

URBAN RENEWAL IN DEVON TOWNS

# Axminster Urban Renewal Strategy

January 2023





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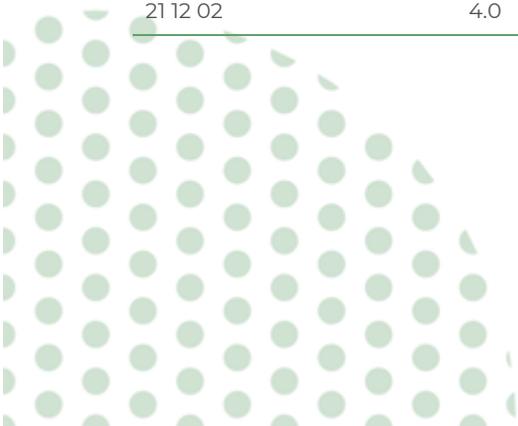
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## Document control

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## 1 Introduction

1.1 Devon County Council, working with East Devon District Council, Axminster Town Council, and Hardisty Jones Associates (HJA) are delivering an urban renewal programme for Devon's towns, including Axminster.

1.2 Previous work on market and coastal towns in Devon comprised an initial review of the challenges and opportunities towns face, identified the highest priority towns for support, which includes Axminster, and set out proposals for their regeneration and structural change in response to both long-standing issues and the more recent challenges caused by issues such as Covid and Brexit.

### Background

1.3 Devon County Council established the Urban Renewal programme to support transformational growth in eight coastal and market towns in Devon, including Axminster.

1.4 The approach to the urban renewal programme includes:

- Establishing a strategic regeneration board (Axminster Renewal Forum)
- Preparing an Urban Renewal Strategy, i.e. this document
- Preparing a Business Case for a priority project
- Implementing quick win projects

### Axminster Renewal Forum

1.5 The Renewal Forum has an advisory, not statutory role. It will shape and guide the future regeneration of the town, setting out the objectives and direction for the future of the town, with a view to increasing inward investment. It will advise the District and County Council and other investors and funders about the town's challenges and opportunities, to inform their local activity and investment.

1.6 The Renewal Forum represents the town, including its residents, Town Council, businesses, and local institutions. It also includes the stakeholders who will help deliver support for future economic growth (e.g. the District and County Councils).

## Funding opportunities

1.7 The primary role of the Renewal Forum is to identify the needs and potential projects for strategic regeneration in Axminster. However, the Renewal Forum should maintain an overview of funding opportunities and should continue to liaise with East Devon District Council and Devon County Council on potential sources of funding for projects.

## Urban Renewal Strategy

1.8 This strategy document, prepared by the Axminster Renewal Forum, sets out the objectives for the regeneration of Axminster. This sits alongside other strategies and plans for growth that affect Axminster.

1.9 This strategy is a 'live' document, meaning that challenges, opportunities, and projects can be updated in future as new issues arise and progress is made.

1.10 Projects have been identified by the Renewal Forum that align with these strategic objectives. Quick win projects have been identified, and a Business Case will be prepared for a more significant project.

1.11 Analysis of the socio-economic and policy evidence base which identifies the strengths, opportunities, challenges, and barriers for transformational change in Axminster is included in Appendix 1.

## 2 Vision and Objectives

### Vision

2.1 A vision statement for the future of Axminster is being refined through the Neighbourhood Plan development process, and whilst the emerging Local Plan sets out strategic policies for development in Axminster, it does not set out a vision for the town. This Regeneration Strategy should align with both the Local Plan development policies and the Neighbourhood Plan. Once adopted, the Neighbourhood Plan vision will form the vision for this strategy.

### Objectives

2.2 Drawing on the socio-economic baseline, policy context, and challenges and opportunities identified by the Renewal Forum, the objectives for Axminster are to:

- Create a high quality of employment<sup>1</sup> with a thriving and diverse local economy, including employment and career opportunities for young people
- Improve the quality of public realm and sustain town centre vitality
- Improve accessibility, transport, and parking, with a variety of eco travel options
- Improve the quality of housing and accommodation

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<sup>1</sup> High quality of employment refers to jobs which are higher-skilled, better-paid, and ideally offer career progression opportunities

## 3 Challenges and Barriers to Growth

3.1 The following barriers and challenges have been identified through the baseline data review, policy review, and consultations with local stakeholders including the Town Council and District Council.

### Congestion

3.2 The most immediate and obvious challenge facing Axminster, identified by local stakeholders and District Council officers, is the high volume of traffic, including HGVs, along the A358 through the town, and regular congestion. This adversely affects the perception, quality, and environment of the town centre. A potential long-term solution is a relief road which would take some through-traffic away from the town centre, but there are no plans in place to deliver this. A short-term solution to reduce congestion is a one-way system through the town, but this will not solve the adverse impacts of high volumes of traffic.

3.3 Whilst there are growth aspirations for the town, constraints to development include floodplains to the west and south and landscape designations to the south of the town. Previous plans for a major development opportunity, the 'North Eastern Urban Extension' were hamstrung by the difficulty of delivering a relief road. In light of this, the emerging Local Plan suggests that alternative options to the extension should be considered<sup>2</sup>.

### Town centre and footfall

3.4 Whilst a food retail centre for a larger hinterland, the town is weaker in terms of non-food retail. There are some vacant units in the town centre. Following the closure of the Trinity House department store, this landmark building has been redeveloped for retail and community uses, which is very positive. The internet and social media activity of Axminster businesses is relatively poor, with scope for significant improvement, which would benefit individual businesses and the town as a whole. The town has a lively weekly market which attracts high footfall, but levels are relatively low on other days of the week<sup>3</sup>. Efforts are needed to draw people into the town – both residents of the hinterland and visitors from farther afield.

### Educational services and facilities

3.5 Axminster does not have any sixth-form or further education provision, which means that young people must travel outside the town for education and training. The closest and most popular providers of extensive A-Level choices and further education options are at Lyme Regis, Honiton, and Exeter which all require the use of public transport if students do not have access to a car. The potential for delivering more accessible vocational training and education should be explored. In general, the town lacks social and community facilities for young people.

