

Chard Regeneration Scheme Update

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Purpose of the Report

1. The report provides a general progress update on the Chard Regeneration Scheme, specifically:
 - i) An overview of the impact of Covid-19 on the leisure centre project
 - ii) A progress update on the leisure centre construction works
 - iii) An update on the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) project

Recommendations

That Members note the contents of the report.

Background

2. Following detailed design, SSDC applied in May 2019 for Planning Consent and Listed Building Consent to build a new Leisure Centre, Library & Community Hub and public realm improvements at the Boden Mill (ACI site) in Chard. The proposal requires the removal of buildings associated with the factory site but the retention of the Mill, Building 11, the listed arch and some adjoining buildings to the south of the arch. The planning application was heard by both SSDC's Area West Committee and then Regulation Committee on 3 September 2019 where it received approval.
3. SSDC successfully applied for Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programme to improve Chard's town centre alongside the Boden Mill works. HSHAZ delivery began in summer 2020. The focus of the HSHAZ is around the Holyrood Street – Fore Street – Boden Street area. It will include improvements to public realm as set out in the Chard Public Realm Strategy (including the Eastern Gateway thanks to AWC & Chard Town Council funding), grants to business/property owners to renovate and repair historic shop fronts, and a programme of community engagement. In addition, a local cultural consortium led by Chard Town Council and Somerset Art Works has been formed to deliver a HSHAZ cultural programme.

Covid-19 Overview – Leisure Centre/Boden Mill Site

4. Works on site have continued throughout the second national lockdown.
5. The site operations are continuing with Covid precautions in place, and productivity levels are at around 95% of pre Covid expectations
6. The nature of the works on site are changing from highly mechanised heavy operations to a more labour intensive phase. As the number of operatives have increased on site the contractors have had to provide additional cabin facilities so that operatives can maintain social distancing during breaks.
7. Some supply chain issues are starting to emerge, that are affecting the wider construction sector, but the main contractor is placing orders for materials as early as possible to mitigate the potential for delays. This situation will be monitored and further updates will be provided.
8. An additional cleaner has been engaged to clean the site welfare facilities during the working day to minimise the risks of Covid transmission. The cleaning concentrates on the touch points and takes place almost continuously during working hours.
9. Overall, the works are progressing well, but they remain behind schedule due to the first national lockdown. The effect of the winter period and a potential resurgence of Covid-19 with the cold weather could have further implications for the construction works. Area West members will be kept updated on the situation as the works progress.

Progress Update – Leisure Centre/Boden Mill Site

10. Following completion of the steel frame in late September, the works quickly progressed onto the installation of the timber roof beams and the steel roof deck. The roof deck panels were craned into place during a period of high winds and several days of construction time was lost due to the wind being too strong to safely lift the roof panels.
11. The flat roof insulation and waterproof covering over the pool hall were completed in the week ending 20/11/20. The roofers worked through periods of inclement weather to achieve a high standard of installation. The roofers have now commenced the work on the pitched roof over the gym and studio areas, which is more complex due to the inclusion of roof lights and complex angles.
12. The photograph below shows the gym and studio roof underway in early December 2020. This work has progressed quite slowly through the remainder of the month due to the regular periods of heavy rain. Completion of the roofing early in 2021 is

critical as currently the building is not watertight and this limits the progress that can be made with the mechanical and electrical services first fix.



13. The next photograph shows the shell of the soft play area, directly under the left hand end of the roof in the photo above. This will be a fantastic two storey space that will be full of adventure play equipment when completed. The blue tarpaulins cover sections of ventilation system ductwork awaiting installation.



14. The excavation of the swimming pool was completed in October and the first layer of sprayed concrete was installed. The pools have now been test filled and a photo showing the process is shown below. The main pool is the full 25m in length as required for competition standards, but the photo makes it appear smaller. The blockwork back wall of the pool hall can be seen in the right hand side of the photograph. This wall is now complete and the pool hall is awaiting the installation of the glazing to the left hand wall scheduled for mid/late January 2021.



15. In other areas of the project the demolition of the Boden Street public toilets is now complete. We look forward to linking this area back to the high street (Fore Street) with the new footway. The removal of the toilet block from the street scene has improved the appearance of Boden Street and we shall make further improvements through tree planting and landscaping on the site of the toilet block. A photo of the demolition in progress is shown overleaf.



