

## **Axmouth Annual Parish Meeting – May 2014**

### **Parish Council Chairman's Report**

This has been a year of changes. Carol Rapley decided to step down from her role as Chairman during summer 2013; at the same time, our Clerk handed in her notice but we were fortunate to recruit Becki Davey. I took over as Chairman and Becki started work in early September. It has been a steep learning curve for both of us but, Becki is now firmly in place and guiding our work effectively.

#### **Planning Matters**

The Parish Council has been consulted on quite a number of planning applications from residents in the year and we were able to support the majority although with some conditions. We objected to those that concerned us, in particular the extension of the Harbour Inn car-park and the new proposal for the re-development of the Dive Centre. The Harbour Inn car-park will go ahead, we await East Devon District Council's decision on the Dive Centre.

In the wider view of matters, EDDC submitted their Local Plan for scrutiny but at the same time issued a draft of the 'Villages Plan' which is designed to give a more detailed view of planning policy for each village. The Parish Council were comfortable with the section concerning Axmouth which, in essence, rules out any development outside the 'Village Built up Area Boundary'. In 2012, the SHLAA process, reported upon at this meeting last year, had identified one possible development site but, on further scrutiny, EDDC decided that this site was unsuitable. We proposed some minor amendments to the wording of the Plan in order to improve clarity. In the event, the scrutineer has requested some changes to the Local Plan and further consideration of the Villages Plan is on hold. Additionally, The Parish Council gave detailed consideration to the proposal to develop a Neighbourhood Plan but have decided not to proceed with this major undertaking at least until there is some clarity regarding adoption of the EDDC Local Plan and related Villages Plan.

#### **Traffic Issues**

For many years we have been trying to improve pedestrian safety in Church Street. The Devon County Highways plan to construct a new section of footway outside the Church Wall in March this year had to be postponed because of a backlog of road maintenance work following the winter storms. Since then, Highways have given further consideration to the design, with a view to ensuring access to the Caravan site is not adversely affected. Further discussion will take place shortly but at present the expectation is to undertake the work outside of the holiday season, probably in early November.

Parish Council remains concerned about the effect of the 100% increase in traffic flow through the village since the Tesco development. The Church Street footway is even more important than when first requested. In addition, parking in Axmouth Road on the estuary is causing more danger to pedestrians using the narrow footpath, because traffic drives so close to the pavement and cyclists are threatened because of opening car doors. We have started work on a long term plan to improve the situation for both cyclists and pedestrians which would see parking areas better defined, traffic calming measures, a cycleway and improved footway. It is early days and we have been advised that as it stands, DCC cannot provide financial support but we have at least requested open consideration to any scheme we are able to develop.

#### **Severe Weather**

The viewing platform was damaged in the February 14<sup>th</sup> storm but, this has now been repaired and we have successfully claimed from the Insurance Company. The retaining wall at Coronation Corner has also been damaged and EDDC have included an amount of money to cover repairs in a grant request to Central Government. We await the outcome of the request. If unsuccessful we shall be looking for volunteers to assist us to 'do-it-ourselves'!

The roadway from Springhead Cross up to Bushes Lane has deteriorated badly. County Highways have now committed to undertake repairs to the roadway edges which have been badly eroded.

Prompted by the many episodes of severe weather since mid 2012, APC is starting to develop an emergencies plan. We shall be looking to identify volunteers within the village to help with communications and also to take action in support of the Emergency Services in order to help protect village property and in particular, support our more vulnerable residents.

## **Funding matters**

We have increased the precept for this current year in order to cover the additional expenses arising from the increase Parish Clerk workload but also to help cover costs associated with general maintenance resulting from cuts in some of the services provided by County Council.

We are grateful to County Councillor Knight's Locality Budget which has enabled us to undertake a number of minor projects including the refurbishment of the telephone box and the purchase of a Grit Bin for the Village Hall car-park to store empty sandbags and a supply of sand. We are also purchasing a display board for Coronation Corner to show tide times and the Axe River races schedule. This should be installed shortly.

