

Report of the Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills

Introduction

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 20 February 2020:

By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

Can I please request a Cabinet member report to update council on the ongoing situation at Axminster Carpets. Including the role of Devon County through the LEP , and other regional and economic forums , in terms of trying to keep the business open and viable. And the significance of the 90 jobs are thought to be at risk if the company enters administration.

By Councillor Greenslade as follows:

Press reports regarding the reopening of Appledore Shipyard which say “a lack of joined up thinking and prevarication between the Government and Devon County Council is thought to be the only thing that is holding up the deal” that would lead to reopening of the yard.

Can the Leader/Cabinet Member please clarify what the position of Devon County Council is in this vital matter for the economy of northern Devon and what actions he is going to take to unlock this apparent blockage?

1. Axminster Carpets

Axminster Carpets has been synonymous with the town since 1755 and the company has an unrivalled reputation for quality craftsmanship. We sadly heard yesterday that the company had entered into administration resulting in a significant number of redundancies. We understand that buyers have been found for the underlay business Axfelt, plus the carpet outlet shop, enabling the retention of a small core of staff. Buyers are still being sought for the remaining brand and assets. Devon County Council will be working closely with a range of local partner organisations, including East Devon District Council and the Department of Work and Pensions, to help facilitate a range of support options to members of staff facing redundancy and to ensure the right advice is on offer for those people facing redundancy. Support will be offered, including the opportunity to access Learn Devon’s services such as adult learning, qualifications and skills training. We are keen to ensure that anybody made redundant is able to use their skills to their fullest advantage, which will have knock-on benefits for other local employers who are looking to recruit.

2. Appledore Shipyard

The commitment and political will from Devon County Council is not in question when it comes to re-opening Appledore Shipyard. We know how important it is to the local community, and we’re as keen as everyone to get a deal over the line as soon as possible and get the shipyard up and running. We have worked extremely hard with partners and local MP Geoffrey Cox to get to this point and find potential new owners for the shipyard. Regular engagement with Government over how public investment can be secured to support the re-opening of the yard remains ongoing. Critically, we wish to achieve a sustainable and viable future for the yard and secure long term employment and economic benefits for the local area.

Councillor Rufus Gilbert
Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills