

Meeting AECPSC 01M 08/09
Date 25.06.08

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Area East Community Planning Sub-Committee** held at the **Council Offices, Churchfield, Wincanton** on **Wednesday, 25th June 2008**.

(9.30am – 11.00am)

PRESENT:

Members:

Mike Lewis	Chairman
Tim Carroll	
John Crossley	
Maili Felton	
Colin Winder	

Officers:

Helen Rutter	Head of Service – Area Development (East)
Pam Williams	Regeneration Officer
Mike Allen	Regeneration Officer
Patricia Johnson	Committee Administrator

NB: *Where an executive or key decision is made, a reason will be noted immediately beneath the Committee's resolution.*

1. Election of Chairman (Agenda Item 1)

Councillor Michael Lewis was elected Chairman.

2. Appointment of Vice Chairman (Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Anna Groskop was appointed Vice Chairman.

3. Minutes (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the meeting of the Area East Community Planning Sub-Committee held on Wednesday, 26th March 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 4)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Anna Groskop and Tim Cook, Community Development Officer.

5. **Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 5)**

Councillor Colin Winder declared a personal interest in agenda item 10 – Revenue grant request for a contribution towards the Lynx Project - as he is Chairman of the Wincanton People's Plan's Steering Group.

6. **Public Question Time (Agenda Item 6)**

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

7. **Issues arising from previous meeting of the Sub Committee (Agenda Item 7)**

Referring to the 'Into Somerset' county-wide scheme, the Regeneration Officer reported that discussions had been held with the Economic Development Unit regarding the inward investment strategy and a report would be brought to the December meeting of the Community Planning Sub-Committee. The purpose of the report would be for Members to flag up issues within Area East in order to influence the strategy's programme of works.

The Head of Area Development reported that there was to be a further restructuring of the RDA Somerset Team.

8. **Retail Support Initiative (Executive Decision) (Agenda Item 8)**

The Regeneration Officer presented the report. He explained that, due to budgetary constraints which meant that there was not enough funds in the budget to cover all grant applications, he had recommended approval of priority grants and approval 'in principle' of other grants.

Referring to his reasons for prioritising the grants he explained that, in his view, Bruton House and Truffles were two important businesses within Bruton as they drew visitors into the town. He concurred with the owners of the Packhorse Bridge Stores who felt that an improved accounting and stock control system would make the business more sustainable. With reference to Glades of Ilchester, he explained that the applicants wished to open a new sandwich bar in the town as Ilchester did not have a sandwich bar and this was an obvious business opportunity.

In response to questions from Members and the Head of Area Development or the Regeneration Officer:

- explained that two of the three general stores in Bruton belonged to a business chain;
- believed that the Packhorse Bridge Store was a viable business;
- explained that, whilst Hinton Farm Shop, which was within the 'in principle' recommendation, had scored higher in the assessment than the Packhorse Bridge Store the reason he had recommended the Packhorse Bridge Store for approval and not Hinton Farm Shop was that the implementation of the accounting system and stock control system was urgent, whilst the work that needed to be carried out to convert the milking parlour at Hinton Farm into a farm shop would take between three to six months;

- was of the view that Bruton House would not go out of business if they did not receive the grant aid. He explained that means testing of the business was not part of the evaluation in the present rules, however, he believed that Bruton House was a viable business;
- agreed that there was continuity of business in relation to Packhorse Bridge Stores and as such, in line with the criteria, they would not be eligible for a £3,000 grant and, as such, the recommendation would need to be reduced to £2,000.

Councillor John Crossley felt that, in order to be seen as treating applicants fairly, as both Truffles and Bruton House were in competition it would be unfair to grant aid one and not the other. However, he suggested that the Bruton House grant be reduced to £500, which could then release funds to finance the Elixir application for external improvements to the shop front. He felt that even if Elixir were to go out of business Bruton would still benefit from the improvement to the High Street.

It was proposed and seconded that the award to Bruton House be reduced to £500 and, in line with the existing criteria, the Packhorse Bridge Stores award be reduced to £2,000, that Glades of Ilchester and Truffles of Bruton be approved as recommended. On being put to the vote the motion was carried unanimously.

