

SWT Full Council - 14 January 2020

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, John Hassall, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, Martin Hill, John Hunt, Marcus Kravis, Andy Milne, Richard Lees, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Peter Pilkington, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston and Loretta Whetlor

Officers: Lesley Dolan, Marcus Prouse, Amy Tregellas, Tim Bacon, Joe Wharton, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Robert Hillier, Lisa Redston, Mark Wathen and Jack Johnston

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

94. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors P Bolton, D Durdan, K Durdan, R Habgood, A Hadley, C Morgan, A Pritchard, P Stone, N Thwaites, T Venner, D Wedderkopp, K Wheatley.

95. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr L Baker	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Barr	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Blaker	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Govier	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Milne	All Items	Porlock	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Palmer	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Wedderkopp	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Councillor Mark Blaker declared a prejudicial pecuniary interest in respect of the Petition from My Theatre Matters (Brewhouse) as Director of a Café participating at the Brewhouse and declared he would leave the room for that item.

96.

Public Participation - To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions, statements or petitions from the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 14,15 and 16

- A. Ms Bryony Chetwode (Company Secretary – TravelWatch SouthWest) had submitted the following statement in relation to Item 9 – Taunton Bus Station;

In response to negotiations for the sale of Taunton Bus Station with the Council as potential purchasers, we would like Councillors to ensure any course of action will enable two key outcomes for passengers:

1. Provision of adequate and convenient facilities in town. “Adequate” should be taken to include W.C.s, refreshment, information and shelter. This is especially important for those with accessibility issues, and in encouraging greater public transport use as necessary to tackle environmental issues.
2. Solutions which bear in mind the need for adequate interchange, capable of absorbing the required network growth and potential to increase bus and railway connections. This must be accessible, appropriate, and weatherproof at the station.

The Community must be engaged around future bus interchange provision We hope you will engage with TravelWatch SouthWest by working collaboratively to find the optimum solution for the community, not missing this opportunity to support the growth plan, sustainable transport use, and flow of human resources across the Somerset. TWSW is used to working with Local Government, National Government, Operators and Community Groups, Passengers, and NGO’s, which has given us understanding of triggers for use and avoidance of public transport services.

Taunton community needs reassurance that there will be a good Interchange at all times. The facility provided by the bus station is an asset to passengers and the town, although improvements would be welcomed. If an alternative plan is developed there must not be reduced facility for the community Taunton serves in the short, medium, or long term. An alternative plan should enhance the passenger experience and be considered as an opportunity to improve the cost, reliability, quality, interchange, and perceived safety of public transport use.

Beyond the immediate Building

The Bus Interchange is important as an appropriate scheme could us station could provide an opportunity to address the community concerns:

1. Ageing Population: Good, straightforward, bus connections enable vulnerable people to be delivered from isolation and access services and retain independence without the expense of Council funded transport.
2. Declining High Street; Public transport can deliver people in close proximity of businesses and in (with less congestion and bus priority) better time. As we move to a more leisure-based society public transport

enables the pubs and restaurant to receive business without risking lives as a consequence of drink driving.

3. Social inclusion: The Social Mobility Index shows that the connecting rural communities Taunton serves are as challenged as those in the North of England. Bettering the connectivity is crucial to improving opportunity and retaining our young talent.
4. Accessibility: A good interchange enables access to services and other routes. This is essential for the aging population, vulnerable, child burdened, luggage laden, and weather shy. In a town with an aging population, tourists, County hospital connections, a plan for growth and inclusion, and South Westerly weather, this is logical.
5. Air Quality and Climate Change: The costs of these are both local and global. The benefits of a switch from car to public transport are well documented. Tackling congestion, providing alternatives to cars, and sustainable interchanges form part of a good bus interchange plan and would help the Council meet the Climate Emergency objectives.

Time for a Step Change in Taunton

We would be very pleased if the Council could work with the TWSW and the community when addressing the issues above as it is our aiming to bring a better experience for passengers.

It may even be possible to tie in with future government funding initiatives, whether attached to bus companies buying into sustainability, digitalisation or High Street regeneration.

We need this project to deliver a step change for Users.

- B. Mr David Redgewell (Vice Chair – Severnside Rail Future) had submitted the following statement in relation to Item 9 – Taunton Bus Station;

From a passenger perspective and an organisation which considers Taunton to be a major transport interchange of the SouthWest, whilst we welcome the new bus rail interchange Taunton Station, we are acutely aware that the design of the interchange being built by Network Rail and First Group only involves 5 bus bays. Therefore, we would be extremely concerned if the Council thought that by shutting Tower Street Bus station that these facilities could be replaced at Taunton Railway Station, without considerable amounts of work and investment in building. We therefore think it is essential that we retain the bus station for its regional connectivity (Wellington, Tiverton, Axminster, Wells and Burnham and Bridgewater), as well as being a major hub for national express.

