

Executive Committee

13 September 2016

Development of Dorchester's Centre

For Decision

Portfolio Holder(s)

Cllr J Russell – Environmental Protection & Assets

Senior Leadership Team Contact:

S Hill, Strategic Director

Report Author:

S Hill, Strategic Director

Statutory Authority

Local Government 1972

Purpose of Report

- 1 The report presents the draft of GL Hearn's report Dorchester Town Centre for comment by Executive before the report is finalised.

Officer Recommendations

- 2 That Executive receive the draft Dorchester Town Centre report prepared by GL Hearn.
- 3 That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director in consultation with the planning and asset management portfolio holders to finalise the report with GL Hearn.
- 4 That the additional work described in the report be commissioned by the Council (soft market testing; archaeological peer review and retail capacity study) and once specifications have been prepared and costs/budget have been confirmed, the town centre strategy.

Reason for Decision

- 5 To report to Executive on the GL Hearn commission, which was approved 12 April 2016.
- 6 To enable the Member led Charles Street Working Group to make progress with proposals to support Dorchester's town centre including considering the Council's assets and the Charles Street site.

Background and Reason Decision Needed

- 7 The Charles Street Working Group was established by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 8 September 2015. Since then it has met on 9 November 2015, 18 January 2016, 14 March 2016, 18 April 2016, 16 May 2016, 15 June 2016, 8 July 2016, 26 July 2016 and 18 August 2016.
- 8 The Working Group has considered how best to progress the development options for Dorchester's centre following the end of the Development Agreement with Simons; the ongoing development at Brewery Square; the planned and future likely growth of Dorchester; and to secure or improve Dorchester as an important sub-regional centre.
- 9 Executive approved the commission of GL Hearn (via the Estate Management Consultancy Services Framework contract) to prepare a report on options to support Dorchester's town centre. The Working Group approved the brief and three key elements of work to:
 - Advise the Council on the current and future potential for Dorchester as a more regionally important retail and leisure/housing destination;
 - Advise on Development type/mix; and
 - Prepare Development strategy options.
- 10 The report addresses each of the above three points and draws conclusions. The report provides reasons for its focus on retail development at Charles Street, at least initially, to meet the retail studies identified need of Dorchester. Three broad options for the development of the Charles Street site are described and also consideration of other sites owned by WDDC in the town centre including Fairfield, Trinity Street and Wollaston Fields car parks.
- 11 The report does not select or recommend a preferred option for retail development at Charles Street. However, it does recommend additional works including soft market testing; public realm; archaeological collection of current information.
- 12 The Council has created a page on dorsetforyou (www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/dorchester-centre-news), which provides people with the opportunity to find out more about the development of Dorchester's Town Centre, as it will be updated with the latest news. It also offers people the chance to stay up-to-date by signing-up for a free e-newsletter about the development of Dorchester.

Implications

Corporate Plan

- 13 The Charles Street development project is a top priority for the Council and matches the Economy priority.

Financial

- 14 The Working Group does not have delegated authority to spend Council money and therefore the Executive Committee approved spend of up to £25,000 for this GL Hearn commission.
- 15 Furthermore, to assist with the efficient operation of the work of the Working Group, the Executive Committee provided delegated authority to the Strategic Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder (Asset Management) and the Charles Street Working Group to spend up to a further £25,000 from the Corporate Projects Reserve. To date none of this allocation has been incurred. The additional work (soft market testing and archaeological peer review) will be prepared within that cost.
- 16 £328,991 remains allocated but unspent from the £1.4m previously committed to the Dorchester Retail Scheme from the Corporate Projects Reserve.

Equalities

- 17 None.

Environmental

- 18 The Council's ownership at Charles Street has been the subject of much environmental interest, not least as a site with potential significantly important archaeological remains and a principal site in the historic town centre.
- 19 Related other work includes the early review of the Local Plan and associated supporting documents; the Dorchester Transport and Environmental Plan (DTEP); and review of traffic and parking, including preparation of a WDDC Parking Strategy.

Economic Development

- 20 *Is the proposal likely to lead to an increase in the level of skills needed in the local workforce?* At this stage the consultant commission may identify options that increase in the level of skills needed in the local workforce.
- 21 *Is the proposal likely to lead to growth in local employment?* At this stage the consultant commission identifies options that promote local employment.
- 22 *Is the proposal likely to lead to growth in the number of businesses?* At this stage the consultant commission identifies options that promote local business.
- 23 *If the overall economic implications are seen as negative what mitigating factors have been considered?* The consultant commission includes consideration of economic implications.

Risk Management (including Health & Safety)

- 24 The SWAP Audit report recommends that a Risk Register be prepared for the project, which is agreed and a management action to prepare that Register in tandem with the GL Hearn commission.
- 25 Therefore the commission has considered each option in accordance with the Council's risk assessment methodology and this is included in the draft report.

Human Resources

- 26 None

Consultation and Engagement

- 27 The Council has sent a copy of the GL Hearn report to stakeholders including Dorchester Town Council, Dorchester BID, Dorchester Chamber of Commerce, Dorchester Civic Society and other retail stakeholders. We have also written to them to let them know what our next steps will be. These are referred to in the report and include undertaking soft market testing, an archaeological review and an updated retail capacity study.

Appendices

- 28 Appendix 1: Draft GL Hearn report Dorchester's Centre.

Background Papers

- 29 Previous Committee Reports and Minutes.

Footnote

- 30 Issues relating to financial, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

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