In relation to the 'in principle' recommendations it was again noted that because of the business continuity clause Wheathill Nurseries, Milborne Port was only eligible for a maximum £2,000 grant and not £3,000. Further, with regard to Wheathill Nurseries, the current footfall needed further examination. Members questioned the viability of the business and requested details on the marketing strategy.

With regard to Hinton Farm Shop Members concurred with the Regeneration Officer that it was important for Mudford to have a viable retail store. They expressed concern about the impact of the Farm shop on the viability of the Post Office and asked that officers seek further information on the likely impact.

It was proposed and seconded that Elixir be granted an award as recommended and that the decision on Hinton Farm Shop and Wheathill Nurseries, Milborne Port be deferred to allow officers time to seek further information in line with Members' comments. It was also proposed and seconded that, in line with existing criteria, if the delay in making a decision would seriously compromise the applicant's project then the application be taken to Area East Committee for decision. On being put to the vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Members noted that following approval of the grant applications the remaining unallocated budget stood at £1,393.

The Regeneration Officer drew Members' attention to the two delegated awards as set out on page 4 of the agenda that had been made since the sub Committee last met. She also informed Members that due to a change of premises the £2,500 awarded to Paraiso, Wincanton had been reduced to £2,000.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That officers write to the beneficiaries of grants which have not been drawn down within the award period indicating that the grant offer will be withdrawn if claims are not forthcoming by the end of July.
 - (2) That the following grants be awarded from Area East Regeneration Budget ring-fenced for the Retail Support Initiative:

- (1) £500 to Bruton House, Bruton – as a 23% contribution towards the purchase of catering equipment.
- (2) £2,000 to Packhorse Bridge Stores, Bruton - as a 30% contribution towards the purchase of an IT system to improve accounting and stock control.
- (3) £2,326 to Glades, Ilchester – as a 23% contribution towards the purchase of shopfitting, marketing and training.
- (4) £376 to Truffles, Bruton – as a 50% contribution towards the cost of purchasing catering equipment.
- (5) £600 to Elixir, 6 High Street, Bruton – as a 50% contribution towards the cost of shop front improvements.

All awards are subject to the following standard conditions:

- (a) the grant award may be used by SSDC for promotional/publicity purposes;
 - (b) grants are paid for approved works/purchases on production of receipted invoices;
 - (c) awards are subject to an interim report (within 9 months) and a final report being submitted;
 - (d) applicants will normally be expected to draw down the grant within six months of the offer;
 - (e) that appropriate consents are obtained;
 - (f) works requiring listed building/planning consents or building regulations consent will be required to be signed off by the appropriate officer prior to the release of funds;
 - (g) if, within three years of a grant award the business ceases to trade the District Council reserves the right to reclaim the grant on the following basis: year one – 100%; year two – 75% and year three - 45%.
- (3) That, in order to allow time for additional information to be sought, consideration of the following two applications be deferred until the next meeting of the Community Planning Sub Committee. However, in line with existing criteria, if the delay in making a decision would seriously compromise the applicant's project then the application be taken to Area East Committee for decision.
- (1) Wheathill Nurseries, Milborne Port – £2,000 as an 18% contribution towards the cost of new roofing and marketing.
 - (7) £3,000 to Hinton Farm Shop – as a 27% contribution towards the purchase of retail fittings and marketing.

(Vote: Unanimous)

Reason: To assist with the regeneration of retail businesses in Area East.

(Mike Allen, Regeneration Officer - 01963 435023)

(e-mail: mike.allen@southsomerset.gov.uk)

9. Review of Retail Support Initiative (RSI) (Agenda Item 9)

The Regeneration Officer informed Members that the RSI scheme had been in place for four years and was reviewed on a regular basis. She commented that whilst in the last year there had been a lower number of grant requests, in financial terms the awards had been higher. She explained that because of the budgetary position there was, once again, a need to review the scheme. She drew Members attention to the four options that had been considered by officers as set out on page 8 of the agenda.

