

## **Chard Regeneration Scheme – Gateway Scheme (Executive Decision)**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To update members of the Area West Committee of progress on the Chard Gateway regeneration scheme, the area of public realm at the Silver Street junction with Fore Street, opposite Chard School, and provide details on the next steps and resources.

### **Public Interest**

The Chard Regeneration Programme is an important commitment by South Somerset District Council (SSDC) to invest in Chard town centre, working in close collaboration with local businesses, the Town Council, Somerset County Council and other stakeholders. Public consultation on the programme took place during 2018, 2019 and early 2020, and residents, local businesses and other stakeholders provided feedback on the various priority projects identified as part of the ambitious programme.

### **Recommendations**

1. That members note the content of this report, including progress made towards delivering the scheme and changes in project management.
2. That members agree to increase the commitment from the area capital reserve to £51,880 in order to progress to implementation of the scheme, alongside the Town Council's commitment.
3. That members agree to delegate final design development for the scheme to the project team leading Chard's public realm projects with the final sign-off by Chard Regeneration Board.

### **Background**

The Gateway project has been in existence since the 1990s and, for a number of reasons, work has been prematurely aborted either due to funding or lack of other resources such as officer time. The highways department carried out some repairs to

the area during 2018 but their work did not extend to the resurfacing of the pavement, which is currently a mismatched and ugly surface.

There have been a number of failed businesses in the area, including most recently the Italian restaurant that occupied the property adjacent to the area of public realm in question until the summer of 2018. The failure of the restaurant appears to have been due to a number of environmental factors such as high rent and no application being made by the business to the highways department for a licenced obstruction to enable them to use the paved area for outdoor seating. As the high street contracts, it is possible that this may not remain as a commercial property.

In January 2019, the Committee received a report from Jeb Farrah, Regeneration Project Manager, explaining that the project proposal is to provide better pedestrian security and a more aesthetic gateway entrance to Chard Town Centre, through interventions such as permanent seating, planting and railings. This would be made possible by securing a licensed obstruction from the county highways department. At that meeting, the Committee resolved:

- That project management responsibilities for the site be allocated to the Locality Team subject to an ongoing maintenance plan being agreed by SSDC and Chard Town Council.
- That £23,000 be provisionally allocated from the Area Capital Reserve towards jointly underwriting the scheme with Chard Town Council who had agreed the provisional allocation of £15,000.
- That any additional external grant funding received towards the project be apportioned to Chard Town Council and SSDC as a percentage of their original funding contribution (SSDC 60%, CTC 40%).
- That final agreement on the design and layout of the scheme be delegated to the Chard Ward Members in consultation with the Chard Regeneration Scheme Project Manager.

