



Vision Group for Sidmouth

INSPIRING PROJECTS • GENERATING IDEAS • FOR THE FUTURE

Minutes of the AGM held on the 12th November 2020 via Zoom.

Present

Peter Murphy,
Rita Hedley,
Robert Crick,
Jon Ball,
Michael Brittain,
Graham Cooper,
John and Jean Twibell,
Bob and Mair Miles,
Cllr Chris Lockyear, Sidmouth Town Council,
Cllr Denise Bickley, STC and East Devon DC,
Richard Eley,
Andrew Rugg-Gunn

Jeremy Woodward, retiring Chair

Mary Walden-Till, Communications Officer
(retiring Secretary role to revert to Webmaster)

Roger Till, Treasurer

Apologies received from

Dave and Liz Bramley

Welcome, and remarks from the Chair, Jeremy Woodward.

Jeremy welcomed the attendees and suggested we should start by remembering Handel Bennett who died earlier this year. He created the Vision Group for Sidmouth by his statement at a Council Meeting in 2005 that we needed a body to look at the future of Sidmouth and bring ideas forward. This idea was taken up by the Council and the Sid Vale Association, and the VGS was born. He was a stalwart of the community and will be missed.

Covid has thwarted all sorts of intentions this year. The VGS had intended to bring forward a project called Sidmouth 2020, which would have encompassed a variety of talks and meetings; we hope we can pick up some of the activities in the future

The Chair then offered our thanks to Richard Eley and Denise Bickley for being willing to give us short talks later in the evening.

Agenda Items

Approval of Minutes of the last AGM

As draft minutes are circulated for approval to attendees after all Vision Group meetings, prior to publication, it is considered that the Minutes have been approved.

Reports from Officers

Treasurer's report, Roger Till

We had income of £8 which was an anonymous cash donation into the HSBC Bank account.

£103 was paid on website hosting expenses
£180 on insurance
£44 on hall hire for the hustings
making a loss £320 in the last year

We still have nearly £1800 in the bank which would keep us going for 6 years at the current rate of expenditure.

The accounts can be seen [here](#)

Communications Officer's report, Mary Walden-Till

Not much has been happening because of Covid. We continue to put things on the website including resources pages for the Coord Group which are privacy protected.

We receive and answer occasional emails from outside groups and individuals. Apart from that the Secretary's job has been mainly admin.

Election of officers

Treasurer :- Roger nominated by Mary seconded by Peter, carried

Webmaster :- Mary nominated by Peter, seconded by John Twibell, carried

Chair :- Peter, nominated by Jeremy, seconded by Mary, carried

Secretary :- Jeremy, nominated by Mary, seconded by Roger, carried.

Jeremy remarked that this was a return to a position he first held 15 years ago.

Overview of the past year, Peter Murphy

Peter has been looking at email threads and trying to group them into project areas as follows.

1) Defunct projects :-

the Farmers' Market and Food Group are, sadly, not going anywhere at the moment it appears.

2) Projects carried forward :-

- a) Beach Management Plan where there is a flurry of interest and ideas.
- b) Energy.
- c) Sustainability and Green Growth.
- d) Traffic where a 'round table' is planned that the VGS would be eager 'to muck in with' and to support Council projects.
- e) Sustrans past reports still have relevance in areas such as signage, permeability, and mobility access.
- f) Cycling and walking, including Richard's phenomenal input into projects about cycle and pathways routes; e-trikes; bike hire; Cathy Debenham's 7 Hills route, Richard's 80 mile cycle route challenge, Richard's investigation into using areas of the old railway line which is already available as a route for either cycling or walking. Richard has already seen success with his Sid Valley Ring.
- g) Tourism and publicity where hopefully the VGS can contribute to Council efforts.
- h) Richard has considered the setting up of a Coastal Communities Team which the VGS would be keen to be part of. There is a need to get things up and running so that we are fully prepared to apply for any funding which is made available as part of the post-Brexit situation, or from coastal regeneration funds from Central Government.
- i) The proposed Arches project which is hoped will add value to a neglected area. It was initiated by Graham Cooper and a group put together a proposal which has now been sent to the Sidmouth Town Council Clerk who has given it warm welcome. Among the good things it might achieve is to match any Port Royal regeneration to give new features at both ends of the Esplanade. It adheres to the best practice of re-purposing old architecture.
- j) In closing we have the new Local plan coming up soon and on-going work on the projects which came out of the Neighbourhood Plan, both of these areas should be good things for the town. It

would helpful if we all try to keep track of funding opportunities.

