

Chard Regeneration Scheme Update

Portfolio Holder	Cllr Jason Baker, Chairman of Area West Committee
Project Sponsor:	Jan Gamon, Director of Place & Recovery
Service Manager:	Natalie Fortt, Regeneration Programme Manager
Lead Officer:	Anna Matthews, Chard HSHAZ Project Manager
Contact Details:	anna.matthews@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462958

Purpose of the Report

1. The report provides a general progress update on the Chard High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) project, including the public realm improvements across the town centre, as part of the Chard Regeneration programme.

Recommendations

2. That Members note the contents of the report.

Background

3. In 2020, SSDC was successful in bidding for Chard to become a High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ), attracting £1m from Historic England as part of the £95m government-funded scheme. The scheme will run until March 2024, as part of the Chard Regeneration programme.
4. The aims of the Chard Regeneration programme are:
 - To provide compelling reasons for residents and visitors to visit and use Chard town centre.
 - To bring the key sites and buildings in Chard Town Centre back into economic and community use. This will stimulate physical regeneration and improve the vitality of the town centre.
 - To increase the footfall within the town and support existing businesses.
 - To improve the leisure and health offer in Chard for both local people and new visitors
 - To reinvigorate and bolster the role of Chard as a Market Town and economic centre.

Within this, the particular aims of Chard HSHAZ is to make the high street a more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work and spend time.

5. The focus of the HSHAZ project is around the Holyrood Street – Fore Street – Boden Street area. It will include improvements to public realm as set out in the

Chard Public Realm Strategy, grants to business/property owners to renovate and repair historic shop fronts, and a programme of community engagement.

6. To take advantage of economies of scale, other public realm/highways improvements will be delivered alongside the HSHAZ works: two car park junctions associated with access to the leisure centre, the Eastern Gateway and Howards Row. Funding for these comes from the wider Chard Regeneration programme, Area West Committee capital reserve, SSDC general grant reserves and Chard Town Council. Detailed designs for the public realm improvements were submitted to Somerset County Council for their technical approval and road safety audit on 24th February 2021.
7. In December 2020, a consortium of local cultural and community partners bid for additional funding for a HSHAZ Cultural Programme called *Culturally Chard*. The consortium is headed up by Somerset Art Works and Chard Town Council and involves Chard Museum, Chard Carnival Committee, Holyrood Academy, Chard Town Team and Chard One Team. The aim of the Cultural Programme is to bring new activity to the town centre and encourage people to connect to the unique heritage of Chard's high street in creative ways.

PROGRESS REPORT

Public Realm Scheme

8. Somerset County Council have been reviewing the RIBA Stage 4 designs over the last few months through the Road Safety and Technical Audit processes. Very few issues were raised for a scheme of this type, particularly in terms of road safety, which reflects well on the quality of the work done to date. The final minor items are currently being addressed and sign-off from Somerset County Council on this process is imminent.
9. While this process has been underway, we have also instructed Tozers to act on SSDC's behalf in terms of the required S278 agreement with Somerset County Council.
10. The required new Traffic Regulation Orders have been confirmed and applied for.
11. A desk-based assessment of archaeological potential for the site was commissioned and produced. This will inform archaeological monitoring during the works.
12. The tender process for construction contractors launched at the end of March, using the public realm framework established last year. We received three tenders.
13. The tender process highlighted the major impact that both COVID-19 and Brexit are having on the construction industry. As a result, costs were unavoidably higher

than we had budget for. Officers requested additional funding from District Executive on 8th July, in order to progress the scheme. This funding was secured from the Medium Term Financial Support Fund earmarked reserve, enabling us to move the project ahead with the preferred contractor.

14. Additional funding of £79,000 was also secured from Historic England through a special bidding round, in order to use local natural stone to enhance the water channels and pavement areas.
15. Two pre-start meetings have been held and we will continue to meet on a fortnightly basis to monitor progress. We are on track to deliver the car park junction improvements prior to the opening of the leisure centre, and to complete all other works by the end of this financial year.
16. The scheme will continue to be supported by the RIBA Stage 4 Design Team, with engineers and landscape architects from Hydrock and LHC on hand as technical advisors to SSDC and Coreus acting as Employer's Agent.

Building Grants

17. We had aimed to launch the HSHAZ programme of building grants in the first quarter of 2021/22. The additional work required to move the public realm scheme forward this quarter (due to the unanticipated significant impact of COVID-19 and Brexit on costs) has led to a delay in getting the grant scheme up and running.
18. However, work has still progressed behind the scenes. The HSHAZ officer has been in contact with a number of property owners who will be eligible for grants, as well as others who may benefit from the general investment in the town. This includes Chard School, the new owners of the Manor Court House, and a number of properties on Holyrood Street.
19. In addition, a brief was drawn up to appoint an accredited conservation architect to provide advice and support to the project. Quotations were requested during July. The evaluation process for the contract is underway at the time of writing.

