

A Town Plan For **Somerton**



The Somerton Town Plan is a document that reflects the views and aspirations of the whole community. Whilst the Somerton Town Council and South Somerset District Council have supported the community planning process to produce this document, and recognise the community expectations inherent within, it cannot be assumed that they will automatically endorse or will deliver individual initiatives or projects.

A Town Plan for Somerton

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We hope this plan will address the needs and aspirations of all residents and the Town Council can in the years ahead deliver accordingly. The past few years have been productive and soon we shall see the Skate Park completed, and also a much-enhanced Memorial Play Park and Garden at Etsome Terrace. Making the town more wheelchair friendly is also something we have been active on in recent weeks; Ian Neale will continue to work on behalf of the wheelchair users. The pedestrian crossings on Behind Berry have recently been covered by articles in the Western Gazette; it would seem County Highways are not going to take any action in the near future.

A new Community Hall, changing rooms at the Sports Club, more car parking spaces, a walkway from the Square to Paddock House car park, and wider pavements in West Street are amongst the projects we are going to prioritise. The cost of any project will determine how soon we can get on with it, ever mindful that our precept is already high.

We can only do our best. We are listening to everyone - those who want things done and those who are less enthusiastic about some of our ideas. All fifteen Councillors vote on every item that comes in front of the Council, so please inform any member of the Council of your view point.

Many thanks to everyone who helped to put the plan together. Especially Cynthia Yeates for the many alterations and improvements she made during the drafting process.

Paddy Keenan

Chairman of Somerton Town Council

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Foreword





‘Somerton intends to be a vibrant historic market town which is attractive to visitors and provides cultural, social, recreational and economic opportunities for the whole community’



FOREWORD

The Somerton Town Plan was started under a Government initiative designed to keep small market towns like Somerton afloat and lively, and able to resist the supermarkets and other major businesses drawing trade away to larger centres.

The purpose of the plan is to help the Town Council to co-operate with other authorities and organisations to work to the same end and therefore make every penny count towards what Somertonians want.

Somerton Town Council adopted the task and many consultations were held in open meetings, with the Town Council, the Business & Trade Association and the Community Association, as well as in schools, housing schemes, shopping and business surveys. Government plans and documents for Somerset were consulted in relation to all the relevant Acts of Parliament and Departmental Guidance.

The outline plan was presented to the Somerton Town Council in October 2004, from which a committee was formed to develop the outline, ensuring that many opportunities were taken to include residents' ideas in the final plan. The steering committee consisted of town councillors, who also represented their other roles in the town, delegates from voluntary organisations and appropriate local government officers.

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Nancy Langmaid | Chairman of Somerton Forward Steering Group, editor of Somerton News & Viaduct, Marmaduke Cradock Trust. |
| Paddy Keenan | Chairman of Somerton Town Council |
| John Gardiner | Town Councillor, Somerton Business & Trades Association |
| Peter Campion | Chairman of Somerton Recreation Trust |
| Joy Webber | Sports Club |
| Gill Beale | District Council and Town Councillor, Chairman of Lady Smith Memorial Institute, Wessex Youth Club Trustee |
| Tony Canvin | District Council and Town Councillor |
| Ian Neale | Town Councillor |
| Pauline Clarke | County Councillor |
| Cynthia Yeates | Somerton Community Association |
| Liz Roddle | Somerton Tourism & Heritage Partnership |
| Margaret Tiffin | Somerton Tourism & Heritage Partnership |
| Rodger Calderwood | Clerk to the Town Council and St Michaels Church |
| Charlotte Jones | Community Regeneration Officer (North), South Somerset District Council |

Other organisations were invited to participate.

I was elected Chairman of the Steering Committee at its first meeting and I will cease to be its chairman as soon as the Town Plan is published. A new committee will then take over the annual monitoring of its progress.

The Plan sets out what Somerton is like, what has been done in the last few years and what remains to be done - with some ideas about how the challenges might be addressed and overcome.

Carrying out the 'plan' will depend on the will and support and endeavours of the town, mainly through organisations, but through individual efforts as well.

The consultations and opportunities for residents to make suggestions over the last three years have provided information which will be included in the Appendices to the Plan to prove that the document reflects the collective aspirations of the people of Somerton, and not only a small minority.

