

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE

DATE OF MEETING: 9TH SEPTEMBER 2020

SUBJECT OF REPORT: WESTON PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

TOWN OR PARISH: WESTON-SUPER-MARE

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: CLLR CANNIFORD

KEY DECISION: YES

REASON:

Endorsement of the strategy will not incur costs or make savings of in excess of £500,000. However the development and delivery of projects and programme within it will incur costs or make savings in excess of £500,000, and will have significant effects on communities within two or more wards within North Somerset.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. Endorse the Weston Placemaking Strategy as the new vision for regeneration, placemaking and economic development for Weston town centre, superseding the “Prospectus for Change” document, subject to final graphical tweaks.
- II. Endorse the council’s participation in the Weston Place Agency and nominate the Executive Member for Business, Economy and Employment and the Assistant Director Placemaking and Growth as the council’s representatives for the first 12 months.
- III. Endorse the use of the new WsM place identity and guidelines for promoting place-based communications campaigns for Weston-super-Mare.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

The council has been preparing a Placemaking Strategy for Weston town centre to reposition its long- term vision and develop a package of projects and programmes that can be delivered along the way. The ambition is that the Strategy will support the council and its partners to secure public funding and private investment to the town.

A consortium led by Turner Works was procured to lead a programme of engagement and prepare the Strategy. A key part of the project was also to develop a new brand identity to better broadcast the inherent value and future opportunities of the town to a broad audience including potential visitors, investors and new residents.

The engagement was carried out before the Covid-19 lockdown, which will of course have profound economic impacts on the local and regional economy. This has been considered as projects and programmes have been proposed.

2. POLICY

The commitment to prepare a Weston Placemaking Strategy is set out in the council's new Corporate Plan. The strategy will express a new vision and ambition for the regeneration of Weston town centre, which is a long-standing commitment of the council, and supported within the current Local Plan and the Weston Town Centre SPD.

The objectives of the strategy are proposed to cut across other strategic aims of the council including skills and employment, housing, climate, heritage, culture and transport. The intention is that the strategy brings together such aims and manifest them through interventions across the town centre or in relation to specific locations or sites.

The endorsement of this Placemaking Strategy means that the 2015 "Prospectus for Change" be superseded as the council's expression of ambition for the town.

3. DETAILS

Purpose

Weston is by far the largest settlement in North Somerset and is home to over half of our residents. It is on its way to becoming the second largest place in the West of England after Bristol. It is also a place that has suffered from many years of underinvestment and pockets of entrenched inequality that have not been addressed for decades. Starting to address persistent inequalities has been expressed as a key priority of the council and to do so will require prolonged investment by the public and private sector.

The purpose of the Placemaking Strategy is to articulate a refreshed vision and set of objectives that broaden the scope of regeneration initiatives. By creating a framework around which the council's activities in the town can be shaped (not just regeneration but also use of assets, events, communications, concessions), the council can adjust and coordinate its contribution to how people experience Weston (i.e. its product) which can then be broadcast through a place identity (i.e. a brand).

This exercise intends also to improve the chances of securing government regeneration funding and in the longer term, significant private investment. While Weston has historically secured funding from the LEP, Historic England and Homes England, it has failed to secure substantial Future High Street Funding or Towns Fund to intervene with the structural economic forces in the town centre.

There are fundamental difficulties related to the viability of delivering development in Weston. Regardless of the economic impact of Covid-19, residential and commercial values are simply too low compared with the costs of construction and borrowing, such that the return on investment does not warrant the financial risk. Therefore, sites like TJ Hughes (on High Street) and Dolphin Square have sat vacant for several years with little progress on delivery.

The intention is for a programme of placemaking activity and use of a high-quality new place identity to grow values over time, such that investment can be attracted to deliver mixed use development. This could mean a series of lighter, quicker and cheaper projects that, while granular in scale, can derive a cumulative impact on value in the town.