Community Engagement

20. A Community Engagement Plan has been drafted, expanding on the commitment to community engagement that SSDC made in its bid for HSHAZ funding to meet Historic England's 8 community engagement aims:
 1. The needs, aspirations and involvement of local communities are embedded in the design, delivery and legacy of each project
 2. A broad and diverse range of people will be more aware, interested and meaningfully involved in the heritage of their high street
 3. Community wellbeing will have increased through community participation in heritage programmes and activities

4. Communities will feel more invested in their high streets as places to live, learn, work and visit
 5. Local community organisations, groups and individuals will have learned new knowledge and skills relating to heritage practice, management and advocacy
 6. Local community groups and organisations will have built capacity, learned skills and become more resilient through involvement in the programme
 7. The local economy will have been boosted through the contribution of local communities to the economic regeneration of the high streets
 8. The provision of local social and cultural spaces and services to support local communities will have increased through community engagement in high streets projects.
21. The plan supports activity that allows local and national heritage organisations to connect with Chard residents and stakeholders, particularly children and young people, high street businesses, the Portuguese and Polish communities, residents that live on the high street, and adults seeking to improved wellbeing. It also encourages the use of town centre community facilities.
22. Chard Museum is leading two initial projects: heritage walks and *Hidden Histories of the High Street*. The heritage walks project will refresh the existing lace riot and blue plaque walks as well as developing new heritage walks around the town. For *Hidden Histories of the High Street*, the Museum's volunteers will work with town centre businesses to uncover and showcase the history of their premises.
23. The Community Engagement strand of the HSHAZ also includes raising awareness of the programme. We have recently produced some information boards and booklets, and set up a display on Fore Street as part of the *Culturally Chard* launch day (see below).
24. The archaeology report on the town centre produced for the public realm has been shared with the public, timed to coincide with the national Festival of Archaeology.

Cultural Programme

25. The *Culturally Chard* consortium was awarded £80,000 funding for their HSHAZ Cultural Programme. The award was made in March but the announcement was embargoed until May. Since then, the consortium members have met monthly, to set up the programme and begin the first activity working with delivery partners. SSDC oversees the programme on behalf of Historic England, including holding the funds.
26. A launch event was held at the Guildhall, along Fore Street and at the Museum on Saturday 10th July. Somerset Art Works provided workshops for their Banners of Chard project and the Museum trialled their refreshed Lace Riot Walk as a guided tour and hosted a talk in the evening about the Stop Line. The Town Council provided poetry linked to their Stories of Chard project, and the Carnival Committee and library teams also attended with activities.

27. Unfortunately, the ill health of a key team member, continued covid restrictions and poor weather on the day led to some last minute changes and challenges. A debrief meeting between the organisers was held afterwards and lessons learned for next time.

Footfall Counters

28. Footfall counters were installed in Chard town centre at the end of June, as a shared project between the HSHAZ scheme and the Reopening the High Street scheme. Footfall counting is required as part of the monitoring of the HSHAZ scheme but will also provide invaluable data about how people use Chard's high street to inform future initiatives.

NEXT STEPS

Public Realm

29. We will meet fortnightly with the contractor to progress the scheme and get on site, ensuring delivery to plan.

30. We will shortly begin working with the contractor's public liaison officer and will then be able to share information about the timing and phasing of the works. We will work closely to ensure residents, businesses, event organisers and other stakeholders are informed.

31. Sign-off from Somerset County Council's Road Safety and Technical Audit process is expected very soon.

32. Conclusion of the S278 agreement is a priority. TROs will need to be finalised before works are complete.

33. The Town Council are progressing plans for new wayfinding and signage, bins, lighting and CCTV, with funds from MTIG. This is being co-ordinated alongside the HSHAZ/public realm works.

Building Grants

34. We will appoint the accredited conservation architect and instruct the production of a new Shop Front Design Guide. This will be followed by the production of a Programme of Works – combining a condition survey of each shortlisted property, a recommendation for works required, and a suggested prioritization for awards of funds.

35. Conversations with eligible parties will continue, as well as support to Chard School to access Heritage At Risk funding from Historic England.

Community Engagement

36. Work is underway to “open Chard town centre” for *Heritage Open Days*. This is likely to include special events at the Museum and the Guildhall, as well as a town centre presence from the Chard reservoir team. *Heritage Open Days* is the UK’s largest festival of history and culture, taking place every year. This year it runs from 10th-19th September.
37. A HSHAZ ‘task force’ will be set up to bring together partners from across the community who can make an active contribution to the successful delivery of the scheme, particularly in the area of community engagement.
38. The Museum will continue work on the heritage walks and the *Hidden Histories of the High Street* projects.

Cultural Programme

39. The consortium will continue to meet monthly to plan, develop and oversee the *Culturally Chard* programme.
40. The Banners of Chard and Stories of Chard projects, now launched, will continue over the coming months. The Carnival Committee also intend to purchase new staging equipment.
41. The Banners of Chard project is primarily EU-funded, with a small contribution from *Culturally Chard*. The project will produce banners for public display in the Guildhall, creating a new reason for people to visit the town centre. Many local people will be involved in making the banners, working with an artist from Somerset Art Works and Take Art, including members of the Chard WATCH group, local school children and families who rely on the food bank. The banners will be inspired by life in Chard and its development as a market town, and will be a draw to the Guildhall for all those who contributed, building their connection with the town centre.

Council Plan Implications

42. The Chard Regeneration Scheme is a specific objective of the Council Plan and a priority project for 2020/21.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

43. None arising from this report

Equality and Diversity Implications

44. None arising from this report. An Equality Impact Relevance Check/Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Chard public realm scheme.
