

# Full Council Meeting – 30 March 2021

## Report of Councillor Marcus Kravis – Asset Management and Economic Development

### 1 Economic Development Annual Report for Cllr Marcus Kravis – February 2021

**Business Restriction Grants:** The team has worked alongside their colleagues in revenues to ensure that the various grants have been distributed throughout the year during the initial lock down, lockdown 2 and lockdown 3 with the local tiered restriction grants as well as the dealing with the Additional Restriction Grants. The total amount we have given out since Covid started is more than £65million.

**High Street Recovery:** The £535,000 Emergency Town Centre Fund has been distributed and the team has been working with the various Town Centre and Village groups to implement their plans for the funding they received. During the year the team has co-ordinated activity across the Council to ensure the safe re opening of the high streets. SWT signed up for 'shopappy.com', making this available for free to businesses throughout the district, allowing them to offer a click and collect services and to encourage people to buy local.

**Somerset Economic Recovery and Growth Plan:** The plan, prepared by Somerset Growth Management Board led by James Hassett, has now gone through the appropriate governance at the various councils. The plan has been submitted, making the case for greater support, to Government for consideration.

**Somerset West and Taunton Economic Recovery and Growth Action Plan:** The SWT Local Economic Recovery and Growth Action Plan has been developed to ensure the effective delivery of the SWT led projects within the Somerset Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, and activities that specifically address key economic priorities and support the most impacted sectors and people across our district. The plan focuses on activities to be delivered within the next 18 months and includes large scale projects such as the Firepool development, Digital Innovation Centre, infrastructure and growing our districts inward investment offer - to directly delivering support to businesses and individuals.

**Redundancy Support Package and Task Force:** Our cohesive Redundancy Support Package for employers and their staff includes a range of employment and training advice, as well as signposting to support and financial assistance. The Economic Development team has developed a 'Task Force' of local agencies, including SWT, Citizens Advice Bureau and Job Centre Plus. They are currently working closely with Debenhams but is available when needed for others.

**Employments and skills:** After securing funding the team are supporting 5 Hubs currently in the West of the District, the new youth Hub Employment Hub at the Minehead Eye and establishing up 4 new Employment Hubs in the Taunton and Wellington. The Community based Hubs offer a range of services delivered by volunteers and partners organisations to support people into work, education and training. This is an essential part of what SWT Economic Development team do to ensure Economic Growth and Prosperity. The Virtual career fair for the care sector was a great success, and the team are aiming to replicate this for other sectors such as Health and Hospitality during 2021.

Hospitality and Tourism Skills: The team are continuing to work on West coast 360, which is the excellent partnership of local businesses, employers, training providers, statutory agencies, community organisations and the local community college. The Partnership has come together to provide skills and development opportunities for the hospitality and leisure industry, with the aim of raising skills levels and prospects for individuals. The team are currently looking at a suite of courses, (funded for WS residents) along with the ambassador programme. West Coast 360 is working in partnership with 'Skill Up' to offer further free training aimed at the hospitality industry.

West Somerset College: The Economic Development Team, working with EDF and the West Somerset Opportunity Area have overseen the reopening of the vocational centre at the college which was sadly closed for quite a while. This opens up opportunities for further vocational and adult learning courses to be offered something that has been sadly missing for many years.

### **Visitor Economy:**

A County wide Visitor Economy Support Programme (VESP) has been established with plans to use £500k of Business Rate Retention funding to aid the recovery of the visitor economy. A two phased programme of interventions that include business support & engagement, marketing and experiences to develop and support the offer. Phase 1 awarded two contracts that utilises around 50% of the funding. The phase 2 business plan was recently given the green light at SCC SGMG, work to progress is in the pipeline.

The Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership have set aside £160k funding to support recovery of the Tourism sector. A recent partner meeting evaluated and agreed to a phased approach. Phase 1 will utilise £100k toward a tourism & hospitality grant scheme with launch expected spring 2021. Detail currently being worked on.

HTAP are also working on 12-month digital online business support training programme for the leisure and hospitality sector. The training is aimed to be launched late spring and will offer a series of training around the recently refreshed former COOL tourism Toolkit renamed to 'BOOST', the England Coast Path to promote walking and cycling routes, and raising quality including the Visit Britain 'Were good to go' scheme.

Ongoing support provided to Visit Exmoor. Current activity includes their recent commission to develop the new destination website, launch expected spring/summer 2021. And supporting the organisation transition to become a CIC.

Ongoing support and advice provided to Visit Somerset. Current activity is focussing on new technologies to support the industry.

We have commissioned a consultant to refresh the Minehead Economic Plan on behalf of and working with the Minehead Coastal and Development Trust and key stakeholders. The aim for the completion of the plan is summer 2021.

Hinkley Point and EDF: The team have with working with HPC and EDF to understand the potential impact of an increase in the workforce and the effect on the local communities.

The Economic Development team have been busy during covid allocating funds from the Hinkley Point Economic Development S106 fund, projects that have or are being supported are:

- Bike recycling into work scheme
- The steam coast trail project.
- Digital toolkit training.
- A West Somerset employment land study.
- Minehead cycling options study
- Food and Drink mapping and business support
- Ipad Loan scheme to help people back into work scheme.
- Watchet CCT Social Action project
- Watchet Contains Art Maritime project.
- Exmoor rural enterprise network.
- Cultural innovation grant
- Minehead CCT project officer.

