

MEETING
DATE 19.05.21

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Area West (Informal) Committee** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Wednesday 19 May 2021.**

(5.30 - 7.53 pm)

Present:

Councillor Jason Baker (Chairman)

Mike Best	Jenny Kenton
Dave Bulmer	Paul Maxwell
Martin Carnell	Tricia O'Brien
Brian Hamilton	Sue Osborne
Ben Hodgson	Linda Vijeh
Val Keitch	Martin Wale

Officers:

Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Anna Matthews	Chard High Street HAZ Project Manager
Tim Cook	Locality Team Manager
Adrian Moore	Locality Officer
Matthew Loughrey-Robinson	Accelerated Housing Delivery Programme Manager
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

Also Present:

Adam Dance	Gerard Tucker
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1. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robin Pailthorpe, Oliver Patrick and Garry Shortland.

2. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

3. Date and Venue for Next Meeting (Agenda Item 3)

Members noted that the next Informal Area West Committee meeting was scheduled to be held at 5.30pm on Wednesday 16 June 2021. This would be a virtual meeting using Zoom on-line meeting software.

4. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public present.

5. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

6. Presentation on the Future Chard Strategy (Agenda Item 6)

The Chard High Street Heritage Action Zone Manager introduced Keith Thomas of PER Consulting who had been appointed along with Chris Jones to take a holistic look at Chard and its future prosperity and to draw up a strategy to address the issues faced in the town. She said that all aspects of life in Chard would be looked at as there were long-standing issues faced by residents which had not been addressed. It would be a different and ambitious change for the town which would be evidence and community-led.

Mr Thomas of PER Consulting provided the Committee with a presentation on the proposed Future Chard Strategy. He said it was about the connections of people and communities to their environment and places and also the physical challenges of the change of industry in urban areas. He said:

- they would take a broad appreciation of local community needs and challenges to create a new sense of direction and purpose for the community.
- The 15 year strategy would initially focus on the short term priorities of 3 to 5 years and it would then evolve and grow over the remaining years.
- The delivery of the strategy would include a number of partners including the Town Council, health and social services, community organisations and voluntary groups.
- There would be a 3 phase of activities in firstly gathering data and material on the community and engaging with a variety of organisations to develop a community of understanding and perhaps take a new perspective and see new connections possible.
- The second stage would create a framework around priorities and themes of interaction to structure delivery and tackle issues and see how success may look.
- Discussions with Councillors had identified community engagement as key at several informal meeting points within the town.
- Funding would be ongoing through the strategy.
- Short, medium and long-term interventions would be identified and they would have SMART targets.
- There would be no more than three to five aims in the strategy and they would have structured action plans for delivery along with other partners.

He concluded that it was hoped the strategy would be presented to the District Executive in September 2021. He invited questions from Members.

In response to questions from Members, Mr Thomas, the Director for Place and Recovery and the Chard High Street Heritage Action Zone Manager replied:

- Change in the town was inevitable in terms of the impact of the closure of Oscar Meyer but other opportunities would be created by organisations working together.
- The strategy would be different in 3 years time and 5 years time as issues were addressed and the understanding of place and community would help the response to change.
- The role of the strategy was to set the future direction but that direction would change over time and delivery would have to be agile.
- The people of Chard and the Area West Committee should feel that they own the objectives behind the strategy.
- The current regeneration projects were focused on the town centre and the Future Chard Strategy was intended to cover a wider area. It would also cover environmental factors, the wellbeing of residents and the feeling of community.
- There was not yet an action plan in place for the Council's Recovery Strategy and it had a shorter term ambition but would include actions which would benefit the people of Chard i.e. supporting those unemployed as a result of the Covid pandemic back into work or training. There would be interlocking parts to both strategies.
- Chard Town Council would be a partner and an enabler of the strategy, but it would also engage with other partners like the NHS and Local Enterprise Partnership.
- The strategy would be funded through the revenue budget already available and the cost was not high but the implications of the aims could be significant. The strategy would be an evidence base to apply for grant funding.
- The public consultation process would continue and evolve during the life of the strategy. The broad challenges and issues which the community were facing now would come from the local partners engaged in the community and through the light touch conversations with residents. There would also be an informal survey open to all residents.
- The core structure of priorities in the strategy would be the basis for future community engagement.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked officers for their presentation and for answering Members questions and said they would look forward to a further briefing later in the year.