Comments on Peter's overview :-

With reference to the Beach Management Plan

Robert announced his resignation as the VGS representative on the Steering Group and Jeremy thanked him for his many years of frustrating work on our behalf. Robert said he had hope for progress now and paid tribute to all the work Jo Frith did before her untimely death. He recapped his worries about being told he could not share information about what happened in the Steering Group which left him feeling isolated and at times bullied, he felt his legitimacy was impaired by the fact he was not allowed to get a forum behind him. He shared that many people had stopped attending the meetings out of unhappiness about the situation but hoped perhaps they would come back now.

Chris Lockyear said he will be the STC representative on the SG in future and in preparation has read hundreds of pages of documents, trying to get up to speed. He said he believes that EDDC think they are coming to an endgame and in some ways that is true but the proposed splash wall is a problem. He is an engineer himself so has talked to the engineers about assumptions that have been made. Much of the work done is good, however he has not seen evidence yet about the reasons for the height of the proposed splash wall. Last week he attended a meeting on the Steering Group 'Terms of Reference' which are being reassessed. At this meeting the East Devon District Council commitment to publish everything about the BMP from now on was reiterated. He will feed back as he can, the next SG meeting will be on the 3rd Dec. The new TOR will make clear the original concept that the Steering Group is a Steering Group, and not decision making body. It is a group to advise the Project Board above it but the Board can be ignore it if they wish, they should give reasons if they do so.

Mary said that she and Jeremy would now share the stress of the role of representative on the SG. She said that as in future we can tell people what happens at the Steering Group she will put an SG page on the website for public reference, along with the BMP and erosion pages which are already there. The VGS role is collecting and providing facts for the use of everyone including Councils.

Richard pointed out that the Project Board also could not make decisions as that was the role of EDDC Cabinet, further that we don't know who is on the Project Board and that its meetings are not minuted.

Neighbourhood and Local plans

Discussion of the Neighbourhood Plan outcomes and the new Local Plan were thought to be a topic for another day.

Biodiversity

Jeremy reported that the Biodiversity Group had a clear remit, and that next Tuesday's Cafe Scientific talk would be about butterflies.

Arches Cafe Project

He also stated that the Town Clerk was enthusiastic about the Arches project. Chris said that he was a member of the Resources Group on Sidmouth Town Council and they had been looking at Council assets, the group feels the idea is worthy of investigation but is concerned about the possible effect on the private business of the Fort Cafe.

Peter said that, in his experience in marketing, competition was good for growth and raising standards as long as the competition was not unfair. Chris agreed but said that Council enabled competition might be considered unfair. The discussion will be continued privately.

E-Trikes and delivery service

On the subject of E-Trikes, the STC Environment Committee draft budget contains a sum which could be used to do a feasibility study but only if the VGS can put together a bare-bones outline business case.

It was discussed that this could tie in with the national initiative Shop Appy, where a person's

purchases are collected from a variety of shops and left at just one shop for collection, or in some cases delivery is available. It was wondered if Sidmouth would want to link up with it.

Richard said he had shared the idea with Chamber of Commerce members and felt that something established was easier to pick up rather than starting from scratch, and that it could be worth pursuing.

Jeremy said that 'post Covid' deliveries by some sort of 'e vehicle' were worth looking at more closely as they worked in Exeter but may not work in towns like Sidmouth. Mary said that Shop Appy is considered to work well in small towns in the Derbyshire Dales.

We then turned to Richard's talk 'How to run a successful project', which he said was better categorised as 'learning from unsuccessful projects and heroic failures'. He had put together a list of 10 points which he believed brought the best chance of a successful project.

- 1) Do it yourself, have a committee of one. Don't ask permission just do it.
- 2) Have small committees if you have to have a committee, the bigger the committee the longer things take to do and the more expensive it gets.
- 3) Meet in pubs, the atmosphere is more conducive to new ideas arising.
- 4) Don't be possessive of ideas you have, once it moves to committee things will be changed so accept it.
- 5) Don't agonise over funding, develop the idea and then search for funding; getting funding could be the least of your problems.
- 6) Look for small incremental change to achieve progress. Tiny things can make a big difference as evidenced by the small area of tarmac added to the pavement outside Potbury's which stopped Blue Badge holders choosing to park there and inadvertently blocking the road. Now they can see parking is not a good idea and so things changed overnight.
- 7) Don't accept people's off the cuff claims about costs, ask them if they know exactly what the costs will be: then cost it yourself!
- 8) People's initial response to new ideas is always no if it is outside their previous experience.
- 9) Simplicity. Large scale, complex ideas often involve too many land-holders and stakeholders which makes it difficult to achieve consensus. Also include some quirky additions that you don't mind losing, committees like to put their own stamp on things by removing elements, make it easy for them.
- 10) Be willing to give up when it is taking too long, or doesn't have widespread support. There is no shame in cutting your losses.