Whilst we wouldn't be against the relocation of the bus station within the town centre and are aware that the Crescent has been previously considered, we would not consider it appropriate to make the Parade into a linear bus Station.

The bus station currently includes a café, information centre, staff accommodation and toilets. We would urge the Council to consider full Consultation allowing engagement with Somerset Bus Users, TravelWatch

SouthWest, UK Citizens, and Transport Focus etc. There must be consultation with.

We would have liked the opportunity to raise this in a public forum but understand this could not happen for an exempt item. Therefore, we are asking that this letter is circulated to members of the Executive. We must emphasise that, our concern is with retention of facility to the community and not in the land and that if the facility is moved, we would like full consultation with key stakeholders.

C. Mr Nigel Behan asked the following questions in relation to Item 9 – Taunton Bus Station;

1. Will Somerset West & Taunton (SWT) commit (as part owner of the site) to continue to maintain the site as a Bus Station and in conjunction with Somerset County Council (SCC) who state:

“Together we look at the transport requirements throughout Somerset and work out the best way to achieve a comprehensive and efficient transport network.”

And

“We have long recognised the benefits of sustainable modes of transport and is committed to encouraging residents, businesses and visitors to the county to adopt a positive, healthy lifestyle which embraces walking and cycling as a regular part of their daily routine wherever possible.”?

2. As “The County Council and District Councils are working together to produce a joint Climate Emergency Strategy” will the survey/“Have your say” drops-in consult on public transport (including an expansion of the bus and train network) and appropriate infrastructure that is necessary for this purpose: for instance securing the existing Bus Station and creating public transport hubs (interchanges) etc?
3. How will Service Users, Electors, Citizens, Residents and Council Taxpayers be meaningfully consulted on the future of Taunton Bus Station and additionally an integrated Public Transport (buses and trains etc) Network (and prioritising it as part of tackling (anthropogenic) climate change) in Somerset West and Taunton (and beyond)?

Councillor Marcus Kravis (Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and Economic Development) thanked Mr Behan for his questions and responded that whilst the item was to be held in confidential session, he would say that for economic and social reasons the Council was keen to ensure there was a more than suitable bus service for the whole of the district. Any decisions around the Bus Station

and whether it stays open or closed is down to the Bus Company and also the County Council bears responsibility.

97. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Chair of the Council**

The Chair wished everyone present a Happy New Year. The Chair and the Mayor of Taunton, Cllr Francesca Smith had met with PROMISE mentoring, a registered charity which helped mentor young people from early years right up to young adults who are care leavers. If Councillors were interested in becoming mentors the Chair had further information and leaflets to share.

The Chair highlighted the upcoming Taunton Swimathon, of which there was hoped to be a Mayor of Taunton's team and a request for sponsorship was made.

Councillors were notified of the thanks that had been received from Taunton Foodbank from all the food and monies that was collected at the previous Full Council before Christmas.

The Chair reminded Councillors of the upcoming Holocaust Memorial Service on the 27th January 2020 at St. John's Church, Taunton, which would also be the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

98. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council clarified that in terms of the Taunton Swimathon the Mayor of Taunton had declared that the Leader of the Council would also be submitting a team and would be swimming at the event. Councillors Henley, Booth and Kravis would be joining, and she encouraged other Councillors to come forward for a brilliant cause.

The Leader declared that the Ice Rink which had been installed in Castle Green, Taunton, over the Christmas period had been very successful and was predicted to make a small profit for the District. The Leader was currently in discussions to use that profit to go towards the Council's climate change agenda, to offset some of the carbon emissions that the rink generated. She commended the work of the Communications team and in particular Officers Georgie Andrews and Craig Stone.

Councillors would have seen in the news in the last week or so of the decision of Somerset County Council to push to become a Unitary Authority. The District Councils in the region were working collaboratively on an alternative suggestion as the Districts believed that services were much better delivered at a local level and were already doing great things there in that regard around partnership working. The Leader promised to keep the Council, and the public up to date as the situation unfolded.

99. **To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary**

Meeting has been called any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13

No such questions in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13 had been received.

