



## Chard High Street Heritage Action Zone Update

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## 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, SSSC 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 aim of the Chard HSHAZ is to make the high street a more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work and spend time. It uses the power of heritage to regenerate place.



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 businesses/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.
7. A consortium of local cultural and community partners have been awarded separate 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. Further significant progress has been made with the Public Realm Scheme since our last report to Area West Committee (August 2021).
9. The designs progressed through the technical and road safety audit with Somerset County Council Highways, and achieved sign-off of the final item in early October. LLFA consents were also approved, to allow works to the water courses.
10. Traffic Regulation Orders were advertised by Somerset County Council on November 4th for the statutory 3-week consultation period. SCC have committed to let us know of any objections received during the consultation, and will provide an update as soon as possible after 25th November. If no objections received, we will be able to complete the works, and a date will be agreed for sealing the Orders. If objections are received, SCC will need to consider the grounds on which they are being made and work with us to agree a way forward.
11. The procurement process to appoint a construction contractor concluded with the award of the contract to Alun Griffiths Ltd. Following signing and completion of the S278 Agreement, work began on site in September, starting at the Marketfield junction.



12. Essential works at Marketfield were completed prior to the Chard Leisure Centre opening. Work is underway on Boden Street (car park junction), Fore Street north side and Holyrood Street. Traffic management is in place where necessary to facilitate the works, approved by Somerset County Council.
13. There are national issues with materials lead-times and logistics, as expected. In response, the contractor has placed early orders where required, and is working the planned construction programme flexibly in response to supply.
14. Materials lead times and delays in booking road space (including temporary suspension of bus stop) mean that the original completion date for Marketfield and Boden Street car park works of 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021 has not been achieved; the knock-on effect is approximately 2-week delay across the programme with an anticipated overall completion in mid-April 2022 instead of 31<sup>st</sup> March. However, this is not causing undue concern at this stage, as it has not affected the opening of the Leisure Centre, and the team continues to progress as rapidly as possible. Fortnightly progress meetings are held with the construction team to monitor this.
15. Chard Town Council have commissioned a project to replace the street lighting columns along the Guildhall side of Fore Street and Howards Row, and install a new CCTV column for Boden Street, in liaison with Somerset County Council. This work will interface with the HSHAZ paving works and Alun Griffiths are liaising with the lighting contractor to ensure it is installed without negative impact on the HSHAZ scheme. This is also the case for new pedestrian wayfinding and new bins.



16. Alun Griffiths have a Public Liaison Officer in post who has been leading on communication with local residents and businesses. Two newsletters have been issued, including by direct mail, by hand and by email. Members and their constituents are encouraged to sign up to receive these email updates: <https://mailchi.mp/alungriffiths/chard-town-centre-public-realm-improvements>







## 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. However, work has progressed well since the last report to Area West Committee.
18. Quotes were sought for an accredited conservation design professional to support the scheme, leading to the appointment of locally-based Levitate Architecture West, led by Jo Hibbert.
19. Levitate has completed a draft programme of works for the grant scheme, following a visual condition survey and cost assessment of all the properties in the Chard HSHAZ shortlist. A draft prioritisation matrix has been drawn up, taking all this information into account alongside other factors such as economic impact and project readiness, to enable us to prioritise the awarding of grants.
20. In liaison with Historic England, it has been agreed that the maximum grant rate be increased from 50% to 70%, in recognition of the challenging economic circumstances faced by businesses in Chard, to encourage take-up and efficient grant spend.

21. Levitate has also completed a draft Chard Shop Front Design Guide, informed by initial public consultation during October and November. The draft has been approved by Senior Leadership Team to go to District Executive on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, for approval for formal consultation, in order that it be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document before the 2022 pre-election period.
22. Relationships continue to be developed with local building owners and potential grant recipients. The grant scheme process will be reviewed by the officer working group in December, ready to receive applications.

## Community Engagement

23. Chard town centre 'opened' for Heritage Open Days in September – the UK's largest festival of history and culture taking place every year. Chard Museum, Chard Town Council and SSDC's Chard Reservoir team put on 5 events with publicity support from SSDC as part of HSHAZ, including popular tours of the Guildhall clock tower. The events engaged with over 300 people and volunteers contributed over 50 hours. There are plans to build on this over the coming months and for next year's Heritage Open Days.







24. A HSHAZ/*Culturally Chard* stall was held at the Chard Carnival Street Fair on Holyrood Street in October. Lots of positive conversations were held with passers-by and 44 people made a pledge to support their high street.





25. As mentioned above, initial public consultation was conducted to inform the development of the Chard Shop Front Design Guide. This included 3 open days at Chard Guildhall (alongside the Future Chard Strategy consultation) and an online survey.
26. Volunteers at Chard Museum continue to work on leading two 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 will work with town centre businesses to uncover and showcase the history of their premises.

## Cultural Programme

27. The Cultural Programme, *Culturally Chard*, is delivered by the consortium of local partners, led by Somerset Art Works (SAW) and Chard Town Council. Please refer to [www.culturallychard.org](http://www.culturallychard.org)
28. Somerset Art Works continue to run the *Banners of Chard* project, which has delivered a large number of workshops reaching across the community, helping to design and produce new banners representing the town's heritage and culture. It is primarily funded by an EU grant with a small contribution from Historic England's HSHAZ Cultural Programme fund.
29. Chard Carnival Committee have been able to purchase new staging equipment with the HSHAZ Cultural Programme funding that the consortium were awarded. The kit was put to good use on Carnival Day and will be available to other groups in the town putting on events.
30. Chard Town Council are planning for the new *Spring Cultural Festival* which will take place Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> April to Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022. This will incorporate a creative celebration of the water channels that flow through the town centre. SAW and Chard Town Council held a community networking event on 20<sup>th</sup> October to gather ideas and connect with other local organisations.





31. Chard Town Council will also be running *Stories of Chard*, a creative writing and storytelling project (this has been temporarily on hold due to staff ill-health). The Museum's projects mentioned above are also integrated into *Culturally Chard*.

32. The consortium continues to meet monthly to plan, develop and oversee *Culturally Chard*.

### **Footfall Counters**

33. Footfall counters have been in place since the end of June. A report covering the last 3 months is included as an appendix to this report.

### **Council Plan Implications**

34. 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**

35. None arising from this report

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

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

### **Background papers**

None