

Area North Committee – 26 September 2012

## 9. Supporting Local Economic Development - Area North Marketing Project (Executive Decision)

*Strategic Director*                      *Rina Singh, Place & Performance*  
*Assistant Directors:*                 *Kim Close / Helen Rutter Communities*  
    *Charlotte Jones – Area Development Manager (North)*  
*Service Manager:*  
*Lead Officer:*                            *Pauline Burr Community Regeneration Officer (North)*  
*Contact Details:*                        *pauline.burr@southsomerset.gov.uk or: 01935 462253*

### Purpose of the Report

To seek the approval of the Area North Committee for the detailed allocation of £20,000 within the Area North Capital Programme from the existing reserve fund for promoting local economic vitality.

### Public Interest

Area North has a distinctive natural environment and a wealth of historic buildings and heritage sites, it is home to many craftsmen and artists and produces high quality, local produce. Support for sustainable tourism remains a high priority.

Many of our business parks and small industrial estates are at the edge of towns and villages and are often a first impression to the visitor. There is a range of town & village centres which seek to encourage use by residents and visitors.

This report is to propose a short programme of support, financial and advisory, to encourage the installation of well designed signage that promotes visits to local businesses, facilities and places of interest.

### Recommendations

- (1) Members to approve in detail the allocation of £20,000 held within the reserve schemes of the Area North Capital programme including the proposed project management arrangements and grant criteria as set out in the report.
- (2) Subject to recommendation 1, to approve the setting up of an Area North Marketing working group to support the project and appoint 3 members.

### Introduction

This report is to propose a short programme of financial support and guidance to install a range of well considered signage to encourage visits to local businesses and facilities.

## Background

In establishing local priorities for investment, the Area North Committee has recognised that actions to support local economic development can have positive outcomes for our diverse rural communities.

Improved signage (as part of an overall 'light touch' marketing strategy) for local businesses and attractions have been identified for further investment, using a community based approach.

Earlier this year the Area Committee commissioned the installation of six free standing, large scale photographic images at the Cartgate picnic area that promote the district to users of the A303; as a chance to promote our district and encourage visitors to explore the local hinterland. This has been completed (August), and has received positive feedback. Recognising that the site also presents an opportunity to showcase Somerset as a destination for business relocation, Into Somerset, the inward investment agency, has funded a promotional banner next to the TIC.

Area North has many interesting and unusual attractions which are of interest to local visitors and to those from further afield; we also attract commercial and business visits from customers and suppliers. Our local shops and amenities benefit through secondary spend by this increased customer base.

Many of our business parks and small industrial estates are at the edge of towns and villages and are often a first impression to the visitor; there is often a disconnect between the site and the rest of the town. In the town centres, this is mirrored by the small shopping precincts, which are self contained and don't necessarily encourage natural flow to the rest of the town.

Area North has a distinctive environment, including its historic buildings and environment. The National Trust properties, the networks of pathways for walking, cycling and riding, open spaces like Ham Hill and the River Parrett Trail are notable assets within the district. The Somerset Levels and Moors is a low wetland of international significance for bio-diversity and is home to a variety of programmes initiated by the RSPB and Natural England.

Investment by SSDC into local economic development and regeneration in Area North has been largely managed through a community based approach, working collaboratively with local groups, businesses and town / parish councils. Community led projects are likely to achieve additional, longer term benefits beyond the actual project. Other benefits include the additional match-funding, project management and on-going maintenance costs provided by local communities in various ways.

## Project aims, objective and description

### Aims:

- To contribute to local economic vitality and well-being through clear and well-designed signage and interpretation to town centres, business parks, rural businesses and key cultural locations, designed to promote additional visits and extended stay and spend.
- To support local communities to maintain, enhance and promote the varied landscape, rich architectural heritage and local distinctiveness in Area North

The **objective** of the project is to add value to existing local marketing through improved local signage without compromising the integrity of the local environment.

The project will provide guidance and financial support to promote local businesses either individually or collectively, through improved signage and better orientation for visitors. [Phase One of this project included the installation of six promotional units at the Cartgate Picnic Area.]

The project will use a community based approach and operate as a programme of grants to third parties (for example local businesses, community groups or town/parish councils) together with guidance to design and install a series of signs within / around Area North. Subject to agreement, the project may include installations at SSDC sites, providing revenue costs are accepted by the relevant service.

