

Area North Committee – 25 June 2014

9. Area Development (North) – Review of 2013-14 and Priorities for 2014-15

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Purpose of the Report

To report on work undertaken by the Area Development (North) Service during 2013-14 and to look ahead to 2014-15

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

Public Interest

Area Development teams support the council's four Area Committees (North, South, East and West) to secure investment in local social, economic and environmental priorities for Yeovil, the market towns and rural areas of South Somerset.

This is our end of year report for 2013-14 which also looks ahead to 2014-15.

Recommendations

- (1) Note and comment on the report and presentation highlighting any specific current issues within wards and parishes.
- (2) Endorse the proposed priorities and work programme for Area North for 2014-15 set out on page 5 and at Appendix A.

1. Area North Development - what was achieved – 2013-14

The work of the Area Development Service broadly falls into three areas designed to support the community leadership role of the Area Committees and local ward members:-

- locally led innovation and investment;
- local access to services and
- community engagement – including our work with town and parish councils.

Local innovation and investment: - we work with communities to make a difference to local social, economic or environmental well-being. We use the principles of 'Asset Based Community Development' to achieve this. This means building on what you've got and making the most of opportunities rather than a focus on 'gaps' and problems. The Area Development team can assist with (or find other sources of help for) community led project planning, consultation, securing resources, delivery and monitoring. This work can

include frequent contact lasting some years or be a very 'light touch' and this will depend on the needs of the group and significance of the project. We also work with other SSDC services to help deliver the Council Plan and other relevant strategies.

- During 2013-14 Area North awarded grants of £50,078 to 15 community led local projects, worth a total overall investment of £295,000 and supported around 65 further projects (in addition to the 'enquiries' noted below). This includes projects led by a community group or partnership, or directly by SSDC.
 - Appendix A lists projects supported ward by ward.
 - Appendix B is the list of community grants awarded. The average % of SSDC funding was 17%, this means that for every £1 of SSDC funding into community projects, a further £5 was invested through local fundraising, parish precepts and external grants.
- During the year the team handled over 120 different requests for information, project support, guidance, printing or hire of equipment from ward members, town and parish councils, local businesses, other public organisations and community groups. Some examples are:
 - The loan of display boards to parish councils for public consultation events.
 - Rapid printing of posters for a public meeting to discuss community ownership of the local shop / post office
 - Providing a set of useful contacts for a group researching for a proposal to take on the management and ownership of the village pub
 - Finding advice and support on complex employment matters for a parish council
 - Assistance to local residents to design and issue a consultation survey as part of reviewing the parish plan, and help to analyse the results.
 - Help to find help (!) to discuss local transport issues.
 - Help to arrange a local workshop for parish councillors to discuss planning matters
 - Providing an explanation of the Community Right to Bid
- We considered the impact of around 20 planning applications in Area North, and made consultation responses to provide additional local evidence where appropriate.
- The Localism Act 2010 introduced the 'Community Right to Bid' (CRTB). Nominations are assessed by the Area Development Manager. Area Development received a number of enquiries during the year relating to the CRTB and there are four properties registered on the Council's register of assets of community value in Area North. During the year two registered properties came onto the market and in both cases the six month moratorium period was triggered to provide time for a community led bid to be made to the landowner. Both periods have ended and neither has resulted in the asset being sold to date. CRTB assets are shown in Appendix A under the relevant parish.

Local access to services: - SSDC operates a network of community offices across South Somerset where residents can find face to face help with their enquiries and requests. In addition the Area North team work in partnership with other agencies and local communities to maintain and develop local access to services.

- In 2013-14 the Langport Community Office service handled 1222 requests for help and information from residents including 735 (61%) for help with council tax, housing and welfare benefits. The service is available from 9am – 2pm Monday, Tuesday and

Thursday and is co-located with the Local Information Centre, and Links Community Transport Service.

- Area North helped to fund and arrange additional face to face support from a Welfare Benefits Advisor during 2013-14. This service continues to be available, without additional funding, including regular surgery sessions in Langport and Somerton, together with the work of advisors handling individual cases across the area referred to them.
- The severe flooding events in the winter of 2013-14 had a significant impact on communities in Area North where many homes or businesses were flooded coupled with numerous road closures over many weeks. The Area North team worked alongside many other SSDC services and partners to help maintain access to services and day to day life. We also contributed to the creation of the 20 year flood action plan, and the evidence base for local economic impact.
- A £5000 grant (included in the total for community grants above) from Area North to the Somerton and Langport Links Community Transport service, helped purchase a new vehicle and the service as a whole provided 10,117 passenger journeys (71,134 total miles) during 2013-14. This is an increase of 305 passengers and 31000 miles on 2012/13. The Area Development team can find help to discuss local transport issues, or to help with locally led ideas for improvement.
- The four Local Information Centres in Area North (Somerton, Langport, Martock, South Petherton), fulfil an important role for visitors and residents alike. Area North maintains links with the volunteer / parish council groups who manage the LICs, through a service level agreement and a small annual contribution to running costs. During 2013/14 volunteers handled over 9500 enquiries. All groups continue to experience 'challenges' in recruiting volunteers, however all four remain positive about the future. All LICs have different issues and importantly are not standing still, by looking at ways to continue to improve their services.

