

# Axminster Chamber of Commerce

## Management Committee - Monday 17 July 2023

at Axminster Tools (store), Weycroft Avenue, Axminster

**Present:** Jane Rockett (Chair), Karen Hussey (Vice Chair), Barrie Hedges (Secretary), Stuart Carrington (Treasurer), Karen Dowdeswell, Mark Dowdeswell, Sandie Draper, Alison Hayward, Colin Hayward, Ellis Holt, Steve Holt, Matt McCaulay, Miranda Woodman.

## Minutes

(Draft until approved at next meeting)

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Becky Lippett, Emma Herrod, Gemma Moore, Emma Rowe, Jan Rowe and Barry Searle.

### 2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the Management Committees held on 17th April and 19th June were approved as correct records.

17th April - **Proposed:** Alison / **Seconded:** Ellis

19th June - **Proposed:** Alison / **Seconded:** Karen D

### 3. Matters arising

- (a) Model railway project - Barrie outlined progress. A small team is now working on design and aims to have the model ready by Christmas. He stressed the criticality of identifying a fallback location should the former River Cottage be let in the meantime. Several suggestions were made - Steve will investigate the Heritage Centre while Sandie will make an approach re Oliver Josphe's gym.
- (b) **Tourism** - Barrie reported progress. Axminster Town Council has been approached about a joint initiative and will probably discuss in September. The Heritage Centre has agreed to participate. Barrie has meanwhile had a preliminary Zoom meeting with the team behind East Devon Excellence who would be keen to welcome Axminster and are coming back with costs. Potential grant support is being investigated for a full report at the next meeting.
- (c) **Axminster Gate to Plate** - Barrie reminded everyone of the plan for the 'Axminster Gate to Plate' food festival on Saturday 7th October. To date, around 60 food and drink producers had booked stalls and there were around five pitches left. Barrie was pushing the potential with local food producers and would add new suggestions made. Ideas were now needed to ensure that other Axminster traders benefit from

the footfall. A copy of the information from eat:Festivals would be circulated to committee members for their ideas. See also 'Scarecrow Festival' below.

**Action:** All - come up with ideas quickly (our next meeting is too late) and submit to Barrie

#### 4. Correspondence

Plastic Free Axminster had asked if it would be possible to find a representative of the business community to join their committee. After discussion it was agreed that Mark, in his new capacity as a town councillor, would relay PFA information to the Chamber management committee. PFA will also continue to be welcome to submit information for inclusion in Chamber newsletters.

**Action:** Mark

#### 5. Treasurer's report

Family and business priorities had delayed Stuart piling into his new role but he aims to produce a full update for the next meeting. Jane and Alison will in the meantime deal with outstanding payments.

**Action:** Stuart / Jane / Alison

#### 6. Memberships

Total memberships had now reached 40 and rising steadily. Ellis had made preliminary approaches to businesses on Millwey and will pursue, passing on requests for payment links or invoices as needed from Barrie. Barry S / Miranda will assist by sourcing info re businesses on the Carpets site who can be approached. Other committee members were all urged to encourage new memberships amongst friends and contacts.

**Action:** All - push membership

A query had arisen over whether payment was due from the Heritage Centre in line with the general decision to charge charities. It was agreed that, given the fact that the Heritage Centre had given us free use of the Bradshaw Room for our AGM, we should apply a quid pro quo on their membership.

**Action:** Barrie - advise Heritage Centre

#### 7. Axminster Town Council report

In Becky's absence, Mark reported on council matters. Early advice had been received on two further new businesses coming soon. A planning application had been submitted to convert the property that housed Totally Kids from commercial to residential but that could be subject to having to be advertised for a year given the shift away from commercial. Devon CC had no funds to re-paint street bollards but it was hoped an agreement could be reached for ATC employees to tackle the work. The long awaited new Axminster 'gateway' signs had been delayed due to DCC queries over suitable materials but should be in place

soon. Finger post direction signs should also be in place soon. Agreed that the committee's concern re the long delay with the latter should be made known to ATC - Mark to feedback.

**Action:** Mark - feedback fingerpost signs concern to ATC

## 8. Axminster Renewal Forum

Jane reported on the most recent meeting of the Forum, where discussion on major projects had focused on the future of the Websters Garage site. 'Quick win' projects being developed included plans to introduce E-bikes between Axminster railway station and the town centre. On the training front, Jane had detailed to the Forum the Chamber's plans for training sessions covering needs such as social media. The DCC representative promised to investigate grant support for this.