16. One area of the project that we have not been able to progress as rapidly as hoped is the refurbishment of Building 11. This building was originally due to house the new public library, but following extensive discussions with County Council we were not able to progress this option.
17. Alternative uses for the building were sought, but after advertising the building for ten months, we had received little interest from potential tenants or purchasers. The refurbishment costs of Building 11 are extremely high as the building is in poor condition and the previous industrial use of the building has led to contamination of the internal walls and floors with arsenic.
18. As the building is currently derelict, and it is located directly opposite the leisure centre main entrance, the Chard Regeneration Board was asked to consider various options for the building. The preferred option was to remove the building and provide additional car parking and public realm. We are currently investigating the viability of this option but the potential removal of the building from the scheme will allow funds to be used to refurbish some of the more prominent historic buildings on site.

High Street Heritage Action Zone

19. Historic England have confirmed the funding award for Chard's High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) is £1 million. Alongside £1m match from SSDC, the project will invest a total of £2m in reinvigorating Chard's historic town centre.
20. During the summer, a Project Manager was recruited to deliver the HSHAZ project. Anna Matthews began in post on 5th October.
21. The focus of the project is around the Holyrood Street – Fore Street – Boden Street area. It will include improvements to public realm as set out in the Chard Public Realm Strategy, grants to business/property owners to renovate and repair historic shop fronts, and a programme of community engagement.
22. Detailed designs for the Holyrood Street, Fore Street and Boden Street public realm schemes, along with the Eastern Gateway, were completed in summer 2020, and following a procurement exercise, a design team comprising Hydrock, LHC and Coreus was appointed to take the public realm schemes through the technical design phase (RIBA Stage 4). This has been underway since October 2020. The plans were submitted to Somerset County Council for their technical approval on 24th February 2021 and we anticipate feedback after a 4-week review period.
23. To inform the detailed design process, a public consultation regarding proposed changes to parking on Holyrood Street took place during November and December. Chard Regeneration Board considered the results of this consultation at their January meeting and changes were subsequently made to the designs to take account of the feedback. A press release was issued on 17th February: <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/news/2021/2/holyrood-street-public-consultation-sees-changes-to-final-designs/>
24. Highways improvements near the Boden Street and Marketfield car parks, which are required for the leisure centre, will be progressed alongside the HSHAZ public realm works, as well as the creation of an Eastern Gateway site at the Fore Street-Silver Street junction. This brings benefits of scale in both timeframe and resource.
25. A Community Engagement Plan will be drawn up over the next couple of months, to ensure that there is community involvement in the project.
26. A HSHAZ Cultural Consortium of local partners has been formed to bid for additional funding for a HSHAZ Cultural Programme. The Consortium is being led jointly by Chard Town Council and Somerset Art Works. The bid was submitted in mid-December and a decision is imminent. The process is non-competitive as it is ring-fenced for those towns that already have HSHAZ grants, but the decision on the bid will determine the amount of funding Chard will receive.

27. Planning is underway for the HSHAZ Building Repair Grants scheme. The Grade I Listed building, Manor Court House (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1197449>), was sold at auction in February 2021. This building is on the Heritage At Risk Register and is therefore a priority in terms of renovation and bringing it back into sustainable use. Under the HSHAZ, we will be seeking to work with the new owner and with Historic England to secure a positive future for this important property.

Next Steps

28. The impact of Covid and the uncertainty around Building 11 has resulted in the plans for the progression of the residential component of phase two being deferred. During this time, we have engaged with Homes England to establish if we can find ways to bring forwards phase two with partners or directly with a commercial developer.

29. The town centre public realm plans will be reviewed by SCC. At the same time, we will progress discussions around Traffic Regulation Orders, S278 legal agreements and other consents required. We are planning ahead for tendering for construction contractors and the scheduling of the works, to avoid any delays. It is likely that work would begin on site in the latter half of 2021. We aim to launch the HSHAZ programme of building grants in the first quarter of 2021/22.

Council Plan Implications

30. The Chard Regeneration Scheme is a specific objective of the Council Plan and a priority project for 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

31. None arising from this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

32. An Equality Impact Relevance Check/Equality Impact Assessment is underway for the Chard public realm scheme.