**Figure 1: Location of proposed scheme (Area 05)**

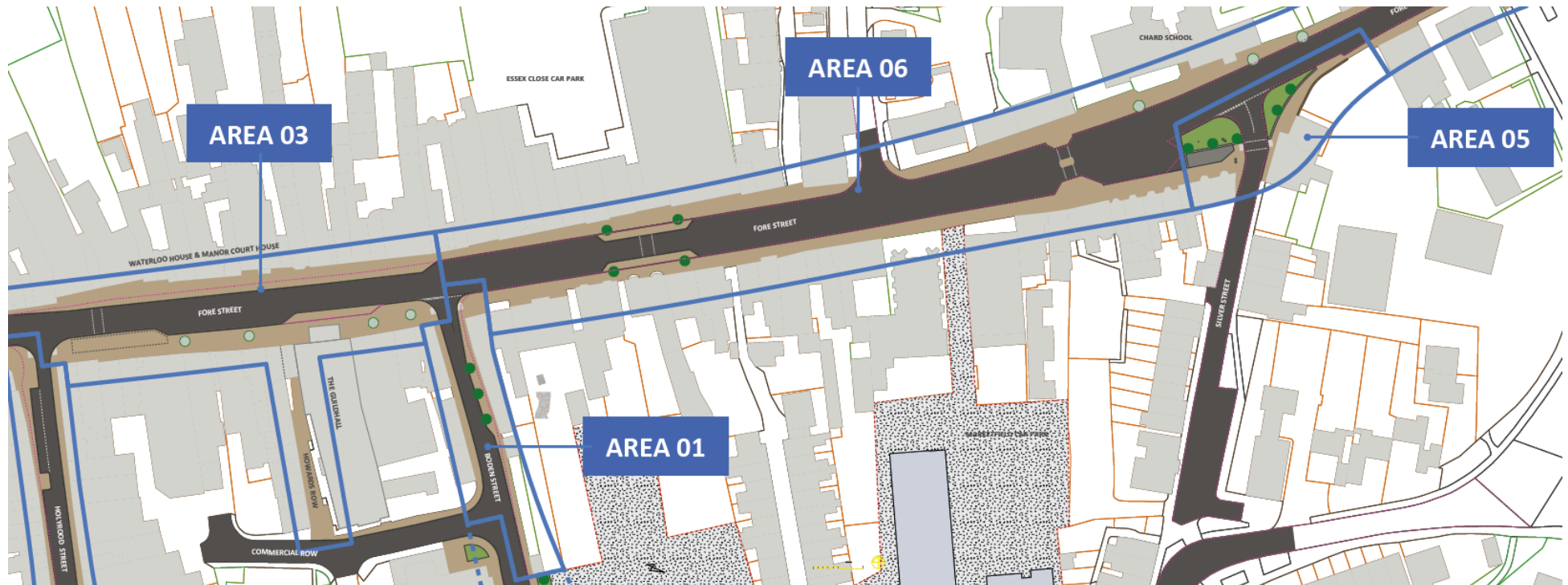


Image credit: *Chard Town Centre Public Realm Strategy, October 2019* by Element Urbanism & Hydrock

## Update to the Context of the Project

Since the previous update to Area West Committee on this project, SSDC commissioned a Public Realm Strategy for Chard Town Centre, to take account of the town centre environment in terms of its connectivity and the quality of its streetscape. At the heart of the strategy is the desire to protect, enhance and celebrate Chard's historic buildings and townscape character. It allowed priority areas for public realm improvements to be clearly identified across the town. The strategy includes the Gateway site as a priority project, putting it in the context of the ambition for wider town improvements.

This document has supported and informed the development of a successful bid to Historic England for the Chard High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ). This funding for Chard was announced earlier this year, and brings £1 million of Government high streets funding to the area. Matched by SSDC, a total of £2 million will be invested in the historic heart of Chard's shopping area over the next 3½ years.

The HSHAZ area is defined as the section of Fore Street running from Boden Street to Holyrood Street (including the Guildhall), and the northern part of Holyrood Street. Included within the HSHAZ project, therefore, are public realm improvements to Boden Street, Fore Street and Holyrood Street, to improve the quality of the environment to a standard that befits the many beautiful historic buildings in the area, as well as improve pedestrian safety and access to the shops and businesses. The ultimate aim of the HSHAZ is to reinvigorate and champion Chard's high street. This sits alongside the regeneration of the Boden Mill site, including the new leisure centre.

## Project Management Update

As a result of the successful HSHAZ bid, a dedicated project manager has been appointed. With its funding from Area West Committee and Chard Town Council, the Gateway project can be managed by the HSHAZ project manager, alongside the HSHAZ-funded schemes. This would mean that the project can benefit from consistent design practices across the town, economies of scale, and the momentum of delivery that comes from a time-limited programme.

The HSHAZ project will sit within the governance of the Chard Regeneration Programme, overseen by the Chard Regeneration Board. Final sign-off of HSHAZ public realm interventions sits with the Regeneration Board.

## Design Update

Following a tender process, a design team comprising Hydrock, LHC & Coreus has taken the concept designs for the Gateway site forward into developed designs (RIBA Stage 3), alongside the three HSHAZ sites. This process allowed more detailed consideration of the brief to create an attractive, green gateway to the town with

opportunities for sitting and a safe, comfortable pedestrian route across Silver Street. In order to provide this, the area was expanded to include both sides of Silver Street, which brings the added benefit of improving the east-bound view.

Figure 2 shows the developed design of the proposed layout, including areas of shrubbery planting, two trees, a paved area incorporating the reinstatement of the water rill that runs down the rest of Fore Street, and safe crossing area.

