

Report for: Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	30 th July 2024
Subject:	CREDITON TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Steve Keable, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration
Responsible Officer:	Andy Robbins, Senior Project Officer
Exempt:	None
Wards Affected:	Crediton Boniface, Crediton Lawrence
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 - Draft Masterplan Appendix 2 - Statutory & Other Consultee Comments and Responses Appendix 3 – Summary of Questionnaire Comments on Issues, Objectives & Themes. Appendix 4 - Comments Arising from the PPAG Meeting and Town Centre Walkabout April 16 th . Appendix 5 – Equality Impact Assessment Appendix 6 - Strategic Environmental Screening report Appendix 7 - Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

Reason for Report. To approve the draft Crediton Town Centre Masterplan SPD and Delivery Plan.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. That members note the comments received at the Stage 2 public consultation (Appendices 2 and 3), the comments of PPAG (Appendix 4) and support the proposed changes as set out in the report.**
- 2. That the Cabinet recommend to Council that;**
 - i) The Crediton Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document and Delivery Plan be adopted; and**
 - ii) That the Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix 5), Strategic Environmental Screening report (Appendix 6), and the Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report (Appendix 7) be noted.**

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Council has resolved to develop a Masterplan for Crediton Town Centre as a Supplementary Planning Document. Consultants have been commissioned to inform and enable its production. It will form a framework for key regeneration projects underpinned by four main themes *viz* Community Infrastructure, Circulation and Movement, Wayfinding and Legibility and Green and Blue Infrastructure. The focus is on pragmatic and deliverable projects including specific proposals to address air quality issues, improve the pedestrian environment and encourage the use of sustainable transport.
- 1.2** In accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, the Masterplan has been subject to two stages of public consultation. Stage 1 scoped out the proposed contents of the masterplan and options that might be included. An initial stakeholder group was undertaken Thursday 25th May 2023 with feedback and results being captured to inform initial masterplan themes. The subsequent formal Stage 1 Community Consultation was undertaken (hosted by the Council's website), which ran from 21st July 2023 – 4th September 2023.
- 1.3** The feedback collated from 79 respondents primarily covered a range of transport, environmental, community and economic issues which informed the document which has been subject to this second phase of consultation.
- 1.4** Stage 2 of the public consultation included two staffed public drop-in events at the Boniface Centre in Crediton on January 17th 2024 and February 21st 2024, the former of which was preceded by a meeting of key stakeholders, alongside the online event which ran from January 15th 2024 until February

26th 2024. In addition to emails, press releases and social media announcements, the Town Council helpfully publicised the event and hosted a permanent exhibition at the Town Council offices in Market Street. All the associated documentation (including a copy of the draft masterplan, exhibition boards, baseline report, online questionnaire and interactive map) were made available on the Council's website for viewing, downloading or for submitting comments. The public were also able to make direct contact (email and telephone) with the lead officer.

- 1.5 Subsequently the results of the public consultation were shared with Planning Policy Advisory Group on April 16th 2024 and the opportunity taken for a town centre walkaround. The issues raised at this meeting, along with comments, are summarised in Appendix 4.
- 1.6 The draft plan was considered by Crediton Town Council at their Full Council meeting on May 21st 2024 following which the Council supplemented its initial comments with some more detailed feedback. This feedback, with comments is summarised as part of Appendix 2.

2.0 Summary of Public Consultation

- 2.1 In total, 84 on-line survey responses and 17 paper copy responses were received. In addition a further six written responses were received including from Crediton Town Council, Devon County Council and the Environment Agency. The majority of questionnaires had been completed in a significant degree of detail indicating a high level of engagement with the survey. An analysis of statutory and other consultee responses received by email is provided at Appendix 2.

3.0 Summary of Findings

- 3.1 The following paragraphs provide a broad summary of the feedback under various themes and is followed by a tabulated list of specific issues raised and a response to each of the points raised.

