

Yeovil Refresh Update

Strategic Director:	Jan Gamon, Director - Place, Recovery and Arts and Entertainment
Service Manager:	Natalie Fortt, Regeneration Programme Manager
Lead Officer:	Ian Timms, Yeovil Refresh Project Manager
Contact Details:	ian.timms@southsomerset.gov.uk

Purpose of the Report

This report provides an update on the Yeovil Refresh project and seeks approval from members to update provisions relating to Yeovil Charter Market. This aims to improve the basis of operation for the Charter market.

Public Interest

The Yeovil Refresh is an ambitious project seeking to transform the town centre through a range of projects and interventions. This report provides a brief update on the current progress of the project.

Yeovil Charter Market was established through a historic charter in 1683. This Royal charter enables the holding of markets on specific days and is held by South Somerset District Council. This report seeks to strengthen the legislative foundation for operation of this market to enable a positive contribution to the local economy. This charter will be transferred to the new Somerset Council as an element of the Local Government Reorganisation. This report does not make any proposals relating to the current market operator or general operating practices.

Recommendations

1. That members note the progress being made with the Yeovil Refresh project.
2. That members agree to make a declaration that Part III of the Food Act 1984 is to be used to operate and manage Yeovil Charter Market.

Background

National Context

High streets and town centres create jobs, nurture small businesses and inject billions of pounds into the county's economy. However, consumer patterns have changed and spending online has significantly increased. Therefore, in order to survive, High Streets need to refocus. The Government has described the need for a renewed emphasis on 'experience' bringing convenience, valuable services and a powerful sense of the community to the fore.

The Future High Street Fund was set up to assist High Streets to adapt to the changing expectation of shoppers and visitors. The council was successful in securing significant funds for Yeovil High Street, as the ambitions set out in the Yeovil Refresh were considered to be transformative and the outcomes sought would ensure the future sustainability of the town centre.

Yeovil Refresh

The Yeovil Refresh is an ambitious programme seeking to transform the town centre through a range of projects and interventions. The programme is split into four themes which will be delivered by a number of different stakeholders. These are broadly defined as.

- **Public Realm enhancements.** Improvements to core streets including Westminster Street, High Street, Borough, Middle Street, Triangle and Wyndham Street area. This will create a better shared space which will be greener and easier to navigate. A new events square will be created at the Triangle.
- **Transport system changes.** Changes to road systems, additional cycle ways, improved walking routes, review of bus routes, car parking improvements and possible highways junctions.
- **Developments.** This relates to bringing forward empty buildings and stalled development sites within the town centre.
- **Soft interventions/complementary initiatives.** This includes events programmes, markets, management of spaces in the town, evening economy changes and a range of other economic activities.

Progress Update

Public Realm

The Yeovil Refresh aims to deliver a comprehensive package of public realm improvements to transform the visitor experience, increase pedestrian safety and provide a new multi-use square for events and activities. This investment will also access and stimulate investor confidence in adjacent empty units.

The recent report to Full Council, Yeovil Refresh Scope Change January 2023, detailed the current issues being experienced by the project, identified key risks and recommended approaches to resolving those issues. These recommendations were all accepted, so work has begun to redesign Middle Street East and amend the designs of the planting areas in High Street. Once the planting designs have been finalized and agreed, High Street will be the next area of public realm to undergo works, starting at the clock tower.

Westminster Street has been subject to numerous delays but the paving work to phase 2 of the street has now begun. This section is due to be completed by the end of April 2023.

Construction work at the Triangle has required significant utility diversion work with all major utility companies involved. The next stage of this work includes diverting the main sewer and complete water main diversions.

Licensing Committee and Full Council have agreed the proposal to consult on Hackney Carriage Ranks across the Town Centre. This consultation is due to start in March 2023.

The Refresh is long term investment in the town centre and improvements will continue over a number of years. However, the majority of the current public realm works will be complete by the end of Summer 2024.

Cycleways

The four town centre Cycling and Walking Packages are progressing well. Hendford and South West Terrace are in the Road Safety Audit and Technical Approval stage, with Indicative Bills of Quantity being produced to support the tender of these two areas. Co-ordination work has also been undertaken with the Somerset County Council signals team.

The Stars Lane/South Street Reversal which includes cycling facilities has an Active Travel Fund 3 allocation of £600,000. Further design work is necessary on the section to review compliance with the Active Travel Fund requirements.