Nancy Langmaid



Somerton Town Council



Somerton Business & Trade Association



Somerton Community Association



South Somerset District Council



Community Council for Somerset



Countryside Agency



Introduction





‘a thriving market town which is a pleasure to visit, work in and live; representing all sectors of the community....’

Public Workshop July 2003 - Visions for Somerton



INTRODUCTION

A Description of the Parish of Somerton

Somerton is a market town in central Somerset, situated on a ridge, with the Somerset levels to the north and farmland used for arable and dairy farming on the higher land to the south and west. The community consists of the town and several hamlets. Somerton is about 10 miles from Yeovil, 6 miles from Street and 20 miles from Taunton. It is only 4 miles from the A303 at Podimore.

Somerton has a long history. There were Roman farms and villas in the area, and the first settlement was probably made in Saxon times. This fortified town was a meeting place of the Royal Council, the 'Witan', and was sacked by the Danes. The town is mentioned in the Domesday Book as a royal manor, and it was the county town from 1278 until about 1366. Most of the buildings are of blue lias stone, taken from local quarries, some of which are still working. The group in and around the Market Square includes the octagonal Market Cross, the Town Hall and some imposing town houses of the 18th century, as well as the largely 13th century church which has particularly fine woodwork in the roof and the sanctuary furniture.

This was a farming community with an important market for sheep and cattle and it was on the coaching route from Taunton to London in the 17th and 18th centuries when the town was prosperous and the handsome buildings in the town centre were built. In the 19th and early 20th centuries some small factories, now closed, provided employment. The coming of the railway in 1906 brought renewed activity until the station closed in 1966. From just after the First World War until recently there was a significant radio communications centre at Badgers Cross.

Since about 1960 the town has increased in size with new housing estates, and a trading estate has been established at Bancombe Road which provides a range of light industrial, 'high tech' and commercial enterprises. However, trade within the town centre has suffered, as in many other Somerset towns, through competition from national brands and 'out-of-town' complexes.

The population of the parish is now some 4,850 and includes the main settlement as well as the nearby hamlets of Catsgore, Midney, Hurcott, Etsome and Park, with scattered houses on Somerton Hill and South Hill. The surrounding parishes include Compton Dundon, the Charltons, Kingsdon, Long Sutton and Pitney, with Somerton acting as a hub for many local services and transport links. There are up to 300 small to medium businesses in the town and the surrounding hinterland.

There is a network of footpaths and bridleways, providing circular walks within the parish and linking with longer footpaths and cycle routes through Somerset.

The town includes two banks, a library, a post office, a small supermarket and a variety of retail shops, as well as legal and financial services, a doctors' surgery, two dentists, an optician and a vet. There are six public houses and six churches. The town hosts the area's police station and a fire station. There are several restaurants and tea-rooms to cater for a variety of tastes.

There are a number of public buildings for use by the community groups, including church rooms, a parish hall and a youth centre. The youth centre is staffed by the County Youth Service for one evening a week, and by volunteers for a second 'junior' night, when up to 75 children attend for a wide variety of activities.

There are two elderly persons' housing schemes with wardens and a residential home for the elderly. Two ancient almshouses provide additional homes for thirteen old people. There are several organisations providing voluntary support and social opportunities for the elderly.

Within the town there is a housing unit for adults needing supported care in the community. A voluntary group, 'Access 2000', provides weekly social and craft activities for adults with learning difficulties.

The District Council maintains a community office which includes a Local Information Centre for visitors and residents, as well as a means of accessing council services face to face. This building is also headquarters for the Town Council, the Clerk having his office there. The Town Council is active and has a number of Committees, which work towards improving the facilities of Somerton, in co-operation with the Business and Trades Association, the Community Association and other organisations within the town.

There are two schools, about three-quarters of a mile apart, for infants and juniors, with 40 child-minding places and one pre-school. Students aged 11-16 travel by bus to the school at Huish Episcopi five miles away. Older students attend colleges at Strode in Street, or at Yeovil or Taunton. The availability of space and opportunities for adult learning and access to ITC is restricted, although there is a lively University of the Third Age, which arranges groups catering for many interests.

