

RETAIN REFURBISH REUSE

INFORMATION SHEET 5

What role does Sidmouth Town Council play?

Sidmouth Town Council (STC) has a very significant role to play in any redevelopment of Port Royal and eastern town. The Town Council is responsible, as Trustees, for the area occupied by the fishing sheds and the rest of the Ham (see info sheet 4). That means they must agree to proposals that affect those areas and they can work with the community to help improve them. STC can also negotiate with the District Council over ownership and improvements to East Devon District Council (EDDC) assets and apply for grant funding.

It is important to note that the Town Council cannot block ('refuse') any planning application relating to assets owned by the District Council. STC's powers are limited to expressing an opinion on any application, just like any affected resident. The District ward members for the Town (Cllrs Gardner, Booth and Dyson) can play a slightly more significant role in the planning process by ensuring that disputed applications (where the Planning Officer's recommendation differs from theirs) are decided by the planning committee (DMC) based on strict planning policy grounds.

Town Councils have far fewer powers than District Councils, but the powers they do have can make a real difference to their town. The Localism Act 2011 provided something called the General Power of Competence, which allows STC to do anything an individual can do. STC can help in many ways and they could make a real impact on implementing ideas to "Retain, Refurbish, Reuse" at Port Royal and the eastern town. Their support could range from simply giving a project their blessing; making a financial contribution or providing administrative help. STC are best placed to apply for many kinds of grant funding, with or without a community project group. Support from a Town Council can make the difference between success and failure for a community-focussed project: they can be the town 'champion'.

Applications for funding

Sources of funding change on a regular basis, as funds open and close to applications. Sources usually include the Heritage Lottery Fund www.hlf.org.uk, the Big Lottery Fund www.biglotteryfund.org.uk and the Co-op www.thenews.coop/category/sector/community

Some applications require match funding, whereby usually half the money must be found before the grant can be awarded to match it. STC do have funds available to use and donations can be made by the public, for example to refurbish the Drill Hall. Examples of community-funded projects are available via sites such as the Co-op and www.locality.org.uk. Lyme Regis set up a Trust in 1998, which could also provide a model for Sidmouth, see www.lrdt.co.uk. Frome Town Council are working on a project to improve their market square, details can be found here: www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/boyle-cross-remodelling. Totnes also have a great initiative: totnescommunity.org.uk. Other organisations can provide support and advice as well as detailed examples of successful projects, e.g. www.princes-regeneration.org.

Asset transfer

It is possible for STC to take on assets from EDDC. This may happen with some of the parkland at the Knowle, if the sale to PegasusLife proceeds. That land includes a small car park, a source of potential income to offset the maintenance costs of the park. Taking on assets also means taking on their liability. Some assets (like the Ham Lane car parks) are income-generating for EDDC and therefore they may be unwilling to pass them over to STC. Imagination and negotiation are key to asset transfer.

We can all help and work with STC to improve our town: Sidmouth has a history of forming strong community organisations working for the benefit of residents