

SWT Full Council - 27 January 2020

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

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

Officers: James Barrahan, Lesley Dolan, Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, James Hassett, Steve Hughes, Wendy Lewis, Lisa Redston, Clare Rendell and Amy Tregellas

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

104. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors R Habgood, R Henley, Marcia Hill, D Mansell, S Nicholls, P Stone and K Wheatley.

105. 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 P Bolton	All Items	Minehead	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 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 C Morgan	All Items	Stogursey	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 T Venner	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Wedderkopp	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Wedderkopp	All Items	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
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

106. **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**

Mr Shawn Rutter (No Taunton BID) made the following statement in relation to Agenda Item 12 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

Good evening, I'm speaking for No Taunton BID, representing the significant number of businesses opposed to the new Taunton BID proposal, some of whom have joined me tonight.

BID is an emotive subject, probably more-so because of Taunton's poor BID history. Whilst some voters might see value and can easily afford it, there are many that just don't see the value, and don't want to be forced to part with their hard earned cash, at a time when high street running costs are high enough. But let's move onto my main point, your BID ballot voting decision for your properties, and the moral dilemma you face in making that decision.

This Council is legislated as a BID partner, and has a vested interest in BID businesses investing in one of its towns, but this council also has a moral responsibility to do right by both voting sides. All this makes you a very different voter.

The only way a fair ballot can be achieved for the businesses BID is meant to be for, is if this council does the right thing and abstains from voting for its properties, in order to let the businesses decide for themselves.

At average BID ballot turnout, just this councils ballot vote for its 11 properties, will amount to about 6% of the total votes cast, and 11% of the cumulative rateable-value vote. This is significant block voting bias from just one voting decision, and if the poor turnout at the YES campaign event last week is anything to go by, this weighting could be a lot more.

Despite being a NO campaigner, note that I'm not stood here asking you to vote NO for your properties as perhaps I should – because morally that's not fair given it would cause voting bias against those businesses wanting a BID. So you should not vote NO.

And so by the same reasoning you should not vote YES for your properties, as it would cause voting bias against all those businesses not wanting a BID.

If Taunton is to do BID yet again, it will only work if the true majority of real businesses vote it in, and the only way that can happen is a ballot without council voting influence. Only last week I spoke with a Director of the last BID, and he said what made it exceptionally hard last time was not having the full support of businesses, and we all know how that BID ended.

Say you vote YES for your properties, and your block vote effectively swings BID in, do you really want to be known as the council that despite Taunton's BID history and being warned, helped force BID in against the will of the true majority of businesses?

So far you have done all the right things as a council by supporting development of this BID proposal and that's only right. BUT the fairest and most morally acceptable decision for you tonight, is to abstain from voting for your properties, and be proud that you have embraced the true spirit of BID regulations by leaving the decision to the businesses.

So Councillors – putting it simply, you should actually be pleased that this is one of those rare occasions, when you are allowed to let others make the final decision for a change.

And with BID, that's the way it should be, in order for you to give it the best chance of success.

Thank you.

Mr Nigel Pearce (President - Taunton Chamber of Commerce) made the following statement in relation to Agenda Item 12 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

Firstly I would just like to thank you on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce for your support to date and for allowing us the opportunity to speak. In representing the wider business community, some based in the town centre and some further afield such as Blackbrook. Although I have an office within the BID area I am an architect, it would therefore reasonable to ask 'What benefit am I going to get from the BID?' There is a lot of support from other businesses and the wider professional services. Their reasons for doing so include the need to attract good quality staff, and this can be a struggle in the town when we are in competition with Exeter and Bristol. It is not all about salary levels, and lifestyle and enjoyment can be a much higher issue on the Agenda. For many that means a good and thriving Town Centre, and a place their families can enjoy and use for more purposes than just shopping, making Taunton a really good place to live. So these companies do see the BID as an important factor in their ability to recruit and be successful. As an architect, I am not looking to expand greatly, so recruitment is an optional driver, but the employees of these companies and the companies themselves are my clients and that is why BID is important to me.