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<sup>2</sup> See references to Draft Local Plan in Appendix 1: Context.

<sup>3</sup> Visitor Insights (2022). Most popular day to visit each month 2020 – 2022.

## Employment and social mobility

3.6 Employment in the town has declined in recent years and Axminster has a below average ratio of workers to residents when compared to other towns in Devon<sup>4</sup>.

3.7 Despite the above-average rates of population growth in recent years, consultations with local stakeholders revealed the perception that the town is falling behind nearby competitors such as Chard and Honiton in terms of growth and vitality. The population is relatively old and getting older.

3.8 There are few business incubator opportunities and support for small businesses is difficult to access. Although this barrier is not unique to Axminster, it has been suggested that in recent years small businesses in the town have had limited opportunities to access grants and business loans, which is stifling the growth of local businesses.

3.9 Poor housing affordability and limited high quality employment opportunities means that many younger people leave the town. There is a need to increase aspirations and the level of ambition amongst young people in Axminster. A potential solution is to encourage local business leaders to engage with schools to act as role models and raise awareness of career opportunities for young people who remain in the area. Alongside this, there is a need for a wider provision of vocational skills training in Axminster, focusing on those skills most required by local businesses.

## Vision

3.10 A vision statement for the future of Axminster is being refined through the Neighbourhood Plan development process, and the emerging Local Plan sets out strategic development policies for the town. Until the Neighbourhood Plan is adopted, there is no strong community-led vision for the future of the town in place.

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<sup>4</sup> See A1.5 in Appendix 1: Context

## 4 Strengths and Opportunities

4.1 The following strengths and opportunities have been identified through the baseline data review, policy review, and consultations with local stakeholders including the Town Council and District Council.

### Population

4.2 Having seen strong growth in the working age population between 2011 and 2019, Axminster has potential to see further growth in this cohort if new homes are built in the town. Increasing the population will increase the customer base for local businesses and services, making the town more vibrant and potentially more self-contained. There is potential to make Axminster a more sustainable place to live, work and play.

### Reputation

4.3 Axminster has some external recognition – largely for Axminster Carpets and Axminster Tools. Greater awareness of the town can be built around brands such as these.

### Town Centre and hub of activity

4.4 The town has few multiple retailers, and many independent retailers, and there have been few closures during the Covid-19 pandemic. The recent redevelopment of the Trinity House building has shown that there is scope for new town centre commercial and community activity. Following the closure of the town's last remaining bank, Lloyds Bank, in 2022, Axminster has been earmarked as a potential location for a new banking hub, which will occupy a town centre unit. Improving the quality of the public realm will help to make the town more attractive to visit.

4.5 A weekly market draws people into the town, and recent footfall data shows that post Covid-19 visitor numbers in Axminster were higher than pre pandemic figures<sup>5</sup>. This increase was supported by the Reopening High Streets Safely and Welcome Back Fund programmes, suggesting that there is potential to draw more visitors into the town through community engagement and support for local retailers. Improved internet and social media activity will also help with this.

### Employment

4.6 Delivering new employment units in established employment areas, and co-working space in the town centre will enable more people to work in Axminster, and potentially start new businesses. Even if people work flexibly – part-time in Axminster and part-time elsewhere – this will increase the vitality and sustainability of the town.

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<sup>5</sup> East Devon District Council (2022). Monthly Footfall January 2017 – March 2022.

## 5 Potential Projects for Urban Renewal

5.1 This chapter sets out the criteria for project selection as part of the Urban Renewal programme in Axminster and assesses potential projects against these criteria.

### Criteria for Selecting Projects

- A clear and comprehensive description of the project should be written.
- The project should help achieve the agreed objectives for Axminster.
- A lead stakeholder should be identified to develop and deliver the project. They should have the resources, skills, experience, and ability needed to do this.
- The potential benefits of the project should be clearly identified, but do not need to be quantified at this stage.
- Potential sources of capital or revenue funding should be identified (both private and public funds).
- The approximate financial scale of the project should be identified, but detailed costs are not needed at the selection stage.
- The approximate timescale for delivering the project should be identified, but a detailed timetable is not needed at the selection stage.
- How the project contributes to Net Zero ambitions (where applicable) should be considered

### Types of projects

5.2 Projects are defined as either strategic economic projects or locally significant.

5.3 **Strategic economic projects** are those which directly contribute to meeting the objectives of the Urban Renewal programme. These should lead directly to economic outcomes including new and safeguarded jobs, better quality jobs, and higher paid jobs. Strategic economic projects mostly tackle common issues faced by many towns across Devon, and so there may be a common response delivered across more than one town. The District and County Council are well-placed to lead these projects. In a few circumstances the County Council may support projects that are specific to a town, but which directly deliver strategic economic change in that town.

5.4 **Locally significant projects** are unique and important to the town and its vitality, but are not strategically important across a wider area. Local stakeholders are better placed to lead on these projects.

## 6 Economy and Employment

Create a high quality of employment with a thriving and diverse local economy, including for young people.

### Strategic economic projects

	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale <sup>6</sup>
6.1	Delivery of vocational skills training aligned with skills needs of local businesses in the Axe Valley. Employability support to be offered to students alongside this. Initial suggestions include the delivery of manufacturing and catering skills training. Ensure that the training is accessible to all. DCC is currently promoting a digital skills training programme, so is well placed to deliver further training.	DCC to deliver skills training in the Axe Valley. DCC will coordinate with Axminster and Seaton Chambers of Commerce and large employers to identify skills needs.	Higher skills enable people to access local jobs, reducing the need to travel	Higher skills lead to better employability, and support the growth of local businesses	DCC Skills funding available	Short term
6.2	After the landlord database is established (see 7.3 and 7.4), there is potential to identify an empty unit to lease and offer to new businesses/pop up shops.	DCC to liaise with Axminster Property (Kelly Apps) and Chamber of Commerce (Jane Rockett) to identify empty units.	Reduced need to travel	Support for micro/ small local businesses lead to job creation and growth of	-	Short term

<sup>6</sup> Short term projects generally have funding secured and can be delivered within one year; for medium term projects there is potential funding identified and they may take between 1 year and 3 years to deliver, long term projects have no funding source identified and could take three years plus to deliver.