7. Presentation on the role of Scrutiny in SSDC (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman of the Scrutiny thanked Members for the invitation to discuss the role of scrutiny with them. He said the Committee's purpose was to review and develop policy and be a friend to the authority. He said they reviewed the reports on the District Executive agenda each month and made recommendations on them, some of which were upheld. But the purpose of his presentation was to encourage Members to bring forward items which the Scrutiny Committee could consider, discuss and enhance. He said they had recently discussed the Council's Environment Strategy and the Procurement Plan relating to energy which had been very interesting. They had also undertaken a positive review of the payment of business rate grants. He concluded by asking the Members to consider future items for the Scrutiny Work Programme which would be beneficial to the work of the authority.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- Scrutiny had a very useful role in their review of policy and it was a good starting point for Councillors to understand how the Council operated and how decisions were made.
- All Members should attend the Scrutiny Committee meetings.
- Part of good decision making was to look at reports or subjects in detail and be helpful in good decision making.
- Following the major flooding in Somerset during 2013/14, the Scrutiny Committees of Somerset worked together which eventually resulted in the creation of the Somerset Rivers Authority.
- The Scrutiny Committee worked very well with the District Executive.
- It would be helpful to receive feedback from the District Executive Committee on the suggestions made by the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said he was keen to look at a wider remit than considering District Executive reports and he was also seeking to improve communication feedback from the District Executive Committee.

The Chairman thanked the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee for his presentation.

8. Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Executive Decision) (Agenda Item 8)

The Locality Officer introduced the Manager of the Blackdown Hills AONB who provided Members with a short presentation on their work during 2020/21. He said that the team of 4 officers were usually based at Hemyock and their work and projects included:-

- Commenting on 15 planning applications and 3 pre-applications.
- Undertaking adder, nightjar and crayfish surveys and Beaver activity training.
- Nature recovery planning as part of climate change mitigation to focus work on ecological networks to reconnect, improve and enlarge them.
- Linking in with the South Somerset Environment Champions on the nature recovery work.
- Sensory garden at Combe St Nicholas including willow structures and vegetable growing.
- Project at Dommet wood to help hazel dormice by removing non-native conifers to allow natural regeneration of broadleaf trees and also improving public access with new steps.
- The Government's Farming in protected landscapes scheme to support farmers moving away from a basic payments scheme.
- A Farming Advisory Officer would shortly be engaged to help with the delivery of nature recovery and roll out climate change measures.
- Somerset Nature Connections was a 3 year project to bring groups of people into the AONB areas as volunteers as a nature and well being programme.
- The Saving Devon's Treescapes also included Neroche in Somerset to prevent Ash Dieback and build resilience in landscapes.

He concluded that they hoped to return to hold more in person events during 2021 and encourage residents into the AONB from the surrounding towns.

Councillor Martin Wale, as the SSDC representative of the Blackdown Hills AONB, said they were doing a great deal more project work than was mentioned in the report and the SSDC contribution of £6,000 generated further funding for them.

In response to questions from Members, the Manager of the Blackdown Hills AONB advised:-

- The Colchester Declaration was their national ambition for nature recovery across the AONBs and the South West Consortium had produced a State of Nature for each AONB which would be published shortly for consultation.
- They were working with the East Devon Catchment Partnership to create farm transformation plans to help address the issue of phosphates in rivers.
- Members of the Blackdown Hills Parish Network were part of the AONB management group and they were working on climate change issues including Broadband and had suggested lobbying MP's on this issue.
- The District and County Council contributions to the AONB had varied historically but their overall 25% contribution was vital to draw down DEFRA's 75% funding.
- An environmental land management test and trial had targeted large dairy farms within the Blackdown Hills to help them to comply with the Environment Agency targets to reduce phosphates in water.