There is a well established and successful annual Summer Arts Festival, and more than 70 groups, including charities, social clubs and cultural interests, which provide a variety of social activities for many of the residents. There is an active voluntary network, one of which, the Somerton Community Association, seeks to improve the quality of life in Somerton by raising money and helping groups to further that aim. Somerton is twinned with Sillé-le-Guillaume in France and Licciana Nardi in Italy, and many people are involved with these interesting contacts.

The Somerton Recreation Ground includes a sports and social club and pitches for rugby, football, cricket and rounders, and dedicated tennis and bowls clubs. A multi-use games area with two tennis courts, a kick-wall and basketball hoops was built about six years ago. Indoors there is a skittles alley and a billiards room. A new play area with a variety of equipment was opened in 2005, and a skate park is under construction. There are golf courses at Long Sutton and Wheathill as well as excellent fishing at the Viaduct Fisheries in Somerton.

There is another children's play area nearer the centre of the town, which is to be refurbished in 2005. It adjoins the former county highways depot site, which the Town Council now owns, and there are a number of possibilities for its future development under discussion, including perhaps a new medical centre. It is hoped to provide a play area with equipment at the east end of the town.

There are regular bus services to Yeovil, Taunton, Street and Bristol and to the villages along those routes. Railway stations are at Taunton, Yeovil and Castle Cary.

The recycling centre at Bancombe Road for domestic refuse is well used with up to 90% being recycled which is second best in the County. There is also a black box collection from houses for some kinds of recyclable materials. We need to build on the household collection to reflect the local enthusiasm for recycling by extending the range of materials that can be collected. Westcombe Waste operates a landfill site for inert materials. However other business waste must be taken to Dimmer for disposal.



Achievements & Challenges





‘a clean town, vandal free and with safe streets; good retail infrastructure....’

Public Workshop July 2003 - Visions for Somerton



ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Achievements

Recently the town's several organisations, led by Somerton Town Council, have worked hard to deliver some of the needs identified in previous consultation exercises and have taken opportunities to use grants from government and other bodies to supplement money raised by the local precept to complete these projects:

- Successive town councils have worked to provide valuable free parking in the town centre under our own control for the foreseeable future.
- Two key sites (the Surgery and the former Highways Depot at Etsome Terrace) have been acquired for future development to meet community requirements.
- An 11 acre extension to the sports field in Gassons Lane was given to the town in 1998 on a 1000 year lease. We now have sports pitches for rugby, football, rounders and cricket, tennis and bowls clubs, a multi-use games area for tennis, basketball and a kick-wall, an adventure and play park for youngsters; and a skate park is well on the way to completion.
- The Town Clerk's office has been moved to the Community Office in the Parish Rooms to enable him to work in parallel with the District Council officers and to be more easily accessible to residents.
- A town mini-guide has been produced and 50,000 copies have been distributed over a wide area.
- A Directory of Businesses is produced every two years.
- The town has campaigned successfully to install Broadband.
- The Summer Arts Festival has again been a success in its eighteenth year, providing eight days of music, drama and social events for residents and visitors.
- An Oak tree avenue and a 'gateway' at the Langport Road entrance to the town has been created.
- The town's principal shopping areas are lit at Christmas with colourful lights and are decorated with hanging baskets and flower tubs in the summer.
- The Butter Cross has been given spot-lighting and the church tower is now floodlit.
- Two new housing schemes have used brown field land in-fill sites within the town to provide 62 new homes with a range of prices, including some for rent.
- Access for users of wheel-chairs has been improved at the Parish Rooms and the Wessex Rooms.
- A monthly newsletter for the town, VIADUCT, has been established and is delivered to 2000 homes, in addition to the annual SOMERTON NEWS.
- Two new books about aspects of Somerton's history have been published, and more are in preparation.

- The local 'street scene' has been improved by reducing levels of litter, dog mess and weeds.
- A new green space for relaxation at Horsemill Lane has been created.
- Recycling facilities on the Bancombe Road estate have been improved, with a high rate of recycling, and a Black Box scheme collects recyclable refuse from domestic addresses.

All these achievements will help Somerton to compete with nearby towns for shoppers and visitors, to develop economic opportunities through leisure and tourism and to improve the quality of life for residents and build a stronger community.

Challenges

It is recognised that there are still issues to be addressed. These were identified during several consultations with residents and interest groups within the town.

