

‘Golden opportunity’ for renewal of Port Royal

First meeting of Port Royal Scoping Study Reference Group takes place

The Port Royal Scoping Study Reference Group has met for the first time to discuss the first stage in determining what renewal could happen to the eastern gateway of the town.

Sidmouth Town and East Devon District Councils, who are both landowners of Port Royal, are moving now to jointly commission a scoping study of the area and will be commissioning experts to assist them in carrying out an appraisal of the area.

The town council is taking the lead in the process while East Devon District Council is providing professional support. Both councils will be working with the Reference Group made up of representatives of Sidmouth town organisations and Devon County Council.

The Sidmouth town organisations represented on the group are the Sid Valley Neighbourhood Plan Group, the Sid Vale Association, Sidmouth Vision Group and the Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce.

Councillor Jeff Turner, Chairman of Sidmouth Town Council, who is chairing the Reference Group, explained to the meeting that the group would act as a bridge between the expert consultants, the stakeholders and the wider public. He said: “We have a good representation of the major bodies from the town on this group who have shown historic leadership and a keen interest in the future of Port Royal. With the help of our experts, the study will provide us with information on the constraints and opportunities for the area with options and how viable they are. This will help us move forward toward a detailed vision for the area.

“Sidmouth is one of the best coastal towns in England and with land being in public ownership, this is a golden opportunity to look at ways of renewing the eastern gateway to the town, ensuring that it is both enhanced and protected.”

Cllr Turner stressed that no decisions have been made about the future of the area. “Nothing has been decided. The scoping study is the start of a process that will involve detailed visioning for the area that will inform decisions in the future. The study is likely to take around three to four months to complete and during this time consultants will carry out consultation both with tenants and members of various clubs as well as our residents and businesses. Wherever possible, we will work together with Sidmouth’s organisations to ensure that consultation is carried out in a co-ordinated way.”

The Reference Group emphasised that it will involve existing work already carried out on Port Royal including a study compiled by the Sidmouth Vision Group in 2012. The group also decided that following every meeting they would send out a communication to Port Royal tenants to keep them and their members informed of progress.

Potential funding opportunities with organisations such as the Coastal Communities Fund or working with organisations such as the Heritage Lottery will also be explored so that opportunities to enhance and protect the area can be maximised.

Sidmouth Town and East Devon District Council will be starting the tendering process for consultants to carry out the scoping study in the next few weeks. Once appointed, it is expected that the consultants will start work in the New Year which will include regular interaction with the Reference Group.

The consultants will provide expert opinion on what kind of redevelopment would be potentially viable for Port Royal and will be asked specifically about how they will consult the community during this first stage of the process. They will also identify the boundaries and ownership of the area and the needs of existing occupants.

The group is expecting to meet again in January.

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. 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.