**Figure 2: RIBA Stage 3 drawing of proposed scheme:**

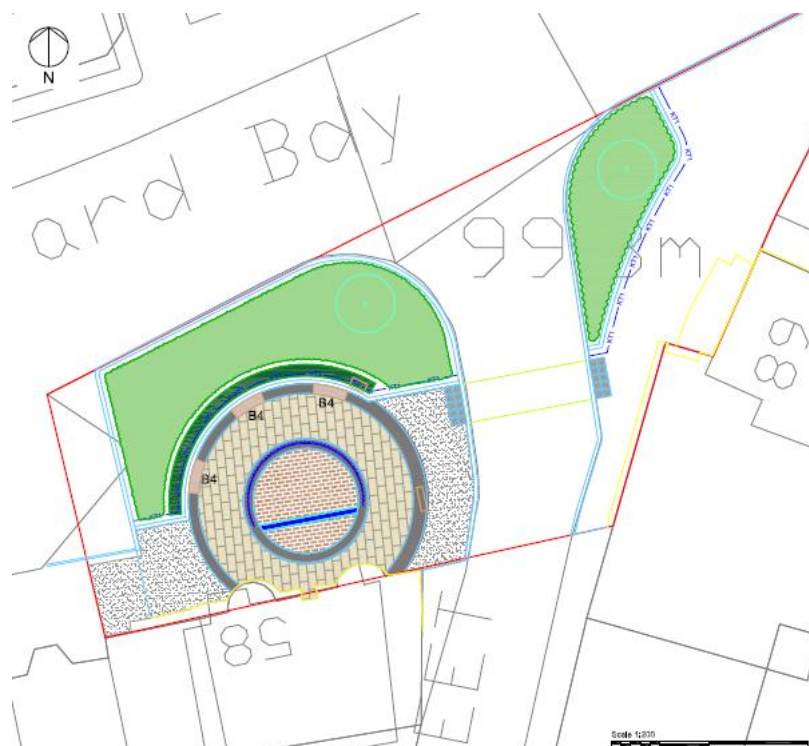


Image credit: LHC Design

## Project Budget

This stage in the design process allows for a more detailed understanding of the costs of delivering the scheme. The table below outlines the current budget, and the projected cost for the Gateway.

<b>Budget</b>	<b>Current £</b>	<b>Proposed £</b>
South Somerset District Council commitment	23,000	*67,193
Chard Town Council commitment	15,000	**30,000
<b>Total budget</b>	<b>38,000</b>	<b>97,193</b>
<b>Total Projected Cost</b>	<b>97,193</b>	<b>97,193</b>
<i>Additional Funds Required</i>	<i>59,193</i>	<i>0</i>

\*£15,313 from General Grants Reserves and £51,880 from Area West Committee Capital Programme

\*\*Chard Town Council increased their commitment to £30k at the Full Council meeting on 9 November 2020

This total projected cost includes design fees, surveys, works and materials estimates and contingency, all based on a specification. The previous project cost presented to the Committee was a generic estimate and didn't include this detail. It should also be noted that the cost of materials is escalating at the moment, due to stop-start demand and covid-19.

It is possible that the projected cost reduces as the project progresses, for example through economies of scale in tendering the construction work alongside HSHAZ works, through the process of competitive tendering, or through the reduction of risk as surveys reveal more information about the site.

It is possible to reduce the quality or scope of the scheme in order to reduce the estimated costs at this point in the process, but members should be aware that this would incur redesign fees for which additional budget would still be required.

It is therefore advised that members increase the provisional budget allocated to the scheme to meet the projected shortfall at this stage. The table above suggests the new level of funding from both South Somerset District Council and Chard Town Council. In terms of the SSSDC contribution, £15,313 has been identified from the General Grants Reserves (from a street clean-up fund). Therefore the request to Area West Committee is for an additional £28,880, to a total of £51,880.

## Timeline

Should budget be confirmed at this meeting and the Full Town Council meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> November that allows the scheme to progress, the aim would be to complete the technical design process by the end of January 2021. This would mean that works could begin in late spring of that year.



## **Decision-making**

In order to give the best chance of meeting the timeline above, timely and responsive decision-making will be critical. It is therefore recommended that Area West Committee delegates the final design development for the scheme to the project team leading Chard's public realm projects, with final sign off delegated to the Chard Regeneration Board.

## **Financial Implications**

If both Ilchester Hall, Chiselborough and Horton Playing Field Community Grants are awarded, the balance in the Area West unallocated capital programme will stand at £92,682. If the committee agrees this extra £28,880 for the Gateway, then £63,802 will remain.

## **Council Plan Implications**

To progress implementation of the Chard Regeneration Programme is one of the council's Priority Projects for 2020-2021.

The regeneration of Chard town centre also assists the council in meeting several of its Economy objectives including:

- Regenerate our town centres and high streets, unlocking key sites
- Enhance visitor experience and income from tourism.

## **Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications**

None directly arising from this report but the planned addition of trees and/or planting will have a positive environmental impact.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

None arising from this report.

## **Background Papers**

Chard Public Realm Strategy

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