Community Engagement including town and parish council liaison

- An Area North community event held in May 13 event was attended by around 60 local volunteers / councillors and included presentations on Superfast Broadband and planning for Civil Emergencies. A range of agencies provided face to face help and information including the local policing team. The event is a forum for discussion and networking and helps raise awareness of who can help in solving local problems or to develop new ideas including grant funding and other support.
- The SSDC Area North annual meeting with town and parish councils was held in October, and attended by 37 councillors representing 19 (out of 31 in Area North) town and parish councils. Discussion / presentations covered planning matters and developing 'community assets'. Good feedback and a number of follow up enquiries received.
- Area Development, Development Management and Spatial Policy teams provide guidance to communities including town and parish councils to re-fresh community plans through local consultation and research and to better understand the land-use planning system and local priorities for development. No formal applications to create a Neighbourhood Plan have been submitted to SSDC. Officers will help arrange discussion / workshops with parish councils on request.

Looking ahead - Area North priorities and work programme for 2014-15

The current Area North priorities (Jobs, Affordable Housing, Local self-help and Flood & Water Management) are still felt to be relevant for the time and place – providing the framework for work supported or directly managed by the Area North team, underpinned by the Area Committee's influence and budgets.

- **Jobs** – *we will aim to add value to the economy in Area North, through promoting local economic development and the availability of local employment, promoting the availability of Superfast Broadband; and enhancing the offer to visitors to extend stay and spend.*
 - In the coming year this will specifically include actions to support the 20 Year Flood Action Plan (business resilience); the success of the future Leader programme for the Levels and Moors; completing the signage and marketing project; and further work to assess the current supply / demand for employment land in Area North.
- **Affordable Housing** – *we will promote the delivery of affordable homes in Area North, including support to test and develop new models.*
 - In the coming year this will specifically include work to secure as much progress as can be achieved in Norton, Compton Dundon and Ash. In addition assistance with local housing needs surveys can be provided, together with help understand how delivering affordable housing works, and to connect parishes with housing providers and vice versa.
- **Self-Help** – *we will promote greater levels of self-help to promote the sustainability of local services and facilities for all ages.*
 - In the coming year this will specifically include support to projects still to be completed from the 2013-14 programme, supporting progress in a variety of ways. We will continue to promote access to our general enquiries service to help residents; councillors; businesses and groups find the help and information they need. A number of new projects for 2014-15 have been added and these are shown in Appendix A.
- **Flood and Water management** – *we will promote locally led solutions which prevent unacceptable flood events in our communities; we will support the work of the Somerset Water Management Partnership including the task force for the Levels and Moors; we will seek to include past learning from the Parrett Catchment Project into future solutions and we will support the partnership of the 20 Year Flood Action Plan to deliver its objectives including a long term solution to flood relief and the return our rivers to their 1960's profile.*
 - In the coming year this will specifically include support to raise awareness of and engagement with the objectives and progress of the 20 Year Flood Action Plan, together with support for actions in the South Somerset / Somerset Flood Recovery Plan. This includes the completion of the Repairs and Renewal and Business Support Grants programmes; and construction of the Thorney Ring Bank.

Attached:

Appendix A - Area Development Programme 2013-14

Appendix B – Grants awarded under Community Grants programme 2013-14

Financial implications

In addition to the staffing budget and small support budgets, there is a revenue budget £16,680 to support community led projects through grants. There is £240,536 for future allocation to local priority schemes in the Area North Capital Programme for the next 2-3 years. The Area North unallocated reserve stands at £15,600.

Council Plan Implications

The recommended priorities are in line with the Council Plan (2012-2015). The service team considers the implications for the Council Plan when negotiating support for local projects, handling enquiries and assessing grants.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None directly from this report. There are a number of local initiatives designed to promote carbon reduction for example promoting sustainable tourism. 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 encouraged.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None directly from this report. Projects and initiatives will be designed or assessed for support using the principles of equality analysis, and many will make a direct contribution to the Council's Single Equality Scheme. For example projects for community facilities will be expected to demonstrate accessibility and other considerations to promote equalities and diversity objectives.

Background Papers: *SSDC Council Plan; Area Development Plan 2013-14*