Consultation is referred to in this paper below, but widespread public engagement was a significant part of the project to energise and capture community input and bring together stakeholders in focussed discussion.

The design, engagement and co-design of a new brand identity for Weston has intentionally been integral to this exercise so that the effective creation of a new regeneration programme for Weston starts to generate content that can be communicated and broadcast. Weston has had a perception problem for many years which has exacerbated the challenges related to delivering regeneration. The creation of a new brand for Weston is intended to start to address this.

Procurement

The budget for the project was well below the threshold for services contracts that would ordinarily require an OJEU Notice to be posted. A longlist of 20 UK placemaking consultancies were invited to respond to a brief in September 2019.

Six tender returns were received and were scored against qualitative and quantitative criteria set out in the brief. Consultancies that prepared the top three scoring proposals were interviewed for clarifications.

A consortium consisting of Turner Works (lead consultant), Burgess and Beech, Greengage and Retail Revival were selected to undertake the project.

Method

The first phase of the project entailed collecting and understanding qualitative and quantitative data to define challenges that could be addressed through a set of placemaking projects. This included indicators related to health and wellbeing, household income, visitor expenditure, town centre performance and property values.

A programme of digital and face to face engagement was designed and delivered to collect the views of local people, visitors and people further afield. Facilitated walks, design labs, workshops and mystery shopping exercises were also undertaken.

Taking data and conclusions from the engagement process, the project moved into a propositional stage where a programme of projects have been scoped, developed and described across the town. Some of the projects exist and are familiar to officers and members, while some are new proposals developed through the preparation of the Strategy.

Throughout the process, a new place identity has also been developed so that when any specific activity contained within the projects or programmes can be broadcast, it can be done so through a high-quality brand. During the preparation of the strategy, an exciting opportunity to significantly broaden the use of the brand has emerged, and this is explored below in the section called Weston Place Agency.

Objectives of the Placemaking Strategy

Eight thematic objectives are proposed within the document and these are listed below. Projects and programmes are then identified as delivering against those objectives using graphically designed pictograms. Projects and programmes include those that could be delivered across the town or those that might be specific to a site. The objectives are:

Weston Wellbeing – making the connections between health, wellbeing, inclusive economic growth the assets that Weston has to offer for this

Active Weston – promoting walking and cycling and developing the role that activity can play in the local economy

Carbon Neutral Weston – increasing the use of public transport and supporting electric vehicles, use of renewable energy, repurposing vacant buildings and growing a circular economy

Weston Experience – how the boundaries between the visitor economy and town centre economy can blur to create footfall and value through cultural programming

Learning Weston – role of schools, further education, higher education to realise potential and skills and employability programmes support people into work

Green Weston – rewilding and tree planting to increase sequestration of carbon and enhance ecology, supporting mental wellbeing with green spaces and planting, connecting green spaces through the town centre

Work Weston – how Weston can support and exploit the impacts of distributed working through workspace, local amenities and natural assets and investment in digital infrastructure to drive productivity

Weston Living – the qualities and benefits of living in Weston, a child, student and family friendly place, delivering well-designed new homes and improving conditions within the private rented sector

