

10. Overcoming Barriers to Regeneration in Area East

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Purpose of the Report

To report the conclusions of the Members' workshop held in December 2007 and the actions identified

Recommendation

To note and comment on the proposed actions as a basis for steering further work.

Background

The promotion of suitable economic regeneration has been a high priority of the Committee over many years. Land use policies and their application through development permissions is a key tool in bringing about appropriate economic regeneration thus securing more balanced and sustainable communities. The Committee has also allocated significant funding and investment over a long period to improve the attractiveness of the area and enhance opportunities for businesses to locate here.

Main Conclusions from Workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to clarify the purpose and findings of commissioned research, the retail capacity study and the workspace demand study and how they are used in land use terms. It also aimed to look more widely at the barriers to, and opportunities for, regeneration in Area East and how we can work more effectively to address these.

The Head of Economic Development, Planning Policy and Transport explained the parameters set by the Regional Spatial Strategy, and how this will inform new planning and other strategy work stressing that: new provisional housing figures will allow for growth outside of Yeovil. A study being conducted by Bakers Associates, will look at the role and function of market towns, will set important context for where the growth outside of Yeovil should go. Most of South Somerset falls within the Yeovil travel to work area. Policies adopted in the new Local Development Framework will need to have a strong evidence base and data has been shared across the Sustainable Community Strategy, the new Economic Development Strategy and the Local Development Framework to make sure that these strategies are all mutually reinforcing.

The Economic Development Team Leader explained the provisional findings of the workspace demand study. Data so far indicated that there is significant demand in the Wincanton area, both for relocation and expansion space, both leasehold and freehold. The team are doing a wider exercise of contacting more businesses and supplementing the data already gathered, so as to flesh out the picture of need across Area East.

In response to questions about the future of our smaller villages and towns for growth and how much flexibility was there in the Regional Spatial Strategy to meet the particular

local needs of these settlements, it was mentioned that the new evidence base should give us a more defensible basis on which to argue for a broader spread of growth to respond to the needs of communities and the distribution of development allocation. All of this will be taken forward in the new Local Development Framework consultation process.

The Business Ambassadors service was stressed as an important way to give quality and consistent advice to applicants at an early stage so as to get better and speedier outcomes. Planning Officers specialising in commercial applications will also help to achieve better consistency of advice.

Other points raised included:

- the importance of securing some development in the smaller market towns to address the gaps in provision and make sure that they are better balanced communities;
- the role of Parish and Town Councils in helping to provide local evidence of need;
- the perception that there is demand for workspace but this may have been missed in the research and broader concern about the quality of research;
- if the response levels are too small to give valid evidence the opportunity exists for Town Council and Parish Councils to top-up the evidence;
- narrow interpretation by Highways of what sustainable development means.

Key Issues and Barriers	Opportunities and Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steps needed to counteract the decline of business and domination of housing in market towns through improving self containment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that local evidence bases are tapped into through Town and Parish led Plans and studies to augment Council sponsored studies • Work more closely with Town and Parish Councils to carry out quality local research to track local quality of life matters • Check the brief for the form and function of towns' study to make sure that it covers all relevant aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow interpretation by Highways of sustainability, which can constrict desirable development (narrow transport impact assessments, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to address the lack of resources in both SCC and SSDC to give top quality highways advice – is there some scope for a joint approach? • Seek attendance by Highways Officers for applications with significant highways concerns (is there an SLA?)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy base can inhibit development eg: property, which is only available on a leasehold basis is becoming less attractive to businesses and those seeking commercial sites, which can contribute to undesirable change of use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend policy. • It was noted that new rating rules may bring sites forward and also the business pension plan changes. These need to be promoted locally

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism infrastructure is weak in this area. Linked to this, it is vital that we secure the highest quality of development to make sure that we conserve and nurture the very high quality of environment, which tends to attract people to this area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further proposals to be brought back to the Committee in March 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underdeveloped potential of railways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work continues via the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership but funding will finish soon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust data and research needed to underpin planning and other decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger cross service working needed to pool all available data and commission research to fill gaps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where growth is planned, we need to secure a better package of planning gain, in particular, to support the local economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are now regular Planning Gain meetings coordinated by the Head of Service for Development and Building Control, it is important to bring forward local evidence bases, through Community Plans, etc. to these meetings to inform the needs assessment and the planning gain element
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision of noise contours in the Ilchester/Yeovilton area - this inhibits development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify process for this via LDF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More investment needed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) in town centres – there are site assembly problems, which need considerable work to resolve b) to support rural business development suitable for the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Regional Development Agency and other local interests, particularly in the public sector to package sites • Work with communities and agencies on submission of <i>expressions of interest</i> for the Local Action for Rural Communities Programme, for the Blackmore Vale Area and the Market Towns of South Somerset

Financial Implications

Further work is needed to assess funding implications of the above measures. The feedback will be fed into the roll forward of the Area East Development Plan.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

To ensure consistency with the Corporate Aim to promote Economic Vitality.

Other Implications

None.

Background Papers: None