The last cycleway package is for the Pen Mill link via the country park, the statutory consultation for this package has commenced and designs will be reviewed following the completion of the consultation period.

Developments

A change control request has been submitted to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to assist smaller stalled development sites in the town centre. This work would focus on bringing key empty buildings in the town centre back in to use. A decision has not yet been issued in regard to the change request but officers have begun negotiations with property owners to ensure this work would be in a position to progress within the tight timescales dictated by the Future High Street Fund.

Complementary Initiatives

The public realm works will improve the visitor environment but it is essential that these new spaces are utilised and that events and activities are planned that attract new visitors to the High Street.

Service Level Agreements have been agreed with Love Yeovil CIC and Yeovil Art Space to provide events, activities and cultural opportunities in the town centre.

The public realm works at the Triangle will create a multi-use event space, therefore, officers are working to secure an events licence that will allow the area to be used for community events and outside performances. The area will include a stage and screen to further assist in creating a vibrant space for community and cultural activities.

Markets

As an element of the welcome back programme related to the covid pandemic South Somerset District Council engaged the National Association of British Markets Association (NABMA) to support towns across the district in strengthening and developing their markets. NABMA has been working primarily with Town and parish Councils to review their arrangements making a number of recommendations.

Yeovil currently enjoys the benefit of a Market Charter. This is the only market which continues to be operated by South Somerset District Council. This has meant that engagement with NABMA for the council has been via the Yeovil Refresh project. This is due to markets contributing to the complementary initiatives workstream of the Refresh.

The town centre market is run under the Charter that was originally granted to the town in 1683. The Charter empowers the town to hold three annual fairs and three weekly markets on a Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. The Charter was passed from predecessor authorities to South Somerset District Council in 1974. This will pass to the successor authority Somerset Council when it is established on 1st April.

In order to modernize and update market powers and operations across the district NABMA have made some suggestions to Council's. These recommendations update and clarify the basis for operation of Charter markets utilising additional powers available to councils under the Food Act 1984. A number of towns across South Somerset have already applied these recommendations to their charter markets.

To supplement the Charter it is suggested that the Council embraces Part III of the Food Act 1984 which provides the modern statutory framework to operate Markets. A combination of the Charter and Part III will provide the Council with comprehensive market powers that are capable of covering each day of the week and dealing with some of the important operational issues relating to the operation of market activities.

Part III is the modern statutory framework for Markets and in particular the following powers are relevant:

Section 50: The power to establish or acquire a Market

Section 52: The power to determine market days and hours

Section 53: The power to make charges

Section 60: The power to introduce Byelaws to regulate the use of the Market

Section 61: Confirmation that Part III embraces Local Councils.

The benefit of using Part III enables a Local Council to hold a Market on any day of the week and stipulate the hours that are regarded as being the most relevant. Further, using Part III provides a statutory basis for market charges.

A combination of a Royal Charter and Part III provides a comprehensive package of legal powers. There is no prescribed procedure or consultation process required to make use of Part III. All that is required is a Council declaration making it clear that in respect of any market event the powers contained in Part III will be used as appropriate.

Area South Committee is therefore recommended to make a declaration that Part III of the Food Act 1984 is to be used to operate and manage Yeovil Charter Market.

This will improve the foundation for operation of the market by the new Somerset Council. There are no proposals relating to the existing contract arrangements within this report.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Council Plan Implications

The delivery of Yeovil Refresh forms part of Priority Project 2 of the Council Plan. This report therefore directly links to and supports this priority.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None directly arising from this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The Refresh project has been subject to consultation on a number of occasions. Specific projects are also subject to full Equality Impact Assessments with appropriate adjustments being made to projects in line with identified issues. This report itself has no direct implications but has been reviewed in line with Council policy to ensure consideration of these issues. The Equality Impact Relevance Form is attached.

<i>An Equality Impact Relevance Check Form has been completed in respect of the Proposal?</i>	Yes
<i>The Impact Relevance Check indicated that a full EIA was required?</i>	No
<i>If an EIA was not required please attach the Impact Relevance Check Form as an Appendix to this report and provide a brief summary of its findings in the comments box below.</i>	
<i>If an EIA was required please attach the completed EIA form as an Appendix to this report and provide a brief summary of the result of your Equality Impact Assessment in the comment box below.</i>	
Additional Comments	

Background Papers

None.