The recommendation to continue the SSDC contribution to the core funding of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership was proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by members.

RESOLVED: That Area West Committee members agreed to recommend that the Chief Executive agrees to continue SSDC contribution to the core funding of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership of £6,000 in 2021/22.

Reason: To continue the SSDC contribution to the core funding of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership in 2021/22.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

9. **Community Grant to Hinton St George Pre-School Appeal (Executive Decision) (Agenda Item 9)**

County Councillor Adam Dance spoke in support of the grant application and he asked that the Committee support the recommendation.

The Locality Officer introduced the report and said the school's Chair of Governors and head teacher were in attendance to answer any questions from Members.

Councillor Paul Maxwell, as Ward Member, said the timing of the grant application was crucial as the pre-school and primary school played a role in the viability of the village. The proposed site was at the edge of the village with good opportunity for outdoor play. He thanked those involved in the project, particularly the Vice-Chair of Governors, and for the impressive local fundraising.

In response to questions from Members, the Locality Team Manager and the Locality Officer advised:-

- The grant scoring process was difficult when considering a pre-school application as it did not fit the normal grant scoring questions
- Section 106 and CIL funding was the first source of funding for parish projects but officers were not aware that the Parish Council had received any funding from these sources.
- Due to the Covid pandemic, there had not been very many community grant applications in the previous year, and at present there were not many coming forward. Officers encouraged Members to promote their availability in their Wards.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- Schools were an important part of village life and pre-school children naturally flowed into the primary school.
- The grant scoring mechanism should be reviewed.
- The SSDC grant sought was not out of proportion to the overall cost of the scheme.
- A vibrant pre-school would support the long term future of the primary school.
- There was a shortage of pre-school places in the area and this would help towards reducing that shortage.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Paul Maxwell and seconded by Councillor Mike Best. A named vote was taken and Members unanimously supported the recommendation.

The Chairman thanked the school's Chair of Governors and head teacher for attending and wished them well in the project and the new school term.

RESOLVED: That Area West Committee Members recommend that the Chief Executive award a grant of £12,500 to Hinton St George Pre-School Appeal, the grant to be allocated from the Area West Capital Programme and subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (Appendix A) towards the purchase of a new Pre-School building at Hinton St George.

Reason: To award a grant of £12,500 towards the purchase of a new Pre-School building at Hinton St George.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

10. Community Grant to Radio Ninesprings (Executive Decision) (Agenda Item 10)

The Locality Officer introduced the report and noted that a similar report had been presented to the Area East Committee to provide community radio in the Wincanton/Bruton area and this had been agreed by the Committee.

A representative of Radio Ninesprings said their principal purpose was to broadcast localness to residents. Training young people in broadcasting, IT, presentation and writing skills was also a priority as it provided them with skills to enter commercial broadcasting or gain a paid broadcasting apprenticeship. He said the FM licenses were

very difficult to obtain and two gain two more for the Wincanton/Bruton area and Chard/Crewkerne area was exceptional. There was currently no transmitter in the Chard area.

In response to questions from Members, the representative of Ninesprings Radio advised:-

- There were no paid employees and all staff were volunteers.
- They had a partnership with Yeovil College media department to train students

The recommendations were proposed and seconded and a named vote was taken. The proposal to award £2,516 to Radio Ninesprings was unanimously agreed.

The Chairman thanked the Ninesprings Radio representative and said he looked forward to hearing his broadcast more clearly in the future.

RESOLVED: That Area West Committee Members recommend that the Chief Executive award a grant of £2,516 to Radio Ninesprings towards a Local Community Radio FM transmitter for Chard/Crewkerne. The grant to be allocated from the Area West capital programme and subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (Appendix A).