	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale <sup>6</sup>
				local businesses		
6.3	Business support services, including support to improve online presence.	Chamber of Commerce to work with DCC and EDDC to identify need and deliver support	-	Business support will help business survival and growth, leading to more economic activity and employment in Axminster	UKSPF	Short term
6.4	Ensuring sufficient allocation of employment sites in strategic locations, specifically for industrial premises and workspaces. Implementing an effective mechanism to ensure employment is delivered on allocated sites. Set up meeting between Renewal Forum and EDDC Planning Policy team	EDDC Local Plan review process currently underway. Ensure that allocations are deliverable.	More employment in Axminster will reduce the need to travel	Employment space will allow existing businesses to grow, and attract businesses to the town, creating job opportunities for local people	-	Medium term – April 2024



## Locally significant projects

	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
6.5	<p>Potential for a Business Improvement District (BID). Consider a BID covering the industrial areas of the town as well as town centre.</p> <p>Need to understand whether there is interest in this from local businesses.</p>	<p>DCC may be able to provide further information on BIDs. EDDC to consider</p>	-	<p>Better quality environment could bring vitality and footfall to the town, leading to more employment in the town.</p>	-	<p>Medium term</p>

## 7 Public Realm and Town Centre

Improve the quality of public realm and sustain town centre vitality

### Strategic economic projects

Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources funding	Approximate of timescale
7.1 Events and markets to draw visitors into the town. Need to identify suitable location for outdoor market, including the provision of shelters for market stalls. Potential to involve local businesses with this. Combine local events with Seaton i.e. stalls rotate between towns on weekly basis.	Business led. Engage local market operators.	More activity and employment in the town reduce the need to travel	Events and outside activity could bring vitality and footfall to the town, leading to more employment in the town	-	Short term
7.2 Potential for mixed-use development at Webster's Garage site. The phosphate issue is slowing these plans as residential development is included in the scheme.	EDDC Site is privately owned	More activity and employment in the town reduce the need to travel	Some commercial development will create employment opportunities in Axminster	Business Case to support bids for future funding being developed by HJA	Ongoing. Medium term

## Locally significant projects

Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources funding	Approximate of timescale
7.3 Create a landlord database to identify landlords that will engage to maintain buildings and offer affordable rents. This will help provide transparency to those looking for units. Potential next stage is to encourage landlords to join Chamber of Commerce to encourage community engagement.	Chamber of Commerce currently undertaking this. Potential for support from ATC.	-	Better engagement with landlords leads to public realm improvements.	-	Short term
7.4 Research into reasons for empty retail units <sup>7</sup> . Potentially a landlord forum to help understand reasons. Potential for property agents to be involved in this e.g. Axminster Property	Chamber of Commerce.	More activity and employment in the town reduce the need to travel	-	-	Short term
7.5 Potential to appoint a marketing/branding consultant to review the brand and prepare a strategy for promoting this locally and more widely.	ATC Chamber of Commerce	More activity and employment in the town reduce the need to travel	Better branding should encourage more visitors to the town, and more spend	-	Short term

<sup>7</sup> See A1.8 in Appendix 1: Context. Axminster has a higher vacancy rate than the national average according to the Local Data Company (data used by DCC)



	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources funding	Approximate of timescale
	<p>Create links from the Axminster Town Council Website to local community groups and use website to promote the brand for Axminster.</p> <p>Initial suggestions for the brand surround heritage and gastronomy. i.e. build upon the many good eating options e.g. Axminster Eats.</p> <p>There is potential to employ a Town Centre Manager to develop the brand for Axminster further.</p>					
7.6	Better signage for the entrance to Axminster.	ATC	-	Better signage and branding should encourage more visitors to the town, and more spend	DCC looking into potential funding for this.	Short term

## 8 Transport and Accessibility

Improved accessibility, transport, and parking, with a variety of eco travel options including for EV's and bikes

### Strategic economic projects

Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
8.1 Move bus stops and town centre memorial [Jubilee Fountain N.b. This is listed] to improve traffic flow	Review strategic transport analysis previously undertaken. Traffic count surveys currently underway. Possible next step: Strategic review of transport and accessibility in Axminster. Work with DCC transport team. KD to discuss with DCC (Jamie Hlland)	Less petrol/diesel vehicles in town reduces congestion and pollution	Safer and more attractive environment lead to more use by local people and visitors, more spend, and greater investment	-	Short to medium term
8.2 Introduce a one-way system in the town centre and divert HGV's to the current bypass					
8.3 Potential for pedestrianisation of some parts of the town centre					
8.4 Ensure and raise awareness of integrated transport options					
8.5 Impose a time window in which HGV's cannot drive through centre of town. This needs consultation to understand impacts on local businesses and haulier firms.					
8.6 Completing the Stop Line Way for improved links between Seaton and Axminster. DCC committed funding to deliver Seaton to Colyford element of Stop Line Way next year. Kilmington to Axminster section is missing. Potential for some of this to be delivered temporarily along quiet lanes.	DCC funding committed to deliver part of Stop Line Way South Western Railway is supportive of the Seaton-Axminster and	Active travel reduces congestion and pollution	As well as improving local accessibility this will draw more visitors to the town,	Business Case to be developed for this as part of the Urban Renewal	Medium term



Project Description		Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
	Ultimate ambition to deliver entire length of the Stop Line Way along offroad cycle paths. This requires cross county cooperation between Devon and Somerset County Councils. There is also interest in developing a cycle route from Axminster to Chard.	Axminster-Chard routes		leading to more spend in the town, supporting more employment	Programme for Seaton.	
8.7	Long-term (ultimate) ambition: delivery of relief road	Not actively being pursued at present. ATC, EDDC, DCC need to work together to actively support this as a long-term aspiration	Reduction in pollution and congestion in the town centre	Will help to remove traffic, congestion, and pollution	None at present	Long term

