

Yeovil Refresh Update

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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 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 progress on all projects and the planned consultation activities related to the public realm work which will be carried out in the next few months.

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 9th and 10th 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.

In addition to this board approach there are two other important groups which are intended to support delivery of the Refresh programme.

The first of these is key external stakeholders who have a significant impact on the town and are able to provide input on the programme as it progresses. The second is a grouping of internal officers who meet regularly to co-ordinate activity, share information and address any operational issues relating to the Refresh.

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. This review is currently being formed into an action plan.

Yeovil Access Strategy

The first phase of this work is now complete. This phase had two elements: a technical review of possible infrastructure outlined in the Refresh document and updated modelling work based on proposals. The aim of the strategy is to improve access to the town centre by all forms of transport. The work now moves into phase 2 which will be detailed assessment of the initial baseline work.

Work to assess has also begun on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan which will be completed in this 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. This area is broken into six projects P1 - P6 which are fully described in the Refresh document.

Work is now underway which has three components

1. Production of a Public realm Design Guide to cover the town centre P1
2. Creation of Outline designs for the project areas P2 – P6
3. Creation of detailed designs for P2- P6 to support the build phase

At this stage we intend to consult with key stakeholders during June and are planning a public consultation event on Saturday 6th July combined with materials on the council's website for comment. This will feed into the design process.

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.

As a fore runner to the main project a proposal has been submitted for the use of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), which controls vehicle access in that area. The proposal has been submitted to SCC and the completion of the process is currently paused to consider the representations which have been submitted to SCC. There is an ongoing discussion with SCC whilst this consideration continues.

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.

It is important to note that the proposal relocates a number of disabled bays into adjacent streets with possible changes having been identified in the adjoining Union Street, Wine Street and Peter Street areas. This would clarify and improve the parking arrangements in these streets. The proposal would also reverse flow of Wine Street which should minimise traffic passing through the Borough.

Potential Investors in the town

There are a number of opportunities around the Refresh development theme which are progressing. As members will be aware Glovers Walk was purchased in late 2018 by Martin Group Ltd who are developing their plans. We will continue to work with them and hope to see firm proposals in the near future which will inform a planning application. Benson Elliot have taken an option to develop the Old Cattle Market site which is also an exciting opportunity. A Planning Performance Agreement is being finalised with them to enable us to support the development of a planning submission.

In addition to these two main development sites there are a range of other investments occurring such as the introduction of Dun Elm into the town centre. We are also exploring opportunities as they arise where they are connected to the Refresh aspirations.

High Streets Fund bid

A bid was submitted to DCLG on 22nd March 2019 seeking funding to support the Refresh. This bid was aspirational and sought funding of £13.5 million for a wide range of the projects. DCLG are proposing to advise bidders in the summer if they have been accepted to progress to phase 2. Phase 2 will be supported by the government's high streets task force to assist in the development of detailed business cases for projects.

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 2019/20.

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.