

Neighbourhood Development Officers – Communities Update Report

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide members with an update on the range of Neighbourhood Development activities undertaken in Area South over the last 6 months.

Public Interest

This report sets out the project work undertaken by the Area South Neighbourhood Development Officers over the last 6 months in line with the Area South Development Plan.

Recommendation

It is recommended that members note and comment on the report.

Background

There is one full time and one part time Neighbourhood Development Officer – Communities post within the Area South Development Team (1.5 Full Time Equivalent).

The overall job purpose of the Neighbourhood Development Officer – Communities (NDO) is:

To work in parishes and neighbourhoods across the Area, supporting the development of community infrastructure and strong, self-sustaining communities. To help people articulate the needs of their communities and localities; and work together to meet those needs themselves. To help people to influence the improvement and development of public/local services and facilities.

The NDOs work alongside other council services and other local agencies to deliver a true community based approach in Yeovil and surrounding parishes, consistent with the government's and local communities' ambitions and aspirations.

In the absence of the Area South Development Manager, the full time Officer has been seconded to the post of Area Development Lead (ADL), which incorporates the existing NDO work and also parts of the Area Development Manager's role. This report details the main body of work undertaken by the part time NDO and the ADL.

Main areas of work

Engage with and support Parish Councils

The NDO and ADL continue to work closely with Parish Councils including supporting West Coker to undertake a Housing Needs Survey, offering advice to Barwick and West Coker on

their plans to develop their community facilities and recreation grounds and providing funding advice to Odcombe, West Coker, Hardington Mandeville and East Coker.

One particular key project for the NDO is supporting West Coker Parish Council and Recreation Ground for Children & Young People Trust with master planning the Recreation Ground on Halves Lane, West Coker.

The project aims to replace the three dilapidated buildings that currently stand on the recreation ground with a new sport and youth pavilion and new changing rooms. The project will also extend the play area in order to meet the needs of older children within the village. The cricket pitch will also be improved and a new Multi Use Games Area will be provided.

Leading the master plan process is a steering group, made up of recreation ground trustees, parish councillors, residents and local user group representatives. A feasibility study is being undertaken to establish the need for each of the projects. The study will assess local data, compile information from the parish consultation, detail the costs of the individual projects and identify possible funding sources and advise on likely timescales. The steering group are now at the stage of interviewing architects for the new pavilion building and confirming plans for the new play park extension project

The NDO has also worked with West Coker Parish Council on other projects including the refresh of the parish plan and the additional enhancements to the village hall, establishing not only a need for all the new facilities but also how the two facilities will work in partnership.

The ADL has been working on the new 'key sites' within Brympton and Yeovil Without, details of which are included elsewhere in the report.

The team have also continued to produce Parish and Community Bulletins, which have been well received.

Health Inequalities and Westfield regeneration programme

The NDO is working closely with Ward members, the Westfield Community Association and local agencies to target health, social and economic inequalities across the Westfield community. The newly formed action plan led by Westfield Community Association and supported by the NDO and partner agencies is a result of the recently completed 'Our Place' project. The new regeneration programme has evolved from 'Our Place', adding additional actions to meet the wider need of the residents and local community organisations. These projects include the development of a new community hall at St. Peters Church, new bus bays at Westfield Academy, community training programmes, fuel poverty education and support, visual enhancement of green spaces and waste land, improved branding and communications across the neighbourhood and healthy lifestyle initiatives to support young people and adults living locally.

Enhance open spaces

The NDO and ADL are working with other SSDC services and community groups/ parish council working parties to develop local play and open spaces within our communities. Such projects include West Coker Recreation Ground master planning (pavilion, play, youth and sport facilities), Barwick recreation ground and play facilities, Westfield open spaces, Wyndham Park play facilities and the proposed Bike Park in Birchfield.

Area South Community Forum

The Area Forum meetings continue to be well attended by over 30 community representatives. The forum has been set up to discuss issues such as community safety, youth initiatives, local funding opportunities and community groups. The meetings are flexible to deal with emerging issues and allow time to network, share ideas and solve problems.

The forum is aimed at agencies, parish councils and local community groups who live or work in Area South. Members include Housing Associations, District, Town and Parish Councillors, Police and Fire Services, Youth Workers, Community Associations, Community Justice Panel and Community Speedwatch.