Issues/Objectives/Themes

- 3.2 Responses to the questionnaire revealed that many local people are unclear about the limitations of a land-use planning document such as this. Unsurprisingly many people are somewhat confused by the sheer number of policy documents and initiatives (including but certainly not limited to the Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan and Local Transport Plan) and their relationship with each other and on reflection, the questionnaire could have made this clearer. Around half of the respondents considered that the plan was tackling the key issues. Many of the responses suggest confusion regarding scope, citing for example, the need for major highway infrastructure or social housing which would fall outside of the masterplan remit. Where respondents

specifically identified something which they considered to be missing this is discussed in the table below.

- 3.3 Unsurprisingly, the most cited missed issue is that of through traffic and the need for a bypass (although the document clearly states that this is not within the scope of the masterplan). The formal response of Devon County Council makes specific reference to this issue, commenting that “whilst there has been some discussion of a potential bypass for east-west traffic, it is considered unlikely such a scheme would be delivered in the foreseeable future” which actually highlights the importance of projects within the masterplan which mitigate the impact of this traffic. With regard to the other issues raised, many are clearly outside of the scope or geographical area. However, two issues raised, those of “facilities for elderly people” and “health and well-being”, were perhaps “undersold” in the consultation draft plan. Whilst some of the projects will be beneficial to the former and address the latter (indirectly in many cases) the text of the plan has been updated to be more specific and more positive on how these issues have been considered. For example, more than one respondent specifically mentioned more seating for elderly people and whilst the plan does reference new seating in many different areas, the details were perhaps a little lost and have now been given greater emphasis.
- 3.4 Appendix 3 provides a detailed analysis of the responses to the points raised around the issues, objectives and themes.
- 3.5 **High Street Improvements/ On-street parking**
- 3.5 When asked specifically, whether a loss of some on-street parking to accommodate additional crossing points and environmental enhancements would be acceptable, only 20 respondents gave a positive response, with 62 respondents saying they would not support the loss of parking. A slight nuance is that 19 responded gave a more qualified response, often saying they would support if re-provided elsewhere. Loss of significant on-street parking clearly does not enjoy the support of the community. Future projects, when worked up in detail, should therefore seek to minimise the loss of on- street parking.
- 3.6 In terms of High Street improvements most “votes” went to “additional pedestrian crossing points” (72) with “street trees and additional planting” (44) in second. There is also reasonable support for “wider footways” (34), “new street furniture” (31) and “improved lighting” (28). There is a tension between the strong desire for more crossing points and the resistance to the loss of car parking. An approach therefore may be to draw up some specific options, with varying degrees of parking loss, for further consideration so that the balance between parking loss and improved pedestrian crossings can be better understood.
- 3.7 Somewhat surprisingly 16 respondents want to maintain everything as it is at present, which suggest that future interventions should be sensitive to existing character.

Better Walking and Cycling Connections between the Station and Town Centre

- 3.8 This project enjoys strong support.

Enhancements to Green Spaces and Planting

- 3.9 Most of the proposals enjoyed broad support with most “votes” for “street trees and tree planting” (51), “improved seating” (44), “wildflower meadows” (43). Least popular choices were for “bike pump track” (18) and “improved skate park” (25) although this may well reflect the demographic of respondents. Interestingly the “do nothing” option scored quite highly again (19) which again points to sensitive interventions. There is therefore clear support for better green infrastructure but more “active” interventions should be considered carefully as projects are developed.

Newcombes Meadow

- 3.10 The park is clearly valued primarily as a good sized area of green space close to the town centre – a valuable “green lung”. Nineteen respondents commented along these lines. Of the more specific elements/qualities most enjoyed, the children’s play area scored well (15) as did “peace & quiet/tranquillity” (11). The bandstand scored 6 whilst trees and the paddling pool both scored 5. In terms of the new proposals there were 67 respondents in favour and 32 against. This suggests that the Council needs to be very sensitive to changes here and that there should be significant public engagement on the specific proposals.
- 3.11 Some responses, including that from the Town Council, would like to see the provision of public toilets in the park. However, public toilets are challenging to provide in the current financial climate and it is considered more realistic to include new toilets to serve the park as part of the proposed new community hub on Union Road.
- 3.12 The issue of anti-social behaviour in and around Jubilee Gardens was raised by the Town Council and is “on the radar” of the local Neighbourhood Policing Team. As a response to this the Newcombes Meadow project will make specific reference to addressing this issue in a redesign of this area of the park.