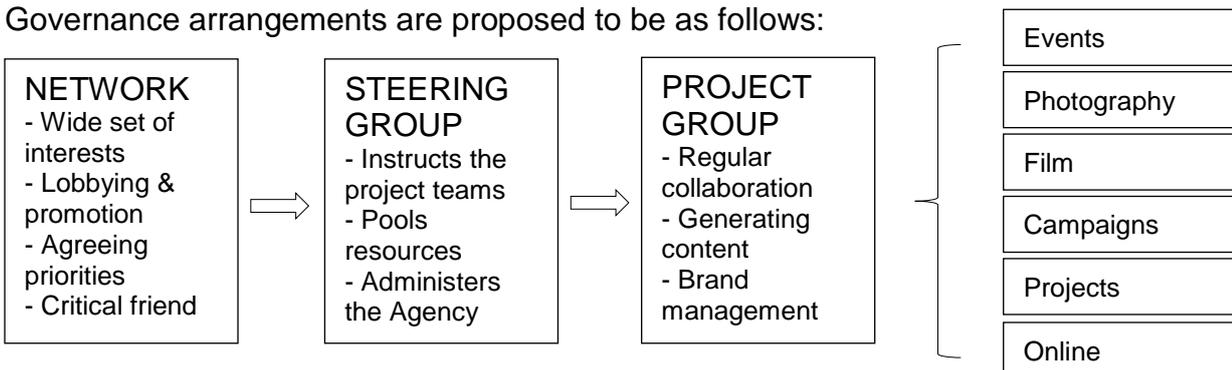
New projects of note that members may wish to reflect on include:

Weston Place Agency

This is a proposal for closer working and leadership between a network of local government (including the Town Council), business, culture, the community, institutions and funders with an interest in the town. A collaborative project team comprised of officers from participating organisations will work to (i) curate a programme of town centre cultural activity, (ii) develop communications campaigns through the use of the new place identity and (iii) generate content and provide editorial control over a new place-based online platform, again using the new brand identity.



Governance arrangements are proposed to be as follows:



The Place Agency is to be an open network that will seek broad representation across the diversity of community, business and development interests, organisations and institutions, the voluntary sector and funding partners.

The Steering Group will be made of members of the network, nominated from within participating organisations and then the Network. In order to create the collaborative structures and generate momentum around activities and content, it is proposed that for the first 12 months the Steering Group comprises of the following organisations that have been working to create a space for collaboration:

- Weston Town Council
- North Somerset Council
- Weston Chamber of Commerce
- Weston Bid
- Weston College
- Culture Weston
- The Sovereign Centre
- Grand Pier
- Dowlas

Weston Town Council has agreed to initially nominate Town Councillors Alan Peak and Ian Porter to the Steering Group. This paper proposes that the Executive Member Cllr Mark Canniford and Assistant Director Placemaking and Growth Alex Hearn are nominated.

The Agency is a network of organisations already doing work in Weston but now doing this together. Actions that require decisions to be made within those participating organisations will be subject to normal decision-making processes. Participating organisations are accountable to their own governance arrangements whether this be through democratically elected individuals or through their investors.

Should the network start to hold money or trade, formal corporate governance arrangements will be introduced following engagement and decision making within participating organisations.

Wayfinding

This is a proposal to shape and articulate movement around the town, particularly from key points of entry into the town centre and between the seafront and town centre. Weston receives a great deal of footfall throughout the year (particularly in the summer months) but this tends to be focused along the seafront.

This section introduces the principals of the 'Weston Constitutional' (to reflect a future role and approach to curating movement and activity along the seafront) and the 'Weston Peculiar' (the rich network of local and sometimes barely visible cultural assets and businesses in the town centre), and how wayfinding can help manipulate footfall from one to the other.

It is proposed that tactically located, professionally designed and bold graphical interventions on the highway, in the public realm or on the outside of buildings, as opposed to modest signage.

New Homes Investment Programme

This is a proposal to acquire and redevelop existing properties in the town centre to increase the number of homes and improve the quality of living conditions. The council would work with skills providers and housing funders, delivery and management partners to develop this proposal. Funding would support the acquisition of and redevelopment of existing properties in residential, commercial and hospitality use and convert them into good quality homes for rent and for sale, including genuinely affordable housing.

As well as providing a much better private rented sector, this would provide an opportunity for local and skilled employment through construction and refurbishment including through Modern Methods of Construction. New homes would be more energy efficient to help address the climate emergency and relieve people of fuel poverty.

