

Progress Update Yeovil Refresh

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Purpose of the Report

To give a brief update on progress with the Yeovil Refresh projects.

Public Interest

Yeovil is South Somerset's principal town and the Yeovil Refresh is an important commitment by South Somerset District Council (SSDC) to invest in Yeovil town centre, working in close collaboration with local businesses, Somerset County Council (SCC) and other stakeholders. Public consultation took place in March 2018 and both residents and local businesses provided feedback on the various priority projects identified in the document.

Recommendation

Area South Committee note progress in delivery of the Yeovil Refresh Programme.

Background

The Yeovil Refresh programme is a holistic programme of work designed to regenerate Yeovil town centre. The Refresh has three key infrastructure based themes supported by an underpinning animation theme. The Refresh was adopted in 2018 with work beginning on the three theme areas in late 2018. The projects focus on Transport, Major Development Sites and Public Realm.

The Refresh aims to make Yeovil town centre a vibrant place to live, work, learn and visit. It seeks to provide an improved transport network, revitalised public spaces and supports major developments to help regenerate the town centre.

The Covid -19 pandemic has accelerated changes in the way town centres are used which are very much in line with the broad thrust of the Refresh projects. This has really highlighted the need to reduce the dominance of retail space, providing alternatives through leisure, commercial and residential uses. This change in the way we use space will require more diversity in the use of existing brownfield sites and buildings within the town.

Transport

The Refresh proposed a series of ideas to improve connectivity issues in the town centre area. This led to the creation of an access strategy which creates a transport package for the town centre. This is broken into sections which cover: highways, bus network, walking and cycling routes and links to wider areas such as the railway stations.

Public Realm

This theme aims to create and transform public spaces through the town centre. This supports the place making aims within the Refresh. It will create streets which are shared spaces from Westminster Street through Middle Street to Wyndham Street area. The Borough will be improved as a civic space and an events space incorporating a big screen and fountain will be created in the Triangle area. Key principles are to declutter these areas making them more accessible, greener spaces with more planting and reduced levels of through traffic. The pandemic has illustrated that this type of space will be of real value in future providing strong support for the town centre.

Major Development Sites

A number of large sites were identified which included Old Cattle Market, Glovers Walk and car park sites in SSDC ownership. The Old Cattle Market and Glovers Walk are in private ownership, therefore any potential development on these sites will be led by the private sector.

Update

The previous update to this committee was to the October 2021 meeting. Progress in each themed area is outlined below:

Transport

As stated in the background section of the report the Access Strategy work has been completed and this now forms the basis for action. Work continues to deliver improvements to the Town Centre Cycling and Walking network. This also includes the proposals in the Refresh to reverse traffic flow in Stars lane which is intended to support the public realm works in the main streets.

As reported to the committee in October 2021 we are consulting on the design. This is a statutory consultation with specified organisations which also engages individual properties along the proposed routes. This enables issues to be raised with the design which can be addressed following the consultation. The plans are hosted on the SCC Small Improvement Schemes website with links from the Refresh Microsite.



The sections under consultation are:

- Hendford
- Reversal of traffic flow Stars Lane and South Street
- SW Terrace junction improvements and updates

We are still working on a further section which links to Pen Mill Station via the country park. This has been slow to progress due to limited access to ecological services which are needed to support the design.

Work also continues on bus routes through the town. A consultation was carried out with the public in September 2021 as part of a suggestion to move bus stops from the Borough to South Street. This has now been added to other work and we are exploring possible options moving forwards.

Public Realm Work

The work to complete the designs for improved public realm has been completed and a timetable for delivery agreed by the Refresh board. We expect to complete all works from Westminster Street to the Middle Street junction with South Western Terrace by December 2023.

The first section in Westminster Street was underway but at the time of writing our main contractor Midas has entered administration. This has meant little work has been progressed on site since just before Christmas 2021. We are currently working through the issues associated with this to ensure we re-start this project at the earliest opportunity. In addition to this serious issue we are seeking to secure a road closure to enable works to progress safely. We have sent letters to surrounding streets which resulted in discussions with a number of residents and businesses. We are now reviewing the situation to identify a solution which causes the least possible disruption in the area and enables construction to progress.

In other areas a short section of Wine Street has been rebuilt and this was constructed in accordance with the agreed timetable. This was part of the Triangle contract with South West Highway Group. Works at the Triangle are impacted by the need to divert all four utilities which is complicated. We are hoping to announce a clear date for a start on site shortly. Some preparatory work has been done and we are looking at opportunities to commence work on site.

The tender for Middle Street West, Middle Street East and the Borough/High Street had been completed but due to the situation with Midas we are now needing to re-run that exercise. This will delay planned commencement of work on those sections of street by around 3 - 4 months. We are though reviewing opportunities to add sections to existing contracts.

Development sites

The Old Cattle Market site and Glovers Walk form a substantial part of the town centre area. Therefore, whilst they are not within SSDC control, officers have been seeking to facilitate planning applications on the sites. However there has been no significant progress over the past few months.

These schemes have been affected by a range of factors which fundamentally affect their deliverability. These include significant viability challenges, limited availability of investment partners, occupier interest impacted by the pandemic and the general state of the property market.

Complementary initiatives – Animation

Work is now underway on a number of areas within this theme. These include:

- a re-start on the night-time economy group which is led by the Police
- Market review in association with the National Association of British Markets as part of the Welcome Back Fund
- Market rebrand in association with Area South Committee sub group
- Support to events group to enhance co-ordination and set up a clear annual programme
- Setting up management and licensing arrangements for public realm

This work will develop over the next 6 months to support the wider concepts of the Refresh.

Financial Implications

None directly arising from this report.

Council Plan Implications

Delivery of the Yeovil Refresh is part of Priority 2 in the Council Plan so focus will remain on the projects which are outlined within the document and on linked initiatives.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None arising from this report. However, all of the plans and projects are being developed with this theme in mind. As an example, public realm proposals include planting and greening of the area which was strongly supported by consultation in 2019. Also transport proposals seek to create a mixed network which promotes active travel, in practical terms this will promote walking and cycling as modes of transport.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None arising directly from this report. However, when delivering each project impacts are identified and an Equality Impact Assessment carried out. We will continue to



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engage with groups and individuals to address issues and make reasonable adjustments where needed. Further consultations are also planned on traffic regulation orders in the next few months.

Background Papers

None attached