Union Road Hub

- 3.13 There is broad support for this - 69 respondents in favour, 29 against but some concern that if it is a café it will divert expenditure from established businesses and some suggestions that it would be better sited within the park. There is also a significant proportion of people who wish to see the reopening of the public toilets or their inclusion within redevelopment. However the support for the principle of a new park entrance at this point is much more unequivocal.

It should also be noted that the masterplan work has been a catalyst for wider discussions on the Union Road Hub proposal. Officers are proactively taking forward discussions with the Crediton Heart group in conjunction with the Town Council. The masterplan will provide a useful framework for these ongoing discussions.

Support for Local Businesses and the Farmers' Market

- 3.14 This topic generated many comments – it obviously excites local interest - but most are not land use related. Nonetheless there are some good ideas and it is recommended that they be carried forward in discussions with the Town Council and Chamber of Commerce. One practical issue which was identified and also referenced on members' walkaround on April 16th 2024 was the need to provide more comfortable seating. It is considered that this is something which can be delivered in the short-term at a modest cost.
- 3.15 The issue of car parking was also prominent in respondents' comments with strong concern expressed about the proposals for charging for on-street parking (now dropped) and suggestions that there needs to be more parking or that St Saviour's car park should be free on market days. Other suggestions included some shelter/shade for traders, better storage, improved signage and better public transport from surrounding villages.

Additional Wayfinding and Public Art

- 3.16 Support for this was broad but not overwhelming; 49 in favour, 21 against and 23 indifferent. It may be that the consultation document did not "sell" this idea as strongly as it might and the text and images have been re-visited and strengthened. Inevitably, at this stage the ideas are a little generic but as detailed projects are developed there will be opportunities for the local community to become involved, particularly around public art.

Sustainability features and infrastructure in the town centre

- 3.17 Significant support for a drinking fountain (50) and also strong support for additional recycling facilities (39) and EV charging points (38). Again, very interestingly 23 respondents responded "none". Whilst sounding ostensibly negative this comment may indicate strong support for the status quo in Crediton.

Development of sustainable brownfield sites

- 3.18 Relatively strong support; 75% in favour. Lots of commentary alongside about what type of development is needed which will usefully feed into discussion on the new local plan.

4.0 Planning Policy Advisory Group

- 4.1** The results of the Stage 2 public consultation exercise have been considered at two PPAG meetings on April 16th 2024 and June 26th 2024. The April meeting held in Crediton included a town centre walkabout which allowed members to view the sites of specific projects and discuss some of the wider issues in more detail. The comments that arose from this earlier meeting and officers' responses to them are contained in Appendix 4.
- 4.2** The meeting in June endorsed officers' revisions to the plan that were made in response to the public consultation and earlier PPAG meeting. At this meeting, officers were encouraged to revisit some earlier proposals for Newcombes Meadow when working up the new project and to explore the possibility of coach parking close to the railway station. Both comments will be actioned on and indeed discussions have already taken place with Great Western Railway around the aspirations for the station project.
- 4.3** Members also underlined the importance of delivering the plan. This led to a very useful discussion around the importance of the local community, whether in the form of the Town Council, business community or organisations such as the Crediton Heart Project, in partnering with the District Council to make these projects happen. In response to this, officers have amended the Delivery Plan to make it more focused and specific and to emphasise the importance of partnership working. The scope of the plan has also been extended to include initiatives which do not perhaps have their own "headline" land use project but which nevertheless contribute to the continuing vibrancy of the town. These include the promotion of tourism and visitor facilities and support for local businesses, which are issues that members have raised. It is the intention that, in addition to ensuring projects happen on the ground, that the Delivery Plan is used as a live document which provides a framework for wider discussions around all aspects of the town and identifies new opportunities and links between initiatives. It is hoped that by using the document in this way, there will be more opportunities for joint working between the District and Town councils as well as with other community groups.

