Area North Committee – 25 April 2012

10. Addressing Community Priorities - Area North Development Plan 2011-12 – Outturn Report

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Purpose of the Report

To provide an end of year report of the work undertaken by the Area Development service on behalf of the SSDC Area North Committee to address priorities identified during April 2011 to March 2012.

Councillors are asked to contact the Area Development Manager or other named contacts in advance of the meeting with any requests for further information.

Public Interest

Four SSDC Area Development teams support four Area Committees and 60 ward members to identify and address local social, economic and environmental priorities for Yeovil, the market towns and rural areas of South Somerset, in Areas West, North, South and East.

Each of the four SSDC Area Committee's seek to improve local quality of life which includes directing the work of the Area Development team, together with an annual grants budget, and a dedicated allocation of the council's capital programme.

This report provides information on the work supported through partnership working or direct investment) by the Area Development Service and Area North Committee, completed or taking place from April 2011 to March 2012.

Recommendation

Note and comment on the report highlighting any specific current priorities within wards and parishes.

Background

In a rural area such as Area North in South Somerset, economies of scale can be harder to achieve for public services. Building on existing partnerships, or promoting voluntary action can assist to make real improvements for local people.

South Somerset District Council aims to address this challenge, and build upon the local skills and knowledge found in local communities, through its well-established Area Working system, the Council's 'enable-partner-deliver' ethos, and its ambition *"to strive to deliver an improving quality of life for all"*.

1. Introduction - Area North and SSDC Priorities 2011-12

Following the re-election of the Area North Committee in May 2011, local priorities were reviewed and agreed as follows (for further details see report to Area North Committee November 2011).

a) **Jobs** – we will aim to add value to the economy in Area North, through promoting sustainable economic growth, assisting with the delivery of the Somerset Rural Broadband Programme, promoting tourism and enhancing the offer to visitors.

b) **Affordable Housing –** we will assist with the delivery of affordable homes in Area North, including support to test and develop new models.

c) **Self-Help** – we will promote greater levels of self-help to promote the sustainability of local services and facilities for all ages.

Agreement on local priorities helps direct the allocation of time and of funds held within the Area Portfolio, and act as a basis for work with SSDC services, other public agencies and communities. This might include local scrutiny of public service delivery, promoting local partnership working and supporting community engagement activities.

During 2011-12 SSDC also reviewed and published a revised Council Plan for 2012 to 2015, setting out a sharp focus on priorities and what SSDC wants to deliver within available resources.

Appendix A provides a summary of the SSDC Council Plan together with the links with the work of the Area Development (North) team and current local priorities set by ward members. The Council Plan can be viewed in full at:
http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/408146/ssdccouncilplan2012-2015.pdf

2. The Area North Development Plan – 2011-12

The Area Development Plan is the means by which progress towards particular aims and projects are managed and monitored. The plan is formed primarily from the work programme of the Area Development service team, but is largely achieved through the combined efforts of many services, partners and local community organisations.

There is a wide range of work included, covering many aspects of supporting sustainable community development across Area North. (A summary of support to community led projects during 2011-12 within the Area Development Plan is included in **Appendix B**.)

Further information on the local delivery of SSDC services can be provided at a ward or parish level on request.

In summary the Area Development Service provides support for:

- The delivery of projects and initiatives that invest into local economic, social and environmental well-being. The significant majority of work supported is community led – including business groups, or in close collaboration with other services.
- Community involvement in public decision-making.
- Forming and maintaining effective partnerships and investments between communities and public services.
- Local access to services for residents, businesses and visitors through SSDC community offices and Local Information Centres; through publications and through occasional workshops and events.

The following sections highlight results from 2011-12 Area Development Plan.

3. Enabling and investing in services, facilities and activities for the community
There are three main ways in which SSDC assists with investment into local communities – through finding people the help they need to help themselves, through financial help and through its role as the Local Planning Authority to secure longer community benefits arising from development.

3.1 Helping people help themselves

Area Development (North) offers an enquiries service to help anyone within the area seeking guidance on ways to start up or develop a local service or amenity, or seeking help to address or resolve an issue within the community. People using this service include local town and parish councillors, volunteers, as well as individuals and businesses. Ward members will also request help or information from time to time drawn from local community engagement.

Details of last year's enquiries on a parish / ward basis can be provided on request.