**Action:** Jane - pursue as appropriate

## 9. Town Centre facelift opportunities

Jane briefed on Chamber's evolving campaign to achieve 'quick win' facelifts in the town centre.

- The blinds at the Fabric Shop had proved to be 'too far gone' for cleaning.
- **Colin** is to further pursue Boots re painting their unsightly store room door.
- **Barrie** will write to the Co-op re the problem of plants growing into the fascia of their mini shop in South Street.
- It was agreed that an action party of volunteers would be formed to generally clean signs and other key town centre elements in need of TLC. **Jane** will contact Brian Ball to enlist help from him and from John Jeffery with their water bowser. Aim to tackle the project around the end of September so that Axminster looks its best for 'Gate to Plate'. While **Jane, Karen H and Sandie** will organise, we all need to pile in and attract others.

## 10. Christmas 'shop local' initiatives

The committee looked further at various Christmas initiatives discussed at the last meeting to encourage people to spend time in Axminster:

**Christmas Grottos** - Jane had met Matt Smith of Waffle which is considering plans to repeat the Trinity House grotto and believe it can be achieved on a self-funding basis. The committee was supportive of the initiative but, as funding or input was not needed, did not believe Chamber's direct involvement was necessary. Members expressed a particular wish that the toys offered were of better value than in 2022 and hoped they could be sourced from several local businesses. Ellis advised that his Gabe's Cafe may also run a grotto.

**Action:** Jane - feed back to Matt

**Music** - Barrie outlined progress on our hopes of staging a town centre music event on Saturdays in December. He had met Pete Scott of Waffle and Simon Tatman and discussed a plan that would involve live music on a trailer stage from mid-morning until mid-afternoon on two of the three December Saturdays. Musicians for whom performing is a livelihood may need to be paid and a budget of up to £500 would be needed. There would be opportunities also for local food and drink traders to service the event from stalls or from special offerings at their own premises. It was agreed that a working group should be formed led on our behalf by Barrie with Ellis and Karen H plus Pete and Simon to further developed the many aspects of the project.

**Action:** Barrie - convene group

**Christmas Trail** - Jane is leading on plans to repeat our Christmas Trail initiative but on a much larger scale of participation with many more locations from which shoppers can pick up loyalty cards. The prizes on offer were further refined as: 1st prize - £50; 2nd prize - £30. Prize for winner selected from all the unfinished cards - £10.

**Action:** Jane / Alison - further develop

## 11. Networking and training

Discussion of the manner in which Chamber can best evolve plans for networking events and also the development of training opportunities was delayed until the next meeting to give Steve and Stuart time to put together a detailed plan. Social media and other marketing training will be a key element in the latter.

Action: **Steve / Stuart** - develop strategy for next meeting

## 12. Axminster Scarecrow Festival

Ellis outlined his ideas for a week-long Scarecrow Festival as a further initiative designed to encourage people to visit businesses throughout wider Axminster. Each business would be invited to create and display a scarecrow for judging via votes on the Chamber's website and social media. A trophy would be awarded for the best. Entry would be free for Chamber members and £5 for non-members. It was agreed that the ideal timing would be the run up to the 'Axminster Gate to Plate' on 7 October. Ellis will develop a poster and Barrie will circulate as a Chamber newsletter.

**Action:** Ellis / Barrie

## 13. Potential Axminster Treasure Trail

Discussion postponed until next meeting

## 14. Any other business

Axminster Carpets had kindly agreed to give us the Coronation carpets displayed in the River Cottage windows as a potential fund raising proposition. It was agreed that they should be raffled to raise money for Chamber funds. Stuart kindly offered to cover the cost of printing specific tickets. Thought needs to be given to acquiring a lottery licence.

**Action:** Christmas music working group

It was agreed that the issue of the Chamber logo and branding would be discussed at the next meeting. Barrie explained that he and Becky were looking at the overall social media and website strategy within which the issue of the brand would be particularly relevant.

**Action:** Barrie / Becky

Barrie also provided an update re the Chamber's Business Directory ([www.axminsterbusinessdirectory.co.uk](http://www.axminsterbusinessdirectory.co.uk)) which currently has over 80 listings. He explained that the directory uses a platform produced by Bubble, the cost of which is about to increase. Our website provider, Adrian Lausch of Pink Pigeon has, however, now developed his own directory platform which he will run for us at lower cost and which will have significant new features. The switch between the two would be made shortly. Meanwhile, Barrie is to write to every existing business with a listing to advise them of the plans to reduce non-members to word-only listings, or full photo listing for £25. The site will remain free for members.

**Action:** Barrie / Adrian

## 15. Date of next meeting

Monday 18 September - venue to be advised