

# SOUTH SOMERSET MARKET TOWNS VISION

A methodology for developing a guiding vision for the sustainable development of the market towns and rural areas of South Somerset

For

**South Somerset Together**

**Final Report**

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# Section 1 - The South Somerset Market Towns Vision

## 1.1 Background

In January and March 2005, reports were submitted to the South Somerset Together Board, which recommended that SST convened a Market Towns Strategy Development Group, together with the allocation of £6000 towards a researcher. This was approved.

The role of the group would be to frame and recommend policy (referred to as the “*Market Towns Vision*”). The policy would address the question:

*“How do we ensure that all of our market towns are able to achieve sustainable development that complements and builds on their character and distinctiveness?”*

In other words the Market Towns Vision is **NOT** about creating model market towns for South Somerset, to a format created by the LSP!

We want to make sure that all of our Market Towns are vital, successful and sustainable places where people want to live, visit, work, play – and invest in. That much of the vision is clear and obvious.

The South Somerset Market Towns Vision must be as much about the ‘HOW’ as the ‘WHAT’. There needs to be strong focus on the mechanisms employed to deliver projects effectively.

## 1.2 The Market Towns Vision Research Project

The overall brief was to:

***Develop a performance management framework within which all our market towns are able to achieve sustainable development that complements and builds on their character and distinctiveness***

In particular to:

1. Agree a methodology for classifying Market Towns in South Somerset
2. Provide a strong evidence based argument for the role and composition of Market Town partnerships and community plans, as a methodology for delivering social, economic and environmental planning and regeneration at a local level
3. Recommend options for the representation of Market Town partnerships at LSP level
4. Recommend a methodology for developing a guiding vision for developing the roles of Market Towns
5. Recommend options for a suitable and effective performance framework, including roles, responsibilities and timescales

The research was undertaken by the SSDC Community Regeneration Officer (North) – Charlotte Jones, working with the SSDC Area Development Manager (West) – Andrew Gillespie, as lead officer for the project. The research took place between May and September 2005, averaging around 16 hours per week.

## 1.3 Approach to the research project

The research was primarily desk based and involved the collection and review of relevant published research (usually commissioned), guidance for good practice, the views of

professional and governmental bodies, published statistics and reports. A list of the key reference sources is included in Appendix B.

Recommendations in this report are linked to evidence in support of them, with much of the results of the research contained in appendices, or collated

The project has also produced a 'library' of documents and web links for practitioners and policy makers, and the report includes a recommendation to host and maintain this.

## **1.4 Structure of the Report**

**Section Three (Why are Market Towns important?)** presents findings from a review of literature and **Section Four (Identification of Market Towns)** summarises the approach taken to answer the apparently simple question "Which are the market towns in South Somerset?" A four-fold approach is proposed, and a first assessment carried out. The detail used needs further refining, and the assessment repeating during the revision of the Community Strategy. NB: The travel to work data used is at ward level only, but will shortly be available at a lower (more accurate level), for an improved data set.

**Section Five (the Market Town Healthcheck – Introduction)** and **Section Six (a Framework for the Market Town Healthcheck)** sets out a proposed performance management framework for planning, managing and evaluating market town regeneration and sustainable development – specifically with the use of market town healthchecks and a local partnership approach. The recommendations include the composition of the market town partnerships; establishing a practitioner network; and tailoring a market towns healthcheck toolkit for South Somerset.

**Section Seven (The Local Community Plan / Market Town Action Plan) and Section Eight (The Market Town Partnership)** concentrate on the structure and content of both the community plan, and the local partnership. A template for a SMART action plan is included.

**Section Nine (Partnership Representation for South Somerset Together)** The creation of a district wide market towns group, as a sub-group of South Somerset Together is proposed

**Section Ten (Making the Links – the Bridging Protocol)** focuses on probably the most important element of the Market Towns Vision – the arrangements for 'bridging' local plans to the Community Strategy (ie: the making and monitoring of responses). A protocol for "bridging" in South Somerset is proposed, based on guidance. Research showed that one bridging framework will work for market town plans and parish plans, and so could also work for other locally produced strategies.

**Section Eleven (The performance management framework)** gives a final overview of the performance management framework for the Market Towns Vision

## Section 2 – Summary of Recommendations

### 2.1 The following recommendations are made to South Somerset Together

2.2 NB: Section 6 includes a detailed breakdown of the actions needed to establish the market town healthcheck approach, and Section 10 includes actions to establish the protocol for bridging plans to the Community Strategy – only the key actions to establish the means to complete the tasks are included below

Report Section	Recommendation	Who will implement recommendation?	By When
4	Revise the community strategy in the light of this report – including further testing of the proposed market towns assessment	LSP working group / LSP co-ordinator	Published end 2006
6	Adopt the Market Town Healthcheck Approach, for local community planning and regeneration in South Somerset.	LSP Board (and SSDC DX)	? November 05
6	Appoint a convenor of the market town co-ordinator network – to carry out the recommendations for that group	LSP Working group (ADMs to identify market town co-ordinators)	December 05
6	Identify a Healthcheck working group (from within the co-ordinator network)	LSP Working group	Dec 05
6	Complete the “Market Towns Healthcheck Toolkit” and the recommendations from Section 6 to establish the healthcheck approach	Healthcheck working group	Toolkit by April 2006, other actions are specified in Section 6
7 & 8	Approve proposed arrangements for structure and content of partnerships and local community / action plans	LSP Board, LSP working group, ADM/CX group, SSDC DX	LSP - November 05
8	Identify market town partnerships for each of the defined market towns, appoint a market town coordinator to each and identify the provision of appropriate administrative support	ADM group, reporting to LSP working group / market towns strategy group	Proposals for community planning partnerships (area and make up) by Dec 05. An agreed programme by April 06
9	Agree to the establishment of the South Somerset Together Market Towns Vision sub-group – as a District wide forum -	LSP Board	Nov 05
9	Establish the South Somerset Market Towns group, as a sub-group of the Local Strategic partnership, in line with the guidelines set out in this report - to be developed during the revision of the community strategy	Lead officer to group LSP coordinator	First meeting Feb. 06? Within process to revise the community strategy
10	Review and recommend for adoption the	LSP Board, following	Before formal start of

	proposed bridging protocol, following the recommendations to establish bridging and publish arrangements as part of the Community Strategy	development by working group. LSP coordinator to publish arrangements	revision of Community Strategy
11	Provide a summary of the PMF components of the performance management framework for the Market Towns Vision, to be incorporated in the revised Community Strategy.	LSP working group	Feb 06
11	Review the components of the PMF through the process of revising the Community Strategy to ensure the PMF meets requirements and of Government, partners and community	LSP working group	By publication of community strategy
<b>General recommendations</b>			
	Monitor progress towards all of the above with update reports provided to the LSP Board and SSDC DX	Market Towns Vision Strategy Development Group, and the LSP co-ordinator,	Quarterly
	Complete the review of local / county partnerships, in the light of the proposed PMF of the Market Towns Vision, the SSDC corporate plan, and the revised Community Strategy	?SSDC	?

## Section 3 - Why are market towns important?

### Introduction

- 3.1 The market town is a medieval phenomenon, which provided the rural population with a place to gather, buy and sell - and they have been an important feature of rural British life for several hundred years. Historically there would have been a market centre within 10 miles of almost all of the population (Betley 1978) and the successful ones grew into more substantial settlements as the rural population moved in.
- 3.2 Even with the changes observed over the past decades to traditional ways of life – most people would say they recognise a market town as having at its heart, the supply of, and demand for local goods and services. Whilst the nature of the supply - for example the range and type of services provided will change and adapt over time – one thing remains constant – the role of the market town is to be the place and the focus for the sale and supply of goods and services to the local community.
- 3.3 Market towns may be identified by a number of geographical and historical features – for example being at the site of an important bridge, at a crossroads or having a market place – which could add any number of settlements to the list.
- 3.4 One of the simplest definitions would be to say a market town is a settlement between 2000 and 20,000 – although this does not tell us more than its role as a centre of population.
- 3.5 Whilst the presence of a market can still be of social and economic importance to a town – a modern understanding of a market town is more likely to be based on its all-round ability to serve both its own and the surrounding population.
- 3.6 ***So defining a market town is actually a process of assessing its functionality – and trade and employment is likely to feature highly.***

### Market towns and rural regeneration

- 3.7 Many market towns in England continue to thrive and prosper, but that is not true in all cases. Several towns in South Somerset have experienced well-evidenced economic, environmental and social decline, in part linked to the decline in agricultural, in part to the loss of manufacturing, or from loss of trade to larger centres. Decline may have occurred over a number of years and many suffer from traffic-blight and congestion.
- 3.8 Market towns are seen as an important focus for rural regeneration activity, particularly to stimulate the local economy. They are often viewed as the vehicle to assist in the delivery of a range of social, economic and environmental objectives for a wider population than its own residents.
- 3.9 'Our Countryside: Our Future' (the Rural White Paper 2000) acted as the impetus for the **Market and Coastal Towns Initiative**. It asserted that prosperous market towns could help regenerate the surrounding area (as the prime economic driver) through a programme designed to help identify priorities for the future. The MCTi uses capacity building processes with funding to support local people and groups to gain the skills necessary and implement community strategic plans. 5 towns in South Somerset are currently engaged in this process, with one town (Langport) having a published action plan, an established development trust and agency funded project officer.

3.10 In 2005 Government continues to focus on Market Towns to deliver rural regeneration. One of the underlying keys to success of the new **South West Rural Delivery Framework** is for the market [and coastal] towns to act as a hub for services – thus contributing to five out of six of the higher level aims for rural areas ie:

- Better paid jobs
- Strong and inclusive communities
- Fair access to services
- Adequate and affordable housing
- Accessible transport solutions

### Local aspirations – Local markets

3.11 Locally there is much to suggest that many towns are proud of their heritage and do not wish to become dormitory towns for Yeovil and Taunton. There is a belief that the retail and service sectors provide a distinctive and personal service, which once lost would be regretted, and would affect other aspects of town life. Moves that seem to affect the town's ability to serve its 'customers' are well debated.

3.12 Town Council's, local chambers and a range of community groups and volunteers actively support their local economy, promote tourism, provide cultural events and manage their town centres. Market towns are important to South Somerset because the local businesses and the local community believe them to be so.

3.13 There is a growing understanding that sourcing local products, and providing a lively town centre are closely linked to the renewal of the local economy, and can redefine for the town the sense of local distinctiveness many feared lost.

3.14 Market towns are also important where they have independent retailers (which maximises the circulation of money within the local economy), and provide services to the wider business community (eg: professional services) and employment for the surrounding rural area.

### Local service centres

3.15 The function of serving a rural population is more complex today than it ever was. The same population may use different towns for different purposes. Research published by the Countryside Agency considered how a number of modern rural service centres function and found that simplistic assumptions are unlikely to relate to the actual behaviour of rural residents. It noted that future approaches to settlement planning should be based on a detailed understanding of how individual rural settlements actually function – requiring an adequate evidence base.

