

Agenda Item No. 8

Title: **Update on Issues and Challenges – Regeneration Service**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Michael Mounde – Economic Planning and Development**

Reporting Officer: **Adam Nardell - Regeneration Project Manager**

Introduction

1. This report follows on from the previous report to Scrutiny Committee of April 2008 which focused on Performance Plan aspects and how the Regeneration Service could most productively use the remaining time and other resource available to it for the long-term benefit of the five towns.
2. Although much is known of how Wiltshire Council (WC) will approach regeneration, this report does not attempt to link the current with the future in this area. Much can still change in the next three months and what is to come is best approached as an entirely new regime.

Corporate Plan

3. The West Wiltshire District Council Corporate Plan has as its regeneration priority “improving market towns”, with the overall aim that “all five towns become increasingly attractive and vibrant places for people to live and work”. With unification, there will be no District Council to support and articulate the need for resources for the five towns and each will have to compete with the other 19 towns within Wiltshire for the regeneration resource available.
4. Against this background there are three ways in which West Wiltshire District Council can support the five Towns for their immediate and long-term benefit.
 - a. Assist towns to prepare for independent life beyond April 2009
 - b. Consider ways in which 5Ti benefits can continue beyond 2009
 - c. Support towns to finalise existing regeneration projects.

Assist towns to prepare for life post-LGR beyond 2009

5. In the potentially more stringent circumstances post-April 2009 of competing for resources from WC, it is fundamental that a town has:

- a. A very clear vision of what it is,
- b. what and where it wants to be,
- c. what is involved in that journey and
- d. what resources are required to achieve that.

Without such work in place, few bids for resources will be well-founded.

6. West Wiltshire's contribution to the towns' preparation is mostly a series of planning and consultation exercises, and much of the work and consultation has been done or is in hand. The town aspects of West Wiltshire's Core Strategy, each town's Community Area Plan and Town Conservation Area plans are examples. Broader Town Plans, Town Regeneration Plans and other documents vary in their existence and completeness across the five towns. All such work will be valid and required for working with Community Area Boards and more directly with other Wiltshire Council departments.
7. To date, the Regeneration Service has worked with Warminster and Melksham Town Councils to begin the development of Town (Regeneration) Plans. Work on the Warminster Plan is at a more advanced stage with a "Vision and Scoping Study" (funded through town/5Ti revenue streams) completed and adopted by the Town Council in October 2008. This sets out the key issues for the town and advises of the further development work required for this to become an authoritative and materially weighty (in planning terms) spatial plan. This approach has been welcomed by the next Wiltshire Council Director of Economic Development, Regeneration and Tourism who has indicated a willingness to part-fund the next phase of work, and to consider the Warminster Plan as a blueprint for other market towns in the county.

Consider ways in which 5Ti benefits can continue beyond 2009.

7. The 5Ti initiative was initiated to respond to the different needs of each town while also developing partnership working. It has become an extremely valuable forum for the exchange of information and views for the benefit of all, in addition to being a source of regeneration financial support from West Wiltshire District Council. There would be much merit in exploring how these benefits could be taken beyond April 2009 so that much good work over many years is not gratuitously set aside.
8. Several options have been discussed by Wiltshire Council and an agreed approach has been achieved. However, all towns have agreed in principle to budget for 5Ti Capital in 2009/10 in the anticipation of equivalent capital being committed by Wiltshire Council.

Assist and support towns to finalise remaining regeneration projects

9. Transforming Trowbridge and the current 5Ti projects make up the remaining town regeneration work that is supported by West Wiltshire District Council and Wiltshire County Council. There is a need to ensure that the Wiltshire County Council/Wiltshire Council commitment to these projects remains, and work is required to ensure that each project is driven to completion in the most appropriate way.
10. The District Council appointed consultants KPMG to undertake a comprehensive audit of 5Ti funded projects. The aims were to identify the risks that might prevent completion by the end of March 2009 and the mitigation that could be taken to ensure that, where appropriate, funds could be carried forward successfully thereafter. Their findings are included below.

11. **Major Regeneration Projects**

a. Transforming Trowbridge

Shires Gateway – 75,000 sq ft retail centre developed by Parkridge. Topping-out ceremony on 16 December with building completion anticipated in April/May 2009. Fitting out completed by September 2009. Comprises 6 large retail units for “anchor” stores and “Courtyard” smaller boutique units. At this time three of the main retail units are let, to Next, Brantano and New Look. Because of the downturn in the housing market it is not viable for Parkridge to build-out the main residential element (on the southern edge of the site) at this time. However, their Planning Consent allows these to be developed at a later stage. In addition, they will be delivering in the region of 20 apartments which are an integral part of the main retail block.