5.0 Strategic Environmental Assessment / Habitats Regulation Assessment Screening

- 5.1** A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) is required in accordance with regulations and Directives on any plan or programme prepared for town and country planning or land use purposes or which sets the framework for future development consent for certain projects. These have been subject to consultation with the statutory consultees. Natural England has commented that it is highly unlikely that the Masterplan will give rise to any issues in respect of protected habitats.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1** The Stage 2 consultation process has been effective in engaging local people. The questionnaires and written responses received were often very detailed

and respondents were enthusiastic to share their views. This was reflected in the often lengthy conversations that officers and the consultants enjoyed with attendees at the public events. On such occasions, people took the opportunity to share their ideas and concerns about the town even if they fell outside of the current remit and it is not surprising therefore that the twin issues of a bypass for the town and prospective on-street parking charges were often raised. In respect of the former, the County Council who as highways authority would lead on such a project have made it clear in their response to the masterplan consultation that it is “considered unlikely such a scheme would be delivered in the foreseeable future”. This will be disappointing to many locally but highlights the importance of projects within the masterplan which mitigate the impact of this traffic. In respect of on-street parking charges this proposal is no longer being pursued by the County Council.

- 6.2** Putting these two issues aside the consultation process revealed broad support for most of the projects and initiatives contained within the draft masterplan and the engagement process has not identified any significant omissions. Interestingly many responses revealed high levels of satisfaction with much of the town centre as it is and it will be important to ensure that the projects proposed preserve as well as enhance the special qualities of the town. To this end, public and stakeholder consultation will need to be central to all of the projects as they are developed. It is hoped that the Town Council, who have been extremely helpful in publicising the masterplan, will work with the Council on this. The proposals for Newcombes Meadow are an obvious example of where interventions will need to be sensitive and all stakeholders involved in the process.
- 6.3** Of the projects proposed, there is an obvious tension between the desire for additional pedestrian crossing points and environmental improvements and the concerns of many local people, including local businesses, regarding the loss of on-street parking. The proposal for more crossing points actually “scored” more highly than retention of all on-street parking and there was also strong support for more trees which of course will be critical to addressing air quality. Neither of these can be achieved without the loss of some on-street parking. As stated above therefore, it is suggested that some specific options, with varying degrees of parking loss, are worked up for future consideration so that the balance between parking loss and improved pedestrian crossings and tree planting can be better understood.
- 6.4** Taking the issue of car parking aside, the other projects all enjoyed support, albeit in some cases perhaps not as strongly as officers may have anticipated. This perhaps may in part be a product of the indicative nature of some of the projects although the plan has been deliberately drafted in this way to avoid specific proposals being worked up without full community and stakeholder engagement. It is recommended therefore that changes to the text be made to emphasise this point. The Town Council have supplemented their earlier comments with a more comprehensive and specific response which has been

helpful for officers. Whilst the response has perhaps not been as positive as one might have wished for, given its close engagement throughout the process. It is recognised that the Town Council will be absolutely key in the delivery of the plan and will be critical to the identification and engagement of relevant stakeholders. Officers have subsequently met with representatives of the Town Council and explained how the District Council can help to address some issues raised which lie outside of the scope of the masterplan and emphasised the important role of the Town Council in helping to deliver the plan.