Mr Lee Tomkins (Independent Financial Adviser – Blackdown Financial Services) made the following statement in relation to Agenda Item 12 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

I am a businessman in town and actually have three businesses in the proposed BID area. I was involved in the last BID 2007-2012 and was deeply unimpressed. I was asked if I would get involved again this time round and my new line was that I wouldn't as I wasn't impressed with the Council back in the day. However, I've been convinced that you are a new Council now and hopefully you have learnt from those mistakes. So I'm supporting the BID, I think it's a worthy cause and if the BID and the Council work together they can make the town a great place. My experience of the people that I have met in the BID environment this time is there is some good people there and some good heads and some good ideas. I think it is vitally important that there is communication between the Council and the BID.

Ms Mel Amor (Crystals Bath Place & Vice-Chair of Bath Place Traders Association) made the following statement in relation to Agenda Item 12 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

I urge you to vote for the BID because it is an opportunity for the business community of Taunton to form a strong group of passionate individuals who can

make good decisions and implement new ideas to improve the town's atmosphere and overall visitor experience. Taunton is in need of an injection of well-planned regular events. Events which have been carefully constructed to maximise footfall and encourage more people to shop locally whilst fully enjoying themselves and to attract new visitors too. The more entertained and happy people we attract to the town the more the benefit to our businesses and our communities. I cannot see a better way of raising needed funds than to deliver such a vibrant programme events than the money collected through the BID. It means we are all contributing a fair amount into the fund to benefit from something we have all created together. Also, identifying a distinctive and unique selling point for the town as a whole is something I feel passionate about the BID achieving. Taunton needs to be known for something great so it can enable business to flourish and our culture and communities to grow. We have yet to fathom what defines Taunton, we need to create an identity that is strong and empowering for our town. In my view, the BID team is the best hope of working this out and ensuring Taunton becomes the best possible version of itself. We need to put our minds together, and by this I mean the business community and the Council to work together and consult each other on what really is actually best for the town's businesses, population and potential future visitors. We are the people on the ground. We have constant contact with those who shop, eat, spend and consume. We hear what the public are concerned about, what they are pleased about and enjoy and also general response to the Council's actions actually are. We are the people who know how things are impacting our businesses. The BID is an opportunity for us as businesses and the Council to unite and really put Taunton on the map. By you voting for the BID it means you are supporting our local business community and contributing to the success of the town in general. This relationship needs to strengthen and consultation needs to increase. The BID is how we can do that. By voting for the BID you will be ensuring we have the resources needed to improve our town effectively and efficiently.

Mr Colin Barrell (Chairman - Taunton Chamber of Commerce) made the following statement in relation to Agenda Item 12 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

Thank you for the opportunity to come and address you. I and the working group of around 15 individuals representing large national retailers such as Debenhams, Marks and Spencer, Primark; Small Independent businesses from the likes of Bath Place and the St. James Street area, pubs, charity shops, banks, building societies and estate agents. We've been engaging with them all our working group, we've given people opportunities to come to meetings, individual one to ones, we've had newsletters and questionnaires go out to get information. One of those businesses we've consulted with is Somerset West and Taunton. You after all, are one of the biggest businesses in the town. You've got significant revenue income from your assets within the area of the proposed BID. It is my belief and that of the working group that we need to work in partnership for our mutual benefit and that of our residents, our employees and our visitors. If you know me and my track record both in business and the community, you will appreciate that as well as wanting a successful business for myself and my twenty eight employees, I'm also passionate about making Taunton an even

better place to live and letting more people know about that. Taunton is crying out for all of us to work together and grasp the opportunity a BID can provide. The vast majority of the businesses are prepared to invest and I believe the Council will want to endorse the mandate to move forward by voting yes when the ballot does take place. We are constantly compared to other towns in the region. Most of them have got together and chosen to strengthen those partnerships between the businesses and their Councils by voting yes to a BID. You only need to look down the road to Minehead, Clevedon and Exeter pretty much everybody has got a BID. I urge you to vote yes to unlock the potential we all know exists. Just to finish off, anecdotally, I do a lot of meet and greet in my business, I've met in the last month people from Newton Abbott, Shepton Mallet, Sidmouth, Burnham-On-Sea, Tiverton, Barnstaple – the answers as to why they came to Taunton were many but it's a nice town, its compact, we've got great independents but a good smattering of national shops as well. Friendly people, we get a great welcome, we can now find the car parks because we have got good signage. The traffic is not as bad as Exeter and Bristol. But, you need to shout about it more, they're telling us that, it's a great secret that people don't know about. I believe a BID can do that, I hope you will help us to make that happen.

