

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 8 June 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Project Groups for Axminster and Seaton - DCC Urban Renewal Project

### Report summary:

Devon County Council's Team Devon Recovery Group (Devon Place Board) have commenced work on a Coastal and Market towns project. This work is aimed at tackling the long-term and immediate decline in some of Devon's underperforming towns. It identified 8 towns that would form part of a pilot project for future investment and both Axminster and Seaton are included within these.

A report (Agenda Item 18) together with the consultants' Phase 1 report was considered by EDDC's Cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> March where it was recommended that East Devon District Council participates in this project (Axminster and Seaton being the selected pilot towns) and that a future report (to EDDC's Cabinet) will set out a recommendation for the format of the Project Groups (the term that EDDC's Cabinet have advised is used) for Seaton and Axminster and their governance structure, following advice from the consultants, Hardisty Jones Associates (HJA), appointed by DCC to lead on the Devon Place Board Urban Renewal Phase 2 project.

Initial discussions have taken place with the Town Clerks and Mayors of Axminster and Seaton and advice and guidance has been sought from HJA.

### Proposals

Draft proposals for Terms of Reference for the Groups are attached for information at Appendix 2. These will be the starting point for setting up a group for each of the towns and will be amended to reflect each town's particular issues/needs.

In terms of the structure of the groups it is proposed that cabinet determines that these are set up in accordance with the guidance for forums as set out in [paragraph 2.11.7](#) of the constitution. This means that the membership can include local representatives of outside interests (e.g. businesses, community representatives) alongside cabinet members.

There is a requirement to establish these groups at the earliest opportunity in order to take advantage of the funding available for up to 3 "Quick win" projects in each town which must be spent during the summer and autumn of 2022.

In accordance with paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6 below, the membership of the Project Groups could comprise:

- Portfolio Holder, Economy & Assets
- District Councillors (ward members) x 3
- Town mayor (or a nominee to deputise)
- Town clerk (in their capacity as an officer of the Town Council)
- Town councillor x 1
- Business x 3 - 6 (dependent on issues)
- Community Groups x 2 – 4 (dependent on issues)

**Is the proposed decision in accordance with:**

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

**Recommendation:**

That Cabinet recommends:

1. That the Axminster Project Group and Seaton Project Group (or such other name as either group chooses to reflect local level aspirations) be established as Cabinet appointed forums on the basis of the Terms of Reference at Appendix 2 .
2. That delegated authority be given to the Service Lead - Place, Assets & Commercialisation to finalise the membership of the two Project Groups and their Terms of Reference in accordance with the approach identified in paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6 below.

**Reason for recommendation:**

To enable Project Groups to be established and the Coastal and Market towns project to move forward at the local level in a timely manner and to ensure that the opportunity to deliver some quick win projects can take place over the summer/autumn 2022.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk;

**Links to background information**

[2 March 2022 Cabinet report](#) (Item 188)

[Appendix 1 – Report – Urban Renewal in Devon’s Coastal and Market Towns](#)

Appendix 2 – Draft document outlining the role of a town group

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon

## Report in full

### 1. Background to the project

- 1.1 Devon County Council's Team Devon Recovery Group (Devon Place Board) have commenced work on a Coastal and Market towns project. This work is aimed at tackling the long-term and immediate decline in some of Devon's underperforming towns. It had identified 8 towns that would form part of a pilot project for future investment and both Axminster and Seaton are included within these.
- 1.2 Following a study undertaken last year by consultants (Hardisty Jones Associates), phase 2 of the project has commenced in some of Devon's towns.
- 1.3 To enable the project to commence in East Devon, a report (Agenda Item 18) together with the consultants' Phase 1 report was considered by EDDC's Cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> March where it was recommended that East Devon District Council participates in this project (Axminster and Seaton being the selected pilot towns) and that a future report (to EDDC's Cabinet) will set out a recommendation for the format of the Project Groups (the term that EDDC's Cabinet have advised is used) for Seaton and Axminster and their governance structure.
- 1.4 The Devon Place Board/ HJA work was initially focussed on the 5 case study towns (Axminster, Bideford, Dawlish, Ilfracombe and Tiverton); this mix of towns is made up of differing geographies, population size and are at differing stages of action planning (i.e. some of the towns already have established regeneration type boards, agreed action plans and a pipeline of projects). It is important that our towns identify the economic issues that are relevant to them and projects that are deliverable and achievable i.e. appropriate in scale and timing.
- 1.5 The Devon Place Board project is time limited and specific tasks must be identified to be completed in 2022. Hardisty Jones Associate in their report note that 'Regeneration and change are not quick processes and can take years to deliver, so a realistic approach is important'.

### 2. Proposal to establish Project Groups

- 2.1 There is a requirement to establish the Project Groups at the earliest opportunity in order to take advantage of the funding available for up to 3 "Quick win" projects in each town which must be spent during the summer and autumn of 2022.
- 2.2 The council has received draft/model terms of reference from HJA. These align with the focus of the Devon Partnership work and timescale (i.e. short – medium term Covid economic recovery). They have been amended to reflect the initial feedback from the towns that includes a change in some of the terminology and reflects the immediacy of the delivery of the Coastal and Market Towns project (Urban Renewal in Devon's Towns). These will be the starting point for setting up a group for each of the towns and will be amended to reflect each town's particular issues/needs. The towns may wish to rename the "Project Groups". Axminster for example has suggested that it is called the Axminster Renewal Group.
- 2.3 In terms of the structure of the groups it is proposed that cabinet determines that these are set up in accordance with the guidance for forums as set out in [paragraph 2.11.7](#) of the constitution. This means that the membership can include local representatives of outside interests (e.g. businesses, community representatives) alongside cabinet members.

2.4 The consultants have also provided information about representation on the groups. **This is a decision for each locality**, but in terms of operation and focus, the consultants have suggested that, from their experience, a group size of approximately 10-15 people, reflecting the key issues to be addressed would be optimal. The consultants have provided examples of the representation on a group such as local authority representation (all tiers), business and community representation together with representation in relation to particular issues for a locality i.e. highways, health, young people/ education etc. The group may be an existing body or newly formed for this purpose. For the purposes of clarification, the role of the Group in approving a renewal strategy, projects or quick-win projects to pursue, does not commit the council to deliver these.

2.5 The stakeholder group that has met twice to discuss the Axe Valley project could form the basis for the membership of the Project Groups. In order to expedite the process, those attending the Axe Valley update meeting held in May, have been asked to consider whether they would wish to be involved in the Project Groups. In addition, the town councils have been invited to provide nominations for the Project Groups. If individuals do not come forward from those businesses/community groups or via the town councils, then the council could promote the need for membership using social or print media to secure interest and local representation on the groups. This could involve implementing an application process.

2.6 With this in mind, the membership of the Project Groups could comprise:

Portfolio Holder, Economy & Assets

District Councillors (ward members) x 3

Town mayor (or a nominee to deputise)

Town clerk (in their capacity as an officer of the Town Council)

Town councillor x 1

Business x 3 - 6 (dependent on issues)

Community Groups x 2 – 4 (dependent on issues)

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### **Financial implications:**

There are no direct financial implications at this stage.

### **Legal implications:**

It is permissible for Cabinet to establish these two forums on the basis set out. There are no other legal implications requiring comment.