

VGS Special Meeting – 23 June 2022 – minutes

Attendees: Dave Bramley, Eleanor Carr, Graham Cooper (VGS coordination team), Richard Eley, Ian Gregory, Roger Till (treasurer), Mary Walden-Till (webmaster), Jeremy Woodward (secretary)

Apologies: Ian Barlow, Denise Bickley, Chris Lockyear, Peter Murphy (chair), Hilary Nelson

The purpose of the meeting was to vote in a new chair of the VGS, following the resignation of the current chair Peter Murphy, due to ill health.

Jeremy as acting chair welcomed attendees, asking each to briefly introduce themselves:

- Dave is the former VGS chair; he joined the meeting at the end, to consider with Mary the setting up a new website for the town council's carbon footprint project
- Eleanor has the local business www.uniqueboutiqueevents.co.uk/sidmouth-eats-boutique; she sees VGS as an umbrella organisation, bringing the community together, in a similar way to her business
- Richard is president of the Chamber of Commerce and founding member of the VGS

Jeremy thanked Peter, now stepping down as chair, paying tribute to his contributions, notably <https://sidmouth-champions.vgsidmouth.co.uk/>

Jeremy gave a brief overview of the VGS online

Ian introduced himself more fully, to talk about his 'vision for Sidmouth' and to suggest how the VGS might help promote this:

- Ian is a businessman and former investment banker, having set up <https://sidmouthtoymuseum.com/>
- He is very excited about the VGS and is impressed by the range of issues it covers; but perhaps it needs to focus on where it can make a meaningful impact, which will be the main challenge for the VGS
- Ian started visiting Sidmouth as a child and so has 50 years of Sidmouth memories; it is a quintessentially English town, which we do not want to spoil; Sidmouth should be kept special – developed and enhanced but in a sensitive way, building on the town's facilities and assets:
 - focussing on events: the variety of festivals and visitors make the town vibrant
 - developing culture: both visitors and locals should be included and engaged
 - highlighting assets: deck chairs and gardens
- Ian felt sustainability should be a major focus for the VGS:
 - including the BMP and managing the environment for future generations
 - the provision of food and initiatives to provide plots and grow veg
- In conclusion, Ian said he would be very happy to work with colleagues on the VGS coordination team, to help make Sidmouth an even better place!

Jeremy opened up the conversation to attendees:

SolarPunk:

- Mary suggested Sidmouth could become a SP centre, as Whitby has for SteamPunk; SP is about technology and the natural world working together, about not wasting

food/clothing; there was a lot of interest shown at the Sea Fest

- Eleanor felt that whilst the SP movement was 'rebellious', it had a different take compared to XR; SP has a strong branding and ethos which businesses could sign up to, carrying forward its values
- Ian agreed SP sounded interesting and could fit in with Sidmouth's Arts & Crafts traditions and Dissenter movement
- Roger felt that XR is too negative for Sidmouth – whose population is still 'young in mind'
- Graham noted that SP would be a way of getting younger people involved – alternative tech and growing veg

Built Environment:

- Graham noted that the town council had achieved a lot over the last 12 months:
 - connecting with other towns re sustainability issues
 - traffic management with priorities for pedestrians
- Graham felt that it would be necessary to keep an eye on planning if we don't want to lose the character of town (Knowle, Sidford business park)
 - locally-listed buildings: photographic documentation which shows the character of place and Sidmouth as a special place
 - retrofitting and repurposing buildings for new uses
 - saving the high street by making shops viable and encouraging an artistic community

Jeremy called for a vote to formally accept Ian as new chair:

- Richard was grateful that Ian had offered to take on the position
- As VGS chair, Dave had felt that one of the skills the town council should develop was to make use of voluntary effort; he now felt the council was currently engaged with groups such as the VGS – which has a real role, to guide on the meaty issues
- Jeremy asked for a proposer and seconder for Ian as chair:
 - Roger proposed; Mary seconded
 - the vote for Ian as the new chair of the VGS was carried unanimously by those present

Jeremy thanked Ian for taking on the position; and thanked everyone for their contributions, looking forward to working with them in future.

This part of the meeting was closed – and followed immediately by a session during which Mary and Dave looked at creating a new website for the town council's carbon footprint project. Ian, Graham and Jeremy were also present and contributed to the discussions.