### Locally significant projects

Project Description		Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
8.8	Encourage and enable active travel i.e. walking and cycling within Axminster and from other places to Axminster. Development of the Stop Line Way through Axminster (discussed above) will help to encourage active travel and bring increased footfall to the town.	Potentially covered by Neighbourhood Plan.	Active travel reduces congestion and pollution			



	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate of timescale
8.9	<p>Eco Transport solutions i.e. e-bikes and scooters. ATC and EDDC to coordinate with Co Cars and Co bikes to deliver travel options in Axminster.</p> <p>DCC to provide Quick Win funding for technical support to develop this project. Axminster Town Council to prepare Terms of Reference for this.</p>	<p>ATC, potentially with support from DCC. EDDC</p>	<p>Should help to reduce congestion and pollution</p>		<p>South Western Railway Customer &amp; Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF)</p> <p>Quick Win funding from DCC, once CCIF secured.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Short term.</p>

## 9 Quality of Housing and Accommodation

Improve the quality of housing and accommodation.

### Strategic economic projects

	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
9.1	DCC: Support available through One Public Estate and Homes England to deliver affordable housing. Potential support for sites acquired by public organisations. Can any potential sites be identified? Joined-up approach between Axminster and Seaton? This is discussed in the work undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan	DCC	-	Affordable housing will enable people, especially young people to live in the town	OPE and Homes England funds available to deliver affordable housing	-

### Locally significant projects

N/a

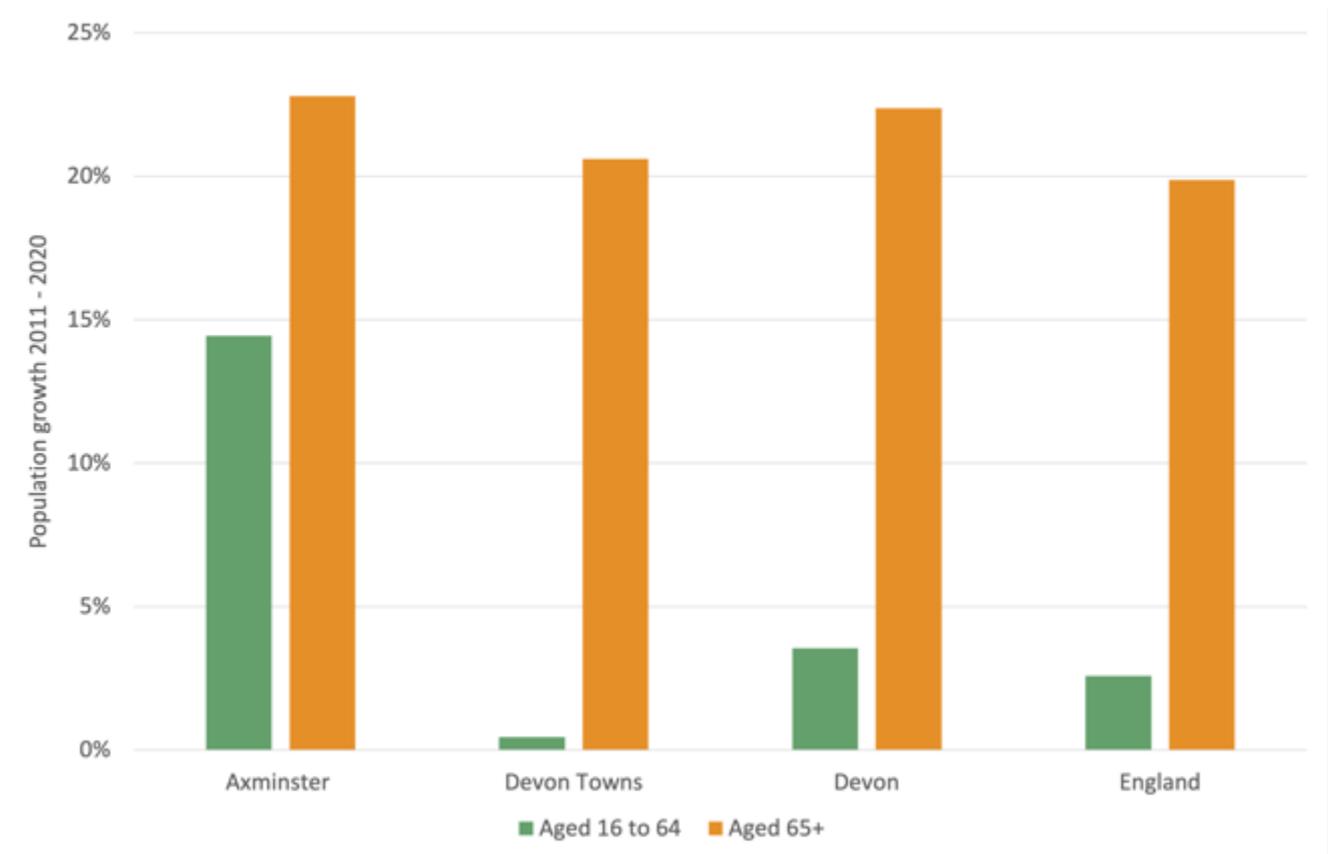
## Appendix 1. Context

A1.1 This appendix sets out the most up-to-date socio-economic data available for Axminster. It will help to build an understanding of the potential drivers of future economic growth in the area as well as identify challenges to the local economy.

### Labour Market

A1.2 The Built Up Urban Area (BUA) of Axminster had an estimated population of 8,400 people in 2020<sup>8</sup> but, it is the service centre for a large rural hinterland. It saw population growth of 18% between 2011 and 2020, which was the second highest rate of growth of the 25 towns in Devon<sup>9</sup>, likely due to new housing development. Whilst the population aged over 65 grew at a greater rate than the working-age population over this period, the growth in working-age population was the highest of that seen across the Devon towns. Despite this, Axminster has an older population and a greater proportion of residents aged over 65 than average for the Devon towns.