100. **Receipt of Petition on behalf of My Theatre Matters (Brewhouse)**

Ms Val Hammond (Chair of Trustees of Taunton Theatre Association) presented the petition's demands on behalf of My Theatre Matters which had been included within the Agenda along with a pro-forma assessing the potential approvals required;

Good evening Councillors I am Val Hammond, Chair of Trustees of Taunton Theatre Association, which as you know is a registered charity and which has successfully revived your capital asset The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre in Taunton. The petition was originally presented to Council on the 8th October 2019 where it had been signed by over 3000 people. The petition requested an increase in funding to enable Taunton Theatre Association to sustain its high quality and accessible and diverse arts centre in Somerset's County Town due to the planned redevelopment being put on hold by the Council's new administration. The great majority of the signatories live in the District but some of them further afield evidencing the venues positive economic impact.

Taunton Theatre Association is the largest provider of arts and culture in the District, providing a rich and diverse programme at our base and increasingly working with others across the region and nationally. We're a successful organisation, offering over a thousand events each year, six to seven days a week, day and night and with visitors now reaching 72,000 people a year. As you will recall, four years' work with the previous Council resulted in well researched, realistic and ambitious plans for a Multi-Purpose Venue with a 750 seat theatre, cinema, studio theatre, art gallery, and cultural space. This flexible and sustainable venue would re-invigorate Taunton and benefit the whole region and its people. The project, anticipated for the Brewhouse site, could be re-purposed to provide a spectacular centrepiece for Firepool.

However, rather than repeat the presentation that was made to Council in October I would like to comment on the proposal before you and update on what has happened since then. I must emphasise, that the request for additional funding did not originate from TTA but was made in response to a request from the Council on 1st April 2019 to set out clearly the financial implications of the proposed Brewhouse development not going ahead as planned. On the basis of this TTA brought forward a financial proposal demonstrating the additional costs necessary to sustain its cultural programme if it were to remain in the aged and seat limited Brewhouse facility we showed both best and worst case scenarios. Best case TTA winning grants from elsewhere, worst case based on not winning any grants at all. Something we have not experienced to date, although grants are usually dependent on there also being local Council support.

In the papers before you tonight, the figures showed the worst case for one year, that year has been rounded up and presented as if it was the case for each year. I put it to you that although it is wise to consider the worst case, the way it is presented is misleading especially as it includes the existing grant. We anticipated negotiation on would, could and couldn't be afforded and to be asked to taper our request accordingly. Instead there have been no discussions on this particular aspect and little engagement recently. With uncertainty surrounding the planned redevelopment and funding TTA are in limbo, uncertain if we can continue to deliver the breadth and quality of arts provision successfully developed since we re-opened the Brewhouse in 2014, and as demanded by the public.

The re-development project, which could solve the sustainability issue, is on hold whilst The Brewhouse, the Council's own asset further degrades, for example, during the Christmas show, The Railway Children, which was itself very enthusiastically received by very strong audiences, we had to close the Theatre to the public and cancel performances when water poured through the roof and into the main electricity board. We were grateful for the supply of the Council's maintenance team, but must emphasise that this kind of unplanned expense is very likely to occur due to the age and structure of the building. A reason for looking seriously at redevelopment. For our part, TTA has already taken the difficult decision to close the premises on Mondays and further changes may be necessary without sufficient funding.

I would ask you please tonight to think carefully about your decision. It could well affect the future economic development of our County Town. As The Brewhouse is a key driver of the day and night-time economy and brings people from across the region as well as meeting local needs. The variety and scope of activities that we offer are unlikely to be delivered at any other centre on such a consistent basis across the whole age groups and cultural spectrum. We appreciate the Council has many demands on its funds and attention, but we must say that from our own hard-won experience it is harder to generate a lost theatre than to keep a successful venture going. Please support and engage with us to find a solution that works for all. Thank you.

Councillor Benet Allen (Portfolio Holder – Communications and Culture) responded and thanked Val for her presentation, and appreciated the work that The Brewhouse has done over the last four years. The petition did not make direct mention of the financial situation but he confirmed that there is provision in the forthcoming budget to maintain the £132,000 per annum which is the extent to which the Council currently subsidised The Brewhouse. He pointed out that there was another fairly large theatre in the District in Minehead which received absolutely no Council subsidy at all. They were quite good at fundraising and he implored The Brewhouse to look in all directions for funds. There was also an extra £28,000 in the current budget which he believed was for essential statutory maintenance to the building and to keep it running. The Council was very pleased with the TTA's stewardship of The Brewhouse but he thought we could all agree that The Brewhouse was not in a very good physical shape and the building has got some very serious problems and rebuilding on that site may not be the easiest way forward. There was also, as he was sure everybody was aware, a