The forum meets 3 times a year at Brympton Way and the date for the next meeting is Monday 17th October 2016.

Youth Work Provision

The ADL is part of the Steering Group looking at Youth Service Provision across Area South. The group is lead by Yeovil Town Council and has representatives from Yeovil Without Parish Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset County Council.

The steering group initially commissioned four youth clubs but due to a lack of demand in one area and an unsuitable venue in another, this has now been reduced to two. The youth club in Westfield has proved to be very popular but the provider has now been tasked with improving attendance and engaging with many more young people in the Milford area of Yeovil.

The ADL has continued to chair and organise the district wide Youth Opportunities Group (YOG). YOG has representatives from statutory agencies, local charities, youth groups and local churches who meet to tackle issues relating to young people and identify opportunities for youth activities and joint working.

The ADL has also recently become a trustee for the Yeovil Young Achievers Trust. The trust provides grants to young people who need assistance in order to carry on with their studies or develop their talent. Examples of previous grants include a specialist laptop for a talented graphic design student and help with the travel expenses of a female amateur kick boxer who had been selected to compete for Great Britain but couldn't afford the associated costs. The ADL was asked to join the trust to help promote awareness of the charity.

Wyndham Park

The ADL has organised a number of meetings to look at specific issues on the Wyndham Park Estate including the need to develop community facilities on or near the site. There is a gap in community hall provision in this area and local residents, ward members and SSDC officers have raised the issue of the evident shortfall of community facilities in the east of Yeovil.

The project has support from local residents, registered housing providers and church leaders. SSDC has allocated £400,000 towards the project, which added to the £220,000 secured through the renegotiation of the section 106 document, gives the project a current budget of £620,000. Yeovil Without Parish Council has also offered support for the project but the challenge remains to find an appropriate site.

The MOD has agreed to allow the community to use one of its properties on the estate as a temporary community hub, while the ADL investigates possible alternative sites. The house will be able to be used by various agencies for advice surgeries and also by residents wanting to start new groups and activities. The project is still in the very early planning stages but is a very exciting development for the estate. The ADL will continue to keep members updated as the project develops.

The ADL has promoted community engagement by helping to set up a Wyndham Park Community Association, and has designed and funded community newsletters in order to keep residents informed regarding the various issues on the site. The ADL, alongside the Yeovil Without Parish Clerk and a Knightstone Housing Officer, has also planned a number of open events, that allow residents the opportunity to speak to officers from a variety of agencies and find out more information about their estate. The latest of these was held on 4th June and the feedback received has been extremely positive.

The ADL is also a member of the Wyndham Park Partnership that has been established by the Parish Council to provide a strategic overview of the issues and opportunities within the site. This group has representation from the Parish Council, Housing Associations, Church members and the Armed Forces Covenant and may provide the necessary mechanism for securing community facilities for this estate.

The ADL is part of the steering group working to develop the play areas and a MUGA on the estate. The land currently allocated for a MUGA is not in an ideal position, as it is situated next to housing and this produces a problem with 'ball containment'. The ADL is looking in to the possibility of acquiring land adjacent to the site, so that the MUGA can be moved to a more appropriate site. However, residents are very keen that a MUGA gets delivered soon, so the steering group have investigated possible designs that could be installed, should the adjacent land not become available or exceed the project budget.

Help communities wishing to develop community facilities

In addition to helping Barwick, East Coker and West Coker Parish Councils with the development and/or improvement of community facilities, the NDO is on the steering group looking to develop a community hall in the Westfield area of Yeovil.

The NDO and ADL have noted an increase in local residents and community groups aspiring to run community buildings through the 'community right to bid' programme. The NDO and ADL have assisted community groups through this process by registering eligible buildings on the register of assets of community value.

Support and promote Community Associations, community events and community engagement activities

As part of the work to promote sustainable engaged communities, the NDO and ADL have helped and advised a number of Community Associations and supported community events, information days, volunteer fairs, table top sales and other community activities. These activities promote community cohesion and help to recruit community volunteers.

The NDO has supported the SSSC working group to aid and assist new refugee families to settle into their new community. Signposting and links with community groups, facilities and activities are all helping to settle the families into South Somerset life.

