



PROPOSAL to ILMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL for its SUPPORT for a PROJECT TO DEVELOP A NEW TOWN COMMUNITY WEBSITE

About the Proposer

Experience Ilminster Community Interest Company (Exil) has been in existence since 2008. Its purpose is to promote Ilminster as a place to live and to visit. Its principle operations to date have been through events, chief amongst these is the Ilminster Midsummer Experience (IMEx) although it is involved in and supports several other major projects and events every year.

About this Project

Background. Exil has had a website (www.ilminsterexperience.co.uk) since its inception in 2008. This originally was targeted at the promotion and administration of the Ilminster Midsummer Experience as the main event each year. As the number of Exil supported community events has increased, so the website has expanded into more of a community website supported by social media, providing access to other town and area events and activities via a What's On section, a Community Calendar, a listing of Community Groups, and information about Team Ilminster, our community volunteer project.

Looking forward

Ilminster needs a comprehensive website that represents all facets of the town and its surrounding area. It needs to be the default site for answers to questions from both potential visitors and residents.

The site must be attractive, easy to use, comprehensive and as accurate and informative as possible. There needs to be effective continuing SEO and the site must be linked to active Social Media. A preliminary Design Briefing paper has been developed outlining these objectives.

Proposal.

Currently there are several Ilminster websites: ilminsterexperience.co.uk, visitilminster.town, ilminsterweb.com and Ilminster Town Council. None of these completely meets the needs of an appropriately dynamic Ilminster website, which needs to promote both business and community interests.

The existing Exil site probably comes closest and could be a potential development base. However the site has been developed in an ad hoc fashion over several years by a small team of volunteers with varying degrees of technical skills and, crucially, time available to spend on the project. It has become clear that fully to develop the site to its necessary potential, professional input will be required, both in its initial new design, the development phase and for its on-going maintenance. Volunteer participation would continue and be an important part in the ongoing maintenance and content creation to ensure that the website continues to offer fresh, up-to-date information and continuing work to maintain and increase visitor levels.

Initial Design and Development

A Design Brief would be prepared with all interested parties, including the Town Council, having direct input. Once the Design Brief has been agreed, the project would be handed to a contracted designer to complete and initiate.

On-going Technical Maintenance and Information Input

It is proposed that on-going site maintenance is divided into 3 areas: technical, commercial and community:

- Technical maintenance would be contracted on a continuing monitoring basis, providing SEO and technical support as required.

- Commercial advertising introduced would be managed as a part-time position and would be paid for on a commission basis, although on-going customer account maintenance would be needed and paid for on a fixed-cost basis.
- The community content would be maintained by suitable skilled and experienced volunteers with the information by event organisers or the organisations themselves electing to add details to the site in much the same way as they update Facebook.

Funding

- Preliminary financial modelling shows that the website will produce an annual operating surplus after the first year of operation and recoup all initial investment after 3 years.
- However start-up funding of around £13,000 is required in order to fund the development stage. It is planned to apply for grants from local authorities and grant making bodies for this investment.
- Future surpluses from the website should be made available to support public enterprises.
- The modelling assumes the website is hosted by an independent commercial organisation with community purposes at its heart. As such, Experience Ilminster CIC would seem to be a straight-forward existing option.

Next Steps

With the general acceptance of this broad concept by the Town Council, it is proposed that a more detailed presentation should be made to the Council in the near future.