**Figure A:1 Population growth in Axminster and comparators, 2011 - 2020**



Source: ONS Population Estimates, 2021

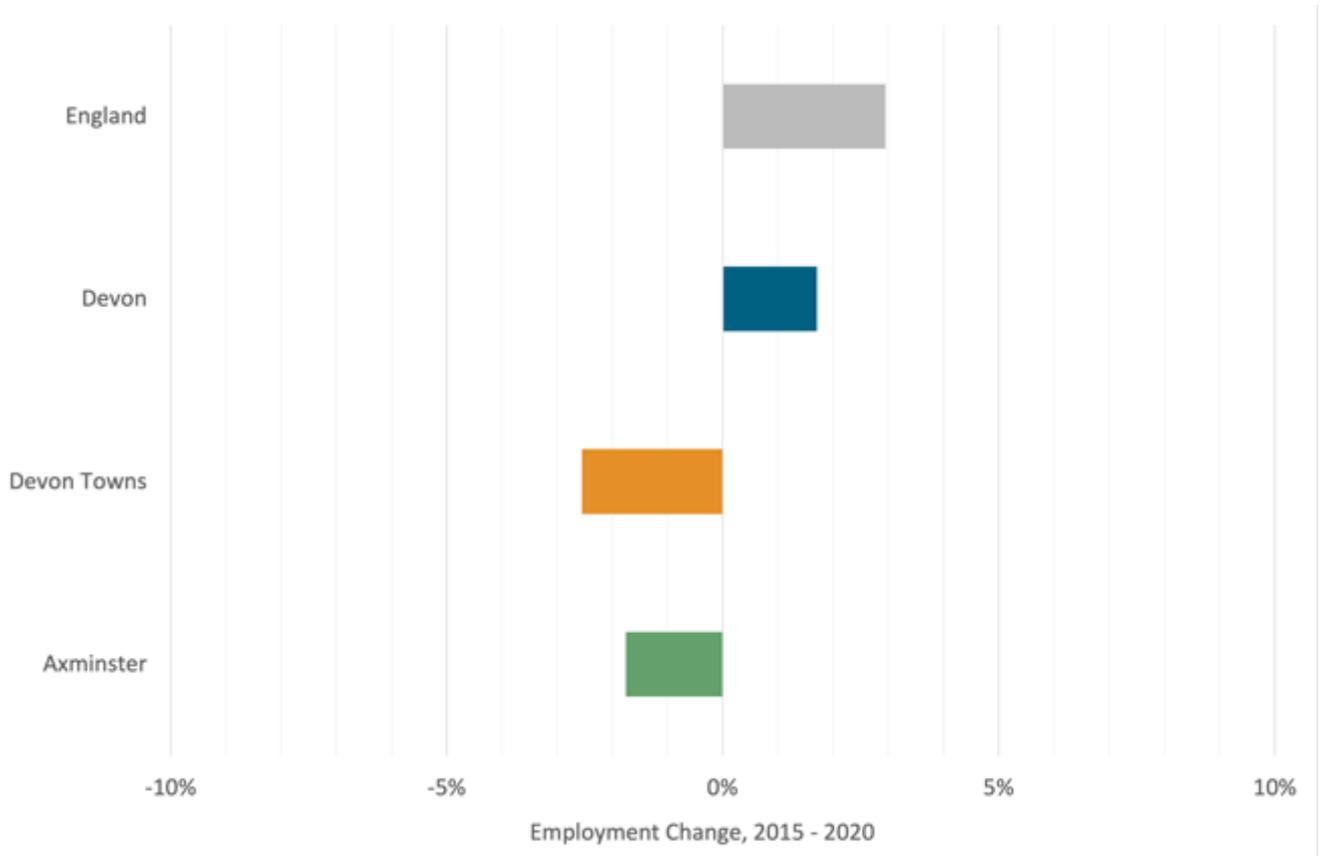
<sup>8</sup> Source: Population of Built Up Area - ONS Population Estimates

<sup>9</sup> These are all towns in Devon with an estimated population greater than 5,000 in 2020. Cranbrook has been excluded as a comparator area as a new town will see significant growth above what will be seen in established towns.

## Economic Activity

A1.3 There were 2,800 people in employment in Axminster in 2020 . This is the lowest level of employment seen in the town over the period 2015 – 2020. Employment in Axminster has fallen by 2% over this period and whilst this rate is comparable to the Devon towns average decline of 3%, it compares poorly to the 3% employment growth seen in the South West and England.

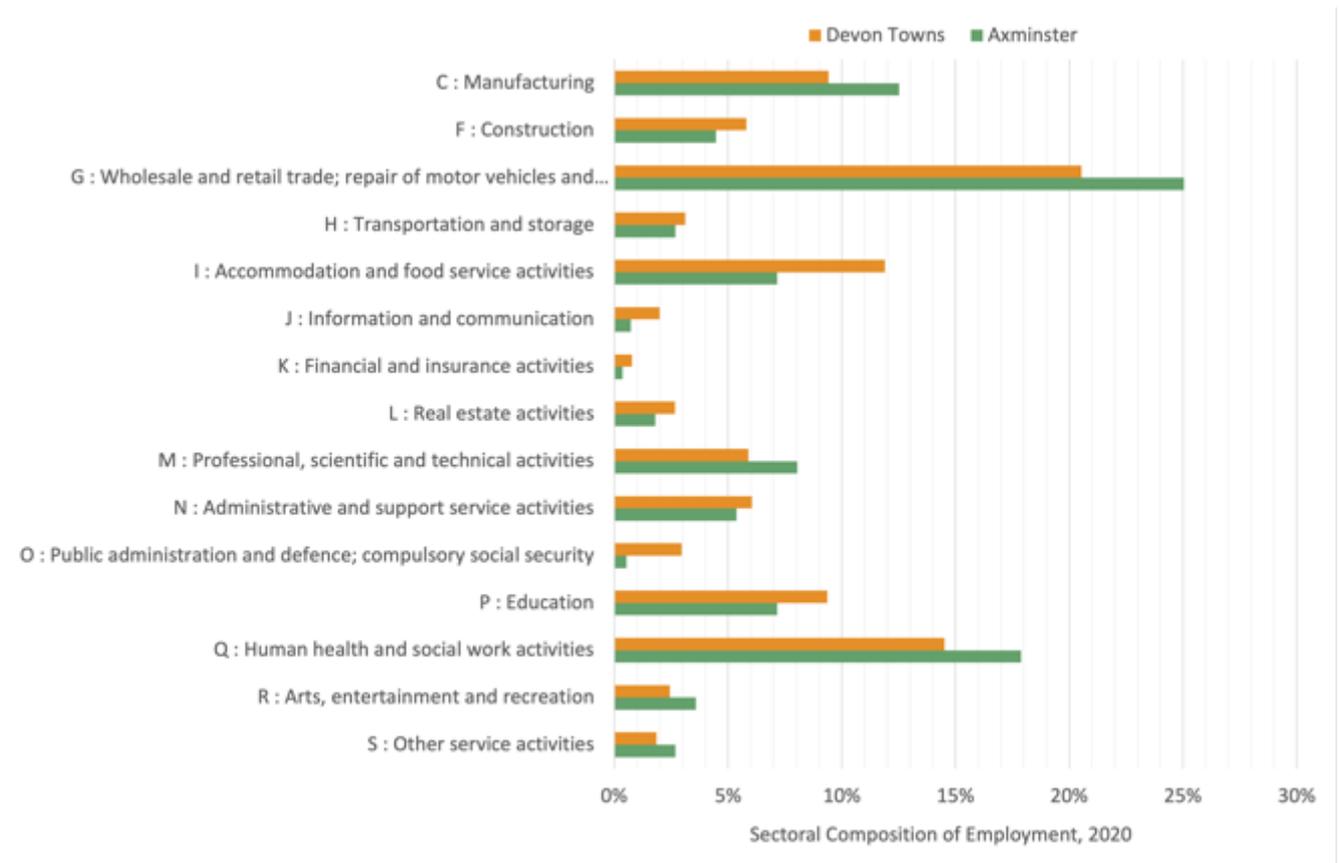
**Figure A:2 Employment change, 2015 - 2020**



Source: ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2021

A1.4 In 2019, Axminster had a higher proportion of workers in Manufacturing related sectors than the Devon towns average, reflecting its strong industrial and manufacturing heritage.. The largest declines in employment in 2020 have been seen in the Manufacturing, Construction, Wholesale & Retail Trade, and Human Health sectors..

Figure A:3 Sectoral Composition of Employment, 2020



Source: ONS Business register and Employment Survey, 2021

A1.5 The employment ratio (of workers to residents) was lower than the average for Devon towns in 2019, and remains so in 2020 given the decline in employment<sup>10</sup>. Axminster sees net in-commuting, with 3,100 commuting into the town and 2,800 commuting out each day<sup>11</sup>. It is unclear how the Covid-19 pandemic and declining employment in the town has impacted this.

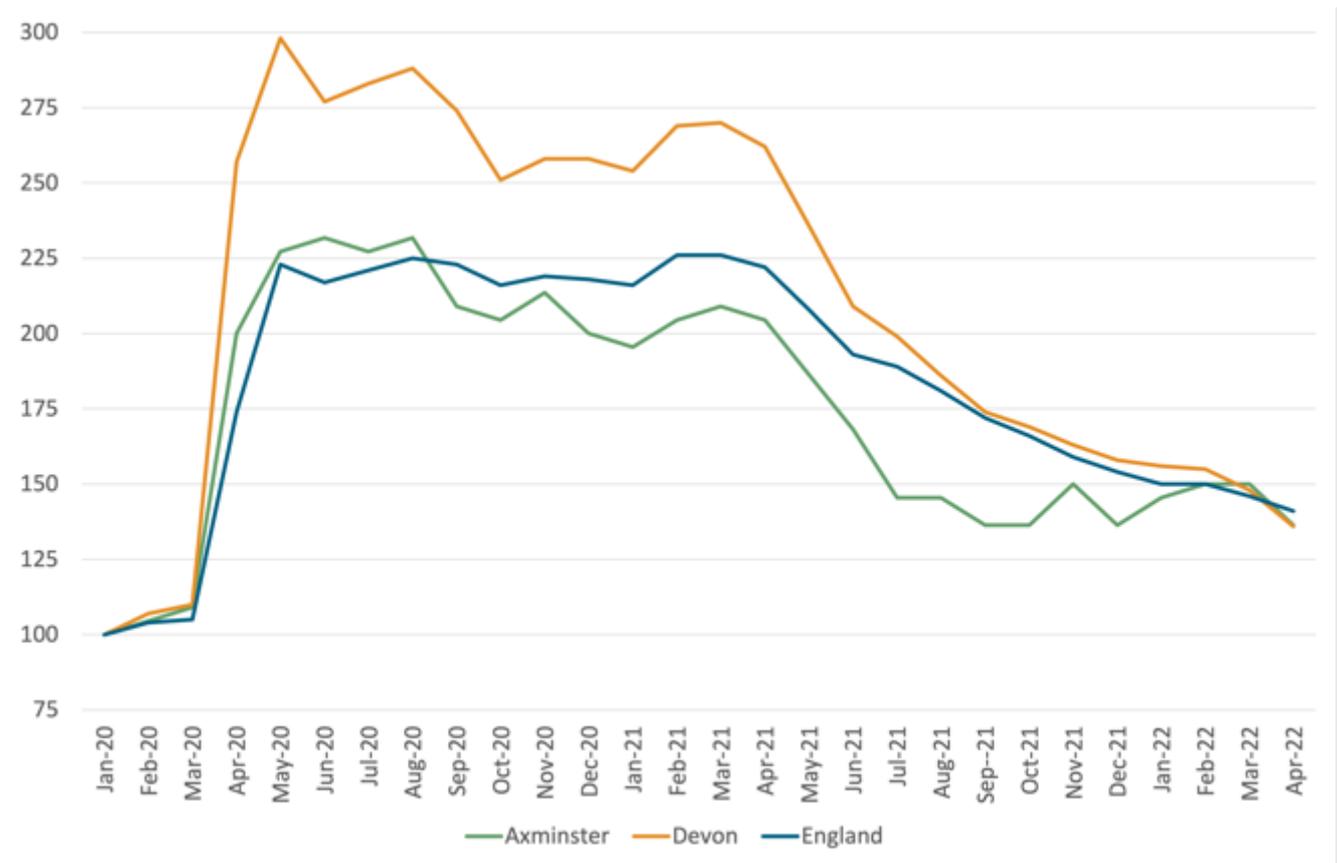
A1.6 The average claimant count in 2019 as a proportion of the working age population was slightly above the Devon towns average but well below South West and national figures. In absolute terms there were approximately 100 claimants on average.