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

A minutes silence was observed at the start of the meeting to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

The Chair of the Council made the following announcements at the start of the meeting:-

- Councillors were reminded that they were required to complete the Hospitality Book and Register of Interests with any amendments.
- The Chair passed round the sponsorship form for the Swimathon for Councillors to show their support for the team.
- Councillors were reminded about the Songs for Summer event being held on Saturday 29 February 2020 at St James' Church in Taunton.

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

The Leader of the Council made the following announcement:-

- She had attended the Holocaust Memorial Service and thanked all Councillors and Officers that had attended and encouraged all Councillors to attend the civic services that were held across the district.

109. **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 questions were received in relation to Council Procedure Rule 13.

110. **Environment Bill (For Information Only)**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried whether the District Council analysed the Bills that were sent through Parliament and believed that they should be scrutinised. *The Chief Executive advised that officers submitted their opinions to any consultations that had been sent out, however, he was happy to include Councillors within that process in the future.*
- Councillors were glad to see that flood and coastal erosion had been included in the Bill.

Resolved that the report was noted.

111. **Somerset West and Taunton Meeting Timetable**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- The Chair of the Council advised that the Annual Meeting of Full Council would be changed to 5 May 2020.
- The Section 151 Officer advised that he had added some budget setting meetings of Scrutiny, Executive and Full Council to the calendar.
- Councillors requested that the member briefings were held in both the Deane House and West Somerset House.

Resolved that the meeting timetable for the municipal year 2020-21 was noted.

112. **East Quay Wall**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Chair of the Council thanked Chris Hall and his team on behalf of all the Councillors for all the hard work that they had done on the project.
- Concern was raised on Splash Point and the money being spent and whether it would 'future proof' the area from future damage.
- Concern was raised that Government did not help Council like Somerset West and Taunton in situations like that. *Central Government funding was held by the Environment Agency and Local Councils could bid for that. Somerset West and Taunton was in the process of bidding for some but were not likely to get help with the emergency repairs but it was possible that help might be given for Splash Point due to the vulnerable domestic properties located along the Esplanade.*
- Councillors were pleased to see in the report that the southern section was not going to be as expensive to work and that the area had been described as 'sound'.
- Councillors queried who was responsible for the dredging of the Marina and when it was last carried out. *The Council was responsible for the harbour area and the Marina Operator was responsible for the Marina. Officers were in contact with the Marina Operator to ensure they were compliant with their lease agreement.*

- Concern was raised on the design costs and whether the two costs could be combined to save money.

Clarification was given on the two designs needed, the fees were high as they came with a guarantee for the professional services required for the design work, which would be put through the procurement process.

Resolved that Full Council approved the following additions to the Capital Programme, which would be funded through borrowing:-

- 1) The following to the Capital Programme for 2019/20:
 - The sum of £100k be allocated to the wall design works at Splash Point and
 - The sum of £100k be allocated to the wall design works at East Quay
- 2) And the following to the Capital Programme for 2020/21:
 - The sum of £500k be allocated to reinforce the East Quay wall in the central section and
 - The sum of £40k for project management resource to deliver this project to its conclusion.

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

Resolved that the press and public be excluded during consideration of agenda items 11 and 12 on the grounds that, if the press and public were present during the item, there would be likely to be a disclosure to them of exempt information of the class specified in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended as follows: The items contained information that could release confidential information that related to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). It was therefore agreed that after consideration of all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

114. **Housing Revenue Account Acquisitions**

Resolved that Full Council approved the confidential recommendations included with this report.

115. **Taunton Business Improvement District**

Resolved that Full Council approved the confidential recommendations included with this report.

(The Meeting ended at 8.20 pm)