

SIDMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of Sidmouth Town Council's
Environment Committee held in the Council Chamber,
Woolcombe House, Woolcombe Lane, Sidmouth
on Monday 13 January 2025 at 6.30pm

Councillors: Stephen Blakeway (Vice Chair)
 Bernie Davis
 Paul Dodds
 Mike Goodman
 Chris Lockyear
 Hillary Nelson
 Kevin Walker
 Edward Willis-Flemming

Invited Reps:

Ed Dolphin (Sidmouth Arboretum)
 Jon Ball (Sidmouth Arboretum)
 Jan Metcalf (River Sid Project)
 Charles Sinclair (River Sid Project)
 Dave Bramley (CAPS)

Apologies: Ian Barlow (Chair)
 Rachel Perram

The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 8.50pm

PART 'A'

74 Minutes

The minutes of the Environment Working Group meetings held on Monday 21 October 2024, were agreed, and signed, subject to Councillor Lockyear declaration of interest in the Biodiversity Group and being a Member of Sidmouth Arboretum.

75 Declarations of Interest

| Name | Item Number | Type | Action Taken | Details |
|---------------------|-------------|----------|--|---|
| Cllr Chris Lockyear | All items | Personal | Remained in the Meeting during discussion and voting | Member of Sidmouth Biodiversity Group Member of Sidmouth Arboretum |

76 Matters of Urgency and Report

None reported.

- 77 The committee acknowledged the adoption of the updated Environment Policy by the Council and discussed its implications for their future work. Emphasis was placed on aligning committee activities with the new policy.
- 78 **Suggestion for locations of future meetings:**
The committee considered meeting in a workshop format once or twice a year to encourage greater engagement from other groups and improve structured discussion. It was debated that integrating this into regular Environment Committee meetings would not be feasible because of time pressure. Instead, as a trial, an additional workshop session would be set up soon after Sidmouth Nature Day on Sat 7th June to focus on work on the River Sid and gather feedback that will be reported back at the July Environment Committee meeting.
- 79 **Feedback on Traffic Light Engagement and Support Tool:**
There was positive feedback on the traffic light system. A summary of red points from projects that had used it was circulated in advance of the meeting to demonstrate how it is already highlighting common areas of need. Members found the approach helpful. It was noted that the system could also be referred to as 'RAG (red, amber, green) rating' rather than 'traffic lights'.
- 80 Cllr Walker opened a discussion on ways by which groups could be supported with regard to Volunteer issues, with the following suggestions:
Create a poster listing the groups available.
Add a dedicated volunteers page on the Sidmouth Town Council (STC) website.
Transform the 'What's On' section into a calendar format.
Provide information on where to go if you want to volunteer in Sidmouth.
Develop a simplified system to alert people about volunteering opportunities.
Add an agenda item for the June workshop on how environment groups during the workshop how they would like to enhance their social media presence to promote their work.
RESOLVED: Cllr Walker to discuss these suggestions with the Town Clerk and to work with Sidmouth Town Council to update the listings/contacts.
- 81 **Natural Environment:**
- 81.1 Charles Sinclair provided leaflets and talked through the River Sid Catchment Group Plan, a visionary plan within SVBG to restore the Sid to full health. The plan engages with 'water', 'land', and 'people'. West Country Rivers Trust were being employed to map the quality of the river and its habitats, and to start visible action this year to address the multiple man-made barriers to fish passage, particularly salmon, trout and eels (a globally endangered species). All this would require significant public engagement and SVBG requested the support and endorsement of STC in this work. This marks a significant development in re-vitalising the River Sid catchment. The Vice Chair and Members thanked and congratulated the River Sid Catchment Group on their excellent communication, report, and leaflet.
RESOLVED: STC fully support and endorse the project.