During the ensuing discussion Members took account of the four options, i.e:

- do nothing – they felt that due to the budgetary position this was not a viable option;
- close the scheme in its entirety – because of the assistance that the RSI scheme gives to the retail trade and, in particular, the resultant improvements to the streetscene, that this was not an option and Members felt that the scheme should continue in some form;
- divert the resources to other schemes - Members concurred with the officers' views that, whilst other schemes may well be worthwhile this should not be at the expense of the RSI scheme;
- refine the scheme – Members felt that this was the best option. By refining the scheme the maximum grant would be reduced to £2,000 and applicants would not be allowed to apply for more than one award for one property within two years thus making the budget go further and as a result would potentially help more businesses.

Councillor Maili Felton felt that it was important that the District Council were not seen to be subsidising non-viable businesses. She felt that some sort of assessment of the viability should take place before a recommendation was put to the Sub Committee for grant aid.

In discussing this suggestion Members took account of:

- the significant amount of officer time it would take to means test an applicant, particularly given the low level of grant aid;
- the resultant improvements to the external facades of the High Street from those grants for improvements to shop fronts;
- whether, in some cases, it would be appropriate to offer loans instead of a grant. The Head of Area Development advised Members that any loan would have to be subject to the public works board's rate of interest. She also commented that the awarding of loans involved a tortuous route of paperwork. Members commented on the assistance Business Link gave to small businesses in relation to loans and asked officers to investigate the demand and practicality of assistance with loans by Business Link and other organisations.

It was proposed and seconded that the Area East be recommended to continue operating the RSI in line with Option 4 subject to amended criteria and the RSI budget being topped up. That officers be asked to (a) investigate assistance with loan schemes; (b) produce a post award impact statement and (c) carry out an analysis to check that the scheme does not duplicate retail support available from other bodies and to see if

match funding could be obtained. On being put to the vote the motion was carried unanimously.

In response to a Member's question the Regeneration Officer explained the process for clawing back grant aid when a business closed down within the claw back period.

RESOLVED: (1) That Area East Committee be recommended to:

- (a) continue operating the Retail Support Initiative scheme in a modified form as set out in Option 4 of the report;
 - (b) approve the amended criteria as set out in Appendix A; and
 - (c) if Members approve recommendation (1a) above, that the Retail Support Initiative Budget be topped up by £15,000. The £15,000 to be made up from £10,000 from the Area East Capital Reserve for grants of a capital nature over £1,000 and £5,000 from the Area East Revenue Reserve for grants of a non capital nature or under £1,000.
- (2) That the maximum grant level be reduced to £2,000.
- (3) That only one grant award be made to a proprietor in respect of one premises in a two year period. The two year period to commence from the date of the notification of the award of the grant.
- (4) That the Regeneration Officer investigate the demand and practicality of assisting with the awarding of loans by Business Link and other appropriate organisations and bring a report back to the Community Planning Sub Committee.
- (5) That a post award impact statement, particularly in relation to the creation/protection of jobs, be brought to the Community Planning Sub-Committee before the next review of the Retail Support Initiative.
- (6) That an analysis be carried out to check that the scheme does not duplicate retail support available from other bodies and to see if any match funding could be obtained.

(Vote: Unanimous)

*(Mike Allen, Regeneration Officer - 01963 435023)
(e-mail: mike.allen@southsomerset.gov.uk)
(Pam Williams, Regeneration Officer - 01963 435020)
(e-mail: pam.williams@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

10. Revenue Grant Request – The Lynx Project (Executive Decision) (Agenda Item 10)

The Regeneration Officer presented the report.

In response to a Member's question the Head of Area Development explained that the reason that the grant request had been brought to the Community Planning Sub

Committee for consideration was that it was a priority scheme within the Wincanton People's Plan. The Community Planning Sub Committee had delegated powers to allocate funding from the Community Planning Implementation Budget.

During consideration of the application Members commented on the lack of County Council funding and questioned what contribution the County Council made to youth work in Wincanton. The Head of Area Development undertook to invite the Head of the Local Services Team for Young People to an Area East Committee to speak to Members about service delivery within the area.