- During 2011-12 Area Development team recorded 225 enquiries mostly from community groups and parish councils. Some examples of requests for information or guidance included:
  - Purchasing, replacing / redeveloping community owned land and buildings.
  - Setting up new groups or terms of reference for local project steering groups
  - Business planning to redevelop buildings to provide community services
  - Local contacts to find ways to support a new activity.
  - Good practice / affordable ways to undertake local research and consultation
  - Feasibility for new housing / employment / services in villages
  - Funding advice for undertaking projects to promote local well-being

A number of enquiries lead on to offers of financial support from SSDC. The Area Development team will assist with identifying alternative sources of funding, and promotes local fundraising wherever possible. Town and Parish Councils are expected to contribute to community led projects in order to gain SSDC support.

3.2 Financial support

- During 2011-12, **26 projects** within the year's programme, were helped with **£31,106 of grants** from Area North, with a **total project value of £133,935**. This represents an average grant of 23%. In other words for every £1 of SSDC funds, a further £4.30 was invested into the local community. (**Appendix B** refers to projects which received grant aid and further details are available on request.)

  Some examples are:
  - New MUGA and Community Shop in Kingsbury Episcopi.
  - Isle Abbotts Village Hall refurbishment
  - Additional equipment for community use in Pitney, Somerton and Curry Rivel community halls.
  - Two parish lengthsman schemes – Turn Hill and South Petherton. (Final year of support confirmed.)

3.3 Investment via s106 obligations

The programme of developer obligations, which help provide additional community facilities, has received increased recent interest. SSDC implements a detailed

monitoring and collection system, and has recently adopted revised standards for the triggering of developer obligations for community facilities as part of Local Development Framework for South Somerset.

The Area Development team will support as required the Development Management and Community Health and Leisure services to help secure contributions and re-invest against local priorities.

- The s106 Monitoring Officer will report on the progress of collecting and spend into local community facilities in June 2012. Recent examples include the completion of a new play area and open space at Old Kelways, Huish Episcopi, to be maintained by SSDC and grant awards to South Petherton Parish Council to improve local youth, play and recreation facilities.

4. Community Offices and outreach work to promote and access to housing and welfare services

During 2011-12 the Area North Development service maintained two SSDC community office services in Somerton (nine hours over three days per week) and Langport (22 hours over four days per week). There was also a weekly surgery based in Martock (one session of three hours per week) as part of our support to the local volunteers working from the parish community office.

To promote services provided by SSDC through wider community engagement our Area Support Assistants can make one-off visits to local community groups and activities. Information is also supplied to community newsletters, through press releases, via ward members and parish council briefings and through occasional events and workshops.

- During the year **3143** customers chose to access SSDC services 'face to face' from one of three locations for our community office services – Somerton, Martock and Langport. An average of **31%** of all enquiries were for help with welfare benefits, housing and homelessness.

- The opening hours of the **Langport** Community Office (using shared accommodation with the Langport Information Centre) were reviewed and adjusted from 37 to 22 hours per week. (Monday to Thursday 9.00 – 2.30).

- Following the Area Review, and budget setting for 2012-13, SSDC has withdrawn the weekly surgery visit to **Martock** Community Office (wef 1st April 2012), and has proposed to withdraw the community office service in **Somerton** which is currently subject to an equalities analysis. If agreed, a date of closure will be later in 2012-13.

- The Housing and Welfare service have identified greater levels of demand for the **welfare benefit take-up** service in Area North, and will provide additional hours to meet this demand using the saved service enhancement allocation commencing 1st April 2012.

For further information on the above please contact either Teresa Oulds (Community Regeneration Officer) or Madelaine King-Oakley (Area Support Team Leader).

5. Local Information Centres

Area North supports four Local Information Centres (LICs) in Area North in Langport, Somerton, Martock and South Petherton. The LICs are staffed by volunteers, and each parish has a local co-ordinator. Volunteers are provided with training in customer service

and supporting visitor enquiries by the SSDC Tourism service. The Area North Development service monitors and supports an annual Service Level Agreement.

- In 2011-12 each Local Information Centre was supported through a Service Level Agreement, and regular contact maintained with local co-ordinators. The LICs recorded over 11,000 visitors during April to October 2011, supported by around 80 volunteers.

- A networking workshop was arranged by SSDC Area Development and Tourism services in November 2011. Groups of volunteers from each LIC attended the session held at Barrington Court. Feedback was very positive from those attended and further links have been formed between the centres themselves.

For further information on the above please contact either Teresa Oulds or Pauline Burr. (Community Regeneration Officers).

6. Access to services – transport and broadband.

Although physical isolation and exclusion are not solely issues for rural communities - remoteness from main service centres, with poor transport connections or lack of access to IT can make these problems harder to solve.