Weston General Stores

This is a proposal for a composite space in the heart of the town centre for people to work, meet, create, collaborate, study, learn, play and consume. The General Stores will be a key part of Weston's diversifying town centre and emerging experience-based economy. Building on Weston's inherent health and wellbeing assets for people to work productively, it will be a platform to support remote and distributed working models as people will no longer need to commute to major employment centres every day.

The space will consist of:

- Workspace for Weston-based employers and remote or distributed workers
- Meeting rooms and collaborative spaces for workshops
- Events space for teaching, learning, rehearsal and performance
- Trading space for collective retail models including fulfilment or collection for online purchases
- Space for good quality food and drink
- Shared and open source back office functions including printing and reference library
- Bookable community space
- Space for makers and micro manufacturers

North Somerset Council will work with partners including Weston College, Culture Weston and North Somerset Enterprise Agency and the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership to develop a detailed business case for delivery.

Cultural Asset Framework

North Somerset Council owns much of the land and concessions along the promenade used for major events, outdoor trading and seasonal attractions. It also is the freeholder of places like the Old Town Quarry and the Worlebury Hillfort that can make a greater placemaking contribution to the town.

The intention is to:

- Support Weston to become a year-round destination
- Attract the investment needed into a series of assets and opportunities
- Drive footfall across the town
- Improve the quality of the experience for residents, business and visitors in the town

Assets that could be included in this framework are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Tropicana | 11. Beach lawns |
| 2. SeaQuarium | 12. Town Square |
| 3. Parts of the beach | 13. Grove Park |
| 4. Historic Shelters | 14. Beach huts |
| 5. Food outlets | 15. Land train |
| 6. Sovereign Centre Rooftop | 16. Old Town Quarry |
| 7. Street trading locations | 17. Land for meanwhile use |
| 8. Marine Lake | 18. Buildings for meanwhile use |
| 9. Anchor Head | 19. Big Lamp Corner and Silica |
| 10. Worlebury Hillfort | 20. Land at Birnbeck Road |

A menu of agile uses

As the town changes, there will be empty shops, buildings and plots of land and the placemaking strategy proposes a menu of temporary uses that could be used to animate vacant spaces whether this be for a matter of months, or in some cases years.

The ability to deliver these will require strong partnerships with property owners so that they can actively facilitate the use of their assets. This has been very difficult to achieve even on publicly available land at Dolphin Square, but the former SaltRock unit and space in the Sovereign Centre has been successfully re-used to support local creative and cultural activity at Weston Art Space.

Brand architecture

The project has developed a new place-based (as opposed to organisationally based) brand architecture for Weston that can be used by organisations and partners who operate across the town.

The development of the brand was proposed because of the intrinsic relationship between people’s experience of Weston and the value that the experience can create (or lose). The experience of a place defines the product of the place. A place’s product becomes its brand, and therefore the quality and use of the brand is related to value.

Burgess and Beech worked closely with Turner Works and engaged with the local community to develop brand values and the brand identity.

The brand architecture and technical guidelines are attached at Appendix 2.

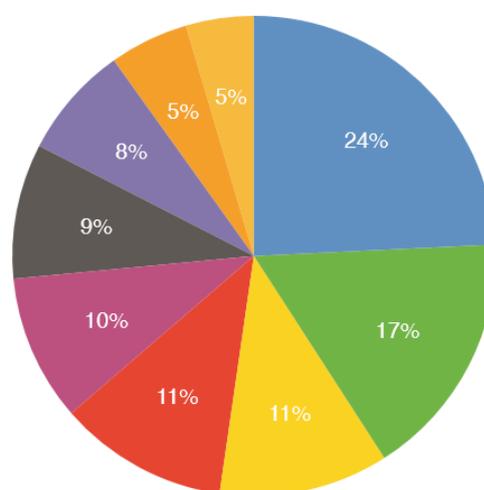
4. CONSULTATION

An innovative approach to public engagement was a key requirement of the council’s brief for the preparation of the strategy.

