

SWT Executive - 15 February 2023

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)

Councillors Benet Allen, Dixie Darch, Caroline Ellis, Mike Rigby,
Andrew Sully and Sarah Wakefield

Officers: Chris Hall, Marcus Prouse, Lisa Tuck, Hattie Winter, Alison Blom-Cooper,
Jenny Clifford and Joe Wharton

Also Present: Councillors Tom Deakin and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

168. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Chris Booth, Derek Perry and Fran Smith.

169. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive

(Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 21 December 2022 and 18 January 2023 were circulated with the agenda).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Executive held on 21 December 2022 and 18 January 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

170. 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 D Darch	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		& Shadow Taunton Town		
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Sully	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Wakefield	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke

171. Public Participation

Mr Martin Pakes spoke to present his petition, which requested the withdrawal of the proposal to construct a pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Tone between Morrison's Bandstand and Coal Orchard, Taunton (Planning Application 38/22/0347). He spoke for five minutes and made the following points (summarised):

- The response from the public had been horrified.
- The Council should have run a consultation exercise on site and the public was unaware of this forthcoming bridge.
- They had referred people to the Council's report on the reasoning for the bridge but people had not seen the need, with the existing Morrison's bridge in situ.
- The new bridge was considered to be uglier/industrial and trashed the landscaping either side of the river, which was an asset to the Town.
- This bridge was solely for the benefit of the Firepool development and not the Town Centre, which is felt to be what the Future High Street Funds was for.
- The Town Centre was not in a good state and was one of the main drivers for people coming into spend money.
- Concerns were raised around the process of hearing this petition.
- The Council was asked to reconsider the proposal and to visit the site.

Cllr Mike Rigby, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, responded and thanked Mr Pakes for his attendance and the petition. The plan to revitalise the High Street was to create an Active Travel Corridor all the way through from the Railway Station to Vivary Park. The existing Morrisons Bridge was considered quite inadequate as a footbridge and was short of the government guidance on active travel crossings. Adaptation of the existing bridge was considered cost prohibitive and would remove access at all for a period. The Bandstand was not considered to be used for a beneficial purpose. He agreed that the paving in the Town Centre was not good enough and projects were underway to rectify this. Officers had been keen to ensure that the role of developer and Local Planning Authority were kept separate.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councils had invested in its roads, and Councils now needed to invest in walking and cycling routes.

- A query was raised as to whether there was any scope to remove the Morrison's bridge and just have the one bridge.
- *Officers confirmed that the structure of the ramps and steps on the Morrisons bridge were part of the flood defence work. The ramps would also need to be widened and the civil engineering aspect was considered to be very difficult. The options appraisal could be added to the Planning application to add narrative to the decision-making.*
- The Morrison's Footbridge was considered crucial to the cultural offering in that area e.g. Brewhouse.
- Councillors urged that the bridge was made to look as pleasing to the eye as possible and to address concerns over its visual impact.
- *A maximum of 5 trees would be removed but the Council policies of a three for one replacement would apply. The Bandstand could be moved and re-used elsewhere. Officers stated that the bridge was designed to be minimalist in appearance and function. The base structure could be improved upon and officers would work with the Planning team on design questions.*
- It was confirmed that there was a funding deadline associated with this fund of use by the end of March 2024. A whole new scheme from scratch would be difficult to deliver in the timescales. The fund was specified to deliver infrastructure rather than beautification.
- The Portfolio Holder accepted that there are things the Council could do differently with the application e.g. the Bandstand move and to expand on the rationale behind it. The Council would gauge responses from the statutory and non-statutory consultees.

RESOLVED that the Council continued with the Planning Application as developing authority.

172. **Executive Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Executive Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

RESOLVED that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

173. **Taunton Garden Town - Delivering our Vision, the Planning Context**

This matter was the responsibility of Executive for Planning, Transportation and Economic Development, Councillor Mike Rigby, who introduced the item.