The project will build on existing marketing from SSDC and others, aim to complement local marketing produced by business groups and local councils (for example), and be part of a longer term investment to increase overall marketing of the area.

### **Anticipated Benefits and links to the SSDC Council Plan**

- Visitors to the area will be more aware of the local facilities, attractions and services through targeted marketing
- We will support the local economy
- We will help maintain employment and potentially support an increase
- If we can support businesses/attractions through better signage we can expect a level of quality control. For example, we will have an opportunity to offer advice on planning requirements, design style etc to ensure any advertising is sensitive to its location
- We will support local pride in what the area has to offer, with an associated reputational benefit for SSDC
- Stronger relationships with groups seeking to promote local economic development

Area Development (North) will monitor the success of the project by the number of new promotional initiatives that are produced and the feedback we receive from businesses, Tourist and Local Information Centres, Parish Councils and members of the community.

### **Links with the SSDC Council Plan are described below.**

#### ***Focus One: Jobs***

- Increasing numbers of visitors to the area will support local employment in facilities, attractions, accommodation providers, services and the supply of local produce
- By making the most of opportunities to promote our natural and built environment, quality local produce and tourism industry we can encourage new businesses and relocation into the district

#### **Focus Two: Environment**

- The project aims to support local communities to maintain, enhance and promote the varied landscape, rich architectural heritage and local distinctiveness in Area North
- Improve signage without compromising the integrity of the local, rural environment.

#### **Focus Four: Health and Communities**

- In addition to enticing visitors to our district, this will be an opportunity to promote the local offer to our local communities and to encourage the “buy local” ethos.
- The Somerset Tourism survey indicated information centres are well used by visitors to the county. We will continue to work with our Local Information Centre volunteers, as a customer facing service, in any new promotions.

## **Project Management and involvement of ward members**

The project will be managed by Pauline Burr, Community Regeneration Officer (North). The project manager will work with potential applicants and assess applications, and monitor delivery. The project manager will have financial authority to make grant awards, subject to the recommendation of a member / officer working group.

It is proposed to establish a working group including relevant officers and three members of the Area North Committee. The working group will establish detailed criteria for assessment and recommend awards.

Reports from the working group will be made within the quarterly financial / Area development plan reports.

Ward members may wish to encourage applications or recommend specific locations from within their parish, and will be consulted as part of the assessment of applications, as is the current practice for community grants.

## **Eligibility, timing, costs and matchfunding.**

- Eligible projects will include signs for drivers and pedestrians / cyclists including 'brown signs', directional signs and interpretation panels.
- Applications can be from individual and groups of businesses, business associations, community groups or town/parish councils.
- Quality assurance will be provided by providing professional guidance, and approvals of the designs supported.
- It is anticipated that this project can be delivered by December 2013.
- Funding of up to £3000 per project and up to 75% contribution (the working group to establish detailed criteria).
- Assessment criteria will include design and location, perceived benefits, fit with wider marketing strategies. Detailed criteria will be agreed with the working group.
- Projects cannot also be supported by other SSDC grants.
- Grants awards will be subject to conditions covering publicity, maintenance and design approvals.

## **Next Steps**

If this project is approved. –

- Publicity to encourage expressions of interest.
- First meeting of working group to agree detailed criteria and planned timescales.
- Simple form and guidance for applicants issued, for a 'first round'.

## **Financial Implications**

£20,000 towards economic vitality is allocated as a reserve scheme in the current Area North Capital Programme

## **Council Plan Implications**

### **Focus One: Jobs**

- Motivate and support business associations...

- Provide targeted support for start-ups and small businesses and those with an aspiration to expand
- Work in partnership to deliver investment and development that local people value...
- Enhance the vitality of town centres...

**Focus Two: Environment**

- Continue to deliver schemes with local communities that enhance the appearance of their local areas.

**Focus Three: Health & Communities**

- Maintain and enhance the South Somerset network of leisure and cultural facilities...

**Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)**

Where appropriate, procurement of signage will seek to minimise energy use.

**Equality and Diversity Implications**

Design and siting of signage will comply with good practice. There is potential to include QR codes which could provide translations.

*Background Papers: Report to Area North Supporting the Visitor Economy – July 2012*

---