A1.7 Figure A.4 shows that the claimant count in Axminster grew (in-line with England) from March 2020 onwards as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although there had been some recovery from the peak of the pandemic by April 2022, the claimant count in Axminster remained 36% higher than at the start of the period. This is in line with England and Devon claimant count rates.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Business Register and Employment Survey (2020) and Population of Built Up Area - ONS Population Estimates (2020). We calculate the employment ratio by dividing the number of people in employment in Axminster by the total number of residents. This calculation provides indication of whether the area is an employment centre or residential centre.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Census 2011

Figure A:4 Indexed Claimant Count, Jan 2020 - April 2022 (100 = base year)



Source ONS Claimant Count by sex and age, 2022

A1.8 The retail vacancy rate in the town was just over 18% in October 2021. This compares poorly to the GB average of 14.5% in the same month<sup>12</sup>.

A1.9 The town has one secondary school, Axe Valley Academy. The most recent Ofsted inspection was conducted in 2019 and rated the school as “3 - requires improvement”. Post-16 education is provided at either Holyrood Academy in Chard which is 7.5 miles from Axminster (approximately 16 minutes by road), Honiton Community College, some 10 miles from Axminster which also has a direct train link taking approximately 20 minutes, and the Woodroffe School in Lyme Regis (approximately 8 miles from Axminster).

### Deprivation and vulnerability to future decline

A1.10 Axminster is the tenth most deprived of 25 towns in Devon according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019.

A1.11 Three measures of the vulnerability of towns to future decline have been constructed for this study:

- Axminster is ranked eleventh of 25 Devon towns for vulnerability to the impacts of Covid-19 (based on employment in sectors vulnerable to Covid-19 impacts, and changes to the claimant count in 2020 and 2021)

<sup>12</sup> Source: Local Data Company (2022)- provided by Devon County Council

- It is ranked seventh of 25 for structural vulnerability (based on the population age structure, Index of Multiple Deprivation, income data in the IMD, and the claimant count as a proportion of the working age population)
- It ranks ninth of 25 for combined vulnerability (i.e. vulnerability to Covid-19 and structural vulnerability)

A1.12 The highest ranked ward in Axminster in the separate Devon County Council vulnerability index (May 2021) is ranked at forty-sixth in Devon (out of a total of 457). This is the Axminster (Central and West) ward.

### **East Devon Local Plan 2013-2031**

A1.13 The East Devon Local Plan aspiration is to grow both the residential and employment roles of Axminster, improving its self-containment and vitality.

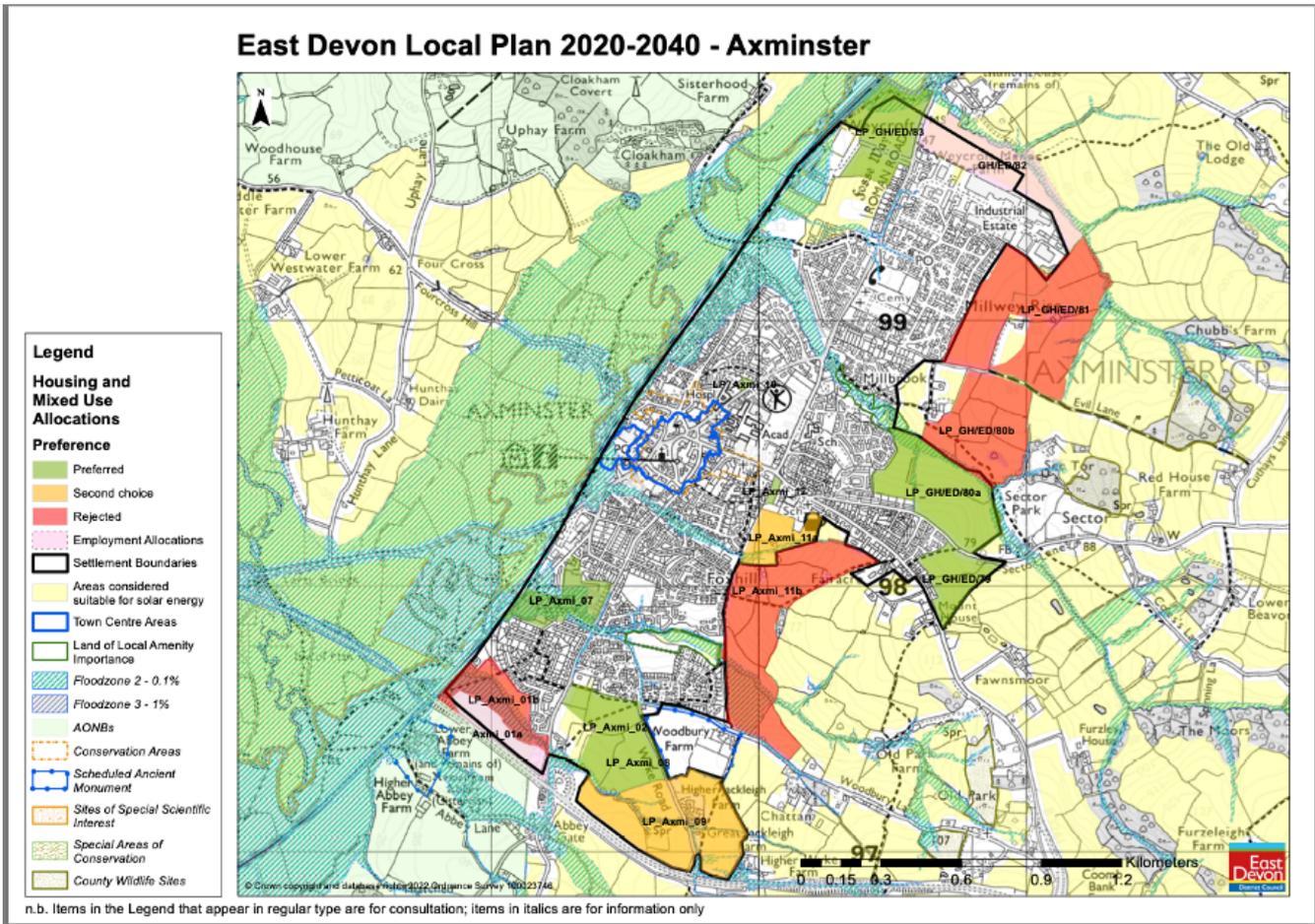
A1.14 Potential for town centre improvements including the regeneration of former Webster's Garage site and public realm improvements are set out in the plan.

