

# Axminster Chamber of Commerce

## Management Committee - Monday 16 January 2023

at the George Hotel

**Present:** Jane Rockett (Chair), Barrie Hedges (Secretary), Pippa Galvin, Alison Hayward, Karen Dowdeswell, Gemma Moore, Matt Smith, Andy Richardson, Colin Hayward (Axminster Community Shed).

## Minutes

(Draft until approved at next meeting)

### 1. Apologies

Karen Hussey, Jess Brooks, Adrian Lausch, Sarah Marsh-Collings, Jason Murrell, Mark Dowdeswell, Steve Holt (Axminster Town Council)

### 2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the Management Committee held on 21 November 2022 were approved as a correct record.

**Proposed:** Alison **Seconded:** Karen D

### 3. Matters arising

#### (a) Business rates

EDDC had been further chased re a date for the promised meeting.

#### (b) Lloyds Bank closure

Barrie reported that there was now a firm promise of a shared banking hub in the town centre. Negotiations were taking place with an undisclosed property owner with a view to the hub being operational in around August. We will maintain contact with the provider.

#### (c) Axminster Renewal Forum

Jane reported that the consultants' final report, as circulated after the last meeting, was still awaiting final approval. It was not yet clear when we would see any outcomes.

*Note: We have in the past few days been advised that Axminster has not been included in the newly announced Levelling Up Funding, which is a great disappointment. More info here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-levelling-up-fund-to-spark-transformational-change-across-the-uk>*

#### **(d) Food events**

**Axminster Gate to Plate** (7 October 2023) - eat:Festivals had advised that they were having meetings with the Lord of the Manor re street trading and with the Parochial Church Council re use of the Minster Green. They had also now circulated cards advising of the planned street closures and would be further publicising their plans shortly.

**Axminster Eats** - Barrie had met Eleanor Carr of Boutique Events who is planning to run further street food events in Axminster from 4pm on 26 May, 23 June, 28 July and 25 August. The events would all serve food from the Guildhall car park, with the Guildhall itself running a market. In the longer term, Eleanor would like to consider running her events on the Minster Green.

#### **4. Networking Events**

Andy outlined his ideas for business breakfasts, which he would like to introduce on a trial basis during March at the Railway Kitchen (7am - 8.30am). Those wishing to attend (max 20) would be asked to sign up via EventBrite and charged £15 to include breakfast. At the first session, participants would have one minute each to introduce their business, followed by breakfast and a discussion on how the group should evolve including considerations such as focusing on one key local issue per meeting. Andy said he felt that ultimately the group should have only one participant per business sector.

The committee agreed to the pilot session on condition that participants had each by that point taken up paid membership of the Chamber. Issues such as the long term charge for involvement to be discussed further by the committee with the benefit of the knowledge from the pilot.

**Action:** Andy - set up pilot session and report back

#### **5. Potential tourism initiative**

Matt had come to talk to the committee about what we might all do to give Axminster a higher tourist profile. He mentioned the Visit Devon website in particular as an example of the way in which some Devon towns (notably Sidmouth and Totnes) sign up at a cost to achieve a higher profile for visitors. While he fully accepted that Axminster was not a tourist destination in the same way as some other towns, he felt our profile could be lifted and that a brand was needed to help achieve that. Discussion focused around a website.

It was agreed that the issue should be discussed with Axminster Town Council and that the views of Axminster Heritage Centre should be sought.

**Action:** Barrie - make contact and look at securing domain for 'visitaxminster'

## 6. Treasurer's report

Given the fact that Jess had been unable to attend, it was agreed that the report should await the next meeting when it was also hoped bank access issues would have been overcome.

**Action:** Jess report to next meeting

## 7. Correspondence

Plastic Free Axminster had invited the Chamber to become a Community Ally in working towards the town achieving plastic-free status. To do so we would need to sign a pledge to eliminate plastics wherever possible, encourage our members to do likewise and generally support local initiatives. The committee agreed that it was a cause we would be happy to support - we will respond accordingly.

**Action:** Barrie respond

## 8. Axminster Town Council report

Steve had provided a written report which was read to the committee. It will be circulated with the minutes.

**Action:** Barrie circulate

## 9. Chamber Christmas events and shop local campaigns

Jane and Barrie summarised the various pre-Christmas initiatives. The plan to bring music into the square in early December had not been possible due to weather issues, but on the positive side Pete from Waffle had provided us with a list of local musicians who he felt might well be willing to support a fuller programme for next year. The Christmas grotto at Trinity House, run by Waffle with support from Chamber, sponsors and our contacts at the Axminster Community Shed, had brought some magic to over 200 children. The Christmas loyalty trail brought welcome exposure for shopping locally though not a huge number of final cards submitted. The three-month 'Big Deal for Axminster' campaign came to an end at Christmas and had again brought substantial social media coverage though trader enthusiasm waned towards the end. Recent facebook 'feature' style posts around specific traders had achieved a substantial following.

It was agreed that a Christmas plan should be developed much earlier for 2023 and that involvement in 'Fiver Fests' and other shop local campaigns should be considered in detail at the next meeting.

**Action:** Barrie add to agenda for next meeting

## **10. Membership campaign for 2023**

Barrie outlined the membership sign-up strategy now about to be put in place. Adrian has consolidated the database so that we now have some 200 targets for sign-ups. Jane will use the [chair@axminster.biz](mailto:chair@axminster.biz) address to write individually to those on the list. We will support that with sign up appeals via a newsletter, our website and the facebook businesses page. We will then review the results ahead of the next meeting with a view to committee members each then making personal contact with those yet to join.

**Action:** Jane / Barrie - take memberships sign-up forward

## **11. Banners campaign**

Barrie outlined the preliminary banners development plan for the next two years. We start with 16 banners and aim to increase that to 26 in 2023 and 36 in 2024 while extending the display to other town centre streets. While Pippins have kindly provided us with the use of a room to start the immediate task of repairs to last year's banners, we are hopeful of being offered a more permanent workshop shortly. We also hope to involve each of the local schools in the new designs. It will remain an initiative that is very much community and volunteer driven.

**Action:** Barrie / Pippa - take initiative forward

## **12. Business directory**

Take up of listings on the new business directory ([www.axminsterbusinessdirectory.co.uk](http://www.axminsterbusinessdirectory.co.uk)) had gone well with some 70 now subscribed. The push for further sign-ups now needed to pause pending the membership drive. Those who chose not to join Chamber would still be able to have a text-only listing, while members would have a larger premium listing with photos as a benefit of membership.

## **13. Any other business**

None

## **14. Date of next meeting**

Monday 20 February 2023 (please note the date - venue to be advised)