Reason: To award a grant of £2,516 towards a Local Community Radio FM transmitter for the Chard/Crewkerne area.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

11. Area West - Area Chapter 20/21 outturn report (Agenda Item 11)

The Locality Team Manager said it had been a challenging year but the report identified a number of projects which had been progressed and Appendix A contained a detailed end of year review for each project. The report also contained the community grants awarded, although each Area grants budget had been underspent for the year.

There were no questions and Members were content to note the report.

RESOLVED: That the Area West Committee noted the Area Chapter 2020/21 outturn report.

12. Reports from Members on Outside Organisations - Chard Museum (Agenda Item 12)

Councillor Jenny Kenton advised that due to Covid restrictions, she had not been able to attend the museum and so her report was drawn up from conversations and information from officers and volunteers.

Councillor Linda Vijeh advised that, as a Trustee of Chard Museum, she had been notified that under the Somerset High Streets award for cultural programmes, Chard

would receive £80,000 from Historic England over the next 3 years for creative and community organisations to work together and Chard Museum would be involved.

In response to a question, Councillor Kenton said there was no timescale for the Museum taking over the building from SSDC and it was an ongoing ambition.

Members were content to note the report.

13. Area West Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

The Chairman advised that he had spoken to Directors regarding presentation dates for some of the reports and he hoped to have the dates confirmed soon.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that a new Lead Specialist for Development Management had been appointed.

The contents of the Area West Forward Plan were noted.

14. Exclusion of Press and Public (Agenda Item 14)

RESOLVED: That the following item be considered in Closed Session by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A under Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

15. To discuss the Addendum Transport Assessment for Chard (Agenda Item 15)

The Accelerated Housing Delivery Programme Manager advised that a planning application from Persimmon Homes for 252 houses as part of the CEDA expansion plan for Chard, had been discussed at the last meeting of the Regulation Committee. The Committee had been unable to reach a decision and concerns had been expressed regarding the traffic impact of the development, in particular, whether the original transport assessment had dealt with the issues of the cumulative impact of the development with all the other schemes as part of CEDA and other development within the town. SSDC officers then met with the applicants and their highways consultants to produce an addendum transport note and to review the original assessment in 2016. They also reviewed the original cumulative impact and assumptions to see if they had been impacted by the interim developments which had taken place. They were also asked to provide a precise view as to whether the original traffic assessments still represented a robust assessment on the impact of the proposals. That report was now presented to Members for discussion. He said the addendum report did conclude that the data assumptions in the key areas of the original report still represented a robust assessment of the impact of the proposed and cumulative impact. An interim comment had been received from SCC Highway officers that they were generally happy with the content of the report.

In response to questions from Members the Associate Director from Vectos, the Highway consultants, advised:-

- The original traffic assessment considered a level of development which far exceeded that which has been built out during the intervening period. The original assumptions had been compared on a year by year basis with the number of dwellings being built and there was clearly a significant overestimation of the level of development expected by 2021. It assumed a further 830 dwellings would have been constructed during that period and by 2023 it overestimated by 526 dwellings so the assessment as robust.
- The trip rate analysis through the critical junctions estimated one single additional movement every minute at the convent junction and one additional movement every 4 minutes at the Holyrood junction.
- The cumulative impact of the development had not been considered serious.
- The site would also bring forward the first section of the Eastern Relief road.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Local people saw the traffic queueing at the Convent junction on a regular basis.
- Anyone not familiar with the traffic in Chard could conclude from the report that there was no traffic issues in the town.
- Every planning application in the town for the past two to three years said the traffic junctions were close to or at capacity.
- Completion of the relief road was the only way forward.
- Although the site may bring forward the first part of the Eastern relief road, there was no prospect of its completion to the A30 at the current time.
- The phasing of development in the Local Plan was out of sequence in Chard and it had failed the town.
- Relying on developers to provide the relief road had not worked in Crewkerne or Chard

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to note the report.

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Chairman

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Date