



Economic Regeneration: A Town Council Strategy for 2024

I. Introduction

The aim of this document is to:

(A) provide an initial desktop analysis of the challenges which Shepton Mallet currently faces in terms of its economic regeneration and a thematic overview of what actions could be taken to overcome these challenges.

(B) propose a structure for idea-generation and decision-making which involves both the town council and external actors. This is what is meant by 'strategy' in this document.

The purpose of the strategy is:

- To inform and steer decisions made by the Town Council which are either directly aimed at economic regeneration or may have an impact on it.
- To enable the Town Council to bid for economic regeneration funding when this becomes available (often requiring 'shovel ready' projects).
- To pave the way for a resilient, partnership-based model for economic regeneration in Shepton Mallet.

This strategy was prepared by a group of councillors and members of the public meeting as a town council working party. As part of the work to prepare this strategy, several of the town's key business stakeholders were informally consulted.

II. Background

In 2020 Mendip DC commissioned LUC to produce [a master plan for Shepton Mallet](#) that could be used as the basis for a bid for Levelling Up funding that subsequently failed. This prompted discussion within SMTC as to how we can attract funding, including via future rounds of Levelling Up funding to support economic regeneration.

Understanding how we can support economic regeneration and where to focus this activity has become more urgent in the light of the folding of some businesses in Shepton Mallet and changes in working patterns and attitudes post COVID. This matters

because it can have positive impacts on the quality of people's lives, including health and wellbeing. In response an economic regeneration working party was established. The town council has an opportunity to influence economic regeneration in our town and should consider adopting a strategy to address this. We need to be realistic about what could be achieved but not underestimate our 'soft power' associated with being the Town Council.

The economic regeneration strategy is linked to the wider Town Council Strategic Plan which is currently being refined ahead of being adopted in April 2024. Other internal strategy documents may already exist or emerge (e.g. tourism) and this strategy will need to be cross-referenced to avoid duplication or oversight.

III. Definition and assumptions

We have adopted the following criteria to identify what we consider economic regeneration to look like:

- The creation of new jobs and security of existing jobs
- An increase in revenue for businesses
- The creation of resilient businesses
- An increase in footfall to the town centre
- An increase in the spend in town

Economic regeneration should not be at the expense of – and indeed should generate:

- An increased sense of community ownership of place and a feeling of belonging
- A more positive perception of the town as a place to live, work and enjoy leisure and social activities

IV. What we know about Shepton

This is a town that has a younger overall population than some other Mendip towns. It is also a town of considerable heritage originally based on the wool industry and trade and more recently cider, brewing and cheese making. We have a long-standing market and are seen as a historic market town, supported by our high street. We have a number of small independent businesses. Several previous consultations have identified the need to develop place making (including the appearance of the centre) and the brand of the town.

We have limited data (or at least, this has not been collated and analysed) to support this work. However, data is available via the Office for National Statistics (ONS) [comparison data Mendip towns population and age profile .xls](#) and other existing sources. In addition, there is data available from previous town consultations including

one commissioned by Mendip District Council from LUC (Land Use Consultants), and the Community Strategic Plan 2006-2021 (*At a Crossroads*). Developing qualitative data from key stakeholders such as landlords and businesses is a clear omission. We are in the process of collecting this data and building relationships. We are geographically close to a number of major attractions and events such as the Bath & West Showground, Glastonbury Festival and a number of economically successful towns.

More data could be useful in the following areas:

- Demographics including working age population, anything on numbers seeking work. Some outline data is available but needs further analysis [ONS data for employment Shepton Mallet 2020](#)
- Data relating to academic attainment, type of work opportunities
- Distance from Bath & West, Glastonbury festival, to locate Shepton Mallet in the region
- Cost of housing- average in Somerset £369K
- Number of visitors to the prison, Glastonbury festival, Bath & West
- Number of empty high street venues

V. SWOT analysis

Strengths

- Well placed between significant population centres that are near enough to spend money in Shepton; Bristol & Bath, Frome, Wells, Glastonbury
- Attractive heritage buildings: Market Cross, Prison, Anglo, Leg Square
- Collett Park / Strawberry line intersection
- Proximity to good outdoor space - Somerset Circle, Mendip Hills AONB
- Tesco traffic (significant number of regular local visitors)
- Kilver Court - retail space & wedding venue ready to reopen
- Strong tradition of independent retail businesses
- Sufficient available employees in diverse 11k population