Financial Implications; The consultant contract for the Crediton Masterplan was awarded in March 2023 under delegated authority following a procurement process. Prior to that, a budget of £60,000 had been approved for the masterplan project. The financial implications in the delivery of the projects and strategies identified within the Draft Masterplan SPD and Delivery Plan will need further consideration in light of service budget, whether they can be managed and delivered in house or will require further work through external commissions. As each particular project is ‘worked up’, each will be subject to financial costings and to Cabinet consideration and approval (where applicable). Funding for these projects is likely to involve a range of public and private sector investment. No other financial implications are anticipated at this time.

Budget and Policy Framework; The budget for the production of the Crediton Town Centre Masterplan and Delivery Plan was agreed at a previous meeting of Cabinet. The Draft Masterplan SPD identifies strategies and projects for implementation. With the support of a Delivery Plan that will sit alongside the Masterplan and, in time, a business case for each of the strategies and projects, this will ensure each scheme will be in a state of readiness should future external funding opportunities arise. No other budgetary implications are anticipated at this time. The Policy Framework consists of both statutory documents that have to be adopted or approved by the Council as well as locally determined policies and strategies that form an integral part of the decision making process. Once adopted, the Crediton Town Centre Masterplan and Delivery Plan would have Supplementary Planning Document status and be a material consideration for planning decision making purposes. No direct impacts on the policy framework are anticipated at this time.

Legal Implications; The process for preparing and adopting the Crediton Town Centre Masterplan SPD will need to comply with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement. Whilst the Adopted Masterplan SPD will not form part of the Development Plan, it will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications relating to the town centre.

The Delivery Plan includes a set of indicative key milestones. These will be kept under review and will be reported back to Members at key milestones or as individual projects progress which require their own decisions.

There are no other legal implications arising from this report.

Risk Assessment: Failure to support the regeneration of Crediton town centre would in itself lead to deterioration in commercial activity, a less vibrant centre, less coordinated development and uncertainty over related infrastructure. The Draft Masterplan SPD and Delivery Plan will be focused on mitigating risk to aid regeneration.

As strategies and projects from the Draft Masterplan SPD and Delivery Plan are 'worked up' an assessment of risk will be undertaken as part of project development.

Equalities and Impact Assessment: No equality issues are identified for this report. Nonetheless, an Equality Impact Assessment is attached (Appendix 5).

Impact on Climate Change: A core principle within the Crediton Town Centre Masterplan SPD and Delivery Plan is the achievement of net zero carbon emissions by 2030 through design and timely delivery of infrastructure, dwellings and employment. Revitalising Crediton centre and encouraging local residents to shop locally and undertake trips by more sustainable means including walking and cycling will assist in reducing the area's carbon emissions.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Crediton Town Centre Masterplan SPD will support regeneration of the town centre through a series of initiatives which will improve the quality of the environment, support active travel, improve legibility and improve community infrastructure in the town. A Delivery Plan is produced separately, as an addendum to the Masterplan, allowing for re-appraisal and updating as projects progress and develop. Together they will contribute directly to the delivery of three of the four corporate priorities, environment, community and economy and will provide infrastructure which will support the delivery of homes, the other corporate priority.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer:

Agreed by the Section 151: Andrew Jarrett

Date: 22 July 2024

Statutory Officer:

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer: Maria De Leiburne

Date: 22 July 2024

Chief Officer:

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive: Stephen Walford

Date: 22 July 2024

Statutory Officer:

Agreed by the Corporate Director: Richard Marsh, Director of Place and Economy

Date: 17 July 2024

Performance and risk:

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager: Steve Carr

Date: 19 July 2024

Cabinet member notified: Yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Andy Robbins

Email: arobbins@middevon.gov.uk

Background papers:

The Adopted Local Plan (2013-2033)

<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/planning-policy/adopted-local-plan-and-policies-maps/>

Crediton Neighbourhood Plan [Crediton Neighbourhood Plan - MIDDEVON.GOV.UK](https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/planning-policy/adopted-local-plan-and-policies-maps/)

Stage 2 Public Consultation Summary Report [Crediton MP - Summary Report \(27.02.24\).pdf](#)