

East Devon District and Sidmouth Town Councils meet to discuss future of Port Royal

Two councils to commence comprehensive scoping exercise as background for a detailed plan of the renewal of Sidmouth's eastern area

Since the beginning of the year, informal discussions have been held between Sidmouth Town Council (STC) and East Devon District Council (EDDC) on carrying out a scoping exercise as the first stage in the process of development and renewal of Sidmouth's Port Royal and Eastern Town. These discussions followed on from an agreement in principle to jointly fund this work between the two authorities.

At Sidmouth Town Council's meeting earlier this week (July 4), Alison Hayward, the District Council's Head of Regeneration and Economic Development, gave a presentation on the processes and stages necessary in a complex regeneration project. Richard Cohen, EDDC Deputy Chief Executive, also attended the meeting and updated the council on the forthcoming scoping study for Port Royal in the context of the good practice and processes that a successful investment and development project requires.

The town council welcomed the presentation and discussion that followed.

Critically, the meeting established the importance of understanding the commercial challenges and the amount of detailed work required to deliver good development. Both councils agreed that everyone involved in this economically and environmentally significant project – from councillors to the local community – must be aware of the complexity and scale of this regeneration scheme if it is to be carried out successfully.

Both district and town councils will be working in partnership on the Port Royal project – STC will lead the process, while East Devon will provide professional support and funding. Both councils understand that securing investment and development, especially in a complicated and sensitive location such as Port Royal, which forms the eastern part of the town and seafront, will be a lengthy and detailed operation.

Although keen to initiate the renewal of Port Royal, STC understand the sensitivities that surround the Ham, which is a publically owned piece of land and they strongly emphasise that any development around Port Royal would need to complement the open space and ideally provide enhanced and increased amenity.

The full scheme will be highly collaborative, involving extensive consultation and will obviously take into account key planning policies, including East Devon's Local Plan, the Sid Valley Neighbourhood Plan and the Sidmouth and East Beach Management Plan.

The two councils will now commission experts to help prepare a strategy for the detailed consultation, planning, design and marketing of the area.

As a first step, detailed information about the area will be gathered so that a properly organised, well informed proposition can be created, which will be used to attract market interest and public funding (potentially) to create the right mix of social, cultural and commercial development.

Councillor Jeff Turner, Chairman of Sidmouth Town Council, said:

“I am delighted that with the support of our fellow landowner, East Devon District Council, we will now, as a very first step, commission work that will scope out a complex exercise of consultation, planning, costing and design. Local people and local organisations, some of whom have spent a great deal of their time in the past pressing the case for Port Royal renewal, will be key to this collaborative process.”

East Devon District Council’s Richard Cohen, added:

“Good proposals, which are innovative as well as practically and financially possible, will be critical to the success of Port Royal’s development. Throughout the process, there will be a firm commitment and a clear focus on consultation and collaboration with local people, businesses and organisations, to ensure that any future development is achieved with their understanding. It will also be important to be open to ideas, which people have already put forward.

“The improvements that this scheme will bring about, will be of enormous benefit to Sidmouth’s residents, business and visitors and will help maintain Sidmouth as one of the UK’s premier seaside resorts.”

Ends

Notes for Editors

- Port Royal is the area to the east of the town of Sidmouth, extending from the seafront backwards, bordered on the east by the River Sid (see map below). It has long been recognised locally as an area that does not meet the high visual and amenity quality of other parts of Sidmouth and is an opportunity for investment, development and renewal.
- There is a shared desire to see a mix of high quality uses, architecture and public realm. The challenge will be to deliver a combination of uses that encompass economic, social and cultural facilities that are also viable in commercial and environmental terms. It is likely that this will require a mix of market investment and public funding.
- The location has the advantage that both the town and district councils are also the main landowners.