3.16 The Countryside Agency research also concluded that useable indicators on market town prosperity should incorporate distinctive, local level survey work and data to bring out the character and distinctiveness of towns and to categorise their relative prosperity.

3.17 **There is no such thing in economic or social terms as a stereotypical market town.** This is now acknowledged in the Government's review of the 2000 Rural White Paper. In addition the research has established that only a minority of England's 1,300 market towns actually function as a rural hub for a surrounding hinterland. This has implications for rural and urban settlement planning and service delivery in the countryside.

## Promoting sustainable communities

3.18 With increasing emphasis on the future sustainability of community life, the common sense view would say that as far as possible, market towns should (and can) provide for all the needs of its surrounding community, thus:

- Reducing the need for and cost of travel
- Building community life
- Encouraging enterprise
- Reducing supply chains, achieving a better cost / quality balance

3.19 The Government's **Sustainable Communities** plan promotes the view that sustainable communities (being places where people want to live, work and play) are the building blocks for neighbourhood renewal and effective community planning. In other words the default position should be to provide – and manage - locally – and to serve a fairly defined area of population. Market towns have developed to do just that.

## The Integrated Regional Strategy

3.20 The Integrated Regional Strategy acts as an umbrella for a number of more specific regional strategies, and has five key aims, which can be summarised as:

- Manage population change
- Enhance the distinctive environment and cultural life
- Enhance prosperity and employment
- Address deprivation
- Ensure full and fair access

3.21 Settlements that are significant to the Region are those that are able to contribute to these aims, and a key role for Regional Spatial Strategy in particular is to identify centres for growth, and priority areas for development, in order to help deliver the Region's Key Aims.

## The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

3.22 The South West Regional Assembly is currently preparing the Regional Spatial Strategy, which will set out the key development policies for the next 20 years. Research was commissioned to assess the functionality of all market towns (as defined under County Structure Plans) across the South West. The key rationale was to assess which towns are significant (ie have the capacity to contribute) to the successful delivery of the strategic aims for the South West.

3.23 The Regional Spatial Strategy also recognises the role to be played by towns, even those not marked for development. At this stage policies are only at the draft discussion stage – draft policy C will include a number of (as yet) unnamed towns, which fulfil the following functions - **assessed by the local authority**. Development is more likely to be permitted – albeit modestly – in these places.

- o Where there is a concentration of economic activity and jobs and where there is potential for further economic development
- o Where shopping and cultural, educational, health and business services serve the needs of a wider area's population and provide a basis for the continuation of the town's service role

- Where public services can be provided efficiently for residents of the town and the surrounding area
  - Where the basic transport services can be maintained
- 3.24 Draft policy D permits development in other settlements which cannot be provided in other towns and which meets local needs and draft policy E will encourage development which provides jobs in 'dormitory towns, whilst housing development will be strictly controlled.

## Summary and Conclusions

- 3.25 This section has considered the role of market towns, from an historic, current and future perspective. The idea of there being an extensive network of distinctive local centres right across the district which have the desire and capacity to fully serve the needs of its residents and that of the surrounding rural parishes is most definitely not a new one. But research has shown that the nature and function of market towns is more complex than before, which our land use and community planning processes must respond to.
- 3.26 Market towns are important because at best they drive the local economy and foster community development, by acting as a focus for social and economic activity. At worst the loss of essential services together with loss of identity and weakened social cohesion leads to increased travel, and lesser quality of life.
- 3.27 In recent years, as evidence of economic decline became apparent, new ideas came forward from Government and other agencies to stem the decline and to encourage local partnerships of residents, businesses and councils to act.
- 3.28 More recently market towns have been specifically envisaged as a key part of the Rural Delivery Framework, and the new Regional Spatial Strategy. This seems largely due to their capacity (as a hub for population, employment, transport and services) to deliver the aims of overarching strategies for the region.
- 3.29 However by using this method to identify Market Towns as those which can best deliver the objectives of the Community Strategy, misses the bottom up principle, which is fundamental to high quality community planning. IE the Market Town strategies drive the Community Strategy and not the other way around. This is not always easy to maintain, but should be a guiding principle during the revision of the Community Strategy.
- 3.30 A market town is best defined by its ability to serve its own needs and that of its surrounding population (although this can be rather simplistic). Assessing a town's functionality can also help to target resources - where the greatest need is found to be with regard to its potential or its performance relative to others.
- 3.31 Our community planning efforts should aim to protect, develop and enhance the market towns as key providers of employment and services to the surrounding rural areas. Local community plans should link to and **drive** the South Somerset Community Strategy, developing involvement, and encouraging vibrant local leadership.
- 3.32 The following section proposes an approach to identify the Market Towns in South Somerset, as the foundation for high quality community planning processes, and the delivery of sustainable communities.

## Section 4 - Identification of Market Towns

### Introduction

- 4.1 Section 3 proposed that identifying a market town is a process of assessing functionality (what it does, tells you what it is). A range of factors can help determine which settlements are more functional than others, and a group of market towns emerges.
- 4.2 Factors could include population served, the presence of retailing, availability of employment, the range and presence of key services. Local aspirations are also important, and any methodology will need to reflect this, as well as valuing local distinctiveness.
- 4.3 In the draft Regional Spatial Strategy assessment of settlements, no town other than Yeovil is named. It will be for Local Authorities to define their own settlements through the process of the Local Development Framework. This project is not intended as a duplication of the work required assessing development policies, although it may serve to contribute to the evidence base. The focus for this project is not to assessing a settlement's suitability for growth, but to assess its significance in meeting the needs and aspirations of the economy, community and environment of South Somerset – and providing an appropriate community planning framework to meet those needs.
- 4.4 The proposed methodology for the Market Towns Vision uses **4 main approaches** to assess a settlement. An initial assessment has been completed as part of this project, but requires further work to test the approach, and provide the best available evidence base for identifying the Market Towns.

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Why?</b>
A. Prior definitions	How have / do others define it / how does the settlement define itself?
B. Levels of self-containment (ratios of living and working within the town – using 'travel to work' census data)	Research showed this is a key factor (especially for land use based planning) when determining the significance of a settlement to itself and to an area.
C. Contribution to strategies	Towns can help deliver overarching strategies for an area; they can also act as a hub to meet the needs and aspirations of the surrounding population
D. Benchmarking	If it looks like a market town – it probably is one.

## A. Prior definitions

- 4.5 The simplest definition found is that a market town is a settlement of more than 2000 residents. In South Somerset this includes 13 settlements, all of which were assessed using the 3 further approaches.
- 4.6 An historic definition is the possession of a market charter, and / or the presence of a regular public market – the latter includes Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, the former would add others including Langport, Bruton, and Milborne Port.
- 4.7 Settlements tend to define themselves too – Martock is the size of many places called towns, but retains its village status. Somerton Parish Council decided some years ago, to alter its status to that of a town. Langport is the smallest town in England, by virtue of its historic position as a trading post. Conversely Milborne Port was a town in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but has changed to a village – and whilst its employment base has declined, the surrounding villages make good use of its services. The language gives us clues – but does not give the truest of answers.
- 4.8 Table 1 below shows how settlements have been or are categorised in South Somerset as a Market Town.

<b>Name of settlement</b>	<b>Inclusion in SRB6 project</b>	<b>Local Plan classification</b>	<b>Somerset profile (SSP)</b>
<b>Chard</b>	Y	Y	Y
<b>Crewkerne</b>	Y	Y	Y
<b>Wincanton</b>	Y	Y	Y
<b>Ilminster</b>	Y	Y	Y
<b>Bruton</b>	Y	N	Y
<b>Castle Cary</b>	Y	N	N
<b>Langport</b>	Y	N	Y
<b>Martock</b>	Y	N	?Y
<b>Somerton</b>	Y	N	Y
<b>South Petherton</b>	N	N	N
<b>Ilchester</b>	N	N	Y
<b>Milborne Port</b>	N	N	N
<b>The Hamdons</b>	Y	N	N
<b>Henstridge</b>	Y	N	N
<b>All other settlements with 2000 + populations</b>	N	N	N

- The SRB6 project “Community Regeneration in Market Towns” provided evidence of need that informed applications to the MCTi. It is not clear from the report why each town was included – it may simply have been population numbers.
- Chard, Crewkerne, Wincanton, Martock and Langport have all been accepted into the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative. The initiative is open to towns between 2000 and 20000 population.

## Conclusion from this approach

4.9 The total number of towns and parishes in South Somerset with a population of more than 2000 = 13

4.10 Due to the emphasis on population centres or historic factors, rather than assessing the current functionality of the settlement, this approach is of limited use, but provides a starting point to apply further assessment.

4.11 Using population only would exclude Langport (pop 1000) – a pilot town in the national Market and Coastal Towns Initiative, and included Merriott, Tatworth and Forton and Curry Rivel – which as will be shown later, do not have the functionality of the towns identified as Market Towns within the Market Towns Vision.

## B. Levels of self-containment (for employment)

4.12 The research report 'A Functional Analysis of Settlements' (Roger Tyms & Partners 2005) commissioned by the SW Regional Assembly concluded that a key factor which determines the functionality of a town (and the best basis therefore for targeting future development) was its self containment level for employment.

4.13 Two calculations have been made, and shown below. Firstly the ratio of working age residents living and working in the town. The higher the ratio, the more self-contained the settlement is – and more likely to be a Market Town. The second calculation uses the ratio of those who are working in the settlement, against the working age resident population. A figure of over 100% means that there is net 'in commuting' – and the town is therefore more functional as a centre for employment than figures of less than 100%.

4.14 The tables below show the two travel to work calculations for as many settlements as was possible – **the data is currently only available at ward level, and so the results must be treated with caution.**

<b>Table 2 : Percentage of residents that live and work in the area.</b> (This does not include the effect of people 'in-commuting'.)			
Chard = 62%	Wincanton = 55%	Crewkerne = 48%	Ilminster = 48%
Bruton = 47%	Castle Cary = 45%	Milborne Port = 44%	Langport = 39%
Somerton = 37%	South Petherton = 37%	Martock = 30%	

<b>Table 3 : Total employment trips vs. resident workers. Shows the net effect of in and out commuting.*</b> (where 100% would show the working population, to be equal in number to the working age residents – but not necessarily the same people)			
Wincanton 138%	Ilminster = 128%	Chard = 117%	Langport = 102%
Crewkerne = 101%	Somerton = 71%	South Petherton = 64%	Bruton = 61%
Castle Cary = 59%	Milborne Port = 59%	Martock = 52%	

## Conclusion from this approach

4.15 As an example - 48% of Crewkerne's working age residents live and work in the town. IE 52% work elsewhere. However the net commuting figure rises to 101%, showing that those leaving each day, are replaced by a similar number of people coming in. This *could*

indicate that the need to travel in the Crewkerne area could be reduced through an assessment of local employment and skills.