- There is no large Community Hall, and some of the buildings used for public meetings need improvements.
- In recent years, trade has declined and some shops have been lost or are empty. There is a need for a Land Use Planning Policy document.
- The main street, West Street, is very narrow and is viewed as unsafe and inaccessible, through a combination of traffic and narrow pavements.
- Parking and traffic management in the old town centre needs re-organisation.
- There are no pedestrian crossings along the main road, Behind Berry, which bisects the town.
- The town has no 'local' bus service for the many residents who live a considerable distance from the town centre shops and services.
- There is no public transport link to the railway station at Castle Cary.
- The town does not have any bus shelters or adapted bus stops for disabled users.
- The town play areas are insufficient for the needs of local children, and teenagers need more activities, organised and informal, to enable them to grow up successfully in Somerton. A drop-in centre has been suggested.
- The nearest indoor sports facilities and swimming pools are at Huish Episcopi School which is five miles away and at Street.
- The changing facilities at the Sports Club need to be replaced.
- Provision of nursery, pre-school, after-school and holiday facilities needs to be reviewed and developed.

- Many of the town's activities are staffed by volunteers, and this is increasingly so as the District Council reduces its face-to-face presence in the town. More volunteers are needed, and they should be involved in decision-making and shaping the services which they help to make available to residents and visitors.
- There are a few buildings in the town that are empty or neglected, and some are used for inappropriate purposes, such as industrial premises in residential areas.
- There is no business refuse recycling facility in the town, so waste materials have to be taken to the tip at Dimmer.

Addressing these challenges is important for the survival of Somerton as a coherent community rather than a dormitory for larger towns in the district. Possible solutions will be considered in this plan. The town is increasingly looking to tourism to assist in its long-term viability. First it needs to meet the needs of the local population and of people who live in the surrounding villages to maintain its position as a prosperous rural centre.

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Vision, Strategy & Action Plan





‘thriving, vibrant - employment opportunities, childcare, leisure, healthy cross-section of young families to older people.... ’

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THE VISION AND PLAN FOR SOMERTON

After much consultation, the people of Somerton agreed that this is their vision for the future of the town:-

“Somerton intends to be a vibrant historic market town which is attractive to visitors and provides cultural, social, recreational and economic opportunities for the whole community”.

The most important issues are:-

- A renewed vibrancy for West Street.
- A safer, cleaner, more accessible and traffic-free town in which to live, work, visit and play.
- Services available to residents and the town's role as a hub for surrounding villages.
- Increasing the number of facilities - especially for play, leisure and culture.
- Planned growth to retain a strong sense of community.

The plan describes **six major aims** for Somerton. These are drawn from local consultations and the associated research.

- To build on the present community spirit and improve facilities for residents.
- To build a stronger local economy.
- To improve safety and access within the town centre and surrounding roads.
- To promote the town as attractive to visitors and local residents.
- To improve opportunities for learning, leisure and culture for all ages.
- To support environmental improvements including visual amenity.

Why do we need a plan?

The purpose of creating and publishing a town plan for Somerton is so that we work together to build a town that we all want. The plan will help to support the successful completion of projects, through showing that all groups share the same vision. It will help unlock funds from government and other agencies by showing that we have thought about and are planning together for the town, for the long-term social, economic and environmental improvement of Somerton, for the benefit of residents in the town and in the surrounding villages.

How has the plan been produced?

The Plan has resulted from consultations and research carried out by a number of agencies at different times. This evidence was brought together most recently by “Somerton Forward”, which was an initiative set up by South Somerset District Council’s Area Development Team, in co-operation with Somerton Town Council, as part of the work to support the regeneration of market towns. The consultations have included the Town Council, residents of Somerton and the surrounding villages, the Somerton Business and Trade Association, the Somerton Community Association, youth groups, schools, arts and cultural groups, the elderly and disabled, the sports clubs and users of facilities such as the Library and the Surgery. The *Market Town Health Check* issued by the Countryside Agency has been used to help to determine the issues and to identify themes for the planning of the improvements desired for Somerton.

Who has paid for the Plan?

A grant from the Countryside Agency, under the ‘Vital Villages’ initiative, has funded the development and production of the plan. Previous consultation and research was paid for by several authorities including South Somerset District Council which has provided an officer to co-ordinate and encourage the work.

