

Yeovil Refresh Update Report

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Purpose of the Report

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

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 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

To note and comment on the progress to date

Background

The Yeovil Refresh was commissioned by SSDC and a draft report was produced by the consultant JLL in late 2017. The document provides a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of Yeovil and a commercial overview of the town. It sets the town within the context of changes within town centres nationally and regionally and in particular, the significant changes occurring in the retail sector.

The Refresh aims to make Yeovil Town Centre a vibrant place to live, work, learn and visit. The revitalised public spaces will celebrate the town's civic life and heritage and help regenerate the town's retail heart.

The Yeovil Refresh details the necessary investigation and further strategy work required in the town centre through a programme of priority projects.

At the Area South Committee (ASC) meeting in January 2018 members approved the reallocation of various capital funds to assist with the delivery of the programme. The Refresh was then finalised in March 2018 and released for public consultation. The consultation event took place in the town centre on 9th and 10th March and was well attended. This consultation has also enabled the final document to carry weight as a material consideration in determining planning applications.

A report was taken to the District Executive and Full Council meetings in May to agree the delivery arrangements for Strategic Development and Regeneration in South Somerset. The arrangements for Yeovil Refresh included establishing a new Yeovil Refresh Programme Board to oversee the delivery of the Refresh. At the same time, significant funding was ring-fenced for this and other Strategic Regeneration programmes contained in the Corporate Plan.

The Yeovil Vision Board also held its last meeting in its current form in May and in future, partners and other commercial stakeholders will participate in the Yeovil Refresh via the Stakeholder Group. The group will work with the Yeovil Refresh Programme Board to comment on detailed delivery plans and help to achieve effective coordination with other complementary town centre work.

Programme Update

Following positive public reaction delivery of the Yeovil Refresh has commenced, phased over a 4-5 year programme

Board Meetings

The newly-formed Yeovil Refresh Board held its first meeting in mid-July in order to drive the project forward and met again in September to review progress against the priority tasks that were identified through the public consultation. The key messages from the public consultation were that residents and businesses would like:

- The main high streets kept clean and better kept with nicer planters and other greenery, while keeping the streets from being too cluttered.
- Improvements in vehicular and pedestrian access into the heart of Yeovil for locals and visitors.
- Concerns addressed about some vehicle access to parts of the town centre (in particular on Middle Street).
- To make the town's open areas more appealing, using the space that is available to encourage visitors.

The Stakeholder Group detailed in the Programme Governance document (Appendix 1) are due to meet on 26th September to establish their Terms of Reference and set meeting dates for the coming year.

Car Park Review

The tender documents for this work have gone out and the project is currently on schedule. The work includes assessing current and future car parking provision, identifying development opportunities, possible cycle parking and electric charging points. Officers are due to review the submissions at the end of September and therefore further details will be available in October once the tender process is complete.

Yeovil Access Strategy

An initial scoping meeting has taken place between Somerset County Council and SSDC officers and the first piece of work undertaken will be the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. The aims are to improve access to the town centre by all forms of transport.

Improvements to Middle Street

The Yeovil Refresh seeks to improve public spaces in the town centre. The spine from the Borough through to the Bandstand or Entertainment Area and then to the bottom of town is the busiest thoroughfare for pedestrians and the plan is for a sequential improvement of spaces along this spine to create a more pleasant experience.

Exploratory work has therefore begun in to the proposed improvement to the top part of Middle Street. The top end of Middle Street experiences the highest levels of footfall in the town, yet it currently has the poorest provision for pedestrians with narrow pavements and space dominated by vehicle routes and parking.

Officers have begun investigating the possibility of redressing the balance between pedestrians and cars in the town centre and creating a vehicle free area at the top of Middle Street through the use of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), which controls vehicle access. Before putting forward any designs, officers will be consulting extensively with businesses and users of the area and the feedback will be used to shape the plans which will then be submitted as part of the TRO application to Somerset County Council. The aim is to submit an application by the end of November. The County Council will then carry out their own additional public consultation exercise as part of the official application process.

The first part of the initial consultation with local business owners is underway, with the majority agreeing that creating a pedestrianised area will be of benefit to their business. The road was shut on a temporary basis in December 2017 to enable a Christmas Market to take place. This was well received by businesses in the vicinity and they maintain that they would like to see the area used for more specialist markets throughout the year. Specialist Markets and town centre events such as September's Super Saturday and the Christmas Lantern Parade bring people in to the town and are an important element in increasing the vitality of the town centre.

A number of disabled bays would need to be relocated in the town centre to accommodate the possible changes, however, redefining the width of the pavements would see improvements for wheelchair users and parents with buggies and prams. Removing vehicles and other obstructions also benefits people with visual impairments who find it difficult to navigate the many obstacles and barriers, including parked cars. Officers will be working with Access for All solutions and other disability charities in order to identify the most appropriate place to relocate the accessible parking bays and to ensure that any proposed changes to surfacing contain safety measures that help assist blind and partially sighted visitors to the town.

This current phase of the project is concerned with the traffic management in the area, the wider physical improvements i.e. enhancement and expansion of the paving will form part of the Public Realm Design Guide. The design guide will detail the improvements required to the public spaces within the town such as the Bandstand area, the Borough and Middle Street as a whole.

Inward Investment

The Refresh officer group seek to support and work with a range of existing and potential investors in Yeovil. There have been some very positive developments in this respect indicating a renewed confidence, and although there is an agreed programme we remain flexible to respond proactively to emerging opportunities.

Project Resource

To support the Programme Manager a Project Manager will be joining the team for three days a week starting in October.

Financial Implications

None directly from this report.

Council Plan Implications

To complete the Yeovil Refresh for Yeovil town centre and progress implementation is one of the priority projects within the Council Plan for 2018/19.

The development of Yeovil town centre also assists the council in meeting several of its corporate objectives including:

- Lobbying for and support infrastructure improvements to enable growth.
- Capitalise on our high quality culture, leisure and tourism opportunities to bring people to South Somerset.
- Progress key infrastructure projects that unlock development

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None directly from this report. The quality of regeneration schemes within Yeovil will be designed

have a positive impact on future carbon emissions.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None directly from this report. However, Equality and Diversity, including Equality Assessments, will be fully explored in the implementation of the various projects within the Yeovil Refresh.

Background Papers

Yeovil Refresh Document.