

Chard Regeneration Scheme Town Centre Regeneration Public Consultation Feedback Report

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Purpose of the Report

1. This report updates members of Area West Committee on the public consultation programme for the regeneration plans and proposals for SSDC landholdings adjacent to Chard Town Centre. The site comprises the Boden Mill, the former ACI factory site, the Boden Street and Marketfields car parks.
2. The formal consultation programme was opened at a public exhibition of the plans and proposals at the Guildhall in Chard on Saturday 16th June 2018. Further consultation activities are being undertaken before the closing date of this initial consultation on 30th September 2018.
3. The report provides a summary analysis of main comments received so far.

Public Interest

4. The regeneration of the Boden Mill site (and the adjacent landholdings) is an integral part of the Chard Regeneration Scheme and the site has been the subject of different redevelopment proposals in recent years. For reasons outlined in the 'Background' to the report (below), it was not possible to deliver the earlier redevelopment schemes.
5. In 2017 the Chard Regeneration Scheme (CRS) Board requested that South Somerset District Council (SSDC) officers should explore options for a more 'community focussed' scheme to improve the health, leisure, cultural and tourism opportunities available in the town. This coupled with a range of general public amenities on the site would create a site of high public interest and usage that would help increase footfall to the town centre without detracting from the town's existing retail provision.
6. This resulted in a completely new development proposal for the site that would include a range of public facilities. The formal consultation on the design concepts for this development began on the 16th June.
7. The exhibition panels used on the 16th June can be viewed via the District Council website at any time and a link for comments is provided. See Paragraph 16 below.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that Area West Committee note the content of this report.

Background

9. Until 2016 the proposed development had included a mixed development scheme 'anchored' by a suitable major food retailer. Plans to develop the site in this way proved constrained by a number of key factors including; its lack of uniform shape; the listed buildings it contains and the general ground conditions. Additionally, a change in the market demand for major food retailing meant that the scheme could not be brought forward. It should be noted that this change of retailer strategy was not specific to Chard as the economic trend away from developing large supermarkets has impacted on the whole of the country.
10. The decision to explore alternative options for a new community-driven development scheme for this site was endorsed by SSDC District Executive Committee in December 2016 when the Committee agreed to fund the exploration of new options, development appraisals and scheme designs. SSDC resolved that the regeneration project should be progressed to a new phase with SSDC acting as developer and retaining control of the project through the feasibility, design and build stages. This would optimise the site potential for the regeneration of the town centre and better ensure the delivery of the project. It was also recognised that there was a need for much stronger community ownership of the project and that the facilities developed within the scheme will need to strongly reflect the aspirations of the community.
11. Throughout 2017 preliminary design and feasibility work was undertaken that tested the site for the number of facilities that might be included in the scheme, and tested the market demand for those facilities. The resulting designs include a range of community facilities; a leisure centre with the potential for a new swimming pool, a base for public services, location for a new library and museum, health centre, learning hub, workspace and other potential facilities. The designs include car parking and additional public spaces that would lend themselves to a variety of uses. The proposal also includes a residential component at the Boden Mill. Additional residential conversion of SSDC owned premises (e.g. the Lacemill) were also considered to help underpin the viability of the overall scheme.
12. The scheme also proposes the development of other initiatives that will support the regeneration of Chard Town Centre including:
 - support to attract creative businesses and artisan / independent retailers
 - support to develop the growth of local food producers and food businesses
 - events and promotion
 - digital enabling
13. The new scheme proposals were considered by the CRS Board in February 2018 and then presented in confidential session to the Area West Committee in April 2018. Approval was given by the Committee to consult the community on the proposals and for SSDC officers to work up and progress the implementation of the new development proposal.

14. It was noted that the designs are concepts at this stage, and their inclusion in a scheme moving forward will be subject to agreement from various external partners and to further detailed development and appraisal to confirm the viability of the various components of the scheme.

Report

The Consultation

15. The formal consultation period opened on June 16th 2018 and extends to 30th September 2018. This is a consultation on the initial proposals for the scheme and for the associated design concepts. The consultation sought the opinions of the residents and businesses of Chard and the surrounding areas.
16. A series of consultation boards were prepared for public viewing and these can be viewed at <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/business/chard-regeneration/>.
17. The Consultation Launch (16th June 2018) was held at Chard Guildhall on Saturday June 16th 2018. The event was advertised extensively by the media following a general press release, it was also covered extensively on social media. Printed invitations were sent to approx. 6000 addresses in Chard and surrounding villages.
18. Several officers and members were on hand throughout the event and were able to answer questions and help explain the proposals to the public.

Consultation Analysis

506 people attended the launch event

137 people left written comments on the day

To date a further 32 comments have been received via communication channels.