The plan describes a number of projects to further the six aims. Some are current and some lie in the future and will have to wait until plans and funding can be agreed.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The Somerton Town Plan will happen only if all the residents, as well as the Town, District and County Councils, work together, using opportunities, enthusiasms and skills from businesses, trades, community organisations and individuals as well as local government agencies.

There is no **them** to do it; it is up to **us**, the people of Somerton, to make it happen and to ensure that Somerton is a vibrant community for the next generation and not just a dormitory town for commuters and retired people.

The Town Council will lead the efforts to implement the aims set out in this document and will co-operate with the other people and agencies involved.



Making It Happen

The Community





‘...vibrant and inclusive community spirit...’

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Making It Happen - THE COMMUNITY

To build on the present community spirit and improve facilities for residents

A lively town depends on happy and fulfilled residents. These projects are aimed at caring for the people as individuals and as members of groups, to enable each of them to contribute to the friendly and welcoming atmosphere so often noted by visitors. Proposals include:

- Plan, design, fund and build a new Community Hall where events for large numbers of residents and visitors can take place.
- Provide better means of communicating and involvement, especially for younger people, through an improved web-site; through VIADUCT, the monthly newsletter, and SOMERTON NEWS, the annual publication listing services, clubs, facilities and activities, with advertising from many of the town's businesses. Notice-boards need to be brighter and kept up to date.
- Encourage and support Somerton volunteers in the many areas where they provide the work force by ensuring that they are involved in the running of the organisations they help.
- Review the provision of pre-school and out-of-school activities for children. Find out if working parents need more support and press the appropriate authorities to provide any facilities that are missing.
- Develop with the District Council a housing policy which will enable local people to afford to live in Somerton when they reach adulthood, with Council provision for those who need it.
- Work with the Primary Care Trust and other agencies to provide for more comprehensive local health care.
- Extend the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme to areas not currently served, and establish a local partnership between the police force and residents to improve community safety and reduce fear of crime.
- Develop knowledge, understanding and preservation of town's history, culture and heritage, by establishing a local heritage centre and a web-museum, and by staging events to recall the history of the town.
- Encourage twinning with other European towns to promote mutual understanding, leisure and tourism, by welcoming visitors from those towns and making special efforts to celebrate their visits.
- Integrate the needs of the less able, mothers & children and the elderly into all plans for improvement to the town.

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Making It Happen

The Local Economy





‘a prosperous market town showing the fruits of the regeneration process - benefiting all ages of the community....’

Public Workshop July 2003 - Visions for Somerton



Making It Happen - THE LOCAL ECONOMY

To build a stronger local economy

A healthy town needs services and job opportunities for its residents, so that it can avoid becoming a dormitory for other larger places. Local businesses should be encouraged to become part of the community and contribute to the common activities. Somerton has a growing trading estate at Bancombe Road, providing services and light industries, and efforts must be made to recruit local people to work there, or to provide homes for those who come to work in Somerton from elsewhere. In the town, shops and services provide for many of the residents' needs, but there is competition from Street and Yeovil which has caused a decline in local shopping and left premises in the centre empty for long periods. Residents can help turn this situation round by buying locally as often as possible.

To maintain a strong economy, Somerton needs to:-

- Support the local business community and increase levels of custom for shops and services, by advertising locally and further afield and by promoting 'unique' aspects of the town's shopping scene.
- Set up a tourism group to promote Somerton, its neighbouring villages and the opportunities for leisure activities of all types in Somerton and its district. Produce advertising materials with a common logo and style to give the area a distinctive identity.
- Encourage new retail outlets to open in the historic town centre.
- Consolidate known information about the area, and identify barriers to economic growth. Establish information on skills, employment (both jobs and workspace) and training. Produce from this an information pack, which can be used by the local business community to encourage new business and the development of the town.
- Provide 'start-up' support for new businesses and promote existing business activities by keeping the BUSINESS DIRECTORY and the Community Website up to date.
- Develop access to Information and Communications Technology, for instance, by encouraging wider use of Broadband services.
- Improve recycling facilities for business waste at Bancombe Road.