rectangle on the new Firepool Development Plan marked 'venue' and as most people were aware there was talk about moving The Brewhouse or some theatre into that slot. So the existing building we have got wasn't really going to do the trick. Nonetheless the current subsidy would continue and he responded as to why the previous report wasn't brought to Full Council. Simply we had been advised by our s151 officer that there was no budgetary provision to provide the extra £1.2 million pounds being asked for over three years and the report was pulled on that basis. Since we were considering new developments over at Firepool we must necessarily keep the project on hold for the time being. TTA were asked to continue to do the excellent work that they had been doing and obviously to look for funds wherever they could find them. They would be aware that they cannot rely on the District Council as a sole source of funding and the Council had many demands on its funding and we were doing our best to allocate our funds as we could. We would continue to engage in dialogue with The Brewhouse about current operations and its long-term future.

Councillor Caroline Ellis made comments of support for The Brewhouse and the TTA and considered it a vital part of Taunton and the wider district. She requested access to the previous feasibility study which included the business case and plan for the redevelopment of The Brewhouse and the previous thinking of the last administration. As an organisation we needed a much better grip on arts and culture. It was a really important partnership and a better way was needed going forward of resolving this. The Brewhouse was vital for the town.

Councillor Norman Cavill stated that the economic impact of The Brewhouse in the last year had amounted to £2.4 million and a large amount of that had been retained in the area. If you were moving a company into the area you need that arts culture, and this was necessary to the town being a growing town. You had to have a vibrant theatre offer, that is full-time and of a size that makes it viable.

Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Leader of the Council) responded that she partly echoed Cllr Allen's points and appreciated that it has taken time to get to this point. The Leader advised that there had been difficulties since coming in as a new administration in May 2019 when the Transformation Programme did not survive impact with reality. There are many things we have had to initiate to ensure that basic services are stabilised such as grass cutting, telephone calls answered and bins are collected. That stabilisation has been the paramount focus of the Council, and along the way we had advised TTA that the new administration does value arts and culture, but despite what may have been said by the previous administration, there were not the funds available to build a new building or provide the £1.2 million request which was not in the budget in October. The Council would be continuing to provide a grant, which is one of the biggest grants that the Council gives out and is proposed to continue in budget setting and is for Council to decide and dialogue would of course continue. The Leader personally reiterated her belief that TTA did great things, with her own family and friends seeing shows recently and there were really great opportunities for all of us including local children to go. TTA did a fantastic job, unfortunately there are so many different pulls on our services the Council just needed to spin all those plates, and whilst it's just taking a little bit of time to get there we are going as fast as we can.

The Chair drew the item to a close, and as no motions were forthcoming by default the Council decided to take no further action.

101. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED that the press and the public be excluded from the meeting for the items numbered 9 and 10 on the Agenda as the items contained exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

102. **Taunton Bus Station**

Councillor Marcus Kravis (Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and Economic Development) introduced the report and proposed the recommendations as written in the confidential report.

During the course of the debate and discussion in confidential session an amendment was proposed by Councillor Blaker and seconded by Councillor Aldridge as follows;

- i. This Council expresses concern that changes to Bus Services might negatively impact on residents across the District, and will seek to engage with both Somerset County Council and First Bus to understand and scrutinise the proposals.

The amendment to the motion was discussed and thus put to the vote where it was lost.

RESOLVED that the Council approved the recommendations as written in the confidential report.

103. **Firepool**

Councillor Marcus Kravis (Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and Economic Development) introduced the item and moved the recommendations as written in the report. Tim Bacon, the Council's Specialist Officer then gave Councillors a brief presentation.

Council **RESOLVED:**

1. Business Case development continues as set out in the confidential report including further external advice on the scheme as a whole, sought on the business case work prepared and the outcome is reported back to Council this includes the costs of design development for an LDO, detailed design on Blocks 1 and 2, business case development for the venue and on delivery options including the possibility of developing the site through a Special Purpose Vehicle and project team costs.
2. The Council allocated a confidential budget amount for the next phase of the development work for the site, to be spent across the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years.
3. The budget to be funded by a confidential budget amount from the Economic Growth and Prosperity Fund underwritten by the Business Rates Smoothing Reserve and a confidential amount from the Town Centre Regeneration existing budget allocated within the Growth Programme.
4. Continued negotiations with the current prospective occupiers in consultation with the S151 Officer and Asset Management.
5. That a Local Development Order is started as soon as possible together with the other planning development work as set out in the confidential report.

Councillor Lisgo declared a wish that her vote of abstention was recorded in the minutes.

(The Meeting ended at 8.50 pm)