

Axminster Chamber of Commerce

Management Committee - Monday 18 September July 2023

at Axminster Carpets, Woodmead Road, Axminster

Present: Jane Rockett (Chair), Karen Hussey (Vice Chair), Barrie Hedges (Secretary), Karen Dowdeswell, Mark Dowdeswell, Francesca Dowdeswell, Alison Hayward, Colin Hayward, Ellis Holt, Steve Holt, Miranda Woodman, Matt Smith, Nigel Sadler.

Minutes

(Draft until approved at next meeting)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Gemma Moore and Matt McCauley

2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the Management Committees held on 18th July 2023 were approved as a correct record

Proposed: Karen Dowdeswell **Seconded:** Alison Hayward

3. Matters arising

- (a) **Model railway project** - work is progressing as planned. Approval has been given by Axminster Town Council for the use of the old courtroom for construction.
- (b) **Banners 2024** - banners will be taken down for winter storage following the Axminster Gate to Plate on 7 October. Plans for next year envisage a final total of 40 banners over 36 sites, with South Street as a new area.
- (c) **Business Directory** - non-members included in the directory had been contacted individually to set out options for their continued presence in the directory. Listings now existed at two levels - premium photo listings for members and those who pay £20pa; and standard listings that are free but do not include photos.

4. Tourism

The committee welcomed Tina Veater (from Ignyte) and Hilary Nelson (Sidmouth Town Council) representing the Coast and Country Tourism Project, a collective initiative involving the towns of Sidmouth, Seaton, Ottery St Mary, Honiton and Budleigh Salterton. They had kindly accepted our invitation to talk to us about how Axminster might become a part of the project.

Their full presentation (minus individual town tourist videos that be found online) is attached with these minutes. In summary:

- The project partnership aims to be a foundation for ongoing future cooperation between towns on tourism and aims to make East Devon the leading year-round sustainable visitor destination in Devon as a whole
- For the other partners, it has already created distinct individual identities with a common recognisable overall brand and website pages
- Individual towns have worked with Ignyte work to create a branding pack, destination video and website. Content generation is key.
- Two options were proposed for Axminster, one centrally funded at a cost of £18,250 and the other a membership option where much of the cost would be covered by signing up business members at costs ranging from £150 to £700 pa. The upfront cost for this second model covering logo, website pages and content generation would be £5,250. For detailed figures, see the presentation.

Members thanked Tina and Hilary for their presentation. It was agreed that a first step should be to check with Axminster Town Council what had emerged from their own recent discussion on the subject. Beyond that, a working group should be formed to recommend a way forward.

Action: Barrie

5. Shared Banking Hub

The committee welcomed Marcus Hartnell from Seaton PO, the franchisee chosen to run the new Axminster Shared Banking Hub. He confirmed that the hub would occupy the former Lloyds Bank and he hoped it would open in November. He explained the arrangement through which the Post Office would operate the hub and provide post office services, with community bankers from each of the main banks also present on different days. Services would include being able to pay in and withdraw cash. A state of the art counting machine would mean that transactions would be rapid. Marcus said he was making the case for an external cash machine which had not been in the initial plans. Marcus will keep us informed - and plans to join the Chamber.

6. Finance

(a) Update on finances - Jane provided a brief update with balances of £3212.21 and £1663.52 in the Chamber's two accounts.

(b) Website and IT costs - Barrie had pre circulated an update on ongoing costs. (Also attached with these minutes)

7. Memberships

Total Chamber memberships were now approaching 50, which was considered very good for a small town. The committee agreed Barrie's suggestion that companies that had generously supported the Banners Crowdfunder to the tune of £100 or more should be

offered free 2023 membership. This adds two further members and takes us over the 50 mark.

Proposed: Steve; **Seconded** Karen H

8. Axminster Town Council report

Councillor Mark Dowdeswell reported on latest council activity.

- E-Scooters at station - money has come through from South West Railway but the chosen partner has gone bust. Options are under consideration.
- A community orchard is planned near the graveyard in Chard Road (on unconsecrated ground).
- A recent presentation by a fibre company promised that by 2025 all copper wiring would be gone.
- Axminster Nub News had now gone but Pulmans Weekly News had resurfaced and is providing a useful service.
- Finger posts signs have now been delivered and will be erected when staff availability permits. There had been an artwork issue with the new gateway signs but it is being resolved.
- Consideration was being given to what might be possible in place of the old bandstand in the Courthouse Garden

9. Town centre facelift opportunities

The Co-op had responded to our email re the premises in South Street by saying that greenery growing on the face of the building had been removed and quotes were being sought for repainting the building. A response was awaited from Bots re the repainting of its side access door. A task group is being brought together to tackle the cleaning of unsightly signs.

Action: Jane / Karen

10. Shop local initiatives

(a) Axminster Gate to Plate - There had been complaints from a small number of traders who felt that the event would take business away from local bricks and mortar traders. The general view amongst committee members that the expected attendance of around 5,000 was very good news for the town and that local businesses would benefit both on the day and beyond.

(b) Scarecrow Festival - Ellis advised that the decision has been made to postpone the event until the Spring when he hoped to have more time to organise it.

(c) Xmas Music - Barrie provided an update on the plan to have live daytime music in Trinity Square on 9 and 16 December with around either bands and individual performers giving the town centre a pre-Christmas lift. Planning by a working group ongoing.

(d) **Extended Xmas opening hours** - Jane advised that shops will be urged to extend their opening hours to tie in with events.

(e) **Xmas Trail** - Jane will lead on organising an Xmas Trail as run previously, with shoppers gathering stamps on loyalty cards which go into a draw for cash prizes.

11. Networking events

Steve and Stuart had brought together plans for an initial networking breakfast at the Railway Kitchen between 7am and 9am on Monday 31 August. The event had been previewed in our most recent electronic newsletter and hard copies had also been delivered to promote this and other activities.

Action: Steve / Stuart

12. Training initiatives

Jane had secured an offer of funding from Devon CC towards Chamber-led training sessions and was talking to potential providers of social media and other marketing led activities. She was due to meet providers in mid October to finalise the plans. More details will follow.

Action: Jane

13. Date of next meeting

Monday 16 October, Axminster Tools new store, Weycroft Avenue 6.30pm