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Making It Happen

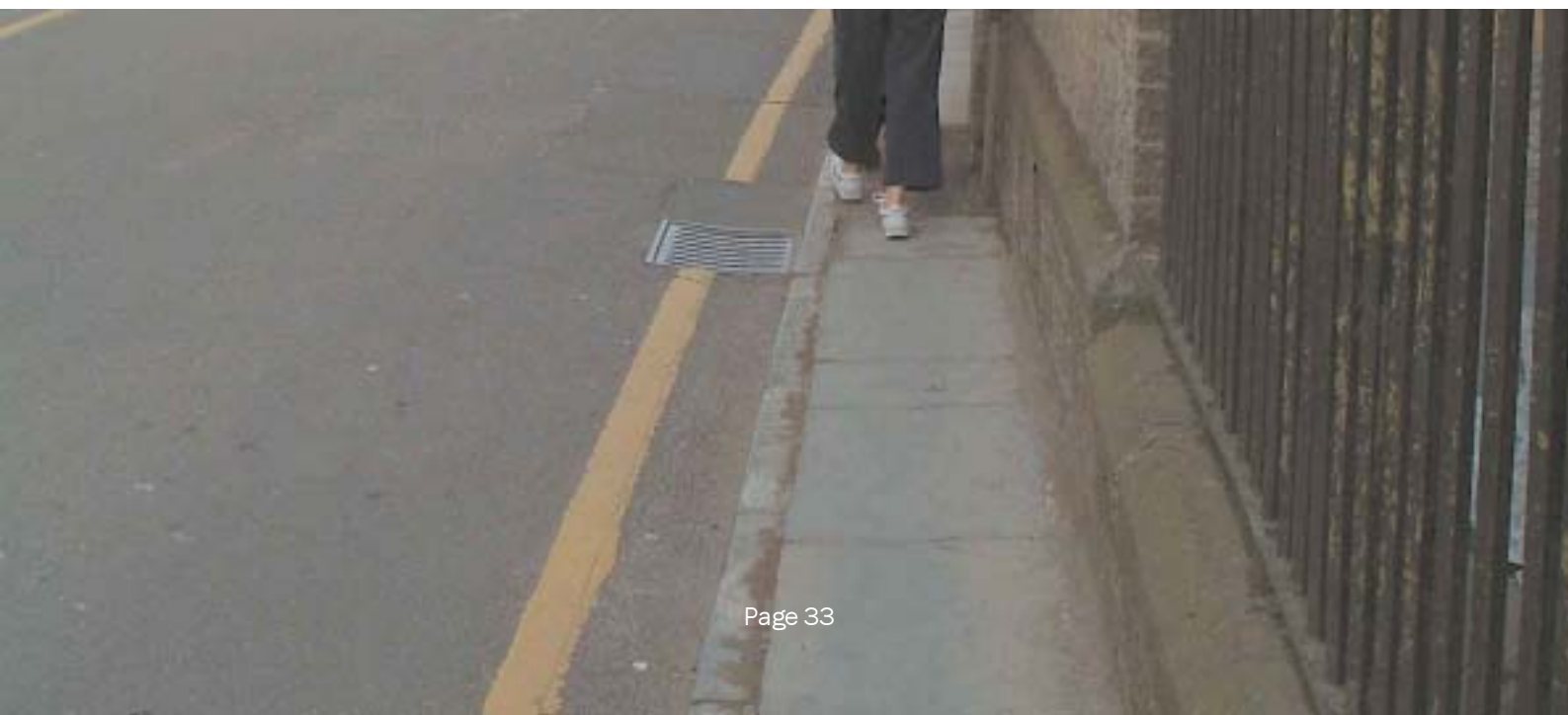
Roads & Access





*‘...remaining a traditional market town,
albeit in the 21st Century....’*

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Making It Happen - ROADS AND ACCESS

To improve safety and access within the town centre and surrounding roads.

Because Somerton has developed over a long period, its central street is narrow but its 'bypass', Behind Berry, is wide and straight, and it now cuts the town in half. Pedestrians in West Street feel unsafe and so do people wishing to cross the Langport Road and Behind Berry. There are problems with on-street parking, although the new car parks are more than adequate for most occasions.