### **Draft Local Plan 2020-2040**

A1.15 The Draft Local Plan for East Devon categorises Axminster as a Tier 2 settlement meaning that it is suitable in principle for significant growth. The Draft Plan proposes that land is allocated in Axminster for development to accommodate 1,050 new homes and 7.2 hectares of employment land through a series of small scale urban extensions and outlines seven sites which are seen as offering good realistic potential to facilitate this.

A1.16 The Draft Plan confirms that the Eastern urban extension is currently undeliverable due to an absence of funding for the relief road.

Figure A:5 Draft East Devon Local Plan Map for Axminster



Source: <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/3724813/axminster.pdf>

### Axminster Neighbourhood Plan 2023 to 2040

A1.17 Two iterations of a Neighbourhood Plan have been drafted since 2013 with the latest being developed for referendum in April 2024 in line with EDDC’s Local Plan delivery.

A1.18 The Plan outlines support for:

- A network of publicly accessible electric vehicle charging points
- Improved connectivity between the town and the wider network of footpath and cycle routes
- A dialogue with Devon County Council Highways Department regarding potential changes to the town centre traffic regime which might be feasible and affordable
- Development proposals which are expected to increase local tourism and leisure revenues
- Encourage housing schemes which deliver a diverse range of dwellings (including affordable housing) which are accessible by foot to the town centre.

## Transport Plans

A1.19 Devon County Council has published a Bus Services Improvement Plan<sup>13</sup> in line with the National Bus Strategy. This proposes improving connecting bus services from the railway station in Axminster. This comprises:

- Earlier and later bus connections from Seaton via Colyford and Colyton and the introduction of a service on Sunday
- There is the potential to introduce earlier and later connections to Lyme Regis subject to discussions with Dorset Council

A1.20 Axminster is a strategic partner within the South West Rail network and is integral in the Community Rail Partnership and the East Devon Line forum. Devon CC, Somerset CC and South West Railways consider Axminster as a potential “Hub” on the Seaton to Ilminster portion of the Stop Line Way

A1.21 Axminster lies on the Stop Line Way which a long-distance cycling/walking route between Seaton and Weston-Super-Mare, although there remains sections of the route between Seaton and Axminster which require completion.

## East Devon Cultural Strategy 2022 – 2031

A1.22 This East Devon District Council Strategy<sup>14</sup> sets out the vision, mission and actions to support the cultural offer across East Devon.

A1.23 It outlines a theme of Cultural Tourism, with an objective to establish new cultural products, partnerships, and promotional activity to mutually benefit and grow the creative and visitor economies. A medium term action is to support and promote festivals and events which bring significant visitor spend and profile to East Devon, building on current strengths. Within this, a potential work programme could be to work with independent promoters and local Destination Marketing Organisations, as well as the in-house events team, to maximise impact from notable events and festivals, with particular focus on those that take place in June/early July and September/October (i.e. beyond the peak tourism season).

A1.24 The strategy also highlights the need for more community spaces in East Devon, setting out an action to invest in co-working, workshop and mixed-use spaces to strengthen community infrastructure, especially in new developments, and take advantage of the shift away from commuting and towards local working.

## East Devon District Council Tourism Strategy

A1.25 The East Devon District Council Tourism Strategy<sup>15</sup> outlines a 5 year vision for East Devon to:

<sup>13</sup> Devon County Council (2021) National Bus Strategy: Bus Improvement Plan

<sup>14</sup> East Devon District Council (2022). East Devon District Council Cultural Strategy. <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/3724566/culture-strategy-2022-2031.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> East Devon District Council (2022). East Devon District Council Tourism Strategy. <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/papers/cabinet/070922bpcabinet%20tourism%20strategy%20for%20east%20devon%20appendix%20a.pdf>

*“...become the leading, year-round tourism destination in Devon, whose diverse ecosystem of outstanding natural environments, distinctive, high- quality businesses, set within towns and villages, all thrive and grow through a commitment to Net Zero, accessibility and collaboration.”*

A1.26 Six objectives for achieving this vision are listed below:

- A modest increase in the volume of visitors coming to East Devon
- Increase the value of those visitors coming to East Devon
- Curate and develop four product themes of Natural Diversity, Food and Drink, Active Nature and Visual Arts and Festivals. Together these themes are aimed at developing a year-round tourism offer and growing the numbers of visitors in low season.
- Actively support tourism businesses to reduce carbon usage and improve accessibility.
- Build a sustainable, collaborative, private sector network.
- Embed the tourism strategy into the wider local policy context

A1.27 The strategy highlights that there is potential to encourage attractions to the east of the district, around Blackdown Hills AONB or Axminster.



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