19. For analysis purposes the responses were grouped into categories and the top 5 groups of comments told us that:
 - A new Leisure Centre with swimming pool would be welcomed, ideally with places to eat and socialise.
 - There was an affirmative response for a community hub hosting a range of public services.
 - Support for local businesses would be welcomed, particularly assistance and advice for small independent retailers, new workspace and a covered market.
 - Affordable and interesting attractions are needed for young people .
 - more open space/ green space for community use wanted within the scheme
20. Each of the following bullet points record the next most commonly recurring comments. These too are listed here in descending order of the frequency with which they were recorded:

- A covered market would offer a different retail experience
 - Consideration should be given to adequate car parking
 - We do not need any major retail outlets, but need more bespoke, boutique or niche retail
 - Do not lose or detract from the existing character of the town
 - A cinema or good facilities/environment in which films can be shown
 - Consider the unique atmosphere of the existing museum
21. The following general comments were also made by several consultees. These are also listed in descending order of frequency:
- There is a lack of public transport to the town – this particularly affects the villages and elderly people
 - Business rates are too high –particularly for small businesses
 - Consider free parking
22. There were also a number of specific comments relating to or affecting neighbouring properties. These will need to be investigated and considered prior to design and planning stages.
23. Generally the overwhelming response to the consultation was positive and enthusiastic. Whilst we did receive a number of critical comments it would be fair to say that these were offered in the spirit of constructive criticism rather than as an objection to the scheme. It was also noted at the launch event that early scepticism from some of the attendees was generally replaced by enthusiasm and support for the scheme once their questions had been answered.
24. For balance, it should be noted that there were a very small number of comments that were purely negative. One challenged the expenditure of public money on such a scheme, whilst the ability to deliver the scheme was raised by more than one person.

Additional Consultation Sessions

25. A consultation session was held at Chard Youth Club on 3rd August. This was primarily aimed at the parents of children attending the 'Play Day' event. 20 adults were in attendance and had the opportunity to view the display boards and leave comments. Approximately 20 comments were received offering broad support for the scheme - particularly for the new leisure centre and a better provisions market. As with the consultation at the Guildhall, there were comments made on some wider issues and these included; no more retail; better parking; better management of the traffic lights; more open space and activities for children.
26. The next scheduled consultation will be with teenage school students on 27th September.

27. This will not be the only phase of consultation on the scheme and SSDC will seek public opinion on future occasions as the regeneration plans move forward. This will include statutory consultations as required by the Planning Process.

Moving the Regeneration Scheme Forward

In order to maintain momentum and progress, the following measures have been taken:

28. Jeb Farrah was appointed as Chard Regeneration Scheme Project Manager (May 2018)
29. A formal Chard Regeneration Programme Board has been approved (Full Council, May 2018) and set up to comprise the following representation:
- SSDC's Leader and Deputy Leader
 - 4 SSDC local members
 - SSDC's Chief Executive Officer as the project sponsor.

Additional officers and advisors may be called by the Board in an advisory capacity as/when required

30. The following work on the scheme has begun:

The Project Team has put together a phased approach to bring forward a demolition application of the appropriate buildings on the ACI site to enable some initial site clearance to be undertaken, before progressing on to a full detailed planning proposal.

The following surveys have been commissioned:

- Preliminary and follow-up ecology surveys
- A heritage survey
- A needs assessment evaluation

Ecology - the follow-up ecology report will detail the extent and type of protected species on the site and what mitigation measures need to be adopted, to enable the demolition application to be brought forward without harm to wildlife.

A heritage survey - is required as part of the planning application. The site has three listed buildings that the heritage consultant will review, not only to support the planning process, but potentially to assist the Council in securing Heritage Lottery funding.

A needs assessment evaluation – is required as part of the Sport England funding criteria. The Council have made an initial submission to Sport England and are in 'the pipeline' of applicants awaiting a funding application assessment. Consultants have been appointed to undertake this work not just for Chard but for the whole District as it will also inform the District's future sporting and leisure facilities needs and priorities.

Financial Implications

31. There are no financial implications directly associated with this report on the initial consultation stage of the project.

The costs for development and design work are initially covered from residual budget as set by the District Executive committee in December 2016 and residual One Public Estate (OPE) budgets (approximately £25k) for feasibility work.

The One Public Estate budget enables us to explore the possibilities and benefits of relocating a number of public services into one central, accessible location. It will help us to determine the need for potential shared space within the overall scheme.

Council Plan Implications

32. The Chard Regeneration Scheme is a specific objective of the Council Plan and a priority project for 2018-19.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

33. None at this stage

Equality and Diversity Implications

34. None at this stage

Background Papers

35. The reports referenced at points 10, 13 and 29 were presented to committees as confidential reports as all included third party restricted information that was deemed to be commercially sensitive or confidential.
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