Weaknesses

- Narrow retail / hospitality offer (few reasons to visit town centre)
- Few specific tourist attractions (only Prison tours)
- Poor visual experience (poor maintenance, litter, pigeons, empty shops)
- Low footfall in town centre
- Weak branding (no strong identity)
- Low aspiration historically
- Centralisation of commercial property ownership
- Poor public transport links to nearby towns, villages and larger cities

Opportunities

- Strawberry Line & Somerset Circle multi-user paths
- New play park in Collett Park and plans for improved facilities (hospitality, toilets, etc.) with indoor and outdoor seating.
- CG Fry housing development
- Economic & aspirational growth in Southwest
- Kilver Court in new ownership
- Anglo maintenance work
- Commercial Road redevelopment
- Local government reorganisation
- Emerging talent (Art Bank, Aurora Kusina, Pillars 501)
- A number of local festivals and events which have potential to grow
- British Solar Renewables is one of the largest solar renewable companies in the country and is keen to reinvest in the community
- In recent years home-working has become normalised so people are more likely to be able to live in Shepton while working for a company based elsewhere.
- Similarly, there has been a national increase in people setting up their own businesses or going self-employed which may mean more people are able to live and work in Shepton Mallet
- There may be another round of Levelling Up funding which we could apply for
- Potential for a new CIC to be formed to operate markets in Shepton Mallet with a clearly defined brief and town council influence.

Threats

- National economic uncertainty
- Local government reorganisation
- Move to online shopping
- Loss of commercial property to housing
- Ignoring evolving changes to what makes a vibrant high street these days - as opposed to the old mainly standard-retail model - will lead to failure.

VI. Interpreting the SWOT: outcomes and actions

All work must be undertaken in collaboration with other stakeholders for it to both resonate with their needs and be sustainable.

A. A vibrant and welcoming town centre

<i>What?</i>	<i>How?</i>
A more vibrant market culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regain control of the markets and develop the infrastructure, running and maintenance of the market. • Support the running of a range of successful street markets throughout the year with input from the Town Council. • Apply for premises licence covering Town Street, the Market Place and up to the junction by Morrisson's, to facilitate markets and other events. • Ensure there is excellent branding and publicity for markets including signage.
A wider, reliable and more varied retail offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage coordinated opening hours for the town centre. • Support pop-up shops in vacant premises. • Engage with the landlords to encourage vacant premises to be fully realised. • Engage with nearby businesses and encourage them to consider setting up business in Shepton Mallet. • Support the operation of agencies to support small businesses. • Explore options relating to parking in town with the aim of increasing footfall in the town centre.
More reasons to visit the town aside from retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instigate the creation of a Cider Museum to give visitors a reason to access the town centre. • Consider what other local industries or assets can be capitalised on (wool, cheese, etc.) • Support experiential offer such as walking tours, heritage walks, etc. • Review busking policy and encourage buskers on market days and Saturdays. • Support and develop Prison tours; and support where possible the acquisition of the prison by the current leaseholder from the current owner.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular promotion of the Heritage Trail • Continue to build on Collett Park improvements including redeveloping the hospitality facilities. • Support and publicise our town’s hospitality offer, both one-off events and permanent offerings. • Ensure there is synergy between any tourism strategy and this strategy.
An attractive and welcoming town centre which is clean, tidy and safe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support initiatives like Shepton In Bloom. • Engage with Somerset Council to ensure issues like dumped waste or vandalism are dealt with promptly. • Engage with shop owners and landlords to support them to keep their properties clean and attractive. • Adopt a policy of rapid response to vandalism to the town centre without publicising the issues (positive messaging rather than negative). • Address parking issues to make sure costs are in line with other towns in the area. • Ensure the town centre is clean, working with Somerset Council where appropriate and considering town council action where needed (pest control, etc.).
A town which welcomes new residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By working with estate agents and accommodation providers to promote what is available and find out what is needed. • By constantly promoting a positive message of Shepton on social and other media.