The Parish Council is maintaining a separate fund, accumulated over a number of years, with the intention of purchasing land to be used as an additional burial ground. Despite extensive research, we are yet to identify a suitable site but will remain alert to possibilities which may arise from changes in land ownership. We have not agreed to a request from St. Michaels Church for some of this money to be used for ongoing churchyard maintenance expenditure, but expect the PCC to continue to apply for a small grant towards those cost, which will be met from the Precept.

We again took advantage of the Parishes Together funding scheme in 2013/14 which provides £1.10 per elector. This year we have teamed up with a number of Councils including Uplyme, who are leading a project to contract in additional 'Lengthsman' services. We shall be able to utilise the two man team for two days this year and will ask them to concentrate on activities such as keeping road signs visible, maintaining access to footpaths and supplementing the drainage ditch maintenance work undertaken by the County Lengthsman. At this stage we are uncertain as to the detailed plans for the County Lengthsman service and so will have to consider further expenditure to ensure road drainage facilities remain fully effective and that the brook is kept free-flowing.

## **Best Kept Village**

We were delighted to be awarded 'Runner-up' in the small villages' category of the Devon wide competition and we are grateful to all those residents and villages groups who helped so much to make our village special. We have entered the competition again this year and will soon be under the judges' scrutiny. Let us hope we can go one better this year.

## **Playground Committee**

Thanks again to Judith Simpson for leading the team managing this valuable village asset. The Parish Council continues to respond positively to grant requests for financial support but, most of the ongoing maintenance work is provided by volunteers. More help would always be most welcome.

## **Footpaths**

Our plans to develop a footpath running North from the village to Coly Bridge received a major set back when the services of the project leader at DCC Highways Right of Way team was withdrawn last summer. Steve Gardner was transferred to another role and was not replaced. Additionally, although supportive in principle to our plans, DCC also withdrew their offer to provide a financial contribution. We have been unable to obtain details of the offers made to 3 of the landowners via their land agents and are unable to pursue negotiations directly, without these details. Due to the excessive charges levied by the agent we are unable to consider continuing negotiations with him. A further land owner has indicated an strong unwillingness to consider access over her land as the 'compensation' being offered was insufficient. We shall be approaching DCC through our County Councillor to see if the situation in the

footpaths team may change when the repair of existing Rights of Way caused by weather damage (especially the SW Coast Path) is complete.

### **Other initiatives**

We have been able to take advantage of some 'donated' professional assistance to devise a new logo for the Parish Council. The main image utilises a photograph of one of the stained glass windows in St. Michaels Church. We shall be adopting the image for use on Council correspondence.

With the assistance of Seaton Rotary Club we are hoping to install a blue plaque on the old toll house adjacent to Axmouth Bridge. We are grateful to the owner for granting permission to do this but need to wait for Listed Building consent.

An additional noticeboard has been installed within the Stepps Cross bus shelter so that the Council noticeboard can be used exclusively for Council Matters. The bus shelter has also undergone some maintenance and refurbishment, as has the Parish Council noticeboard.

Natural Axmouth are undertaking a trial scheme along the verge opposite Southcombe Terrace aimed at encouraging wildflowers and natural vegetation. Part of the verge will be excluded from the routine verge mowing regime.

We are intending to look into the possibility of 'upgrading' the village website to make it more appealing and easier to maintain. In the meantime we are keen to be told about forthcoming village events and news items so that we can keep the site up to date and relevant.

To conclude, we are grateful for the support of our District Councillor Ian Thomas and County Councillor Jim Knight and we would like to thank again all those who help keep our village feeling somewhere special by organising village events and by keeping the neighbourhood tidy.

As a Council we remain committed to serving the community as a whole but could do with some assistance. We have a vacancy on the Parish Council and would like to attract a volunteer to join us. We would especially welcome the opportunity to have a 'local' Parish Councillor, someone with real roots in the village. Are you that person?