- 4.16 The ratios from table 1 show the significance for employment for the towns own population. 100% would show that the settlement is totally self-contained, 0% would show noone who lives there, works there. In reality the ration is somewhere in between those two points.
- 4.17 In Table 2 figures above 100% (net in-commuting) mean that the settlement is functional for employment – by serving a wider area as an employment centre. So Wincanton appears to be the most functional town in terms of serving the employment needs of the surrounding area. Chard's rank 'slips' suggesting that while it provides a good range of employment for its own residents, it serves the surrounding population less well.
- 4.18 Ratios below 100% (net 'out-commuting') means that fewer people commute in than commute out. This weakens the settlements functional role – but could act as evidence of need to strengthen its employment position, if other assessments identified it as a Market Town.
- 4.19 The following towns have net 'in commuting' : Wincanton, Ilminster, Chard, Langport, Crewkerne.

*NB: HEALTHWARNING - until travel to work data is available at a lower level i.e Census output area (COA) - these figures are indicative only.*

### C. Contribution to 'overarching' strategies

- 4.20 This approach aims to identify towns that can help deliver strategies, which aim to bring social, economic and / or environmental benefits for the area, district, or region. The method considers strategies where market towns could be shown as more or less significant by assessing their actual *and potential* contribution to an objective or policy area. Sources of information to judge this includes town & parish profiles, the Local Plan, anecdotal evidence, professional judgement, local plans & appraisals. Three key examples follow, followed by a list of strategies, which could be considered in order to carry out a detailed settlement assessment.
- 4.21 Firstly** the proposed **Regional Spatial Strategy policy assessment criteria** for market towns - criteria against which a development proposal which went beyond meeting immediate local need would be determined - these are:
- Where there is a concentration of economic activity and jobs and where there is potential for further economic development
  - Where shopping and cultural, educational, health and business services serve the needs of a wider area's population and provide a basis for the continuation of the town's service role
  - Where public services can be provided efficiently for residents of the town and the surrounding area
  - Where the basic transport services can be maintained

**4.22 Secondly** the aims of the **Rural Strategy**, embodied in the new Rural Delivery Framework. Market Towns were noted as key to successful delivery. *(the answer to the proposed assessment questions being “yes” = functional as a market town ):-*

- Better-paid jobs *(is there the potential to ‘upskill’, or to develop knowledge industry, create inward investment from key sectors?)*
- Strong and inclusive communities *(are there resources/ facilities to support community well-being and development?)*
- Fair access to services *(are key local services present & accessible, do they offer outreach to more rural areas?)*
- Adequate and affordable housing *(is there a range of housing available, or the potential for new development?)*
- Accessible transport solutions *(are there public / community transport links – is the town a transport ‘hub’ to outlying areas?)*

**4.23 Thirdly** the main priorities of the **South Somerset community strategy**, can help assess the relative significance of different settlements. Towns which will significantly contribute to a successful strategy could be defined as the most functional settlements of South Somerset – in other words – the Market Towns: -

- Reducing crime and the fear of crime
- Improving prosperity
- Improving transport
- Lifelong learning
- Better health and social care
- Improving living standards
- Quality of the environment
- Providing leisure and cultural activity

**4.24 Examples of district, county, regional strategies** which could help assess which settlements are more functional than others – by their ability to deliver the objectives of the strategy in question. Again the size, or even the presence of services are not the primary factor:-

- The economic development strategy and the sustainable tourism strategies of the district, county and south west region
- The Local Transport Plan (LTP – SCC)
- The South Somerset cultural strategy
- The crime & disorder partnership strategy
- The South Somerset Housing strategy (current information via the Regional Spatial Strategy suggests that housing development will be local needs only, rather than contributing greatly to regional housing growth plans.

### **Conclusions from this approach**

**4.25** The application of the approach by a wider group would test its validity, and improve the quality of the evidence base. A facilitated session would provide the basis for this activity.

4.26 Applying the third approach creates a longer list than the previous approach, due to the individual nature of certain locations, for example offering a distinctive product that significantly contributes to delivering the South Somerset tourism strategy. Or having the potential to build a strong and vibrant community sector supporting more remote rural areas with transport to shops and services, learning and cultural facilities.

4.27 The summary assessment includes a ‘best fit’ for this approach, taken all things into consideration, so that a general picture is arrived at. The towns are now listed as:

- o Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Langport, Somerton, Martock, Bruton, Castle Cary, and Wincanton
- o In addition South Petherton and Milborne Port are significant in many ways, but both lack employment land, which limits their ability to assist in the objectives of economic development strategies.

**D. Benchmarking**

4.28 Benchmarking is a recognised tool for self-assessment by comparing actual against expected data. Using a simple model developed from one from the East Midlands Development Agency a broad picture emerges of the quantity and quality of a range of services and functions for each town from the previous assessment approaches..

4.29 The market towns benchmark developed as part of the Market Towns Vision project is in Appendix K , together with the assessment as completed to date (Appendix M)

**Conclusions from this approach**

4.30 The drawback with benchmarking is in determining the factors used in the first place, and where a qualitative judgment is then used. Using the benchmark alone (or done by one person) would not be an adequate approach to identifying market towns – but taken with the other 3 approaches, benchmarking does help.

4.31 The benchmark information gathered also helps form a simple town profile – which is useful for comparison and baseline measurements. In addition some real gaps may show up which can help with prioritising resources.

**The Market Towns**

4.32 Following an initial assessment using the above methodology (the four approaches) the clearly defined market towns in South Somerset are proposed to be:

Chard	Crewkerne	Ilminster
Somerton	Langport	Martock
Castle Cary	Bruton	Wincanton

4.33 Two further settlements are proposed, but with some reservation – largely due to the lack of employment (low self-containment). However they do both have key services (GP surgery and library), together with a greater number of retail and business premises, than the average of all other settlements (having first removed the nine above plus Yeovil.) These are:

Milborne Port                      South Petherton

4.34 As suggested at the start of the report, the assessment should be reapplied, to test its validity, since some elements are judgemental rather than factual. The other factor is the presence of another market town nearby (Sherborne and Ilminster / Martock respectively) – and further analysis may produce a different answer. Further work to assess to actual relationships between the two named, and the nearby rural parishes would be helpful.

4.35 Four further settlements were discounted, although they do show up as centres for population, and have a better than average range of leisure facilities and several businesses. However they do not have services such as a bank, library and GP surgery, which combine as an effective service provision. Nor do they have many shops compared to the two above. Ilchester has a 'look' of a market town, although this is largely historic, and even the presence of the military base does not provide sufficient reason for its inclusion, since it has few services for the surrounding population, who mainly look to Yeovil.

Ilchester                      Merriott                      Stoke Sub Hamdon      Tatworth & Forton

**4.19 Finally, it is important to reiterate that inclusion *or not* on a list of market towns, is not intended to produce a marked difference in the relative futures of two settlements, but to provide the right foundation for high quality community planning – aiming to ensure a sustainable and prosperous South Somerset for all.**

#### **Recommendation from Section 4**

Revise the Community Strategy in the light of this report – including further assessment of settlements using the proposed methodologies

## Section 5 - The Market Towns Healthcheck Approach – An introduction

“Many of our [South Somerset] market towns are the subject of (or have been) initiatives to address key issues of economic development, social inclusion, affordable housing, transport, healthcare, community safety, tourism, community engagement and capacity building.

What we lack is the sense that initiatives are always welcome, well-targeted and appropriately and adequately resourced.”

Extract from Market Towns Vision report to the South Somerset Together, January 2005.

### Introduction

- 5.1 The market towns vision project set out to provide a methodology for addressing the issues referred into the above extract. The basis of the methodology proposed is the Market Town Healthcheck, developed by the Countryside Agency as part of the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTi). A key issue identified during the review of plans, and the desire to make links with the Community Strategy, is the lack of consistency of approach, in content and structure of the published plan.
- 5.2 Put at its most simple the market town healthcheck is a cycle of **PLAN – DO – REVIEW**, with the ‘ownership’ of each stage kept at the level of the market town and surrounding area. The approach can be broken down into a 7 stage cycle:
- Set up a market town partnership
  - Gain community commitment
  - Carry out the healthcheck
  - Create the vision
  - Prepare the action plan
  - Put the plan into action
  - Sustain the partnership
- 5.3 For towns accepted into the MCTi, funding was (is) gained for the **PLAN** stages. This naturally led to the expectation of funding for the **DO** stages too, which in many cases led to a loss of credibility when it appeared the agencies were not providing what had been expected. Loss of motivation meant that the **REVIEW** stage was often left wanting, losing the value of the financial and emotional investment in the first cycle of planning.
- 5.4 **A key feature of the approach is the use of partnership working arrangements, which aim to provide added value to the process, by combining efforts and resources to make things happen.**

### Benefits

- 5.5 The adoption of the market town healthcheck approach for community planning within the Market Towns Vision is recommended here because it:

- Reflects the core values of the LSP and putting the principles of high quality community planning into practice
- Is in keeping with SSDC core values (as recognised in becoming a Beacon Council in 2005/6 within the theme “Getting closer to communities”), and other agency / partnership aspirations for community involvement
- Complements other approaches to community development and regeneration - for example SRB, NRF, MCTi, Healthy Living Centres, Parish/Town Plans, Village Tourism Forums, Community Development Trusts, Community Safety Action Panels – and not least the Local Development Framework - **which all place community involvement, and to varying degrees community ownership and control, into the heart of decision making.**

5.6 Benefits cited by the research reviewed (see references) which evaluated the use of the healthcheck approach are:

- A effective means for community engagement, promoting a ‘can do’ culture
- Providing robust baseline information to support funding bids
- Encouraging a high quality and inclusive approach to consultation
- Provides a framework for better planning and prioritisation, assisting agencies to establish cost effective service delivery based on evidence of need and aspiration
- An effective tool for benchmarking the performance of a group of towns
- A useful complementary process to build upon previous appraisals, approach can apply to all communities (town and parish), and can build on existing structures
- Is specifically designed to address the relationship between a town and rural hinterland

5.7 In South Somerset there is evidence of:

- Leverage of funding into South Somerset as a result of community regeneration and development processes
- The right solutions being applied following high quality community involvement
- Cost savings in officer time and finance through increased community capacity to solve problems and share costs
- Achievement of a range of outcomes through timely application of strategic interventions coupled with grass roots facilitation

5.8 What is harder to quantify at this moment in time is:

- The added value arising from developing and implementing this work
- The potential cost savings in service delivery through efficiencies or transfer of responsibility

## Drawbacks

5.9 Accounts of prior experience with the healthcheck approach in South Somerset are largely anecdotal, but is supported by published research (for example which reviewed the MCTi) and reveal problems, which are not repeated in detail here, but include issues such as:

- The relationship between regeneration initiatives and town / parish councils, with regard to their civic leadership function
- The expected versus actual levels of intervention and engagement of agencies, including regional / national bodies at both a strategic and local level
- The role, structure, funding and future sustainability of existing and specially created delivery bodies
- Sustaining the enthusiasm of volunteers while developing capacity and skills
- Making links from the town action plans to influence strategic planning or to broker direct support

## The Healthcheck approach and links to Land Use Planning

5.10 Guidance issued to Local Planning Authorities (based on research by LUC 2003 for Countryside Agency) highlighted the following:

- Stresses the opportunity under the new planning system for successful market town 'initiatives' (ie bottom up process to develop vision, strategy & action plan)
- Healthchecks can help (and require) development of close working between market town partnerships and LPA. Also vital that economic development and planners work together
- May require supplementary planning guidance to be prepared
- Health checks and action plans could inform / be incorporated into Area Action Plans within the Local Development Framework (LDF).

5.11 Additional guidance from ODPM and the Countryside Agency note **that a key role of the LDF is to deliver the land use based objectives of the community strategy**, similarly the local planning authority needs to consider the land use based objectives arising from a market town or parish plan.

## Conclusion

5.12 Community Planning initiatives, such as those listed above (MCTi, SRB, Health Opportunities Programmes etc) have provided us with a variety of source material from a range of perspectives. It is now the norm to seek to develop local community plans through such partnerships and foras.

5.13 There is currently no template for the composition of these groups, or their plans. Whilst it is important for the community planning process to enhance and build upon local distinctiveness, and encourage a locally led process – there is good reason to seek

a strong evidenced based argument for the role and composition of Market Towns partnerships and community plans as a means for delivering social, economic and environmental planning and regeneration at a local level – which can be sustained well beyond the planning and production of the action plan.

5.14 In South Somerset there are Market Town Partnerships or Town Foras at various stages of development in many of the identified market towns (a brief summary of community planning / regeneration activity is included in Appendix J for the 11 market Towns identified in Section 4).

5.15 Despite the experience of the drawbacks outlined above – there is evidence of benefits to South Somerset – although the approach could be described as opportunistic rather than strategic – including increased community involvement, increased leverage of external funding, and partnerships making interventions or innovating new projects that produced / is producing real change.

5.16 The drawbacks identified appear to be mostly linked to the manner in which the process is managed, as opposed to the process itself. Hence the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of those involved; present a clear and robust methodology; and to ensure that the links to the Community Strategy, and longer term involvement in community planning processes are invested in and sustained. (The following sections provide a clear framework to achieve this)

5.17 What is clear from the research, is that the building blocks of the healthcheck approach eg: community involvement, local ownership of plans, inclusive partnerships, vision, strategy and action plans based on robust evidence of need and so on – are still considered vital, and the right thing to be doing. The focus should be on finding the right way to do it. (eg the quality of engagement, protocols, resourcing)

5.18 The following Section proposes a clear methodology for a South Somerset approach, which builds on the principles of high quality community engagement and a commitment to make a difference to the quality of life of residents, and their communities.

5.19 It is also important to acknowledge that even with varying levels of success, there continues to be support from the towns themselves (countrywide) for the ‘market town healthcheck’ approach – as providing:

**“a broadly successful means of addressing key issues within a Market Town, providing a focal point for activity, a medium for the expression of both strategic and local issues and a model for adoption elsewhere”**  
(research for the Countryside Agency 2004)

5.20 And at a local level, despite experiencing more than a little local difficulty over the relative roles and aspirations of town forums, town councils, the RDA and the District Council, towns themselves remain supportive of the process, as in these quotes from the Forwards of the Ilminster Community Plan 2005 and the Martock Local Community Plan 2004 respectively:

*“My congratulations to all who were involved in bringing this together, for their time, commitment and hard work, the results of which in my opinion, is the most informative assessment ever undertaken of what the people of Ilminster want for the future of their Town.”*

Margaret M. Excell Mayor of Ilminster. Ilminster Community Plan April 2005

# Section 6 – The Market Town Healthcheck – a framework for delivery

## Introduction

6.1 This section sets out the proposed framework for the Market Towns to manage the production, delivery and evaluation of market town action plans, through a market town partnership – and for South Somerset Together to oversee and support that framework.

## The Market Town Healthcheck Framework

6.2 The table below shows the stages, and key tasks (the ‘WHAT’ column) of the market town healthcheck approach to create a vision, strategy and action plan which is ‘owned’ and managed by a market town partnership of key stakeholders. The stages are taken from the Countryside Agency framework, with the addition of “review of prior work” to stage one.

6.3 The ‘HOW / WHO’ column makes recommendations by applying the model stages to the South Somerset market towns vision.

- The Market Towns Healthcheck approach is cyclical, ie: progressing through the stages is likely to occur throughout the ongoing development of the market towns vision. Each town will be at a different stage.
- The templates and information needed to complete each stage form the ‘**Market Towns Healthcheck toolkit**’ – tailored for South Somerset, and its completion is included within the recommendations for this project.

STAGE	WHAT	HOW / WHO
<p><b>1. Set up a market town partnership (and review prior work)</b></p> <p><i>The Healthcheck process is cyclical – this stage is both the start, and the evaluation stage before ‘starting’ again eg: through annual reviews, public meeting, reports</i></p>	<p>Convene a meeting of representative partnership body; and establish administrative support</p> <p>Agree the work ahead - obtain shared understanding of those involved, roles etc (through partnership workshop if needed)</p> <p>Agree timescales for further stages; including use of the “bridging protocol”.</p> <p>Appoint town healthcheck working group to review prior work, co-ordinate healthcheck &amp; action plan stages</p>	<p>Area Development Manager, market town co-ordinator with ward members</p>
<p><b>2. Gain community commitment</b></p>	<p>Run drop in event</p> <p>Publicity</p>	<p>Market town coordinator - planned with town healthcheck working group /</p>

	<p>Presentations</p> <p>Contact with parishes</p>	community volunteers
<b>3. Complete the healthcheck</b>	<p>Plan the consultation / information gathering / assessment period (in the light of review of prior work)</p> <p>SWOT / healthcheck sheets etc</p> <p>Participative processes to identify local needs and aspirations</p> <p>Collate &amp; analyse data, draw results together</p> <p>Gain credibility for results from partnership &amp; community through feedback and 'testing'</p>	Led by market town co-ordinator (eg: CRO / MCTi) with working group
<b>4. Create the vision</b>	<p>Hold a community event to establish vision</p> <p>Agree practical objectives which support achievement of the vision</p> <p>Report on the vision – another event / roadshow</p>	<p>Appropriate facilitator eg CRO/CDO or external;</p> <p>Meetings of working group with co-ordinator, reporting to partnership, and to community via agreed methods (eg newsletter, website, reports)</p>
<b>5. Prepare an action plan</b>	<p>Identify available resources</p> <p>Identify priorities</p> <p>Establish monitoring and evaluation data</p> <p>Make links to the LSP and the Community Strategy</p> <p>Publish</p>	<p>Consultant / co-coordinator or CRO/CDO using South Somerset Together framework.</p> <p>Adopted by local partnership and by Town council.</p> <p>Presented to LSP; assessed using 'bridging protocol'</p>
<b>6. Put the plan into action</b>	<p>[?Appoint a project manager]</p> <p>Set out a clear programme of action</p> <p>Demonstrate achievements</p> <p>Monitor and evaluate</p>	<p>Project management requirement will depend on type / level of projects. Choice of town or district council to host (could be shared if latter). Other bodies include development trust or community association. Partnership admin officer to provide minutes, PR etc – - could be Town Clerk?</p> <p>At the simplest level, the</p>

		Market Town Coordinator (eg: CRO) becomes the 'Project Manager'
<p><b>7. Sustain the partnership</b></p> <p><i>The results of this stage – together with review of the action plan progress – forms the “review of prior work” within stage one.</i></p>	<p>Plan for ongoing success</p> <p>Adopt appropriate structure for function of partnership</p> <p>Review success, roles and responsibilities</p> <p>Monitor added value of partnership</p>	<p>LSP (<i>via ADM</i>) - provides framework for monitoring and evaluation of key projects and partnerships, and supports partnerships through LSP market towns group</p> <p>LSP / SSDC commissions baseline &amp; Q of L measures; and supports annual reviews including evaluation of partnerships</p>

### Implications and recommendations to establish the Healthcheck approach for the Market Towns Vision

*NB: At the end of this section the recommendations are repeated, with proposed responsibilities and timescales*

#### **Stage One – Setting Up (Establish the partnership and review prior work)**

- Those involved need to develop a shared understanding of purpose - that high quality community planning will make a difference to the sustainable development of South Somerset. Undermining the value of community planning processes reduces success due to its heavy reliance on local involvement for both content and process. Community planning may not work even when people want it too – *but certainly won't if they don't.*

#### **Recommendations to establish this stage**

- **Market town partnerships** Establish / review / refresh market town partnerships, in line with the recommendations set out in section 7. Establish model terms of reference within the Healthcheck Toolkit.
- **Partnership workshop** Establish a process plan for eg: a 2 - 3 hour workshop on partnerships & their role in the market town vision, and how to measure their success – initially for members and officers, then with partnerships themselves. Include introduction to LSP and the “bridging protocol”, assessing functional links to parishes. Clarify other links eg to SCC, SWRDA, Market Towns Forum(s)
- **Research library** Create a library of prior research and consultation, and other relevant documents which can be accessed (preferably on line) by development officers, engaged consultants, LSP partners and town partnerships (see bibliography)

#### **Stage Two - Gain Community Commitment**

- The missing bit from much of the prior work reviewed as part of this research project, is the understanding of the links between town and surrounding countryside, and the engagement of the parishes with the towns own planning activity. These relationships are likely to be complex, but need to be understood. This process could act as the

incentive for the partnership to form, or readjust, since there are obvious benefits for a market town in securing the support of more than just its own residents.

### **Recommendation to establish this stage**

- **Market town areas of interest** - Identify the 'hinterland' for each partnership. Where parishes do not appear to naturally link to one of the towns, find the most appropriate local solution, to ensure those parishes are engaged with the community planning process, and their own needs addressed.

### **Stage Three - Complete the healthcheck**

- Where towns already have a published plan, the partnership should first assess their plan against the proposed structure and content (to be compiled as part of the market towns toolkit). The need to measure recent projects, may be more pressing than the need for further public consultation
- The evidence needs to be robust, to support the final action plan, and made accessible afterwards. The scope and breadth of consultation and research should be pertinent to need, rather than the funding available. The method of gathering information should be carefully planned to avoid duplication, officer / volunteer overload and unnecessary detail.
- The process of the healthcheck should use high quality engagement techniques, and be able to demonstrate how 'hard to reach' groups have contributed. The healthcheck working group should encourage the market town partnership to engage with processes used

### **Recommendations to establish this stage**

- **'Market towns coordinator network'** Establish a network, as a sub-group of South Somerset's Community Development Network linking the MCTi co-ordinators, the MCTiA representative, and SSDC Area Development staff.
- **A 'charter' for community engagement** Develop a 'charter' which underpins the South Somerset approach to facilitation and community engagement at both market town and LSP level
- **Skills for engagement techniques** Provide opportunities for community planning staff and volunteers to develop their skills, taking care that their role is not seen as a cheaper consultancy resource, but an integral part of the South Somerset approach to community planning
- **Healthcheck toolkit** Develop and adapt the Countryside Agency "Market Towns Healthcheck Toolkit" (2005 – now published by Action for Market Towns) to meet local needs ensuring a consistent approach to the content and structure of market town / local community plans
- **Audit of existing work** Review existing market town plans for their evidence base, inclusion of 'hard to reach' evidence and consistency of data gathered, identifying gaps, and make recommendations for action.

## Stage Four - Create the vision

- A market towns vision is the concept around which local support will be built, the co-ordinator for the partnership should draw together the vision as a written statement “The statement should be ambitious, but practical and realistic. It should inspire local people and those from other organisations” (*The Healthcheck Handbook*) *Examples to be included in the appendix*
- The vision should be expressed in terms of practical objectives, which make it easy to understand, and make it easier to identify what needs to be done to achieve the vision. Avoid local government speak – although a short and snappy strapline can be a useful addition to the vision
- Reviews of current published vision statements (including those in South Somerset), tend to be a snappy sentence, with the actual basis for the vision hard to pick out from the main body of the plan.

### Recommendation to establish this stage

- **The vision** Include the South Somerset approach to vision statements, and the vision event, within the healthcheck toolkit. This should include a process plan for a visioning event, and a pre event workshop for the partnership.

## Stage Five – Prepare the Action Plan

- The main criticism of plans, developed under the MCTi and Parish Plans frameworks, is the lack of SMART action plans, which can lead to (sometimes unfair) criticisms of plans as mere wish lists. Other criticisms include insufficient prioritisation, no baseline measures and lack of a clear enough basis for linking the projects to the overarching vision
- The action plan should address how progress will be measured, both in terms of the actual project outputs (eg: increase the coverage of NHW schemes), and also in terms of overall success in achieving outcomes (eg: reduce fear of crime)
- It seems appropriate for the measures put in place to also reflect the existing Quality of Life indicators and BVPIs, used by Somerset and South Somerset Council's and LSP's. For example if a local residents survey is proposed every 3 years, the QoL questions could be used to get a local picture, which could be compared to the district or wider level.
- Project evaluation and assessment is crucial prior to inclusion in the action plan – the plan should focus on the priorities for the **partnership**, not on actions which can be achieved by a single group (although these should still be recognised if of importance to the community)

### Recommendation to establish this stage

- **The SMART action plan** - Develop a template for SMART market town action plans, within the Healthcheck Toolkit, which will link to the Community Strategy through the “bridging” protocol. The template should include clear links to the overall vision and strategy for the town, base line measures, milestones and performance indicators for outcomes. (See also Section 8 – the Market Town Plan)

- **Performance measures** – develop a basket of indicators for the Market Towns Vision, as part of the Community Strategy, by reviewing current measures used by partners (EG SSDC Quality of Life survey.) Consider commissioning baseline data collection for all towns to establish local indicators. Suggestions are included in the Appendix.
- **Project evaluation / assessment** – include a methodology for project evaluation within the healthcheck toolkit

### Stage Six - Put the plan into action

- This stage refers to both starting off and continuously monitoring the plans outputs and measuring outcomes.
- The first critical activity after publishing the plan is for an assessment as part of the “bridging” protocol – see Section 9
- The requirements of local project coordination and delivery may now require a project manager. This may be beyond the capacity of the market town coordinator, who may only be involved during the healthcheck stage.

#### **Recommendations to establish this stage**

- **The “bridging” protocol** - Adopt and implement a “bridging” protocol for South Somerset Together to assess and respond to local community plans (see section 9)
- **Annual reporting** – make provision for the annual evaluation of outputs and outcomes, for example through the annual assembly (Ref: SST terms of reference) of local community plans, as well as the Community Strategy, and feedback to the community.

### Stage Seven- Sustain the partnership

- This stage was added under the revised Market Town Healthcheck – in the light of some partnerships appearing to stall or falter once the action plan was published. SST can provide leadership and encouragement, but the local partnerships will also require some ongoing and direct support to move them into the next phase, and embed ongoing performance management
- The review of the MCTi now recommends building on established structures, rather than an automatic assumption to create a new one (eg a development trust). In any event, a delivery body would become a new partner within the community planning process, rather than **be** the partnership itself.
- The return to the first stage (establish the partnership) provides a good opportunity to learn from the outcomes of the evaluation, and to ‘refresh’ membership and terms of reference.

#### **Recommendation to establish this stage**

- **Partnership Evaluation** - Develop a market town partnership evaluation module as part of the Healthcheck Toolkit, linked to the partnership workshop recommended earlier, which can be delivered by in house facilitators. Link this to evaluation process for SST.

- **Future delivery structures** - Include an assessment of appropriate structures for future delivery bodies within Healthcheck Toolkit

**The following table summarises all of the above recommendations with responsibilities and timescales:**

<i>RECOMMENDED ACTION</i>	<i>WHO</i>	<i>BY WHEN</i>	<i>TARGET</i>
<i>Stage One - The Market Town Partnership</i>			
<b>Market town partnerships</b> Establish / review / refresh market town partnerships, (see Section 8) establish model terms of reference in the Healthcheck Toolkit (and of other arrangements for parishes)	ADM to plan process and convene first meeting	ADM to advise	First meeting held
<b>Partnership workshop</b> Establish a process plan for eg: a 2 - 3 hour workshop on partnerships & their role in the market town vision, and how to measure their success – initially for members and officers, then with partnerships themselves. Include introduction to LSP and the 'bridging protocol', assessing functional links to parishes. Clarify other links eg to SCC, SWRDA, Market Towns Forum(s)	Healthcheck working group	Ready to be run within one month of agreement of bridging protocol and partnership arrangements	Process plan in place  Workshop held with favourable evaluation
<i>Stage Two - (Review prior work and) Gain Community Commitment</i>			
<b>Research library</b> The District Council hosts a library of prior research and consultation, and other relevant documents which can be accessed (preferably on line) by officers, engaged consultants, LSP partners and town partnerships	LSP to provide references; CDN to establish framework. Maintained by ??SSDC policy and information (including maintenance of web based library and circulation of new additions)		Library and e-library indexed and stored; publicised and kept updated. <i>USED &amp; valued!</i>
<b>Market town areas of interest</b> Identify the 'hinterland' for each partnership. Where parishes do not appear to naturally link to one of the towns, find the most appropriate local solution, to ensure those parishes are engaged with the community planning process, and their own needs addressed.  NB This may mean some proactive work to link those parishes across administrative boundaries, or linking isolated rural parishes as a cluster.	Initial proposals by ADMs  Partnerships already in place to 'affirm' their links to parishes and provide some interpretation on relationship (via co-ordinators or district wide work within LDF or through LSP research)	Proposals made by Dec 05  To be considered in the light of priority – large gaps in knowledge may prompt further analysis	Make up of partnerships reported to Area Committees and LSP, showing links to parishes.
<i>Stage Three - The Market Town Healthcheck</i>			
<b>Market towns coordinator network</b> Establish a network, as a sub-group of SS CDN network linking the MCTi co-ordinators, the MCTiA representative, CCS and SSDC Area Development staff.	Led by ADM West? Convened by LSP co-ordinator? Self administered	First meeting – by February 06	Meeting held, terms of reference agreed
<b>A charter for community engagement</b> Develop a 'charter' which underpins the South Somerset approach to facilitation and community engagement at both market town and LSP level NB #1 As demonstrated by SSDC within their Beacon work 'getting closer to communities' and through the Interact Network. The charter will be monitored the Area Development teams, on behalf of partnership(s) for quality of engagement and value of material gathered approach.  NB #2 this is likely to build on prior work eg: in setting up Somerset Influence, or in existing customer charters. The aim is to 'embed' a commitment to quality	Beacon co-ordinator to draft a 'charter' through facilitated work with Area teams & MCTiA etc; LSP working group (and partners as required) 'adopt' approach during revision of community strategy	By start of community strategy revision process	Agreed approach in place & publicised within LSP.  Market town co-ordinators and consultants can demonstrate

facilitation processes within all levels of community planning activity and where appropriate influence partners to review their use of consultation and involvement techniques	This work can also be developed through the LSP co-ordinator group within Somerset.		understanding & skills  Further market town work can provide evidence of use of approach.
<b>Skills for engagement techniques</b> Provide opportunities for community planning staff and volunteers to develop their skills, taking care that their role is not seen as a cheaper consultancy resource, but an integral part of the South Somerset approach to community planning  NB: Links should be made to the Interact network, the existing "Moving Parish Projects Forward" toolkit, which provides training modules for community volunteers, and to organisations such as Vista.	SSDC - through SDR processes for staff development needs – consider involvement of other officers in training opportunities  Coordinator network to encourage partnerships to assess volunteer development needs  MCTia to ensure appointed consultants have appropriate skills	As needs demand, and opportunity exists  Skills audit of community planning staff by February 06  Workshop on engagement techniques to be run as required	Skills audit template for partnerships in place;  module devised for 'techniques in consultation and involvement'
<b>Healthcheck toolkit</b> Develop and adapt the Action for Market Towns "market towns healthcheck toolkit" (2005) to meet local needs ensuring a consistent approach to the content and structure of market town / local community plans  NB: this is not a recommendation to produce an extensive document – rather to ensure that plans are produced to a consistent level and that co-ordinators are aware of the sources available to them, the required and optional content of future plans, the links to land use based planning and so on, this could involve developing training 'modules' for coordinators, providing case studies, a template for the consultation plan, adjusting healthcheck 'worksheets' for South Somerset; a methodology for assessing links to rural parishes. The market towns healthcheck toolkit (pub. Countryside Agency) and the SWRDA 'Source book', together with this report are the key sources.	A healthcheck working group to be established from within the Market Town Coordinator network(see end of section)	April 2006?	'South Somerset' Market Towns healthcheck toolkit in place & in use.  Published plans reflect use of toolkit, and adoption of the South Somerset approach
<b>Review of existing plans</b> Review existing market town plans for their evidence base, inclusion of 'hard to reach' evidence and consistency of data gathered, identifying gaps, and make recommendations for action. NB: If gaps are identified, this work can be done as part of the town partnerships ongoing work to develop and implement their action plan. Towns requiring the same work could combine to appoint a consultant, or undertake work for each other to give an independent view (eg a town access audit; a 'mystery shopper' project). Some work may be appropriate to fund as part of revision of Community strategy to ensure a robust evidence base is in place	Market town coordinator network, led by Healthcheck working group	April 2006	Assessment of plans completed, with recommendations for action eg: adaptation of action plans into new template
<b>Stage Four – Create the Vision</b>			
<b>The Vision</b> Include the South Somerset approach to vision statements, and the vision event, within the healthcheck toolkit	Healthcheck working group	April 2006	Included in toolkit
<b>Stage Five – Prepare the Action Plan</b>			
<b>SMART action plan</b> Develop a template for SMART market town action plans, within the 'healthcheck toolkit', which will link to the Community Strategy through the "bridging" protocol	Healthcheck working group with LSP co-ordinator	April 2006	Included in toolkit  Published plans show use of toolkit approach
<b>Performance measures</b> Develop a basket of indicators for the Market Towns Vision, as	Healthcheck working group with LSP co-	April 2006	Basket of indicators

part of the Community Strategy, by reviewing current measures used by partners (EG SSDC Quality of Life survey.) Consider commissioning baseline data collection for all towns to establish local indicators. Suggestions are included in Appendix X	ordinator, and Policy & Performance Officer		agreed for market towns vision, and for local action plans as appropriate  Commissioning of baseline data collection considered and acted on
<b>Project evaluation / assessment</b> Include a methodology for project evaluation within the healthcheck toolkit	Healthcheck working group	April 2006	Template for assessment in place & in use
<b>Stage Six - Put the Plan into Action</b>			
<b>The "bridging" protocol</b> Adopt the "bridging" protocol, and the recommendations arising from it (see section 9)	LSP coordinator to arrange adoption and oversee progress	Adopt by January 2006  Briefing note and partner training by April 2006	Bridging protocol adopted Briefing note published Partner training implemented First plan assessed for bridging
<b>Annual reporting</b> Provide the resource to allow annual evaluation of plans and programmes, reporting to the LSP, linked to partnership evaluation (market town and District level) (EG an annual assembly plus report)	LSP coordinator plus Coordinator network	Include within revision of Community Strategy – market towns event	Market town partnerships have been involved in review and revision of community strategy and its links to town plans
<b>Stage Seven – Sustain the Partnership</b>			
<b>Partnership Evaluation</b> Develop a market town partnership evaluation module as part of the Healthcheck Toolkit, (referring to the principles of social auditing) which can be delivered by in house facilitators. Link this to evaluation process for SST and the partnership workshop recommended earlier	Healthcheck working group (using external facilitation to 'cascade' first module)	April 2006	Module developed and run, with positive evaluation
<b>Future delivery structures</b> Include an assessment of appropriate structures for future delivery bodies within Healthcheck Toolkit (includes facilitated module)	Healthcheck working group	April 2006	Assessment method included in toolkit, plus process plan for workshop

## Conclusion

6.4 The Market Towns Healthcheck Approach can provide substantial and clearly defined processes to plan, deliver and monitor outputs and outcomes. It can provide the means to evaluate local partnerships and contribute to the annual evaluation of South Somerset Together.

6.5 The final sections to this report outline the main elements of the performance management framework required to support this approach to community planning namely:

- The market town local community plan
- The market town community planning partnership
- The South Somerset Together – Market Towns Vision community planning sub-group
- The “bridging” protocol – making links between local and strategic plans

### **Recommendations from Section 6**

Adopt the Market Town Healthcheck Approach, for local community planning and regeneration in South Somerset

Appoint a convenor of the Market Towns Co-ordinator Network – to carry out the recommendations for that group

Identify the Healthcheck Working Group

Complete the “Market Towns Healthcheck Toolkit” and the other recommendations from Section 6 to establish the healthcheck approach

## Section 7 – the Local Community Plan / The Market Town Action Plan

### Structure and contents of the plan

7.1 Based on the review of more than 10 local community and market town plans, and research which evaluated such plans, with regard to their status and influence – the following is proposed as an skeleton framework for a market town (local community) plan:

1. An introduction to the town, a BRIEF history, purpose of the plan
2. Structure of partnership – who is involved, who leads, who funds, how others can get involved, contacts.
3. Results of the healthcheck, profile of the town & area inc. key stats (social, economic, environmental, transport) and consultation – the key issues are summarised – the evidence base is annexed. Clear evidence of how hard to reach groups and all members of the partners were involved, and the range of accessible & participative techniques used
4. The vision statement
5. Include a record of achievements by partners or partnership under prior work
6. The SMART action plan
7. Summary of how the actions and the partnership will be monitored by itself and by others (includes arrangements for local reviews, annual reporting, partnership evaluation, LSP review process, newsletters, forums etc). An overview of the bridging protocol, and the role of LSP partners.
  - The executive summary will be more accessible in format, but should still provide a framework for future feedback.
  - The plan format should be available electronically, and other accessible formats
  - Photographs and quotes make a plan distinctive, balanced with a robust evidence base of need.

### The SMART action plan

7.2 Reviews of action plan formats taken from a number of MCTi market town action plans – showing there is little consistency even from a nation wide initiative, due to each consultant taking a different approach, rather than being due to the distinctiveness of different communities. This makes bridging to the Community Strategy unnecessarily complex.

**7.3 The recommended model for South Somerset to adopt is from Neston – based on:**

- The separation of objectives (what we want to achieve) from the projects (what we're going to do to get there) – projects may be deleted, or altered during evaluation – the objective is likely to remain at least in the medium term.
- Provides tools for effective project management (and external funding bids): the inclusion of a baseline measure that can also be used as a future performance indicator; milestones (steps along the way) and as end targets / outputs.
- Linked projects under an objective allow outcomes to be measured across a range of projects; each may have contributed in some way.

## 7.5 A draft template for inclusion in the Healthcheck Toolkit

The Action Plan is structured into themes – drawn from the research and consultation.

1. Each theme has an overarching aim, which together will contribute to the town's vision
2. Each aim will have a number of objectives (up to 6 is suggested) which provide the focus for attention
3. For each objective, baseline measures, and the specific issues to be addressed are identified
4. Each objective has a series of projects (or single project) linked to it which are judged to be the best ways of effecting the desired change identified in 4.

THEME:

OVERALL AIM: "to ensure that [this town] has / can .....

Eg: *To ensure that [this town] has an attractive and sustainable town centre which meets the week-to-week retail and service needs of residents and workers, at the heart of an area which attracts visitors and 'return visitors'.*

Objective	Objective outcomes	Baseline measures	Objective target outputs	Support to other objectives
<i>(not more than 6 per theme)</i>	<i>What will the effect be? IE: reduced x; increased y; can have more than 1 for each objective</i>	<i>To enable change linked to the projects to be measured</i>	<i>What outputs will tell us we have done something</i>	<i>Demonstrate links</i>

Under each objective – the linked projects – up to 6

Key actions / projects	Priority and start year	Possible lead partner	Possible other partners	Cost category	Possible funding sources	Milestones (the next steps)	Project outputs	Policy / programme links
<i>Define projects (has a start and end, results in a change)</i>				<i>High medium low if no actual figures</i>		<i>Basis of project planning</i>	<i>What project will look like</i>	

*Based on the Neston Community Plan*

## Conclusion

7.4 By adopting the market towns healthcheck approach, the resulting content and structure of each plan has become clearer. While there is room for town partnerships (or partnerships of interest wishing to use the "bridging" protocol) to make their plans distinctive to them, there needs to be an visible thread running through which will make links to the Community Strategy and support the involvement of partners to its success.

7.5 The creation of an action plan, which is robust and accessible, realistic and measurable, and which can be linked to the Community Strategy, requires a framework within which local needs will be clearly articulated. Again, this is not a prescriptive, imposed approach, but ensures that the strategic issues can be identified, and - most importantly- responded to by South Somerset Together and its partners.

## Recommendation from Section 7

Approve proposed arrangements for structure and content of local community / action plans

## Section 8 – The Market Town Community Planning Partnership

“Successful partnerships need to include a range of local public, community and business groups. Where existing structures exist opportunities to build upon them should be taken. Otherwise the importance of inviting officers from the local authority and people from within the community who are known to have energy, knowledge and experience is crucial.”

Countryside Agency

Partnerships are essential to successful regeneration but they are time and resource intensive. It is all too easy – with the best of intentions – to become involved in a plethora of well-intentioned but underachieving partnerships. Effective partnerships can make all the difference but without a clear focus, local authority resources – both financial and staffing – can be spread too thinly and their impact dissipated.

IdeA – Evaluating Economic Development and Regeneration Partnerships

“Partnerships have become an ever present feature of UK social policy.... On the face of it, it is impossible to object to organisations seeking to work together more effectively. Yet partnerships seem beset with problems and doubts, slickly expressed in the popular definition ‘mutual loathing held together by funding opportunities’... We talk of partnership as implying a relationship between organisations, but often all we are doing is creating yet more organisations.... The organisational landscape just got more, not less, complex.

Extract from article in New Start Nov 2004 Bill Jenkins, Neath Port Talbot Council

### 8.1 The beneficial role of an effective partnership

- Foster a ‘can do’ culture
- Contribute to a positive self-image
- Co-ordination between individual members and member organisations
- Promote the transfer of information and sharing of good practice
- Nurture community participation
- Act as a focal point for funding bids
- Encourage the wider view

8.2 The issues referred to in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quote at the head of this section, are proposed to be addressed through clarity of roles (and training for participants), a shared understanding of the overall market towns vision framework, positive support and leadership from local ward members and high quality performance management – primarily focussed on evaluating the added value of the partnership.

8.3 Partnerships are NOT organisations; they are organisations (and individuals) working together in pursuit of an aim, which would not (or is much less likely to) be achieved working separately. Understanding this is vital in the early stages, since members will have a range of experiences of partnerships

- 8.4 In various discussions for this project there have been several comments which suggest participants have a varying view of the nature and value of partnerships – hence the recommendation to develop a partnership workshop module (see Section 6) tailored for members, officers and local partnerships.
- 8.5 Put simply - the aim of community planning is to improve the quality of life for people living in, working in or visiting the District by identifying the often complicated and conflicting issues that affect the area and bringing together the right people to work out the right solutions which will make a difference. In other words – an effective partnership requires the right people working together on the right things, in the right way.
- 8.6 Differing structures for community planning have been used in our Market Towns to develop ideas and ambitions, promote community participation, make and carry out decisions and allocate resources. Not all models were welcomed or even understood at an early stage. Some models for community planning processes have developed while others have fragmented or stalled.
- 8.7 The Market Town healthcheck approach proposed within this report has a local partnership as a fundamental part of the process. The proposal is for each Market Town to have its own Partnership drawn from the public sector, business, community and voluntary organisations within the town and its surrounding area.
- 8.8 The Market Towns Vision should explicitly recognise the civic leadership role of both county and district ward members, and most importantly the Town Council.

**8.9 Proposed membership of the Market Town Community Planning Partnership: -**

- Elected county district and town ward/division councillors (elected ex officio)
- Representatives from business and voluntary sectors (the numbers to reflect the size and composition of the town, the representative appointed by the sector using their own processes. (EG The trade association asked to appoint 2 members; a community groups forum elect 3 members from within an open meeting)
- Some space for individual nominations - say 3 – for example those with particular interests or skills, elected at the partnership’s annual review meeting
- Representatives from the surrounding parishes (if all wish to be represented a separate sub-group probably needed, with 2 representatives attending main meetings)

And will include:

- The SSDC Area Development Manager (in attendance)
  - Regular attendance by key agency workers
  - Administrative support (eg hosted by Town or District Council)
  - Supported by a Market Town Co-ordinator (working with the MCTi agent / consultant if one exists)
- 8.10 Good practice for effective steering groups suggests that 10 - 15 people is sufficient, therefore sub-groups may be needed for larger towns. Another option is to ensure that (for

example) all community groups are engaged with directly through open meetings, with regular feedback to the steering group.

- 8.11 The early stages of setting up (and future stages of partnership review) should include some form of stakeholder analysis – methods for this would be included in the Healthcheck Toolkit.
- 8.12 The objective of the Market Town Partnership would be to provide strategic support and guidance and to promote, deliver and advise on initiatives, which will enhance economic and social prosperity, improve vitality and viability and conserve and enhance the built environment of the town (and surrounding countryside)
- 8.13 Its purpose will be to:
- Prepare and publicise an action plan
  - Identify sources of funding and support
  - Coordinate progress towards outcomes
  - Establish small working groups to progress schemes in the action plan when necessary,
  - Make formal links to existing groups / seek to strengthen existing structures
  - Undertake regular consultation with the local community – including hard to reach groups (one example would be an open day / drop in event)

### **The role of the Market Town Coordinator**

- 8.14 The Area development team will provide or identify a coordinator for each MTP (supported on occasions by agents appointed through MCTi). Key roles will include:
- Develop the quality and efficiency of local consultation work
  - Monitor the action plan and ensure evaluation processes are used
  - Assist SST in the active management of the “bridging” protocol
  - Work within the coordinator network to further develop the healthcheck toolkit to enable the sustainable development of the Market Towns Vision

### **Recommendation from Section 8**

To establish market town partnerships for each of the defined market towns, appoint a market town coordinator to each and ensure the provision of appropriate administrative support

## Section 9 – Partnership Representation at South Somerset Together

### Introduction

9.1 Research by the Countryside Agency showed that in practice the links between parish and market town plans have not yet been firmly established. Participants at the local level were frequently unaware of their Community Strategy, and how it could be influenced.

9.2 The current make up of the LSP Board does not include any formal representation of the market towns. This research project reviewed several different examples of representation at the LSP level by community partnerships or areas, and the general conclusion is that no one model is proving more effective than others (many LSP's are still embryonic) – what matters is the quality of the performance management framework and processes.

9.3 In addition SST identified the need (in the brief for this research) to provide a means to develop the guiding vision for the Market Towns (and rural areas) in order to combine the many ideas, influences and pressures that emerge from time to time through regional and national policy development with local aspirations for development and change.

9.4 A key component of the performance management framework for South Somerset Together will be to assess its added value to outcomes on the ground. This requires the means for partners to identify the extent to which they have changed or influenced their own plans and policies, and to demonstrate how the partnership has contributed to real outcomes for local people.

### The South Somerset Market Towns Group

9.5 **It is recommended that South Somerset Together establish a sub-group specifically for the market towns (and rural areas) vision.** Further elaboration on this proposal is set out below.

#### 9.6 What it is not:

- A South Somerset 'branch' of the Somerset Market Towns Forum. Town partnerships should be encouraged to network with this and join Action for Market Towns ([www.towns.org.uk](http://www.towns.org.uk))
- An attempt to duplicate the work of the above eg: the SMTF provides opportunities for members to look at each others work, network, share experiences etc
- A talking shop / network or market towns lobby group
- Simply a way of identifying and addressing district wide opportunities and threats, which may compromise local distinctiveness or the commitment to bottom up community planning processes

*That is not say it will never perform the above functions on occasions.*

#### 9.7 What it will be:

- A key element of the performance management framework for the South Somerset Community Strategy – covering both the market towns and rural areas of South

Somerset, providing increased democratic accountability and influencing improvements to public service delivery

- A complementary body to the Galaxy group for the Yeovil Vision, within the LSP
- The assessing body within the “bridging” protocol for market town and (parish) action plans, recommending changes to the LSP Board for the Community Strategy
- A sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership, reporting to the LSP board, with membership drawn from the market town partnerships. **It is recommended that the following composition be adopted** (this is based on the need to keep to reasonable number for meetings, ensuring wide representation, and appropriate engagements by agencies
  - One representative per partnership (two for Chard due to size) eg: 12 altogether based on current assessment of market towns
  - 3 representatives drawn from rural parishes (? one per SSDC Area)
  - (A deputy nominated for each, to be included in training & evaluation)
  - 2 ward members per Area
  - 1 county member per Area
  - Facilitated by ADM / market town co-ordinator representatives (annual rotation by area)
  - Attendance by key agency / partnership officers as appropriate

#### **9.8 What it will do:**

- Provide for a two-way flow of information between market town partnerships and partners to the LSP; and between itself and the market town co-ordinator network
- Monitor the community strategy, in relation to issues arising from market town action plans, including the performance indicators and success measures put in place
- Work with partners to influence outputs (and outcomes), find new ways of working, evaluate and share successes
- Take part in the process to assess and respond to market town and parish plans (the “bridging” protocol), making recommendations to the LSP board for adjustments to the Community Strategy action plan
- Appoint 3 members to the LSP Board (this seems a balanced number in relation to existing numbers of both groups)
- Make active use of the added value of partnership at a district level, to achieve sustainable development for the market towns and rural areas. *For example* a partnership bid to develop community / heritage centres; funding a campaign for local purchasing; establishing a South Somerset ‘in bloom’ competition; hosting events for key sectors of the community (youth, business, voluntary) or encouraging projects which address district wide issues eg: rural transport; community safety; skill shortages
- Be a key part of the annual review process for the LSP and Community Strategy, providing the content for a published report, which includes an overview of local action plans, as well as district level progress

- Request / receive policy briefings and facilitate policy development to guide the market towns vision

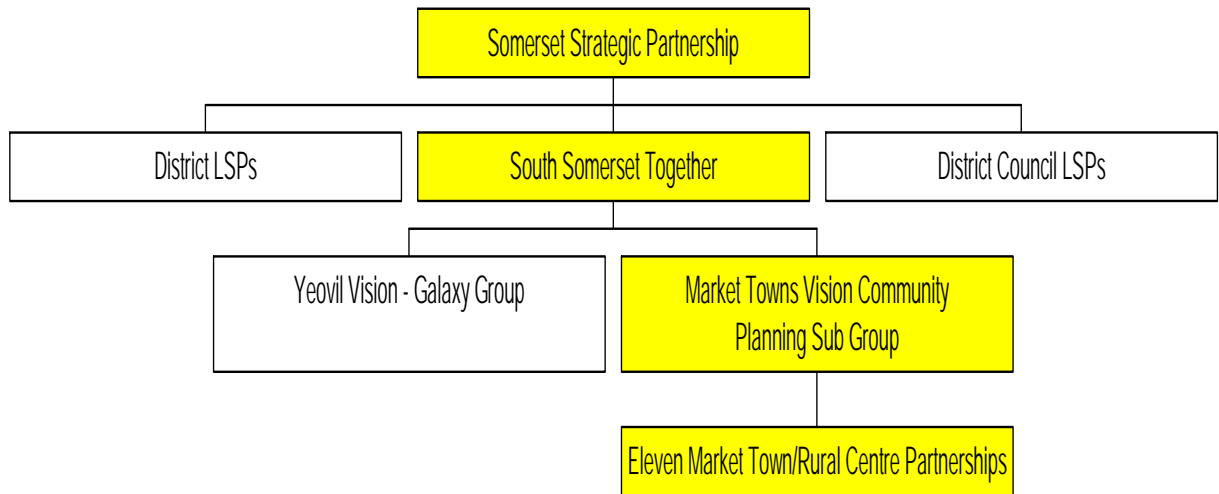
### **9.9 How will it be managed and supported?**

- In the first instance, initial meetings / event, and some basic facilitation to establish could be resourced through the area development teams, funded as part of the revision of the Community Strategy / Market Towns Vision budget
- The LSP provides appropriate administrative support to convene meetings and arrange the forward plan, in conjunction with the LSP coordinator and the LSP working group
- The LSP funds some initial facilitation work, to establish the partnership – linking to the work to develop the market towns toolkit
- Further assistance should be considered in discussion with Somerset County Council and the Community Council for Somerset, as part of their remit to support market towns regeneration and development, and in the light of the future development of the Somerset Market Towns Forum, and the Market and Coastal Towns initiative.

### **Recommendation for this section**

- To establish the South Somerset Market Towns Community Planning group, as a sub-group of South Somerset Together, in line with the guidelines set out in this report

## Market Towns Vision - Proposed Structure for Delivery



## Section 10 – The “Bridging” Protocol – linking local plans with the Community Strategy

Introduction – a brief re-cap on the LSP and the Community Strategy

### 10.1 What is required of the community strategy? (ref ODPM)

- Sets out a long term vision for an area focusing on improving the quality of life
- Contain economic, social and environmental objectives to ensure that the vision contributes to the sustainable development objectives
- Produce action plans which identify priorities that will contribute to the achievement of the long-term outcomes
- Develop a shared commitment to implementing action plans
- Set arrangements for monitoring and reviewing strategies and reporting progress to communities

### 10.2 To do this the LSP, through the community strategy will provide the means for:

- Improving the co-ordination of services delivered by many different services
- Responding to the concerns of local communities
- Delivering services in ways which suit people who depend on them (being customer focussed)
- Taking account of the needs of future generations

10.3 Two key principles for a successful community strategy are **successful partnership working and high quality community involvement**. The potential is for ‘joined up’ services and policies and a more focussed co-ordinated channel for getting things done.

But is this enough?.....

10.4 Clearly community strategies provide a **potential** route by which market town and parish plans can influence the planning and delivery of local services. The use of high quality community planning processes will also build the communities capacity and enthusiasm to help themselves. The ultimate win-win situation!

10.5 The central purpose of this project was to help turn the potential for a route to influence into a **reality**, whilst building on the opportunities to strengthen local capacity to use the route to greatest effect.

### *Linking parish and town plans with the Community Strategy (also known as ‘bridging’)*

Key reference source “Planning for vital communities – good practice in linking parish plans, market town plans and community plans” Countryside Agency. (drawn from “Bridges” research project)

10.6 The ‘bridges’ research project was commissioned by the Countryside Agency and carried out by the Countryside and Community Research Unit, University of Gloucestershire. Its brief was to investigate and develop linkages between community led market town / parish plans and the development of community strategies through LSP’s.

10.7 The ‘bridges’ research project concluded that in practice links between parish and market town action plans and the Community Strategy they came ‘under’ have not yet been firmly established. Links between the two are crucial. **Local plans can articulate need and provide evidence, while the community strategy can help broker policies and decisions.** The research also proposed an assessment framework to assess plans for their fit with the community strategy.

10.8 The advantages for the town / parish plan are clear from establishing good links to the Community Strategy – influence and resources being just two. There are also benefits for the Community Strategy by encouraging robust local plans, and providing effective means for linking and evaluating:-

- A firmer local information base upon which to define the key issues to confront
- A better picture of very local priorities around which to frame service delivery policies
- The prospect of greater collaboration by local communities and
- The enhanced legitimacy that comes from an effective and wide reaching programme of local consultation

### First Steps for effective bridging

10.9 Local community plans are likely to refer to two types of outcome:

- Action which can be locally delivered
- A desire to influence the policies, decisions and actions of other bodies

10.10 The first (local action) may need advice and support, and engagement with outside bodies – our highly commended community development approach reflects well on South Somerset’s capacity to enable local projects to succeed.