Weston Wishes entailed fly-posters, super-graphics and a concerted social media campaign to support the distribution of over 5000 postcards. The results can be summarised as follows:

Key

- Retail/food & drink
- Children’s Activities
- Public Realm
- Green & Environment
- Sports & Swimming
- Culture
- Young People
- Leisure
- Social Support



Weston Wanders was a community mapping activity, consisting of ‘walk-about’s to document thoughts and observations about the town. The aim was to collect current intangible feelings and histories of place in Weston today.

Poems were co-made by Beth Calverley with the community about their feelings and memories of Weston. This is published within the Strategy and could be integrated into future wayfinding projects. Mike Jones (Centre for All Healthy Living) led a walk around Weston, and Chris Fisher (Weston Museum) recorded oral histories.

A large community map of Weston, usable in the future by designers/creatives, interprets the town.

- 51 people took part in making the map.
- 14 people co-wrote poems.

Work Weston was a day of engagement with business networks focused on developing ideas about future economic development of Weston. Roundtable discussions considered attracting investment, branding, workspace and exploring the future of retail.

Burgess and Beech hosted a two-day Design Lab in the Sovereign Centre about branding. This included workshops, a social media campaign, and then an online consultation exercise through the council's e-Consult tool. The brand architecture that has subsequently been developed was overwhelmingly supported by those engaged.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of completing the project were met from the council's Driving Growth Reserve budget.

Not all projects within the Placemaking Strategy are funded, but the strategy is intended to improve the council's chances of securing town centre funding from government and align objectives with key funding partners such as Homes England, Historic England and Arts Council England.

6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

The document is not a planning policy instrument but has been developed with colleagues in planning and the proposals will be used to help inform the council emerging local plan and any new supplementary guidance.

Not all projects are within the council's gift to deliver or are on land or property that the council will own. There will need to be effective partnership working between the council, property owners and funders to support delivery.

There will be occasions where the council will need to use its powers to compulsory purchase sites to enable delivery where there is a credible proposition and the council's costs can be underwritten.

The strategy proposes opportunities for greater street trading, outdoor eating and events within the town centre. This will of course have implications for the council's powers and obligations from a licensing and planning perspective. This will require ongoing engagement with services, business and members.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Addressing the Climate Emergency cuts across the proposed thematic objectives of the Placemaking Strategy. For example, the objectives and related projects and programmes promote distributed working in Weston, thus reducing the need to commute out of the town and encourage local expenditure in the economy. An increase in walking and cycling will have wellbeing and economic benefits for the town, but also increase the chances of achieving carbon neutrality.

There are also specific objectives and projects related to rewilding and reduced carbon emissions.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

The Placemaking Strategy contains a number of projects that will present a degree of risk to organisations involved in delivery or funding, including North Somerset Council. This could include risks associated with development, funding, acquisition and management of space.

For North Somerset Council, projects that are developed, funded and delivered will be risk-appraised and managed through its existing project management architecture.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

A Stage 1 Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. The engagement programme was innovative and had a broad and deep reach into our communities through individuals, informal networks, community groups, business and institutions. Once underway, the engagement spread somewhat organically as interest grew in the project.

10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

The Placemaking Strategy proposes projects and programmes that could be enabled or delivered by services across North Somerset Council, and through partnerships with other organisations.

Projects will ordinarily engage with regulatory services such as planning, highways and licensing.

The Strategy proposes and has developed a place-identity for Weston using a new WsM brand. This is supported by clear brand guidelines and a colour palette for the council and its partners to use when promoting Weston as a place.

AUTHOR

Alex Hearn, Assistant Director Placemaking & Growth

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Weston Placemaking Strategy

Appendix 2: WsM Brand Guidelines

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Weston-super-Mare Prospectus for Change

<https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-02/prospectus%20for%20change.pdf>

Weston Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document

<https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Weston-super-Mare%20town%20centre%20regeneration%20supplementary%20planning%20document.pdf>