It was proposed and seconded that the officer's recommendation be approved subject to a contribution being sought from Somerset County Council. If a contribution is received that District Council's contribution be reduced accordingly. On being put to the vote the motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED: (1) That up to £7,000 be awarded over two years to the Lynx Project towards developing the React project and establishing delivery in Wincanton from the Community Planning Implementation Fund subject to the following conditions:

- (1) That all other funding is secured.
- (2) That SSDC support is acknowledged on publicity.
- (3) That a Service Level Agreement is agreed.
- (4) That the project is reviewed at the end of Year One with outcomes reported to Area East Community Planning Sub Committee.

- (2) That the Lynx Project be asked to seek funding from Somerset County Council. Should funding be secured then the District Council's £7,000 contribution be reduced accordingly.

(Vote: Unanimous)

Reason: To award a contribution towards the Lynx Project.

*(Tim Cook, Community Development Officer - 01963 435088)
(e-mail tim.cook@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

11. Community Planning Update (Agenda Item 11)

The Regeneration Officers presented the report. Members noted the update on the following Community Plans:

- Wincanton People's Plan – some projects were moving forward whilst others were in progress, others were awaiting financial contributions and some projects involved multi agencies. A number of groups were working on projects and they reported back to the Steering Group who met quarterly.
- Bruton – the traffic calming scheme was still awaiting inclusion within the works programme. Bruton was also the first town in Somerset to go 'plastic bag free'.
- Barton St David – a programme for the production of the parish plan had now been drawn starting with a newsletter in July and finishing with the publishing of the plan in April 2009.

The Regeneration Officer circulated a summary of a survey carried out by the Community Council for Somerset of all the parishes that had completed a parish plan funded by money administered by the Community Council. Members asked that the full results of the survey be circulated to Members of the Sub Committee. Members also asked for an analysis of the percentage of plans covered in Area East.

It was noted that Ilchester had declined to produce a parish plan.

Members also noted that the Planning Policy Team were producing a document on the form and function of settlements.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Resolution passed without dissent)

*(Tim Cook, Community Development Officer - 01963 435088)
(e-mail tim.cook@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

12. Next Meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members agreed that the next meeting of the Sub-Committee would take place on Wednesday, 24th September 2008 at 9.30am in the Council Offices, Churchfield, Wincanton.

*(Patricia Johnson, Committee Administrator - 01935 465270)
(e-mail pat.johnson@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

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Chairman

Appendix A**Retail Support Initiative
Operation 2008-2009****REVISED CRITERIA – JUNE 2008**

Percentage contributions cannot exceed 50% of costs and no retrospective applications are eligible (i.e. in respect of works which have already been commissioned/started).

The Community Planning Sub Committee considers most grants on a quarterly basis. However amounts up to £750 may be considered at any time if the Chairman of the Sub-Committee so decides under delegated powers. Exceptionally, a grant can be considered by Area East Committee if a delay in a decision will seriously compromise the applicant's project.

Maximum grant levels:

Existing businesses - £1,000 generally

Existing businesses – up to £2,000 – for shop-front improvements.

New business – up to £2,000

New businesses which compete with an established business in the retailing heart of a town/village will not be considered until they have opened whereupon they can apply as an existing business.

Eligible costs for new and established businesses include:

- Shop-front improvements
- Interior works, shop fitting, displays and layout
- Upgrades/New equipment purchases
- Start-up costs of loyalty scheme on behalf of at least 6 (or majority, whichever is less) of retailers in town or village)
- Promotion/marketing initiatives (particularly those which involve traders working together)

New businesses which are being grant aided can also request assistance with Business Rates during the first 12 months of trading providing this forms part of a package of support through the Retail Support Initiative.

Only one grant award will be made to a proprietor in respect of one premise in a two year period. The two year period will commence from the date of the notification of the award of the grant.

If businesses cease trading within 3 years of a grant award the grant may be clawed back at the following level: within year 1- 100%, year 2 – 75%, year 3 –45%