

8. Market Towns Vision Progress Report

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Purpose of the Report

To report progress in developing the South Somerset Market Towns Vision.

Action Required

The Scrutiny Committee is requested to note and comment on progress.

Background

The Market Towns Vision

A key aim in the SSDC Corporate Plan is; *in partnership with the public and private sector to develop and deliver the Market Towns Vision*

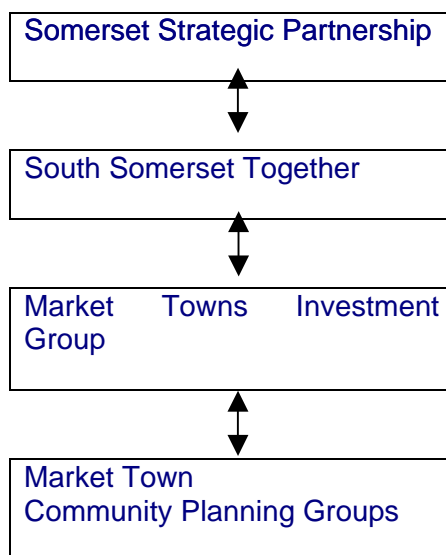
The Market Towns Vision adopted by South Somerset Together (November 2005) and South Somerset District Council (March 2006) is based on a common aim for all of our Market Towns to be successful, sustainable and diverse places where people want to live, visit, work, and play and where businesses want to invest.

Members will be aware that increasing emphasis is now placed on ‘community planning’ as the best way to determine what needs to be done. They will also be aware that the preparation of local community plans and the practice of community planning can be complex with issues of legitimacy, coordination, capacity, mechanisms for delivery, quality, scope and scale all competing for attention. The Market Towns Vision is part of this debate, helping to define, share and promote good practice.

The Market Towns Vision – Strategy

In South Somerset, community planning takes place on at least strategic levels, through the Somerset Strategic Partnership, through South Somerset Together and at local level through a variety of Market Town Community Planning and other initiatives. The purpose of the Market Towns Vision is to create effective bridging arrangements between these strategic levels, so that “top-down” can meet “bottom-up”.

The strategy is to build an effective performance management framework through which much of the complexity can be resolved, and in so doing to encourage more constructive engagement between partners at all levels and more effective investment decisions in our market towns and the rural areas they serve.



Market Towns Investment Group

The Market Towns Investment group is an important new structure created to help deliver the strategy.

To establish the South Somerset Market Towns Investment Group, Town Councils were invited to nominate two representatives, one a serving Council member and the other from their local regeneration forum. The Ten Market Town Areas represented are;

Bruton, Castle Cary & Ansford, Wincanton, Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Somerton, South Petherton Martock and Langport.

Somerset County Council are also represented.

The first meeting of MTIG was in June 2006. Meetings have been held every two to three months. They are chaired by the SSDC Portfolio holder for Market Towns. Councillor George Chinnock had this role until the Council elections in May 2007 when Councillor Kim Turner took on the portfolio.

SSDC for has allocated an initial capital budget of £300,000 to invest in the Market Towns Vision.

The agreed purpose of the group is to recommend programmes for investment in Market Town areas where working together would be better than working alone. This might be because undertaking a number of projects would be more economical, or because together we can create a critical mass that would make a scheme viable. Working together also means that it becomes more feasible to deal with common issues that would otherwise not be addressed. It is well understood that the resources needed to fulfil the ambitions and aspirations we have for the future of our Market Towns could be substantial, and will need to be met from a number of sources including SSDC support. The development of the MTIG partnership is a necessary first step towards this goal.

A clear outcome will be some funding for much needed projects, but the process is not a straightforward grant application between bidder and potential funder. The approach we are attempting to develop is based on encouraging collaborative, partnership working between SSDC, Town Councils, Regeneration groups and others. It is important for all those involved to explore opportunities to build up the case for investment collectively.

This report focuses on the development of investment proposals where there is already some established common ground. As the Market Towns Vision is developed, more themes for future investment that will benefit our communities will emerge. It is anticipated that the strengthened South Somerset Together LSP will allow the brokering of further investment opportunities to help realise the South Somerset Market Towns Vision.

In relation to proposed expenditure by SSDC, the recommendations of the group need to be supported by the SSDC Market Towns Vision Portfolio holder.

Common Themes

The MTIG carefully considered the themes now emerging from published and draft community plans for Market Towns and found a clear common interest in projects that promote tourism, the local built environment, community safety and the local economy. Based on this assessment, the development of three potential investment programmes were agreed;

- (1) Enhancement of CCTV

In our Market Towns a variety of provision was being proposed or was already installed but with differing monitoring arrangements.

At the same time, SSDC was expressing interest in reviewing SSDC revenue expenditure on CCTV arrangements to take advantage of improvements in technology through an options appraisal process. At their September 2007 meeting, the Area South Committee agreed to seek funding for a feasibility study.

Whilst each of these projects could stand alone, there was scope to explore more 'joined-up' solutions that could be better and more cost effective for local communities.

It was therefore agreed to establish an indicative budget of £150,000 from the capital allocation towards the enhancement of CCTV in Market Towns. It is further agreed that a sum of up to £10,000 be allocated from the SSDC feasibility budget for to meet the cost of a comprehensive options appraisal to guide the provision of, and investment in an effective CCTV network in Yeovil and the South Somerset Market Towns

Martin Cole Consultancy Services were engaged to undertake the review and option appraisal. Martin Cole made his final report to MTIG in September 2006. Further work is now taking place both at a Market Town level, where MTIG representatives are considering their options, and with Avon and Somerset Police at a District level.

- (2) Interpretation Boards

In a great example of collaboration, all of South Somerset Market Towns are to install interpretation boards. The boards will be unique to each town but follow a similar format. They will all have the new Somerset tourism branding and encourage tourists to visit other Market Towns in the area as well. The project was proposed by SSDC tourism and enthusiastically endorsed and supported by MTIG. All of the local information on the boards has been supplied by local MTIG members.

There will be 42 Interpretation boards in total. The size of the project has enabled us to realise significant economies of scale.

- (3) Encouraging joint and priority schemes

It can be seen from the above that the MTIG is about more than individual Market Town CPPs making grant applications to SSDC. Mechanisms already exist for that. It is primarily about developing a practical yet strategic approach to investment in the future of our Market Towns.

The group recognises that where two or more local Community Planning Partnerships are considering similar project ideas, the possibility of collaboration could be explored with a view to creating a better overall result. It is felt that when schemes are put forward to the MTIG the potential for such collaboration should always be considered and encouraged.

Many schemes currently proposed in individual community plans are specific to only one of the market town areas. As we want to respect the character and distinctiveness of each of our Market Towns this is to be welcomed and encouraged.

For this reason, MTIG representatives have recently put forward over 20 local priority schemes for the group to consider for financial support. As well as enabling the delivery those projects considered a local community plan priority, this process encourages the sharing of ideas and potential solutions to issues and problems. For example a number of schemes involve the County Highways Service and we are investigating opportunities to take these forward in a more joined up way. As Portfolio Holder, Councillor Turner anticipates some spending decisions being agreed before November 2007.

Resources

The core officer support for the Market Towns Vision is provided through the Area Development teams in Areas East, West and North. Each team has designated a named officer(s) as the Market Town Co-ordinator for each town in their Area. The Market Towns Vision aim and the success of the MTIG structure allows officers throughout the Council and in our partner organisations the opportunity to develop new ways to support the development of our Market Towns and bring their resources to bear in more effective ways.