This report set out the contents and therefore the direction of travel of the proposed document for 'A Vision for our Garden Town' and sought agreement over its scope.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- It was considered that this was another tool in the armoury in ensuring that planning development was as we aspired, with green infrastructure prioritised.
- The recent developments highlighted in the report such as the Climate and Ecological emergency declarations, phosphates and bio-diversity net gain showcased the changes happening which the Council needed to guide developers and ensure the Garden Town was as green as it possibly could be.
- Further explanation was sought on how this documentation would feed into the new Local Plan development and the effect on those in the process of making applications or about to.
- *This was not setting policy but signposting, bringing together all the different documents on the Garden Town in one place to make it easier for everyone to understand the current picture. It would eventually feed into the Somerset Wide Local Plan.*

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- i) Agreed the scope of the document.
- ii) Agreed the green infrastructure checklist document for consultation with agents/applicants within the Garden Town
- iii) Granted delegated authority to the Assistant Director Strategic Place and Planning in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transportation and Economic Development for the finalisation of the document and associated green infrastructure checklist.

174. **Local Labour Agreement Policy**

This matter was the responsibility of Executive Member for Planning, Transportation and Economic Development, Councillor Mike Rigby, who introduced the item.

The report presented a proposal for the adoption of a new corporate policy that stated the Council's position in relation to increasing local skills and employment opportunities generated by new developments for people within the district.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried what the effect of this would be and how it would be monitored from any baseline and also influence providers of training?
- *There were no baselines at the moment. It was considered difficult to baseline when looking at statistics and the number of external factors which could influence this. The Council would be counting the number of jobs and tracking this over time, which would build a year on year picture going forward. The Council would be brokering relationships with local training providers and businesses.*
- It was commented that there was felt to not be a shortage of work but that there was a need for skills pool improvement locally e.g. in the Construction area bringing in local apprentices. There was considered to

be a skills shortage in the carbon neutral/environmentally friendly building sector.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- i) Approved the adoption of the SWT Local Labour Agreement Policy and Technical Guidance Note (attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to this report) as a material planning consideration in the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice and the assessment of major planning applications and any other development management purposes.
- ii) Delegated the approval of any future changes to the Technical Guidance Note (Appendix 2), including thresholds and target levels to the Portfolio Holder Economic Development, Planning and Transportation and the Director of Place and Climate Change.

175. **Scrutiny Recommendations**

The Leader introduced the item which, at the meeting Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 1 February 2023, that committee in considering the report of the Public Transport Task and Finish Group had recommended that before Somerset West and Taunton Council ceased to exist, the Executive considered the report of the Public Transport Task and Finish Group with a view to forwarding it to the new Somerset Council for their appropriate consideration, if so minded.

Councillor Loretta Whetlor, as Chair of the Task and Finish Group, was invited to make remarks and summarised that it was felt important by Scrutiny that this report was considered by the new Council when in being. She thanked Officers and fellow Task and Finish Group members for their work on the Group.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Task and Finish Group were thanked for their work by Executive Members and the conclusions would be taken close note of.
- The evening bus strategy which had linked towns across the District were enabling shift workers to get to and from work at all hours and to boost the night time economy, which had been hit by the pandemic.
- There was a plan to re-open Taunton Bus Station next year and there was a £1 fare scheme in Taunton.
- Significant early progress had been made since the Task and Finish Group had met.
- There were plans for talks about the linking up of the West Somerset Rail line with Taunton.
- The closure of the Bus Station was a decision by the private bus company at the time and the Councils had stepped in at the time to secure the site's future. The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funds would create a mobility hub at the site and would be an opportunity for a terminus with a proper waiting room, but these would be designed and consulted on later in the year.

- The hard work of the Task and Finish Group was recognised and it was felt valuable that the Group had engaged with stakeholders such as the Colleges.
- A query was raised as to whether any of the suggestions had been actioned e.g. writing of letters?
- *None of the conclusions had been actioned and the proposal is that the new Council actions these if so minded, rather than try to rush these out before the end of March.*

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed to forward the conclusions of the Public Transport Task and Finish Group to the relevant Lead Member at the County Council and the rest of the Somerset County Council Executive to consider and decide if any proposed conclusions can be taken forward.

(The Meeting ended at 7.15 pm)