

Draft Scoping Study Report for Port Royal discussed by reference group

Report will now be refined to reflect comments made at meeting

The Port Royal Reference Group met on Thursday 5 October to discuss the draft Scoping Study Report as presented by Heynes Planning Ltd and Groupwest.

The purpose of the Scoping Study Report, which has been commissioned by the Town and District councils as key landowners, is to outline at an early stage the opportunities and constraints that exist for renewal of the Port Royal area of Sidmouth.

There was a robust and frank debate and the Reference Group members clearly reflected the strength of Sidmouth public opinion -expressed through the public consultation and the recent Neighbourhood Plan report - that a single large and high building covering the sea front footprint at Port Royal would be entirely inappropriate for this sensitive site. There was a strongly held view that commercial benefits could be achieved whilst still meeting community aspirations as well as realising benefits for Sidmouth's economy and tourism. Further options needed to be examined.

Having heard the debate and views of the Reference Group in connection with the draft, the consultant has requested further time to refine the study report and in particular to detail recommendations about further investigations in respect of flooding and covenants. The final report will be considered by the councils jointly at which time it will be made public.

Given the request from the consultant, the report will not meet November council meeting deadlines, but it is expected that this will come forward early in the new year.

Councillor Jeff Turner, chairman of the Reference Group, thanked the members of the group and their respective organisations for their participation and similarly thanked those members of the public who had provided feedback through both the Scoping Study consultation and the Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Turner said: "It is the intention of the two councils to debate the independent consultant's report once the final version has been received. The report will also be published on the councils' websites. The Scoping Study project group, comprising elected members and officers of the two councils, will discuss options for further work in due course and make recommendations to the councils. Decisions on next steps are unlikely to be considered before the new year."

ENDS