

# **Update Report on Chard Regeneration Scheme**

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## **1 Purpose of the Report**

To update Area West Members on progress made with the Chard Regeneration Scheme.

## **2 Public Interest**

The Chard Regeneration Scheme is a comprehensive and ambitious framework for regeneration that was prepared by LDA Design, SSDC and partners to establish a long term vision, strategy and delivery plan for the future development of Chard. The plan which was approved in 2010 sets out a 20 year vision for the development of Chard. The CRS sets out an agreed basis for development that is now incorporated in SSDCs Local Plan 2006 -2028. This version of the SSDC Local Plan was formally adopted in 2015.

This report updates members on progress made on the Chard Regeneration Scheme to date.

## **3 Recommendation**

That the contents of the report are noted.

## **4 Background**

The CRS outlines a set of aims and ambitions for a comprehensive regeneration of Chard. It offers a phased approach, methodology and sequencing to the regeneration plan. The main programme of current work falls into three key areas;

- 1) Development of housing and employment land in the Chard Eastern Development Area
- 2) The redevelopment of the Boden Mill/former ACI factory site and adjoining car parks
- 3) Scoping and refining the remaining projects in the CRS scheme.

Whilst officers and members have worked on many additional elements of the CRS, this report gives a primary focus to the above three areas.

## **5 Report Detail**

### **5.1 Development of housing and employment land in the Chard Eastern Development Area**

#### **5.1.1 Housing Development at CEDA**

The Chard Eastern Development Area (CEDA) is set out in the Chard Regeneration Scheme as the principle area for the development for both housing and employment land in Chard over the Local Plan period (to 2028). Land in CEDA is allocated for strategic growth to

provide the following within the plan period and beyond: CEDA will be instrumental in delivering:

- At least 1,220 dwellings (to 2028)
- 13 Ha of employment land
- Associated infrastructure (new primary school and further facilities)

Additional development is planned beyond 2028

The council have been active in guiding development to the Eastern Development Area of Chard. Key areas are:

- Ensuring the CRS is embedded within the local plan, which was successfully defended at the Local Plan Examination. SSDCs Local Plan was formally adopted in 2015
- Putting considerable resource into defending the CEDA under significant challenge from developers of competing schemes to the north of Chard. It should be noted that the CRS was also well supported by Chard residents (who had also committed considerable time and resource) at inquiry in 2015. The inspector, who ruled in favour of the CRS, did indicate the need to deliver projects at CEDA to maintain the high credibility of the CRS.
- Approaching and encouraging cooperation from each landowner, option holder and developer who hold a key to unlocking and bringing forward CEDA.
- A series of meetings were held during 2014/15 in relation to the proposed development sites. This was to ensure that any forthcoming planning applications were compliant with the CRS, with particular emphasis on the highway requirements. Negotiations are ongoing to establish a highway link from CEDA to the Millfield Industrial Estate and the establishment of the Stoplevel Way across CEDA.
- Officers have supported CRS- compliant schemes with advice and recommendations and we are confident that a number of Planning Applications will now move forward in the Winter and Spring of 2015/16. The complete development of CEDA is still very much a long term project but significant progress has been made in the last 12 months.

Key development sites that are progressing are:

- Between Tatworth Road and Forton Road where land to the south of Chard is a key element of CEDA and provides an important element of the road together with a significant amount of housing. We are expecting an application for this site to be submitted by November.
- Land to the south of the A30. Here the land is in the ownership of three owners, with two now active in bringing forward applications. One application (for 72 units) is to be considered shortly by the planning committee whilst the other application (for up to 350 units) is awaiting submission.
- Land between Forton Road and the Green Fields. This incorporates the Employment land and the highway link through to the Millfield Estate. Negotiations are progressing.

At this stage SSDC have received one planning application for residential development in CEDA (the Morrish application to the north of the A30 is for 78 units and is at reserve matters stage) and is expecting a further 5 applications in the latter part of 2015 and early 2016. The applications seek permissions for a total of approx. 900 houses. Members should note that this amount of housing will neither be delivered immediately or simultaneously.

### **5.1.2 Employment Land and key highway infrastructure**

SSDC officers have negotiated a more favourable position at the Millfield link in Chard with the aim of enabling a key highways link between the Millfield Industrial Estate and the A30 trunk road to the North East. This highways link would help access CEDA, facilitate housing development, access to employment and recreational land and help alleviate traffic congestion to the west at Chard Town Centre.

Funding bids have been submitted to help fund 900 metres of highway infrastructure to achieve the link. Preliminary feasibility studies have been completed. Associated with this project is the local section of the cycleway/walkway that will adjoin the Stopline Way and eventually form part of the major Sustrans coast to coast route.

- It is clear that many of the infrastructure costs required in CEDA cannot be fully met by private development alone. In the autumn of 2014 we funded complementary consultancy work to build a business case that demonstrates (to funding agencies) the cost and opportunities of CEDA. The Chard Millfield Link Appraisal Report (September 2014) enabled us to bid for funding under the Growth Deal 2 programme (autumn 2014). This bid proved unsuccessful, but a further submission (September 2015) has been made for funding under the forthcoming Growth Deal 3 Programme. This bid is fully supported by Somerset County Council. We remain mindful that we are bidding for scarce public funding in a highly competitive bidding process.
- Bringing forward employment land and the associated access roadway in CEDA is now an SSDC corporate priority. It is included as a priority project within SSDCs Investing in Infrastructure Programme (District Executive August 2014) and we were successful in getting the project included in the Somerset Growth Plan 2014 -2020. These inclusions will assist us when seeking funding through the Local Enterprise Partnership (who exercise local control of many of the Government Funding Streams). It will also assist us in our quest for funding from alternative sources. The costs associated with this project are considerable and the assembly of a comprehensive funding package will be essential if we are to bring a scheme forward. The inclusion of the project as a top priority in SSDCs Investing in Infrastructure programme does offer a considerable advantage in providing a source of match funding – match funding being a critical component of most funding bids..

### **5.1.3 Wider aspects of CEDA**

The CRS did not recognise or anticipate the planning environment that we currently operate- particular the NPPF, the accent on viability, 5 year land supply, and the need for bringing homes forward overriding many other planning considerations.

Current Housing Growth rates are below what the Local Plan advocates (65 dwellings p.a versus 84 dwellings p.a.) and with this likely to remain the case for the next few years, developer appetite remains low to moderate.

Despite protracted efforts to develop collaborative working amongst the landowners and developers, this approach has not proved to be universally accepted. Developers have preferred to proceed along a more unilateral path and take their chances at appeal rather than agree a mutual CRS-compliant development pathway. There is however an agreed 'Statement of Common Ground' between the Chard Development Consortium to work together to progress land to the east of Millfield.

SSDC do not own land any within CEDA. Development land is owned by third parties where developers have options on the land and therefore control it. SSDC are in ongoing discussions with owners agents to help facilitate development programmes but we are unable to compel developers to commence development.

The council's planning powers are insufficient to insist on timing of development or to enforce cooperation. Each planning application must be considered, and determined if submitted, on its merits. Planning Inspectors have thus far shown some, but not complete, regard to the CRS as a material consideration.

The CRS envisages 'pooling' of contributions to community projects that support the overall intention of the CRS, but this pooling is not now possible beyond 5 sites. Section 106 requests for planning contributions for projects that have no immediate prospect of delivery are considered by the Inspectorate to be unreasonable and seen to be unnecessary for the particular development. This will change when CIL is in place, but expectations should be measured in view of the comments in the next paragraph.

The achievement of all the objectives of the CRS relies on development to finance and achieve key projects. Chard has a limited market capacity for new homes and this means that the planned housing development outlined in the CRS will be demand driven and be spread over a period of time. This in turn will impact on the delivery time of some of the component projects within the CRS.

The impact of this is that time horizons are long and developments that gain permission and start early in the process will deter other developers from commencing on the costly planning application process. Instead they are preferring to bide their time with land that has a potential 20+ year time horizon.

The link road depends on the end to end link being made and therefore only is likely to occur in an extended timeframe. That said the Millfield part of the road can be achieved and this has been made a priority.

For the above reasons, more council effort / resource, will not necessarily bring forward development in a sequenced order or necessarily in the required place..

## **5.2 The redevelopment of the Boden Mill/former ACI factory site and adjoining car parks**

As reported to Area West Committee in April 2014, a conditional development agreement for the site had been signed between SSDC and Henry Boot PLC.

The conditional development agreement was based on a prescribed mixed development scheme of housing, retail, car parking and public realm. The three conditions are:

- Henry Boot must secure a pre-let agreement with a retail end user to 'anchor' the scheme.
- Henry Boot must obtain planning permission for the development

- SSDC must provide vacant possession

All three conditions must be met before the agreement becomes unconditional and the project can move to the construction stage. The timeframe imposed on the agreement is three years, which means that Henry Boot PLC and SSDC must have met these conditions by April 2017.

As such there is no slippage against the timeframe of the Development Agreement, but the changed market conditions for major supermarket developments have clearly caused problems in securing an end user for the scheme. At this stage Henry Boot remain in negotiations with potential end users and the CRS Board will be kept informed of the position.

### **5.3 Scoping and refining and the remaining projects in the CRS scheme.**

The overall CRS includes over 70 separate projects within its framework. The projects vary in size from smaller projects (that lend themselves well to completion by local officers) to major infrastructure projects that will take corporate resource, co-operation from third party landowners and considerable external funding to bring to fruition.

The primary focus of resource has so far been on the CEDA and ACI/Boden Mill site elements of the CRS. Officers have worked on a number of other projects included in the Scheme, but it is recognised that corporate resource will be required to bring forward some of the major projects identified in the CRS.

Resource and timing will be critical for many of the projects and the current, further prioritisation is required to allocate resource appropriately to projects that are deliverable and where increased resource can make a difference. Further prioritisation will also enable better management of expectations on delivery and timeframe. Recent work by officers has been around refocussing and repackaging the complete range of projects within the CRS and to assign them to named officers. This work will be presented to the board this autumn.

## **6 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report.

## **7 Corporate Priority Implications**

The work of the Economic Development, Heritage and Tourism Service supports the Districts Council's corporate priorities (2012-15):

- Focus 1: Jobs
- Focus 2: Environment
- Focus 4: Health and Communities

## **8 Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications**

None associated directly with this report.

## **9 Equality and Diversity Implications**

None associated directly with this report

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