Comments following Richard's talk were :-

That it reminded Jeremy he hadn't thanked those involved in arranging the talk from Prof. Evan Parker earlier this year, he also thanked Prof. Evan for the provoking discussion.

Robert said his experience confirmed Richard's points, and that the important thing was the process not the result. It was the VGS responsibility to engage people, not to deliver projects. He reminded us that we have had experience of engaging people of extreme political beliefs from both ends of the spectrum and reaching accord. However, he was worried we don't have enough women or younger people involved in things around Sidmouth

Denise's talk

There was an introduction by Jeremy saying that Denise had brought the idea of awards to him as

part of developing or rebooting sustainability in the town. It was decided that it may be worth relaunching the Sustainable Sidmouth brand which gained Transition Town accreditation ten years ago. The [transition movement](#) is still going strong in both the UK and worldwide. The Sidmouth Plastic Warriors, started by Denise and accredited by Surfers against Sewage, has been doing excellent work fighting plastic pollution and has managed to engage a variety of people including youngsters.

Denise's Award ideas.

Denise set the scene by referring to the work the Plastic Warriors did in establishing Sidmouth as a [Plastic Free town](#), which she felt was little understood by the public. What did people understand by the term when obviously we weren't free from all plastic usage?

There was an initial public meeting but in reality all the work of the Plastic Warriors was done purely by Denise; she had felt the lack of group support which is now in place. The Surfers Against Sewage [scheme](#) found that support for it tailed off but they have revamped it, however Denise feels we can create a more effective scheme ourselves. A relaunch of Sustainable Sidmouth, perhaps with an awards scheme in place, could bring meaning and prestige to the town,

Her ideas include that :-

- Plastic Warriors create Plastic Awareness Award Champions
- Sustainable Sidmouth/VGS do an Innovative Green Growth Award
- STC do a Carbon Reduction Award

Such an Awards scheme would need clear criteria, obtainable goals, and accreditation levels. The results would be publicised to create community engagement, and an annual awards ceremony could be held when conditions allow.

It would be important to work with different groups, not just businesses but community groups, schools and sports teams, to focus attention on the town.

To get groups to take part we must offer them something, publicity is the obvious reward. The awards might provide encouragement to 'shop Sidmouth'. It is important that any scheme incurs no extra costs for businesses. We should look into whether we can become a green town like Totnes.

Comments on Denise's ideas :-

Peter asked how can we get engagements, raise awareness stimulate interest?

Denise replied we need to get the criteria in place and then publicise it, we would need everyone involved. Plastic Warriors had been going to send out a questionnaire about what people have managed to change in their plastic use, but we should be going further to encourage and share innovation and search out economies of scale.

Chris agreed that awards are good especially if we can show that firms are saving money, and if a good prize is on offer.

Denise commented that we need to market our businesses.

Mary mentioned that we were traditionally bad at using the good things in the town to market the place. For example that we are a [Dementia Friendly town](#).

Robert said we need wider awareness in order to get the sort of coverage other towns do. Wider awareness gets publicity on local media. We should look at Frome and how they have made powerful change to the town. If we start with informing the town it will eventually become more widely known. He pointed out that the Science Festival have good links with schools within the town.

Jeremy commented that lots of people at this meeting have good contacts with schools.

Denise said she works at a primary school and there is an environment group there, Eco Warriors, but unfortunately no link up with anything happening at Sidmouth College when they move there. Sidmouth College is currently fully occupied with wrestling with curriculum difficulties.

Chris agreed and said the College are concentrating on the exam groups which have been affected by Covid, but they had previously had a good relationship with the Science teacher which they are looking to rebuild next year.

Richard offered that the initial award winners could just be chosen by one person and it then publicised, leaving elaboration and formal structure to later. However, Denise likes collaboration from the start rather than individual judgements.

Thanks and closing the meeting

Jeremy offered to chase up award ideas and relaunching Sustainable Sidmouth, he thanked Richard for the list will help us on our way.

He then formally handed over to Peter as this next year's Chair and raised a metaphorical toast to the next 12 months. The meeting was closed with thanks to Rita and the Science Festival for hosting the AGM on Zoom.