

## **Regeneration – Interim update**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To provide an overview of our regeneration work and initiatives from other agencies

### **Public Interest**

Supporting and helping the economy in the towns and villages across Area East.

### **Recommendations:**

- (1) To note and comment on the report

### **Key work strands**

The report endeavours to pull together the various regenerative initiatives both from within Area East, corporately across SSDC and those which are led by other agencies and over which our influence is more limited.

### **Work within Area East Development Team**

#### **Retail Support Initiative**

This long established scheme provides grants of up to £1,500 (£2,500 in Wincanton) to assist with improvements such as re-decoration/signing to the front of their retail premises including village stores and farm shops. Members received the annual report on this popular scheme in July, in which we reported that five awards were made during 2016/17. Since April a further five awards have been made with businesses in Bruton, Castle Cary and Wincanton benefiting. There is also 'pipeline' interest from a number of prospective applicants. A full report and detailed breakdown of the scheme's operation for the year will be provided in May 2018.

#### **State of the High Street**

As the role of the High Street has continued to change with the growth in 'e' business and the loss of critical services such as banks, we've continued a programme of monitoring. The programme comprises:

- Quarterly counts of car park use across three time bands in each car park provide a 'snapshot' of use on the monitoring day but this has allowed us to build up a picture of use trends, graph attached at appendix 1
- Recording the number of empty town centre units and the period vacant

As with the Retail Support Initiative, this information is reported annually (last in July 2017). Whilst not providing a visible outcome it is extremely useful data, helping us to provide more meaningful responses to planning and other consultations. **Attached at Appendix 1 is the most recent car park monitoring report**

#### **Workspace Demand Study**

This work commenced at the end of 2016 and was reported to Members in March 2017. It was commissioned to improve understanding of the demand for workspace in Area East. Approximately 2000 businesses were approached by Cognisant Research who was appointed to undertake the work on our behalf, with just under 400 businesses responding to the survey. Around 60% of respondents were small businesses employing four or less people with the majority expecting staffing levels over the next 12 months to either stay the same or grow. Encouragingly, approximately 20% of the respondent businesses expected to require additional accommodation within the next five years. The report has been made available to local businesses to support investment proposals.

### **Business Event**

A verbal update will be given to the meeting about the event which was held at Haynes Motor museum on Thursday 2 November

### **Wincanton Town Centre**

There has been a long standing item within the Area Development Plan to investigate options to boost footfall in the town centre. At the request of Members, this work has now been prioritised and a small group of Members and officers are working towards taking a proposal to Regeneration Board on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

Specific, responsive work has been undertaken in conjunction with Property Services to facilitate the use of Memorial Hall Car Park by the mobile banks

Another Area East funded project, which has been undertaken in conjunction with Property Services, was the return of 'the lamp' to the Market Place in October.

### **Market Town Investment Group (MTIG)**

As part of a Districtwide programme of work Area officers provide support to a nominated link town. The agenda for meetings allow an opportunity for peer support amongst towns and showcasing of projects to share learning and success stories. Area East towns have received funding for a variety of projects over the years including tourist information boards, finger posts/signs and car park extensions. Following a 'digital audit' earlier this year, (undertaken by volunteers from another town) to better understand the impression created of the town through digital media, a programme of support will be developed with the towns at the next meeting.

### **Work by other agencies**

#### **Superfast Broadband**

By December 2019 Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) aims to have provided at least 380,000 homes and businesses across its region with access to better broadband in areas where the commercial sector will not deliver on its own. A programme of further investments are planned including public funding returned by BT once take-up of the new broadband service passes 20%. This money will be re-invested by CDS to expand broadband coverage to areas without a service and where commercial connection will not be viable.

The community broadband voucher scheme has paused whilst the data from the previous voucher scheme is analysed. A decision will then be made about any future voucher scheme.

Whilst some of the larger settlements in Area East now have access to Superfast within this there are anomalies, where places such as edge of town business parks still do not have access

(although this is not unique to the Area as it was an issue highlighted through the digital audit work undertaken through the Market Town Investment Group)

Area East Committee supported a request from Cucklington Parish Meeting to underwrite a scheme to deliver broadband to one of our most rural settlements. The community responded well to the coordinated approach to take advantage of the original voucher scheme and the Area funding was not needed. A request has also been received from Blackford & Compton Pouncefoot Parish Meeting and is currently being assessed.

### **Heart of Wessex Local Action Group (HofWLAG)**

In April members received a comprehensive report about this 5 year LEADER funded, locally designed, rural development and enterprise programme which focuses on supporting rural job creation and the economy. The changing position with BREXIT means that by the end of 2018 prospective projects need to be in the assessment process so contracts for funded projects can be put in place by March 2019.

A series of surgery sessions held in May and June, supporting applicants to bring forward strong applications, were well received and there is now c£600k of pipeline applications pending. If successful, these would take commitments close to the £1.4m original budget and HofWLAG would then be eligible to apply for any top-up funds which become available as a result of under commitments elsewhere in the country.

### **Heart of South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HofSWLEP)**

This is a high level partnership covering Somerset & Devon, activities can tend to focus on larger settlements but there are work strands which are very relevant to Area East including:

Heart of South West Growth Hub – working across the partnership area providing business advice from initial engagement, signposting and onward referral to workshop sessions, grants and one to one business support.

Rural Productivity Commission – is a collaboration between Hof SWLEP and neighbouring Enterprise Partnerships to influence DeFRA's 25 year plan for Food, Farming, Fisheries and the Environment. Consideration is being given as to how best to influence this using a recently published, jointly commissioned, report.

### **A303 Improvement**

At the time of preparing this report the A303 preferred route announcement for the Sparkford to Ilchester section had just been released. The route known as 'Option 1', which broadly follows the existing alignment, has been identified as the preferred route. The Highways England website advises that this route has been selected for a number of reasons including:

- minimising land-take
- minimising construction in unspoilt rural setting (as the route follows the existing corridor very closely)
- is preferred by stakeholders and most of the local community as it has less impact on biodiversity
- is the shortest of the 2 options so will provide the best journey time

Correspondence has gone directly to people who attended the previous consultation events and relevant Parish Councils. There are two public sessions to be held at Haynes Motor Museum on

7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November between 3 and 7pm. Information is also available to view at Wincanton library.

The next step will be to undertake route surveys and develop detailed designs ahead of a further round of public consultation.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no additional budget implications resulting from this report

### **Implications for Corporate Priorities**

A strong economy which has low unemployment and thriving businesses

### **Other Implications**

Included within the Area Development Plan

### **Background Papers:**

Area East Committee Agenda and Minutes