- 81.2 Jan Metcalf reported on citizen science work on the River Sid. All evidence suggested the Woolbrook, in particular is in very poor health, with significant pollution, no fish and little other life. It is the Environment Agency's role to investigate the apparent pollution to find the main source of the problem. However, the EA is overstretched nationally and in the absence of their action, the Committee started to consider how it could address the challenge through community action. Members thanked the Jan for their ongoing hard work. There also appeared to be pollution challenges in the Bickwell Brook and Salcolme Regis stream that needed to be addressed by the EA.
RESOLVED: To ask an EA Project Officer to look at the Salcombe Regis stream.
- 81.3 Cllr Chris Lockyear reported about his dealings with South West Water. Works at the Ham had been postponed until September.
Mindful of the widely-publicised problems in Exmouth caused when pipes cracked under the higher pumping pressure used by SWW to increase sewage flow rate, Cllr Lockyear had been chasing SWW to measure the wall thickness of Sidmouth sewage pipes before adopting the same 'solution' in Sidmouth. Despite his work, it seemed SWW hadn't yet measured pipe wall thickness despite having increased pumping pressure. They were going to do so.
The committee discussed potential conflicts from SWW delays at the Ham interfering with various other work (eg Rockfish) and festivals in the area.
- 81.4 Tess Bisson, now Chair of the SVBG, gave updates on the Food Forest and the Coastal Beach Garden. She gave thanks to Cllr Ian Barlow for his ongoing help with the project.
- 81.5 Ed Dolphin updated Members about the 14,000 tree planting project. They have secured funding from national companies for the project so far. He emphasised that planting would continue even after reaching the target. Jon Ball also informed the Committee about the upcoming Tree Week.
- 81.6 Stefan Drew introduced a new proposal for making Sidmouth a Civic Food Forest, potentially a national/global first, as another vehicle to encourage the Sidmouth Community to come together around food production, the natural environment and sustainability.
RESOLVED: That STC endorse the concept of a Civic Food Forest.
- 81.7 Cllr Kevin Walker proposed that Cherish Sidmouth Cemeteries (CSC) receive recognition from STC for their excellent work to date.
RESOLVED: Members expressed full support for CSC and extended their gratitude for their continued dedication.

82 Built Environment

- 82.1 Cllr Paul Dodds reported on progress in improving the quality of paths and roads in Sidmouth. He explained how the work has progressed and how it is organised and presented a map highlighting six areas in Sidmouth affected by potholes, with Fortescue being the most concerning. Members thanked Cllr Dodds for his progress so far and his continuing efforts in addressing this issue.

82.2 Cllr Willis-Flemming presented an idea to invite the green belt into the Sidmouth town starting with three stone planters outside the Radway Cinema and exploring the possibility of approaching the Conservative Club to plant hedging. He suggested the idea be extended, planting trees wherever possible, and working with others including the scouts, cubs, and guides. Concern was raised about the viability of trees planted in pots which require specialised care. He would collaborate with the Arboretum to assess areas in the town where planting might be possible to improve the overall look of Sidmouth. However, DCC and EDDC between them they own most of the land so their agreement would be needed before anything can progress.
RESOLVED: That STC supported the idea. The Arboretum to conduct an inventory of available planting locations. Cllr Willis-Flemming to speak to Stuart Hughes, EDDC, and DCC to discuss how they can support this initiative.

83 Engagement

83.1 Report from CAPS:

Cllr Davis reported on the Eco Hub trial. Cllr Davis made a request for funds to be made available to purchase a banner to stand outside the venue during Eco Hub sessions. It was explained the issue was urgent as the next Environment Committee would not take place for a further three months, by which time the trial would nearly be over. Stands were available therefore only a flag required. The Vice Chair and Members thanked Cllr Davis for her progress with the Eco Hub. Dave Bramley provided an update on CAPS' involvement with ECOE and shared that an information leaflet for residents has been created.

RECOMMENDED: That up to £200 be allocated from the Environment Committee budget for the production of an 'ECO HUB' banner.

RESOLVED: Dave Bramley and Cllr Lockyear would coordinate with the Town Clerk to print and distribute the ECOE information leaflet to Sidmouth households.

84 Members confirmed the date for the next meeting as Monday 14 April.

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CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE