

Area North Committee – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2008

## 10. Community Regeneration in Area North Market Towns Update Report

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### Purpose of the Report

To provide an update to the Area North Committee on community planning and regeneration activities and related outcomes in Area North's four "Market Towns".

### Recommendation

Note and comment on the report.

### Background

Each of the four SSDC Area Development Teams have the lead role for community-led regeneration, as well as for the support and development of community planning within the area. In addition to the role of the Head of Area Development, and provision of community offices in Somerton and Langport, a dedicated Community Regeneration Officer works as part of the team to support an extensive programme of work spanning public, private and voluntary groups.

The Community Regeneration Officer (CRO) post is part-time (22 hrs p/w) supported by a Project Support Worker, who assists with research, events, administration and design work.

The scope of Community Regeneration in Area North is the creation of local community plans for Somerton, Langport & Huish Episcopi, Martock and South Petherton, development of public, private and voluntary partnerships and the delivery of locally led projects designed to secure sustainable social, economic and environmental development.

Common themes emerging from local community plans are as follows:

- Youth provision
- Supporting the local economy
- Community safety, including traffic calming
- Environmental enhancements
- Access to services and information
- Provision of high quality, well-managed community buildings

Programmes of work supporting community-led regeneration, are led, supported or co-ordinated by the Community Regeneration Officer (CRO), covering each of the four "Market Towns"\* of Area North, while working with other SSDC service teams and partner to enhance the role and function of these towns as service centres for their surrounding rural communities.

\* Five settlements in Area North have joined the Market Towns Investment Group – these are: Somerton, Langport and Huish Episcopi, Martock, and South Petherton.

## Community Regeneration – current programmes and activities

- Support to Community Planning Partnerships in the production and delivery of community plans (See 1.0)
- Delivery of programme agreed by Market Towns Investment Group (See 2.0)
- Support for local priorities e.g: tourism development, town centre enhancements, youth provision and community safety (see Area Development Plan quarterly reports for further details)
- Supporting business networks and access to business support, including the Area North Small Business grant scheme (See 3.0)
- Monitoring of local indicators of economic vitality e.g: vacancy surveys (See 4.0)
- Major projects development (e.g. arising from the Waterlinks programme)

### 1.0 Support to Community Planning Partnerships and community plans

The CRO is currently working to improve the monitoring and reporting of progress of Community Plans to Members and the Market Towns Investment Group, while ensuring their value is recognised locally as well as within the context of more strategic documents such as the Sustainable Community Strategy.

A project implementation plan template was devised in Martock and has been amended by the CRO for the purposes of monitoring progress of projects and SSDC financial contributions within each Market Town. Subject to some further discussion, future updates will be provided in this format where overall progress monitoring is required. An example extract of this template is included as **Appendix A**.

The Area Development web pages have been recently enhanced, the pages provide information relating to each stage of the community planning process, from consultation to delivery and funding of projects. Improvements are ongoing.

Visit: [www.southsomerset.gov.uk/community](http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/community).

#### 1.1 Langport

In 2002, a strategic community plan (*Langport 2020*) was published by the Langport Area Forum, funded by SWRDA, under the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative. A significant amount of the Langport 2020 plan has either been achieved, or is now out of date and it was agreed in 2005, by Langport Area Development Trust, Langport and Huish Councils and SSDC to produce a revised community plan, supported by a partnership of local stakeholders.

In September 2007 a draft community plan, which drew together a range of projects and needs, identified from prior research and current initiatives, was circulated as a consultation document residents of Langport and Huish Episcopi. The results have been reviewed with the Joint Committee of those councils, who plan to host a meeting for local stakeholders in March, which will process to publishing a shared action plan for Langport and Huish Episcopi.

In addition, in view of the likely planning gain contributions from current housing developments in the Langport area, the Community Regeneration Officer is working with

partners to collate an accurate, as possible, picture of local needs for community facilities.

## 1.2 Martock

During September 2006 - March 2007 the CRO supported the production of Martock's revised Local Community Plan, which was officially launched in April 2007.

Since this time, Area North has provided both officer and member representation on the M3 Community Partnership Steering Group. This group acts as the accountable body for the delivery of the projects outlined within the plan and includes representatives from 7 key partner organisations. **Appendix B** shows the structure of M3 Community Partnership.

Area North, in conjunction with other SSDC departments, continue to provide specific support to the partners and sub-groups of the M3 Community Partnership including; Martock Youth Affairs Committee, Local Action Group, Precinct Improvement Group, Martock Recreation User Group and the developing Business Association.

**Appendix A**, as supplied for Section 1.0, is an extract from the project-monitoring document for Martock. It highlights latest updates and SSDC funding allocations to specific projects.