B. A supportive and dynamic business environment

<i>What?</i>	<i>How?</i>

<p>A town which is welcoming to small businesses and entrepreneurs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the Anglo Trading Estate to rebrand as a Small Business Hub and work with it to develop the proposal. • Support the development of a co-working space in town. • Support entrepreneurs to access vacant premises and provide access to training, seminars and support forums, etc. • Work with education providers to develop opportunities for young entrepreneurs including mentors, teenage markets and pop-up shops. • Work with major stakeholders (including property owners) to develop a shared vision for growing business in Shepton Mallet.
<p>A network of businesses who support each other and work together to cross-promote</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage coordinated activities across businesses (late openings, open days, promotional events, etc.) • Encourage and build relationships with other large attractions around Shepton to pull in visitors to Shepton e.g., Bath & West, Glastonbury festival, Kilver Court

C. A town that attracts and caters to visitors

<i>What?</i>	<i>How?</i>
<p>A town which attracts cyclists, runners, walkers, horse-riders and others with its network of multi-user paths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the hospitality businesses in town to ensure they can cater to cyclists, runners, walkers, horse-riders, etc. • Support Shepton Walks to run regular organised walks and walking festivals. • Publish a map of routes, facilities and services for cyclists, walkers or horse-riders online and in print. Raise awareness locally of the network of paths and the opportunities these present. • Encourage cycling in Shepton Mallet and connections with the National Cycle Network.

A town that capitalises on its strengths to attract visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a ‘tourism strategy’ which defines areas of priority focus for promoting the town, including history and heritage; food and drink; outdoor activities; and the art. As a starting point, review the Tourism Strategy 2020 Draft: SMTC Tourism Strategy Draft - Nov 2020.docx
A town that markets itself to visitors year round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to use and develop the Hello Shepton brand to promote Shepton Mallet as a destination. • Explore new ways of reaching audiences.

D. A strong brand for Shepton Mallet

<i>What?</i>	<i>How?</i>
A clear, ambitious image of what to expect from Shepton Mallet and what our town is about. An image which is known to visitors and which residents both recognise to be true and feel proud of.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town council to influence narrative around town brand and engage external consultants for branding exercise when the time is right. Current themes for the town’s image include heritage, families and young people. • Promote positive messages and aspirational ideas in all Town Council communications about the town (including Hello Shepton programmes, etc.) Ensure this message is reflected in third party communication about the town where possible (Visit Somerset, etc.). This can be done ahead of any branding exercise taking place.
A town which is seen as pro-business and actively welcomes new businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the infrastructure and resources available to businesses in the town in targeted industry media. • Create a business-focused publication aimed at attracting new businesses, sharing the views of current businesses.

VII. Keeping the strategy alive: Shepton Business

The Town Council recognises its own limits in terms of resources available to deliver on the actions outlined in this document. Moreover, any activity is more likely to succeed and be sustainable if it is delivered by or in partnership with local stakeholders.

To this end, the working party recommend the creation of a town centre board bringing together representatives from the businesses sector – from large industry to small business – as well as local landlords, resident associations, visitor sites and attractions, heritage organisations, the Chamber of Commerce, the arts and culture sector. This group could be called ‘Shepton Business’.

Shepton Business would meet 4 times a year with the following proposed terms of reference:

- Create a directory of local businesses hosted on Hello Shepton
- Information sharing about local agencies and how they help
- Networking and issue raising
- Hosting business courses and talks
- Provide access to town and county council
- Information sharing and advance notice of plans and events in town

VIII. Conclusion

This strategy will provide a framework for the council to identify deliverable actions to support the economic regeneration of our town in the short to medium term. In time and if successful, Shepton Business should be a key mechanism for strategic thinking around economic regeneration in Shepton Mallet with ongoing input and support from the Town Council.

IX. References

ONS data - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth?msoa=E02006055>

Key points 63/3% working age (median age – 40yrs), 18.7% 15 or under

49.9% deprived in more than one dimension

Qualifications – 20.2% no qualifications 25.7% level 4 and above

Not economically active (of working age) – 31.7% of which 2.9% of which looking for work

Distance to work (n.b. 2021 data) 44.5% more than 10km, 40.2% less than 10km, 34.6% home or other

Biggest employment- 13.6% retail, 9.5 construction, 7.8% education, 6.2% health, 5.6% food manufacture, 4.4% social work, 4.1% wholesale trade, 3.9% public administration

Socio economic classification 46.1% L1-9, 45.8% L10 -15

Somerset intelligence – <http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/economy-and-jobs.html>

<http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/house-prices-2017/>

Mendip average house price £274,000 (2017)

At A Crossroads – Shepton Mallet and Surrounding Areas Community Strategic Plan
2006-2021