideas and comments asap**. The committee expressed interest and it was agreed that Ellis should do a more detailed feasibility study and bring back to the next meeting.

Action: All - thoughts to Ellis

13. Any other business

Ellis: Suggestion re stringing Christmas lighting across West Street by erecting poles in the churchyard. **Jane to pass on idea to Light Up Axminster.**

Alison: Should the Chamber's closed Facebook discussion group be for members only? **Discuss at next meeting.**

Colin - businesses wanting wooden Christmas trees **please let him know asap**

Karen: proposed Axminster Energy Hub - should the Chamber respond to consultation? **Discuss at next meeting**

14. Date of next meeting

Monday 20 November 2023 - 6.30pm (venue to be agreed)