10.11 The second outcome – influence – is where a community is requiring **change** – and is therefore affected by the **quality and influence** of the LSP. **This aspect is of greater interest to the Market Towns Vision.**

### 10.12 Types of influence sought by town / parish plans

- Influence the overall direction of the priorities of the Community Strategy or a partners own policy eg for affordable housing, traffic calming; town centre recovery
- Influence the **Local Development Framework** (ref CA guidance on Parish / Market Town plans and the planning system)

- Influence specific **decisions or action** beyond local control eg: reuse of derelict site; future of village school

### **10.13 In responding to the published plan, the LSP needs to consider whether:**

- The community strategy 'fits' with the proposal – and the LSP should be encouraging partners to assist in delivery – eg: proposals which would contribute to the successful achievement of outcomes
- The proposal is clearly identified, or whether further work is needed to fully evaluate.
- The community strategy is relevant – if not refer to appropriate bodies + funders

**NB** A formal response to land use based planning issues may result in some form of supplementary planning guidance, but this has yet to be fully determined, and is beyond the scope of this project – this aspect should be resolved during the revision of the Community Strategy and the drafting of the “bridging” protocol as the new Local Development Framework progresses.

10.14 The “bridges” research project and subsequent good practice guidance recommended that each LSP should publish its own guide which six stages of good practice, and recommends the production of a user friendly guide to local bridging which includes:

- Context - aims functions and roles of CS, LSP, local community plans
- Protocol for engagement – *the bridging protocol*
- The template for how proposals can be fitted with CS

The model “bridging” protocol also recommended:

- Establishing a community support network
- “Making it happen” working groups at town / parish level

### **10.15 Six good practice steps for bridging (see also Appendix F)**

1 – Clarify the community strategy context and processes (a simple guide to the LSP, scope and remit of local plans

2 – Identify the roles and responsibilities of participants

3 - Create effective bridging structure and processes

4 – Facilitate good matching between local community-led plans and community strategies, so that the former can help shape and fit into the latter

5 – Provide adequate resources

6 – Monitor the effectiveness of bridging

### **Establishing a “bridging” protocol for South Somerset**

10.16 The table below makes proposals for South Somerset Together, using the key actions contained in the Countryside Agency Guidance – further detail are contained in the publication.

Key Action	Who	When
<b>Stage One – clarify the Community Strategy context and processes</b>		
Explain the 'local bridging context' to all potential participants, in its own local guide to bridging	Via LSP coordinator	At training events; within published material
<i>Recommendation to establish this stage</i>		
Review this framework, submit for approval to the LSP board, and provide the means to publish in a variety of formats	The LSP working group and LSP coordinator to	During revision process
Include the introduction of this protocol within the partnerships workshop, identified in Section 6 – the market town healthcheck	Healthcheck working group	See section 6
<b>Stage Two – identify the roles and responsibilities of participants</b>		
Include in the local guide to bridging an explanation of the following participants: LSP officers & board members; market town partnerships, (parish plan steering groups), LA members and officers; town and parish councils, the RCC, SALC, CVS and other voluntary sector bodies; other 'forums' eg Area Committees	LSP Working group to develop	published & reviewed annually
Consider representation of local partnerships	<i>See section 9</i>	
Ensure involvement of elected members at appropriate times	LSP co-ordinator	Ongoing
Identify one named contact for each local community plan, to facilitate good communication	LSP coordinator	Review annually
<i>Recommendation to establish this stage</i>		
As above - Include the introduction of this protocol within the partnerships workshop, identified in Section 6 – the market town healthcheck – deliver the workshop to both officers, members and partnership groups	Healthcheck working group	See section 6
<b>Stage Three – create (maintain) effective bridging structures and processes</b>		
Clarify timetables to ensure that local community based planning groups are fully aware of when and how their plans can be dovetailed into the preparation of the community strategy	LSP coordinator	When individual contact first made
Provide advice and support to partnerships, monitor plans, help with brokering & bridging ( <i>described as the community support network</i> )	Market town coordinator network / community development network	ongoing
Establish joint 'making it happen' working groups of 2 – 3 key participants from both 'sides' to oversee bridging arrangements, and monitor progress of assessment of plan.	(LSP coordinator to trigger), convened by relevant ADM, with market town coordinator plus 3 members of local steering group, plus ward & county member	First meeting held within six weeks of receipt of plan, (meet at least quarterly)
Establish the 'bridging protocol' (ie terms of engagement) that sets out clear and consistent general procedures, entitlements and expectations, but which could be interpreted flexibly and negotiated at an individual level (see outline in appendix)	Agreed by LSP board, other roles within protocol	Defined by protocol
<i>Recommendations to establish this stage</i>		

Review the templates and guidance and produce a protocol for adoption and inclusion in published arrangements for 'bridging'	Working group, as part of review of Community Strategy – processes for evaluation	Draft Feb 06, for 'testing' during revision of strategy & partnership workshops
Include the agreed arrangements for bridging, and the roles of all participants, as part of the workshops devised to establish and 'train' partnerships; and for LSP partners.	Healthcheck working group, with LSP coordinator / working group	Process plan by Feb 06
<b>Stage Four – facilitate good matching – to help local community plans shape and 'fit into' the local community plan</b>		
Categorise local community plans and proposals	Local partnerships, supported by MT coordinator	During final drafting of plan
Prioritise LSP themes (eg affordable housing) or areas (eg: by deprivation) to guide local activity	LSP Board	For publication of community strategy
Publish, publicise and update plans, highlighting outcomes and achievements – demonstrate examples of good bridging	LSP / partnerships	From publication 'regularly' to suit local need
<b>Recommendations to establish this stage</b>		
Establish a bridging template to assess the 'fit' of local proposals with the objectives and priorities of the LSP (provide template within market town healthcheck toolkit – sample assessment in appendix)	Working group as part of review of community strategy	Draft Feb 06
Establish and resource a communications strategy for SST; provide process plan for training through MPPF / healthcheck toolkit on publishing local plans & projects	LSP Working group / healthcheck working group	April 06
<b>Step Five – Provide adequate resources</b>		
Secure funding and staff resources to facilitate the coordinator network, the 'making it happen' working groups, training and briefing of participants, community capacity building	LSP, partners, use of existing resources	Annual review
<b>Recommendation to establish this stage</b>		
Make proposals to LSP board & partners, in the light of this report, for resourcing this (and other) aspects of the Market Towns Vision having first considered the impact and use of existing staff resources (eg the Area development teams, rural community council, MCTi agents etc)	Market Town Strategy working group	By Jan 06
<b>Stage Six – Monitor the effectiveness of bridging</b>		
Monitor progress on implementing the action points from local community plans – and including the number of plans in place, feedback from community on process and progress	LSP coordinator during LSP evaluation process	Annually
Monitor progress with implementation of individual plans, including the evaluation of 'partner' support and advice [this is currently mainly done by the area development teams, direct to the District Council area committees]	Market town coordinators to feed into LSP working group via ADMs	Quarterly?
<b>Recommendation to establish this stage</b>		
Review future monitoring arrangements of plans, against current arrangements for reporting of area action plans and partnership updates to area committees, making proposals to meet the aims of stage six.	ADM group	Feb 06

10.17 The full report and subsequent guidance outlines a comprehensive process to establish effective bridging, **and so the main recommendation is for the LSP to work through this process itself!** Appendices F, G and H include some additional information, and an overview of the step by step process

## **Conclusion**

10.18 The Market Town Vision will drive the community strategy – the Community Strategy will help deliver the local community plans. Effective use of a “bridging” protocol is the link to make this happen, and is therefore the most critical part of the performance management framework for delivery of the Market Towns Vision.

## **Recommendation from Section 10**

Review the proposed bridging protocol, and revise for adoption following the recommendations to establish bridging and publish arrangements as part of the Community Strategy

# Section 11 – Delivering the Market Towns Vision – policy and framework for performance management

## Introduction

11.1 The Market Towns Vision as developed by this research project, emphasises that increased community involvement with community planning activity is good for democracy and governance through:

- Stronger communities helping themselves
- Efficient service delivery, locally accountable
- Locally led community planning partnerships, with the elected county, district and town councillors fulfilling their community leadership role
- An integration of strategic issues, requiring a multi agency approach at an appropriate level

## Managing performance of the Market Towns Vision

11.3 All LSPs need effective performance management. For a partnership this is more complex than for an organisation.

There are 3 levels to manage performance:-

- Delivery of **outcomes** on the ground
- **Internal working** – efficiency and effectiveness
- Measuring the **added value** ie: the synergy of the partnership

The performance management framework should capture the desired **outcomes** to make a difference and:

- Show links between high level aims, objectives, targets and actions
- Have clear accountabilities
- Involve regular monitoring and active PM through diagnosis, learning and action
- Include feedback mechanisms to community

### Internal working

- Self assessment of process and performance
- Involvement of all sectors of partnership

### Added Value

- Enable partners to identify the extent to which they have exerted influence on the process, culture, policies, plans and activities of the partners / sub-partners
- Enable partners to demonstrate how the partnership has contributed to outcomes

- Provide diagnosis for LSP to modify itself, its work so it becomes more effective

### **The PMF components of the Market Towns Vision**

1. Priorities for action as set out in the Community Strategy, supported by a basket of performance indicators and measures, for review, diagnosis and action planning.
2. A district-wide representative forum for market town partnerships and agencies, to underpin, influence, drive and develop the community strategy
3. A network of community planning partnerships, covering the market towns and served rural areas, producing published, action-focussed, time-bound local community plans, relating to parish plans / steering groups, according to local circumstances
4. A network of market town coordinators linking with practitioners from other agencies, regeneration programmes or CDT's.
5. The Market Town Healthcheck – a seven stage cycle of planning, doing and reviewing, which incorporates a SMART action plan, identification of base line and performance indicators. (employing a national model tailored for South Somerset)
6. A toolkit for practitioners and partnerships to support the effective implementation of the healthcheck approach, including training for participative decision making processes and high quality community engagement techniques
7. Clear and continuous 'bridging' arrangements between local action plans and the community strategy – providing the means to shape and influence the community strategy, and monitor local community plans through formal links to the LSP
8. Annual review and evaluation of the added value of South Somerset Together - including the identification, collection and review of agreed performance indicators and measures linked to the priorities of the community strategy
9. Clear lines for communication and accountability between the various participants and agreed ways to feedback to the community
10. High quality 'agency' arrangements for supporting and developing community planning (eg: SSDC SWRDA, SCC, RCC, SALC)

### **Recommendations from this Section**

Provide a summary of the above components of the performance management framework for the Market Towns Vision, to be incorporated in the revised Community Strategy.

Review the components through the process of revising the Community Strategy to ensure the PMF meets requirements of Government, partners and community

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November 2005**