## 1.3 Somerton

Somerton hosted an event in September 2007 to review the achievements of their community plan. Many of the projects outlined in the plan have now been completed and a reviewed and updated action plan may be required in the next year to ensure continued momentum. More recent achievements include:

- Opening of Memorial Garden
- Completion of Play Area
- New kitchen installed in Parish Rooms
- Responsibility for Christmas lights passed to SBTA (Successfully delivered in December 2007)
- Lighting for the skate park – extending the hours of use for this popular facility

Area North continues to offer support to the key capital project for Somerton – enhancing safety and access in West Street. Area North has also offered support to the production of a longer walks publication.

At present a new bus shelter is about to be installed, and improvements planned for the Sports Club.

## 1.4 South Petherton

South Petherton's Parish Plan was published in 2006 and adopted by the Parish Council. At the time of publication a number of projects had already been completed. More recent achievements include:

- Range of pilot activities for young people
- Improved facilities at the Recreation Ground: New Tennis courts
- SSDC Area North grant award for provision of lift at the Blake Hall
- Regular, well-attended, Local Action Group meetings

Support is being provided to Petherton Arts Trust to complete a review of the existing Business Plan for the David Hall.

A meeting is to be held between the Parish Plan Steering Group, Parish Council representatives and the CRO to plan a programme of review, commencing with the achievements of the original plan being displayed at the Parish Council Open meeting on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> April.

The CRO will be involved in collating statistical evidence of need for South Petherton and supporting the production of a revised action plan.

## **2.0 South Somerset's Market Towns' Vision and Investment Group**

Members will recall that the Market Towns Investment Group (MTIG) identified three priority themes for investment in 2006. These were Community Safety, Tourism and Environmental Enhancements.

### **Community Safety – CCTV & Radio Link**

In principle agreement has been given to purchase 3 deployable CCTV cameras for use by Avon and Somerset Police across South Somerset's 10 Market Towns.

In addition, stakeholder meetings are being arranged in each Area to gauge interest in the adoption of Radio Link, a system that has been successful in supporting efforts to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in Yeovil. A meeting shall be held on February 27<sup>th</sup> February, at Somerton Parish Rooms from 7pm.

### **Tourism - Maps and Interpretation Boards**

A total of 14 boards, including maps and local interpretation, were recently installed across Somerton, Langport, Martock and South Petherton.

A number also include additional community notice boards for use by local groups to advertise events, etc. Feedback received has been positive.

**Local Priority Schemes** – MTIG members were invited to submit project proposals, which would be financially supported by the SSDC capital programme up to £10,000.

The projects to be supported in Area North are as follows:

- Langport – Gateway signs and improved town centre signage
- Martock – Traditional street lighting in Church Street
- Somerton – Flashing speed signs at Behind Berry
- South Petherton – Bus shelter and flashing speed signs

An evaluation meeting for Area North MTIG community representatives was held on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> January. Feedback received was considered at the last co-ordinators meeting and future agendas for MTIG will address the points raised.

## **3.0 Business Support**

The CRO continues to support the development of Business Associations in Langport, Martock and South Petherton, working in conjunction with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce and Industry, SSDC's Business Support Officer and local businesses.

The CRO also co-ordinates the assessment of the Small Business Grants scheme. Since April 2007 a total of 11 grant applications have been received, 7 of these have been paid totalling £5,358.60.

The appointment of dedicated Business Support Officer within the Economic Development Team, has enhanced the level of service available to business support activities. Further details will be provided in a future report to ANC, including an evaluation of the business grants scheme.

#### **4.0 Monitoring local indicators of economic vitality**

Local vacancies, whether in the town centres or industrial estates / small business parks, have been regarded as one of the strongest indicators of economic decline or vitality.

Base line data was provided to members in 2005 following the completion of a survey carried out by the Area Development team. The Planning Policy Team were also in the process of completing a retail capacity study at this time.

In consultation with the Economic Development Team, a review of the way in which we monitor and review business use in the Market Towns is under way. To date, walking surveys have been completed in all four Market Towns and desk-based work shall provide further insight into the hidden detail of 'apparent' vacancies.

In January 2006, there were a total of 33 recorded vacancies across the Market Towns. According to current statistics there are now 51 units appearing vacant or not trading. It must be born in mind that the survey areas vary from previous years and further scrutiny of these results may reveal a number of change of use cases or units being used for storage or alternative purposes. **Appendix C** shows 2006 results, alongside current statistics.

#### **Financial Implications**

None from this report.

#### **Implications for Corporate Priorities**

Objective 8: Work in Partnership with the public and private sector in developing and delivery of the Market Towns Vision.

Objective 14: Maintain above 90 per cent the people who generally feel safe in their communities.

Objective 15: Increase to 65 per cent by 2010 the people who feel engaged in and can influence decisions that affect their communities

Objective 16: Maintain above 80 per cent the people satisfied with their neighbourhoods as a place to live

#### **Other Implications**

None applicable.

**Background Papers:** *Previous reports:- Area North Community Regeneration Update, January 2006, Forthcoming MTIG report to District Executive March 2008 report to DX.*