

# **Yeovil Refresh and Economic Development Update Report**

*Strategic Director:*        *Martin Woods, Service Delivery*  
*Service Manager:*        *Natalie Fortt, Regeneration Programme Manager*  
   *Peter Paddon, Lead Specialist – Economic Development*  
*Contact Details:*         *Natalie.fortt@southsomerset.gov.uk*  
   *Peter.paddon@southsomerset.gov.uk*

## **Purpose of the Report**

To give a brief update on progress with the Yeovil Refresh and how the Refresh Programme works collaboratively with the district wide Economic Development Team.

## **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 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 released for public consultation in March. The consultation event took place in the town centre on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> March and was well attended. 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.

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 Refresh Board was established in July 2018 and the Regeneration Programme Manager was also appointed in July.

### **Refresh Programme Update**

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

### **Car Park Review**

The review has been completed and a draft document has been produced detailing a new signage strategy, suggested improvements to the car parks and suggestions for possible development opportunities.

### **Yeovil Access Strategy**

The initiation meeting has taken place between Somerset County Council (SCC) and SSDC and the brief and project management methods have been agreed. The aim of the strategy is to improve access to the town centre by all forms of transport. Work to assess and update the traffic modelling for the town centre has already begun and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan will be completed in the next financial year.

### **Public Realm Design Guide and Detailed Drawings**

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.

Tenders have been sought from organisations interested in delivering a fresh new look for these public spaces and include both a general Design Guide for the whole of the town centre and detailed designs for particular spaces such as the Bandstand, which will create more space for special events and markets, which help bring visitors to the town.

The team have shortlisted the applications and interviews will be taking place the end of February.

### **Improvements to 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. The proposal has been submitted to SCC and the official consultation is expected to start at the beginning of March, the exact date for which should be known in time for this committee meeting.

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 order to accommodate the possible changes and space has been identified in the adjoining Union Street, Wine Street and Peter Street areas.

### **Glovers Walk**

The Martin Property Group acquired the Glovers Walk Shopping Centre in Yeovil in late 2018. Glovers Walk is a 2.2 acre site which is a significant part of the town centre comprising a retail parade along Middle Street as well as a courtyard of shops on Glovers Walk. The acquisition of the site also included the town centre bus station.

The Martin Property Group has stated that the part vacant shopping centre is in line with its investment strategy of expanding their portfolio through selective acquisitions of challenging assets where repositioning is required. It has also spoken of its ambition to maximise the asset's important and strategic location by working closely with south Somerset District Council as part of Yeovil Refresh.

The Martin Group are in the early stages of drawing up a masterplan for redevelopment of the site and SSDC officers are working closely with the group to ensure the regeneration of this important town centre site.

### **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.

### **Economic Development Strategy**

The new Economic Development Strategy sets a Vision, plus Priority Themes and an Action Plan with Year One Milestones to achieve Key Outcomes for the Districts' economy. The Strategy includes elected Members' and businesses priorities, which are reflected in the six Priority Themes of:

- Business Support, Retention, Innovation and Inward Investment
- Transport and Communications Infrastructure
- Economic Inclusion – Skills, Careers and Training
- Land, Sites and Workspaces
- Supporting Urban Economies
- Supporting Rural Economies.

### **Economic Development and the Yeovil Refresh**

Priority Theme 5 Supporting Urban Economies relates directly to the Yeovil Refresh and the new Economic Development (ED) Team will work with the Refresh to deliver the Programme. Specific areas where the ED team are currently focusing are:

- Reach an agreement to establish an entrepreneurial co-working hub in Yeovil Town centre
- The Middle Street Traffic Regulation Order proposal
- Supporting business development and inward investment.

### **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 and Economic Development Strategy.

## **Background Papers**

Yeovil Refresh Document.