Area North is largely rural area, although most centres have retained key amenities including GP surgeries, Post Offices and a range of shops and local services.

The new Council Plan includes the actions o: *"Work with and lobby partners to help communities to develop transport schemes and local solutions to reduce rural isolation and inequalities to meet existing needs of those communities" and "Support early delivery of Super Fast Broadband to rural areas by 2015."*

Transport - Area North has supported the Links Community Transport service for a number of years, which covers Langport, Somerton and surrounding villages. The current three-year Service Level Agreement has ended and future financial needs will be subject to another report.

o   During 2011-12 Somerset County Council reviewed the allocation of subsidy to a number of rural bus services operating in South Somerset. A separate report is included elsewhere in this agenda.

Broadband - The Devon and Somerset Broadband Programme was awarded a grant from BDUK to help secure better (faster) broadband services across rural Somerset. to roll out broadband to those parts of our counties not covered (or likely to be covered) by the private sector. The project aims to deliver improved broadband (>2mbps) to every business and community across Devon and Somerset by 2015, and Superfast broadband (>24mbps) to at least 85% of the area by 2015, with 100% by 2020

o   The programme is in its early stages, with a target to secure 100% coverage by 2015. The Area Development and Economic Development service will continue to provide support to local community engagement.

7. Community Planning – Parish & Town Plans, Neighbourhood Plans

The Area Development service can advise parish or town councils thinking of producing a parish or town plan through comprehensive community involvement. Help and advice is also available from groups including the Community Council for Somerset and

Somerset Towns Forum. There is no one-way to produce a plan and there is no fixed template for town or parish plan either!

For land use and spatial planning matters the new Localism Act has introduced a formal legal process to create 'Neighbourhood Plans'. SSDC will encourage town or parish councils to wait for the detailed legislation to appear before starting formally down this route. However in the meantime, advice can offered on ways to address issues through the planning system.

A total of 19 parishes in Area North have a published town or parish plan – although some were published more than five years ago.

- During 2011-12 Somerton and Martock published their refreshed town / community plans, both received support on request with their respective consultation and engagement plans and guidance on action planning.

- Tintinhull Parish Council completed a programme of consultation initially focused on local facilities and services, and now developed into a local community plan. The plan is in draft form to be adopted in the coming weeks. Aller Parish Council undertook a similar appraisal and are progressing a number of projects as a result.

- A number of parishes including Stoke sub Hamdon, Curry Rivel, Compton Dundon, High Ham and Shepton Beauchamp have expressed interest in producing or revising existing local community plans. It is anticipated that the adoption of the Core Strategy and the emerging guidance on Neighbourhood Plans will stimulate further interest.

For further information please contact Charlotte Jones Area Development Manager or Les Collett Community Development Officer.

8. Area North Affordable Housing Programme

There is either feasibility work or active scheme development of affordable housing taking place in thirteen parishes, some as part of larger developments, some based on the 'rural exception' model. The draft Core Strategy policy SS2 – development in rural settlements has caused positive discussions within a number of rural communities, in particular to consider a mix of affordable with an element of market housing.

In the larger settlements around 99 affordable homes have been completed in the last 2-3 years in Area North, there are a further 56 with planning consent and a current application if approved includes 18 affordable homes. The draft Core Strategy indicates further growth to take place in Area North over the next few years and there will be a policy (likely to be 35%) to secure a proportion of new dwellings as affordable homes.

- A series of presentations to explain the current economic and spatial planning considerations for affordable housing was given by the Planning Policy and Strategic Housing teams at the Annual Meeting with Town and Parish Councils.

- Schemes in Long Load, Long Sutton, Ash and Norton sub Hamdon have all received additional support to maintain progress. Of note during 2011-12 is the decision to form a Community Land Trust in Norton-sub-Hamdon, and planning approval for 3 new units in Long Sutton.

- A further report on the progress of and issues raised by the Area North Affordable Housing Programme is planned for May 2012, followed by an end of year report in July 2012 to quantify recent new builds and funding allocations.

For further information on the Area North Affordable Housing Programme please contact Jo Calvert Housing Development Officer.

Neighbourhood management and community safety

The SSDC Community Safety Officer and Community Development Officer can advise on ways to resolve or address local issues. There are various schemes and initiatives to help promote community safety – many supported by the Avon & Somerset Police – for example Neighbourhood Watch, Community Speedwatch, and Farm Watch programmes.

There has been a considerable reduction in direct budgets to support community safety, and formal partnership arrangements are under review.

- The March agenda for the Area North Committee provided an outline of the ways in which SSDC supports local community safety on a day-to-day basis and further details of current work is available on request.

