

# Axminster Chamber of Commerce

## Management Committee - Monday 20th November 2023 - 6.30pm

at Cross Keys House, Axminster

**Present:** Jane Rockett (Chair), Karen Hussey (Vice Chair), Alison Hayward (Acting Treasurer)  
Barrie Hedges (Secretary), Ellis Holt (Acting Membership Secretary), Mark Dowdeswell, Francesca Dowdeswell, Ellis Holt, Julian Hussey, Ian Styles

## Minutes

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Karen Hussey (Vice Chair), Colin Hayward, Steve Holt, Matt Smith, Miranda Woodman, Barry Searle, Emma Herrod, Karen Dowdeswell, Sandie Draper, Matt McCauley

### 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2023 were approved as a correct record.

**Proposed:** Alison **Seconded :** Ellis

### 3. Matters arising

- (a) **Shared Banking Hub** - it was reported that the long awaited hub had now opened and had been widely welcomed. Queries were being raised about the details of specific services, which the operator was dealing with. He is also hoping to secure a cash machine.
- (b) **Model railway** - Barrie provided an update on progress, with the planned launch at the former River Cottage on schedule for launch on 9th December. There was widespread community enthusiasm for the project.
- (c) **Town Centre facelift opportunities** - Jane was awaiting a response from Tesco re painting of the 'JHS' railings. Ian Styles undertook to get railings in Trafalgar Way repainted. County Councillor Ian Hall had responded re the need for road signs to be cleaned and it was clear that DCC action was not possible in the near future. Local action would depend on identifying a 'chapter 8' person to supervise. Jane will contact Brian Ball to discuss. **Action** - Jane
- (d) **Fund raising from Auction of Promises** - Barrie reported that, while the print of Lyme Billy had sold for £100 (producing £50 for the Chamber), the two Coronation carpets had not reached their £250 reserve at an auction run by Axminster & Lyme Cancer Support. The best way in which to sell them will be discussed again in the New Year.

- (e) **Christmas Lights across West Street** - Jane had raised the suggestion with the Town Clerk, who said there was a strength and safety issue to erecting a supporting pole in the churchyard.

#### 4. Correspondence

None

#### 5. Finance & memberships

(a) **Update on finances** - Alison provided a detailed update on Chamber finances showing total income for the year to date of £6,455 and expenses of £3,832. Amounts ring-fenced for specific projects were as follows: banners - £1,770; railway - £572, £181 for general and £100 for Xmas expenses. The current account balance was £1,879.26 and the business reserve account £3,168.21, with £150 held as cash.

A discussion took place on the need for the Chamber to attract funding beyond its own membership subscriptions

(b) **Update on memberships** - total memberships remained over 50, with several potential new members to be reminded of the interest they had expressed. In his new role as Membership Secretary, Ellis has the necessary information to be able to take this forward when time permits.

**Action:** Ellis

(c) **Subscriptions** - it was agreed that subscriptions for 2024 should be held at £50.

**Proposed:** Jane **Seconded:** Alison

#### 6. Tourism

Francesca provided an update on the new Waffle-driven website 'What's in Axminster', which she is working on with Matt Smith. Content is coming together well - anyone with events in particular should supply details. Barrie had discussed ways in which the content could subsequently be extended with specific tourist orientated information and then more widely promoted via [www.visitdevon.co.uk](http://www.visitdevon.co.uk). This would require a subscription to Visit Devon in order to get skilled digital marketing support. It was now clear that the base subscription would cost at least £500 pa rather than £295 as previously understood. He believed there was potential to attract grants to support this and would investigate.

**Action:** Barrie

#### 7. Axminster Town Council report

Councillor Mark Dowdeswell reported recent developments: the resignation of the former deputy mayor had created a casual vacancy that was being advertised; responses to the Neighbourhood Plan consultation were being collated; volunteers were being sought to help with the planting of the planned Community Orchard.

## 8. Shop Local initiatives - updates

- (a) **Axminster Gate to Plate** - The date of the next 'Axminster Gate to Plate' had now been fixed for Bank Holiday Monday 27th May 2024. A meeting was being arranged with Axminster Town Council to discuss ways in which the involvement of local businesses could be encouraged.
- (b) **Xmas music** - Plans were now in place for live music to enhance the Christmas shopping atmosphere, with four performers each days on Saturdays 9th and 16th December. The Parochial Church Council had kindly agreed to gazebos from which the performers would play being sited on the front of the Minster Green opposite the Banking Hub.
- (c) **Xmas Trail** - Jane reported that the printed materials for the Trail were ready to distribute. It would operate from 25 November to 23 December and should benefit from cards being handed out at more outlets.

## 9. Support for hospitality businesses

It was agreed that the issue would be discussed in more detail once the meeting had been held with Axminster Town Council to discuss the Gate to Plate.

## 10. Networking events

The challenge remained of establishing networking events as a Chamber activity of benefit to businesses beyond the retail sector. It was felt that the project needed to be driven with insight members in the commercial sector. As a preliminary, Jane will discuss with Kevin Bull of Scott Rowe.

**Action:** Jane

## 11. Training initiatives

Jane reported on her efforts to achieve clarity over the level of support available from Devon County Council towards running training workshops focused on social media and marketing skills DCC funding for workshops. These would included sessions run by Cosmic, BIP and also our own member Becky Lippett. Jane will endeavour to resolve the remaining issues with a view to a programme being run early in the New Year.

**Action:** Jane

## **12. Newsletter**

Ellis provided an update on his proposal for a quarterly printed newsletter run by the Chamber. He had further developed areas of content and also looked in more detail at distribution and advertising costs. It was felt that in the present climate achieving sufficient revenue from advertising would make a regular newsletter a risky proposition. It was agreed that the acknowledged potential should be further explored using a one-off or periodic 'What's on Guide' type approach.

**Action:** Ellis

## **13. Social media**

The meeting discussed the problem of unduly negative comments being posted on its facebook closed group Axminster Chamber of Commerce - Businesses. It was agreed that, in the interests of encouraging as wide a debate as possible, the page should remain open to non-members. The rules will, however, be amended to stress the need to keep all exchanges courteous and constructive. Admins may also remove comments considered unreasonable.

## **14. Axminster Energy Hub**

It was felt that commenting on the planning proposal for the hub would require a good deal more knowledge on the project than committee members currently had and that it was a planning matter best commented on by the Town Council.

## **15. Any other business**

None

## **16. Date of next meeting**

Monday 15 January 2024 - 6.30pm at Axminster Tools new store