Waterside – officers are working with Modus and colleagues at the County Council to close the funding gap on this development, which has been greatly exacerbated by the economic down turn. Officers have sought funding from SWRDA of up to £2.5 million to cover the costs of public realm improvements associated with the development. There is agreement by all parties to continue to work towards delivering this scheme but major uncertainties remain.

St. Stephen’s Place and Castle Place – these sites have been taken into receivership by West Deutsche Bank following the Council’s approval to commence its Compulsory Purchase. The bank has appointed property consultants, GVA Grimley, to act as Receiver with a brief to realise the value of the property. Officers have been

working with Grimley to develop a Planning Brief for St. Stephen's Place which would be used to market to site to a potential buyer. It is possible that Castle Place shopping centre may be sold as a separate package.

Cradle Bridge – having gained Outline Planning Consent earlier in 2008 for a Waitrose convenience store, 60-bed hotel, apartments and riverside shops/restaurants, the developer, Parkridge, advise that the down-turn in the residential market means that the scheme cannot proceed in its existing form. They are investigating alternative uses and layouts and will continue to work with the Council.

Pork Farms Site – officers are engaged with Wiltshire College and Vision Capital (through their respective consultant teams) on the pre-application process for the redevelopment of the former Bowyers site. The emerging scheme will be submitted in January as three linked planning applications: one for the college on approx two-thirds of the Pork Farms site incorporating the Arc Theatre and new sports facilities, one for the Listed Buildings on the site which will involve their re-use for ground floor commercial and upper floor residential uses and a third application for the former Bowyer's cold stores on Shails Lane (likely residential). The re-location of the College to this site is dependent on the final sale of the site to them by Vision Capital, which is dependent on the scheme receiving Planning Consent and the availability of funding from the Learning and Skills Council.

Brewery Bottling Plant – discussions on the S.106 Agreement are progressing well and moving towards a sign-off. Once in place the reserved matters will be dealt with by Development Control. The applicant has undertaken enabling works on site and has indicated an intention to commence the build-out early in 2009. It is likely that the main housing elements of the development will be built out at a later stage than the convenience store and British Row housing.

River Biss Improvements - following SWRDA's commitment of £162,000 to enable the production of the River Biss Public Realm Design and Implementation Strategy, a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and costed programme of works have been produced. The SPD has been recommended by Cabinet for Approval by Council (scheduled for 7 January 2009). The implementation plan has formed the basis of the funding bid to SWRDA for the Waterside Public Realm works and will be used by Wiltshire Council to inform an infrastructure funding bid to SWRDA.

b. Warminster

Town Plan – as noted in para 5, Warminster Town Council is working with officers to develop a Town Plan, a strategic level document to provide a framework for the future growth and development of the town centre. The Scoping and Visioning Study has been produced and adopted, and officers are working with the Town Council and its partners in taking this forward to the next stage – the development of a Town Plan with material weight as a Spatial Planning Policy/guidance. This approach may well form a blueprint for other towns to develop their own Regeneration Strategies which would function not only as Spatial Plans but also as a means of marketing towns to potential investors.

c. Westbury

Market Place Improvements – the implementation of this project commenced in October 2008 and is due to be completed by the end of February 2009. The project is jointly funded by the District and Town Councils through 5Ti (approx value £100,000) and Wiltshire County Council (approx value £250,000). Progress in delivering this scheme has encouraged the county council to investigate the feasibility of extending this approach to environmental quality and pedestrian flow into Maristow Street and Edward Street. If delivered, this would achieve the initial goal of improving links within the town centre.

d.. Melksham

Town Centre Improvements - Good partnership with Town and County Councils with broad concepts for layout of improved space in front of the Town Hall and wider pedestrian realm agreed. The District and Town Councils have carried forward previous years' 5Ti Capital towards this scheme which will provide high-quality specification materials to basic Local Transport Plan-funded scheme. Wiltshire County Council has delayed implementation to 2009/10 – beyond the life of West Wiltshire District Council and current form of 5Ti, creating uncertainties over Funding for higher quality materials. Officers are awaiting confirmation from the county council that funds from its capital programme have been committed to this project for 2009/10.

e. Bradford on Avon

River Avon Footbridge - Kingston Mills planning consent has enabled this project to go forward. The developer will provide a landing site on the Mill side of the river. The Town Council has appointed a bridge designer

and a Project Manager.

However, the delivery of the bridge relies wholly on the availability of a landing site at Kingston Mills which itself relies on the Kingston Mills scheme being built-out. There are still uncertainties over the developer's programme and no guarantees beyond the proposed site enabling and demolition works planned for early 2009. In addition there are cost and consent uncertainties which together with the existing shortfall in funding (at least £600,000) create difficulties for the District Council in committing 5Ti Capital to the project beyond the life of the Council. Officers are discussing with the Town Council KPMG's recommendation that the Town Council produces and implements a professionally-prepared and validated fundraising strategy for the project.