- The Area North Community Safety Action Panel has been dissolved as result of reduced staffing, with new arrangements put in place for the time being to promote local partnerships and good communications.

- A report on the work of Streetscene service in due in May 2012, which includes the SSDC response to many issues covered by 'community safety' including fly-tipping, litter and graffiti.

For more information on ways to address community safety, or to find out more about current community safety issues in your ward, please contact Steve Brewer – Community Safety Officer, or Les Collett – Community Development Officer or the Neighbourhood Policing team

Promoting local economic vitality – jobs, visitors and the rural economy

Local economic development refers to the fostering of improved trading conditions, increased and enhanced employment opportunities through business start-up and growth and the development of skills and knowledge (and earnings) within the local work force. As a local planning authority SSDC has a unique role to play within the local economy, but land use and spatial planning is not the only (or indeed the primary) tool at its disposal.

Work undertaken by SSDC – and included in the Area Development team work programme - to promote local economic development falls broadly into four main areas: town centre vitality; commercial / industrial development; visitor services and facilities (tourism); rural economic development.

The challenges of a small business / rural economy and in some cases market failure in certain areas has been and continues to be evident. The public sector may in turn offer incentives, subsidies or protections to support a sustainable economy, or may provide new ways for services to be provided (for example through social enterprise).

Some examples of current / recent initiatives aimed at local economic development include:

- Resistance to unwanted loss of employment land / premises through the planning system, promoting sustainable development.

- Seeking opportunities for business relocation / expansion and start up in a variety of settings including the re-use of 'brownfield land' and redundant buildings for commercial purposes, encouragement of community ownership where appropriate.
- Promoting access to support services for small businesses and assisting where possible with removing barriers to start-up, growth and innovation.
- Development and support to local community based tourism initiatives.
- Programmes to improve connectivity for businesses operating out of the main urban centres and use of IT for commerce and communications.
- Support to local partnerships to lead local improvements to the cultural and physical shopping / trading environment, for example Langport town centre marketing scheme led by Langport Business Association and Town Council. South Somerset Market Towns Investment Programme – visitor facilities programme ongoing.

Looking ahead 2012-13

As well as continuing to support the progress of current community-led projects in Area North not yet completed (as shown in **Appendix B**), the following areas of work are proposed to form the work programme of the Area Development team and Area Committee for the coming year:

- Review and assess employment land allocations (within saved Local Plan and draft Core Strategy) and current state of employment land and business use within Area North. In conjunction with Planning Policy and Economic Development.
- Support for continued progress of Area North Affordable Housing Programme (With Strategic Housing and Development Management)
- Further consideration of rural transport options (with Transport Officer and Transporting Somerset).
- Support for progress of action plans for Historic Buildings at Risk (with Conservation)
- Assess local needs and opportunities to address unemployment and skills development – including young people 'not in education, employment or training' (NEETs).
- Continue to develop a programme to implement increased levels of local marketing and improve the visitor experience in Area North.
- Establish affordable partnerships promoting local access to services, community led investment and neighbourhood management in conjunction with other service providers (e.g.: Yarlington Housing, Neighbourhood Policing team, Somerset County Council).
- Provide guidance and support to town and parish councils wishing to produce a local community plan and / or promote local development (housing, employment, community facilities) in line with the Localism Act and Core Strategy.
- Complete 2011 review of Area North Capital Programme, to make more detailed allocations in line with local and SSDC priorities.
- Further review in conjunction with Financial and Property Services, of SSDC asset portfolio in Area North.
- Completion of Lean Review of Area Development / Communities, and implementation of review of community / area offices.

Financial implications

None from this report. The Area North budget was approved by Full Council in February 2012.

Council Plan Implications

In the main the Area Development Plan is drawn from local priorities raised by community groups, residents, local businesses and Town & Parish Councils. In consultation with ward members, time and finance provided will be directly linked to corporate priorities as set out in the Council Plan. The most likely contributions to the Council Plan actions are shown in Appendix A.

Carbon Emissions and Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

None directly from this report. There are a number of local initiatives designed to promote carbon reduction including support to 'Transition' volunteers. In particular where we are asked to support buildings projects, applicants are expected to assess the business case for energy efficiency and carbon reduction. Opportunities for sustainable transport and promoting local self-containment are priorities.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None directly from this report. The Area Development Plan includes a number of projects and initiatives, which actively promote equalities through removing barriers to discrimination and promoting diversity.

Background Papers: *Area North Development Plan 2011-12*
Local Priorities – ANC August 2011
Local Priorities – ANC November 2011