Some of the schemes aimed at overcoming these problems are to:

- Sort out the problem of traffic and pedestrian safety in West Street.
- Address problems of speeding and anti-social driving within the town.
- Control on-street parking while respecting the needs of residents and businesses.
- Introduce a Speedwatch programme on the Langport Road and on Behind Berry.
- Install pedestrian crossings in Behind Berry and Langport Road, especially where children cross to get to school or the play areas, and where elderly people cross to get to the shops.
- Establish routes through the town using the footpath network and open spaces which will be accessible to wheel-chair users, prams and bicycles, as well as pedestrians.
- Build proper pavements in roads such as Northfield, Bancombe Road, Pestors Lane and Sutton Road for safety of pedestrians, wherever the Highways Authority thinks they are possible.
- Investigate the feasibility of a town "shuttle" bus to encourage people in the more outlying houses to come in to the town centre for shopping and services.
- Promote public and community transport links by installing bus shelters in the town centre and in Behind Berry, and by creating a "Somerton Public Transport Timetable" bringing together the information in standard timetables which cover wider areas served by several public transport providers.
- Improve all pedestrian areas to help the elderly, the infirm, wheel-chair users and mothers with small children and prams.
- Examine the public transport links to the rail network.

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Making It Happen

Marketing Somerton





*‘...cultural and quality shopping
centre for South Somerset...’*

Public Workshop July 2003 - Visions for Somerton



Making It Happen - MARKETING SOMERTON

To promote the town as attractive to visitors and local residents

Somerton looks increasingly to tourism and shoppers from outside the town to support the local economy. It is therefore necessary to ensure that people planning holidays in Somerset or passing through the area are aware of the attractions of the town and the many opportunities for shops and services, leisure and relaxation that exist here. Some ways of increasing the number of visitors are to:-

- Use the town web-site and other advertising opportunities to improve the publicity and marketing of the town, especially of major events such as the Summer Arts Festival.
- Co-operate with regional authorities in the creation and publicising of walking, cycling and horse-riding routes centred on Somerton.
- Find larger premises which can be open for longer hours for the Local Information Centre.
- Re-publish the town's mini-guide and distribute another 50,000 copies over a wide area before 2007.
- Encourage coach holiday providers to include Somerton in their itineraries, for instance, by providing a permanent centrally-placed bay for coach parking with more public conveniences.
- Increase the range of Somerton souvenirs available and advertise them locally and on the web-site.
- Put up better signs announcing the town on the Langport Road and especially on the approach roads from Street and Yeovil so that visitors do not miss the lovely town centre.
- Install bright and informative tourist maps and boards in the main car parks and in the Market Square.
- Provide a heritage and arts centre combined with the Local Information Centre, to increase awareness of the town's history and activities.
- Create a plaques trail through the town, with explanatory leaflets about the history of Somerton, to support the audio-trail already available, and publish a new Town Guide.

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Making It Happen

Learning, Leisure

& Culture





*‘co-ordinated and unified community
- fully realising its potential’*

Public Workshop July 2003 - Visions for Somerton



Making It Happen - LEARNING, LEISURE & CULTURE

To improve opportunities for learning, leisure & culture for all ages

Over the last five years the town has improved facilities for people of every age group to enjoy many activities. This has been done through partnerships with strong Town Council leadership and informed guidance and financial assistance from the District Council. Voluntary groups, especially the Community Association, have raised money to improve many aspects of the town. The tennis courts have been flood-lit and re-surfaced; the Wessex Rooms where the Youth Clubs meet have been made more friendly for wheel-chair users; toilets in the Parish Rooms have been modernised, and so on. A major investment has been made in a new play area on the sports field with a skate park being constructed near by.

The Somerton Music & Arts Festival takes place every July and is increasingly successful. However, events are curtailed by the constraints of space. Concerts, plays and gigs take place almost weekly in the Parish Rooms, the Church, church halls, pubs and the Sports Club. The loss of the Red Lion ballroom as a venue for larger events and prestigious occasions is still felt after a decade. The very active drama groups in Somerton and the surrounding area are curtailed by lack of stage area, greenrooms (currently outside in the lane), and audience capacity. This is never more evident than at panto time, a popular dramatic highlight of the year with eleven performances held to accommodate the audience numbers.

A Victorian Fayre is held in early December when the town's Christmas lights are switched on. So far, fine or wet, the stalls have weathered the Market Square but an indoor venue would give assurance and allow the event to expand. The Fayre brings in people from a wide area.