Support sustainable transport and green travel schemes

The ADL has been working with the SCC Sustainable Transport Officer to promote sustainable transport options within the key sites in Yeovil. The ADL is also working to promote cycling and is part the steering groups for the Bike Fest event and the proposed Yeovil Bike Park. The SSDC Transport Officer is working on a capital bid to improve cycle routes in the East of Yeovil and should the bid be successful, the ADL will be part of the project group taking this forward.

The NDO and ADL are working with local parishes and other SSDC services to develop new cycle routes and paths across Yeovil and surrounding villages. One project linking Yeovil and Limington has developed cross area working and collaboration of Area Development Teams, Ward Members and Parish Councils.

Supporting economic development and regeneration

As part of the new role, the ADL has joined Yeovil Vision and has also become a member of the Love Yeovil Marketing Group. The Marketing Group have set themselves very ambitious targets between now and the end of the year. Therefore a lot of work is required over the next few months to produce some well attended quality events such as Super Saturday and the lead up to Christmas.

The ADL has also become a member of the South Regeneration Board and is part of the officer group responsible for commissioning the UDF refresh.

Key Sites

A large proportion of the ADL's time is spent on the various key sites in Yeovil. The community work at Wyndham Park is detailed elsewhere in the report. However, the ADL has also spent time working with SCC and SSDC's Development Control and Land and Property Teams to try to deliver the two much needed primary schools within Yeovil. The project team had investigated the possibility of moving the school at Wyndham Park to an adjacent larger piece of land and converting the existing piece of land in to a community asset. The ADL had developed plans for this land including a hall, MUGA and play space. Unfortunately, a decision was taken to revert back to the original plan, so work is now required to find alternative land for these facilities.

The ADL is also working to develop the Dual Use School on the Lufton Key Site. The school is the first Dual Use School in the area, so the ADL has been working to design a dual use agreement that is suitable for both school and community use. The ADL has monthly meetings with SCC project officers, so it is hoped that an agreement can be reached shortly.

The ADL also has monthly meetings with the SCC officer responsible for the build of the school to ensure that the design meets the needs of the community as well as possible within the obvious constraints. The frequency of the meetings is likely to increase as the build date approaches. The ADL has begun working with the SSDC Property Department to ensure the design contains the correct specifications including for example; flooring, kitchen white goods and the correct placement of electrical points.

Grants and funding

The NDO and ADL continue to promote the South Somerset District Council grant scheme and to assess the applications.

The NDO and ADL have also provided funding advice to local projects, charities and social enterprises and continue to research new opportunities and new grants for local groups. The demand for help and advice is increasing due to the current economic climate and the reduction/withdrawal of some grant funds.

Government initiatives

The Locality Bill, Neighbourhood Planning and other government initiatives all bring changes that affect development work. The NDO and ADL respond to these changes and look for new opportunities for the communities within Area South wherever possible. An example of this is our successful bid to become an Our Place pilot.

The Community Right to Bid has also resulted in an increase in workload, with eight local facilities now included on the Register of Assets of Community Value.

Supporting voluntary sector groups

The NDO and ADL continue to support a number of voluntary sector groups including SPARK (Formally SSVCA), Shopmobility and South Somerset Disability Forum.

Responsive Work

The NDO and ADL are receiving increasing numbers of enquiries and requests from local residents and community groups requesting support. These requests range from funding advice and guidance on charity governance, to signposting and co-ordination of other SSDC services. Other queries have included help with statistical analysis, legal advice and requests for training, as well as ideas for new initiatives and projects that may link with or be included in future Area Development Plans. These responsive activities are now being recorded on a community enquiries log within the service team.

An example of a new initiative that arose from within the community is the Yeovil Men's Shed. The idea of a Mens Shed started in Australia and there are now approximately 300 'sheds' in the UK. The Yeovil Shed members have decided to be inclusive and although the name is Yeovil Men's Shed, it is open to everyone who would like the opportunity to socialise and undertake practical activities such as carpentry. The ADL supported this project and will continue to offer help and advice as it moves forward.

Financial Implications

None

Corporate Priority Implications

Health and Communities

To build healthy, self reliant, active communities we will:

- Help people to live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport and healthy lifestyles facilities and activities.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

None directly arising from this report. However, the Westfield Regeneration Programme contains a number of projects aimed at reducing fuel poverty.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The NDO and ADL act as advocates for the whole community, including minority groups. They are the lead officers for the Area in relation to initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion and providing opportunities for those least able to take up Council and other services.

Background Papers:

None