

Axminster Chamber of Commerce

Management Committee - Monday 19 June 2023 - 6.30pm

at Gabe's Cafe, Weycroft Avenue, Axminster

Present: Jane Rockett (Chair), Karen Hussey (Vice Chair), Barrie Hedges (Secretary), Stuart Carrington (Treasurer), Karen Dowdeswell, Alison Hayward, Colin Hayward, Ellis Holt, Matt McCaulay, Gemma Moore, Emma Rowe, Jan Rowe, Barry Searle

Minutes

(Draft until approved at next meeting)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Steve Holt, Becky Lippett, Laura Joyce, Miranda Woodman, and Pippa Galvin.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the Management Committee held on 17th April 2023 are now attached. Please check them and let the secretary know if there is anything you believe to be an incorrect record.

3. Matters arising

(a) **Banners project** - Barrie provided an update. Some 21 banners are now in place, with four to five more planned to go on display before the school summer holidays. The trail will by then have been extended to include visibility in Victoria Place, George Square, Chard Street and Silver Street. South Street will form a further specific phase in 2024.

(b) **Business rates** - Barrie reported that EDDC's business rates team has now agreed to provide its long awaited update in written form, from which we can then produce a newsletter item

Action: Barrie

(c) **Shared banking hub** - Barrie advised that the hub was very much a live project with an as yet unidentified location and preferred operator selected. It is hoped that the hub will open before the end of the year. The operator has offered to come and talk to a future meeting.

(d) **Christmas Grotto costs** - Jane reported that further advice was awaited from Waffle on final costs for the 2022 grotto. Chamber has yet to make its decision on participating in a grotto for 2023 and its location. Jane will discuss with Matt Smith so that the committee can consider all options at its next meeting.

Action: Jane

(e) **Axminster Gate to Plate** - a planned Zoom meeting with the contractor had not taken place as planned. Barrie will contact them to secure a further update with a view to promoting it asap.

Action: Barrie

4. **Correspondence**

A letter had been received from former Chair Fred Wells congratulating Chamber on the success of the banners project.

5. **Treasurer's report**

Stuart was introduced as the new Treasurer. The full handover of the books and updating him on the state of play on different projects, including ring fencing of specific budgets, was underway. Procedures will also be recommended for the way in which spending should be authorised and managed.

The committee will also further discuss the general issue of fund raising from sources other than member subscriptions.

Action: Stuart / Barrie / Jane

6. **Memberships**

(a) A total of 33 businesses had paid their £50 subscriptions for 2023 and more were in process towards an immediate target of at least 50 members. It was agreed that membership should be available to local charities at the same £50 rate as for businesses.

Action points

- **Ellis** will circulate 'why join' leaflets to businesses at Millwey
- **Barry S** will make leaflets available to businesses on the Axminster Carpets site
- **All** committee members will generally spread the word about the benefits of membership to their own contacts
- **Stuart** will consider how best to put in place an automatic renewal system for 2024.

(b) The committee discussed the issue of ensuring that the benefits of Chamber membership are in future prioritised for paid-up members. One particular area where this arises is with those who have, during the subscription-free 2022 financial year, taken pages on the new Axminster Business Directory. It was agreed that all those with pages be advised that they have until the end of August to join Chamber and in doing so retain their free 'premium' listings. Beyond August, entries from non-members will be reduced to basic lineage entries without photos. As an option, non-members could retain a premium listing for a fee of £20.

Action: Barrie

(c) Loyalty events - it was agreed that non-members should be asked to pay £5 to participate in future events. Forms needed by the public to follow specific trails should be charged at £1 each.

7. Axminster Town Council report

Cllr Becky Lippett was unable to be present but had provided an update as follows:

Finger pointer signs - ordered but there is a delay at the manufacturer.

Rubbish problems after market - Initially this needs to go to Jim Rowe - Jan to clarify. General tightening up of street cleaning. Ask EDDC to write to residents to put bins in after collection. Chamber to write to council and to Richard Foord re concerns re Castle Street wall affecting businesses in Victoria Place.

Action: Jan (market day waste) / Jane (other issues)

Bollards needing repainting - a Devon highways issue but unlikely to carry out the work themselves due budget cuts. Becky is asking county councillor Ian Hall if they would allow it to be done by volunteers.

Action: Jan to write to Ian Hall

Traffic lights staying on red - the timer was adjusted after elderly residents complained to Ian Hall that they couldn't get across the road. It has slowed traffic flow but it is felt that pedestrian safety is more important.

'Welcome to Axminster' signs - being delayed by DCC who want to check the design and material of construction.

8. Proposed model railway project

Barrie had pre-circulated a brief on a proposed model railway project involving the Chamber in partnership with the Community Waffle House the Axminster Community Shed and Axminster Heritage Centre. The aim is to re-create the celebrated Axminster to Lyme Regis branch line in a large model that would be on view as an attraction to encourage families to spend time in the town centre. Agreement has been given by Palmers Brewery to it being located in the former River Cottage while that remains empty, but it is important that fall back and follow-on locations are sought. A total of £1,000 funding has been promised by the South Western Railway and the Devon & Cornwall Community Rail Forum. (See full brief for further details). The committee gave its agreement to participation in the project subject to efforts being made to identify a fall-back location.

Action: Barrie

9. 'Shop local' initiatives

The committee considered its strategy for loyalty initiatives and agreed to focus on Christmas, devoting energy specifically to the three Saturdays in December with a mix of activities to potentially include:

- Live music in the town centre. Barrie will liaise with Pete at Waffle with regard to a previous list of potential performers. Barry S will consider the potential for involving choirs in carol singing.

- A children's grotto (see above) - Jane
- Extended opening hours on Saturdays in December - Jane
- A Christmas Trail. It was agreed that trail prizes should consist of three £25 vouchers. People will be encouraged to submit even uncompleted trail cards, all of which would go into a draw for a further £25 prize. Trail cards would also be made available from a wider spread of locations - Jane
- Ellis will additionally develop for the next meeting ideas for a scarecrow festival, either as a standalone or possibly in support of the Axminster Gate to Plate on 7 October.

Actions: as detailed above

10. Training initiative

Plans are in hand for Becky to lead a 'Reels Workshop' on 12 July 2023 at 6.30pm. Barrie will liaise with Becky and produce a newsletter and social media posts. The workshop will be free for members and £25 for non-members. The new Axminster Tools shop's meeting area was offered as a venue.

Action: Becky / Barrie

11. Tourism

The Committee returned to the issue of promoting Axminster's tourist attractions, which had first been highlighted by Matt Smith earlier this year. At that point, further discussion was delayed because, with an election pending, it was not an appropriate stage to discuss the matter with Axminster Town Council. Barrie will now raise it with the council and come back with suggestions as appropriate.

Action: Barrie

12. Any other business

- Karen alerted members to the installation of new BT infrastructure in the town centre which she said could cause considerable disruption.
- Ellis has ideas for an Axminster Treasure Trail which he will develop for the next meeting.

13. Date of next meeting

Monday 17 July 2023 at Axminster Tools new store EX13 5PH