The needs of the town to provide for all the leisure activities include to:

- Plan, fund and build a Community Hall to allow performances and events for more than a hundred people at a time, as well as many other activities.
- Rebuild the changing facilities at the Sports Field for home and visiting teams.
- Complete the skate park on the Recreation Field, improve the small play area at Parklands and completely redesign the Memorial Garden and play area at Etsome Terrace. The possibility of another play area at the Millands is being considered.
- Improve the kitchens at the existing Parish Rooms.
- Increase youth services and events for young people, and involve them in planning and carrying out the schemes.
- Ensure that a variety of activities are available for the elderly, by providing a minibus to help them reach the events, and support when they are out and about.
- Create a town park or garden and improve access to open spaces for informal recreation.
- Review opportunities for adult education in Somerton and to work with the agencies to provide for any identified needs.

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Making It Happen

The Environment





‘a vibrant community, economically sound; sense of pride....’

Public Workshop July 2003 - Visions for Somerton



Making It Happen - THE ENVIRONMENT

To make improvements in the environment

Somerton is situated in an enviable position being surrounded by largely unspoiled countryside. The Somerset Levels lie to the north and west, with their unique wetland scenery, wildlife and way of life. The limestone ridges produce a pleasant agricultural landscape with woodland on the slopes and attractive grey stone villages. It is important that we try to preserve what is good and make sure that we leave a sustainable legacy of which we can be proud to our children. This will involve the design of buildings in the town as well as the preservation of the character of the countryside around our homes.

Over the last few years much has been done to improve the look of Somerton. An Oak Tree avenue has been planted on the Langport Road, with the wide verges cut regularly, and 'gateways' with flowers around them. This was done by volunteers from the business community, the trees being purchased by individuals and organisations in the town. The Butter Cross has been spot-lit and the church tower flood-lit. In summer the town is full of hanging baskets and tubs of bright flowers, and in December the whole of the town centre is lit with coloured lights for Christmas. A man is employed to weed and strim, to tidy up and remove dog mess from the paths and public spaces. The footpaths are walked regularly. The faults are recorded and put right, so that the circular walks all round the parish can be enjoyed by most people.

Somerton has a Recycling Centre on the Bancombe Road Trading Estate with a good record for sending most of the materials it receives for re-use. There is a smaller collection centre for paper, cans and textiles in the town centre, and a 'black box' scheme for the collection of household items, which can be recycled.

Projects for the next few years include:

- Efforts to improve access to the Rights of Way network and to link our footpaths with those of neighbouring parishes and to the long distance walking, riding and cycling routes set up by the District Council.
- Increasing the use of the recycling sites, to reduce the need for landfill and to deal with the causes of pollution in our environment.
- Providing more green spaces in the town for relaxation, like the one recently opened at Horsemill Lane.
- Creating more wild-life havens in the town, and a nature trail.
- Encouraging property owners in the town to maintain their land and buildings to prevent "urban blight" from becoming a problem.
- Investigating the possibilities of creating electricity locally from renewable sources, such as wind farms or flowing water.

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Keeping The Plan On Track





*‘cleaner - less litter; shops - none empty,
local supermarket thriving;
traffic - adequate parking, less speeding;
more facilities for young people - skateboard park,
play areas; less crime - better policing....’*

Public Workshop July 2003 - Visions for Somerton



KEEPING THE PLAN ON TRACK

The Somerton Town Plan will be used to support requests for change and improvements made by the Town Council and other bodies to the District and County Councils and other government agencies, and to open doors to funding opportunities. It will encourage the voluntary organisations to work towards the same aims as the local government authorities so that the town speaks with a united voice.

In order to monitor progress and check that the plan is still relevant, a representative committee or meeting will be set up by the Town Council to meet once a year to assess the achievements, progress and the financial implications of the past year and produce a report. The committee will also propose a plan of work for the coming year, which will be related to the setting of the Town Council's precept and to the District & County Councils' initiatives. All groups in the town will be invited to help in the formation and realisation of the next phase of the plan.

The reports of the monitoring committee will be published in the Town Council's own newsletters and on the website, as well as being sent to the District and County Councils. The aim will be to involve as many residents as possible in making the decisions and seeing the work through, with opportunities for debate and suggestions from anyone who wishes to take part. The plan will thereby achieve its first aim, of creating a Somerton we all wish to live in by our own concerted efforts.

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