Firepool Digital Innovation Centre: This is moving forward at pace to be completed by early 2022. Innovation support services will be commissioned in summer 2021 and will be informed by a business led strategic advisory board.

District Innovation Centres: Now that the feasibility study has now been concluded, and provides a range of conclusions and recommendations on how we should try and move forward with a work plan to create an innovation district within Somerset West and Taunton and a work plan as per SWT's Economic Development and prosperity strategy. It is important to keep the early momentum going with the setting up of an innovation board.

Wellington Co working space: Work on this is progressing with consultants being appointed to conduct a feasibility study.

Food, Drink and Agriculture Sector Support: As part of the recovery work to support bedrock sectors across our district and in response to the impacts of the exit from the EU, the Economic Development team will be commissioning an agriculture, food and drink provider's audit. The team will also deliver a range of webinars and courses to help local provider's access supply chain opportunities and improve their ability to win contracts.

## **2 Asset Management, Annual Report for Cllr Marcus Kravis – February 2021**

Taunton Technology Park: The Lease for occupation of Building 2 to Novanta at Taunton Technology Park was completed. The wider site development is under review.

Deane House: Part of the ground floor of Deane House is now occupied by Meridian. The remaining areas of the ground floor are to be taken Probation. The Team are actively marketing the upper floor.

Blenheim Gardens: A tenant has been agreed for Blenheim Gardens Café in Minehead. Part of the agreement is that they will do the necessary works and so the café will remain. Work was also done to Blenheim Gardens Band Stand.

Flook House and Belvedere gardens: A working group has been set up and had its first meeting to review the future of Flook House.

Watchet Harbour and Marina: The Asset team have finished the emergency works on Splash Point Sea Wall and new access to the beach. SWT has now appointed TMS as the contractor to deliver works to the inner Marina Wall with the aim of completing this works before the Onion Collective complete their building. The Team have also dealt with the legal issues to allow the new operator to take over the operation of the Marina on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2021. The Outer Harbour was also successfully dredged for the first time in many years from the budget allocated last year.

French Weir: A lease was agreed with coach to formalise the storage area.

Former Sure Start Building: Leases and terms have been agreed with two parts of the former Sure Start Centre in Alcombe.

West Somerset House: The team finished the refurbishments works on West Somerset House with the Police now occupying the rear of the building after completing their work. The Team is currently working on a lease to Williton Parish council for the public toilets which they will be reopening.

Assets Receipts: In December, the team completed the sale of the Priory Way Scrap Yard and a small parcel of Land in Brunel Way was sold to the tenant and the Capital Receipt programme is being actively progressed.

Car Parks: The Asset Team has been working alongside the climate change team to help deliver electric car charging points in some car park.

SWT completed Lease of spare former temporary waiting room (Unit 1) at Taunton Crematorium and as a team, Asset Management has continued to carry out work on confidential projects alongside Major project.

### **3 Major and Special Projects**

Coal Orchard: Work is continuing and now the public realm work by the river is in hand with the first show flat is due to open in Easter 2021 with the accommodation being finished by May this year. These and commercial space marketing is underway and terms have been agreed with the first tenant, who will take occupation as soon as the build allows, starting fit out in June with the aim of opening in October 2021. Although there has been a short delay in delivery due to the pandemic impact, the programme remains on track for budget and income forecast. Most importantly, the regeneration of this site into a modern and vibrant place where people can live and work, in the heart of Taunton, will be complete

**Seaward Way light industrial build:** This has been delivered with both Units now occupied, by Snazaroo and Tool Station. The design of the residential build is being progressed by the Housing team, with planning permission. Approval for the housing scheme was approved at Full Council on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020. This build was commenced and completed within 12 calendar months despite slow down due to Covid19, The project was delivered under budget by £180k, and met or exceeded all other targets outlined in the original business case, including the exceeding the forecast return on investment

**Firepool:** Work is progressing with the GWR refurbishment work has now commenced and Plans for the cycle path are being adapted to allow for the build programme and construction footprint of the Digital Innovation Centre with which SWT

are continuing to work in collaboration with SCC on delivery the of a 2400m2 building. SWT is still aiming to deliver key utilities to the site in Summer 21.

Further preparation work has been undertaken and the first block (no 6) has been given detailed planning approval. Various other preparatory works have been undertaken on Blocks 2 and 4.

The block by block masterplan and accompanying Local Development Order has been progressed throughout the last year but has hit a phosphate blockage that has prevented submission. Various options to address Phosphates have been considered both in the short and medium term. Detailed planning applications have been progressed and will short be submitted for Blocks 1 (Firepool South by Viridor), 3 (Firepool North, opposite the station multi storey car park) and the infrastructure and engineering works required to support Blocks 2, 4 and 5. This year will see a substantial start and progress in all Blocks. Decisions about funding packages and delivery routes have also been agreed. Despite the challenges this site has and continues to present we will be in the delivery stages of the project in the coming 12 months.

Special Purpose Vehicle: This will be formed before June 2021.

Bus Station: The team are working towards a planning application to convert the Bus Station to a car park has been delayed slightly.

#### **4: Heritage**

Tone Works: Somerset West and Taunton Council are continuing to work with the CIC to develop a future of the Tone Work site and the land around after completing the purchase of this and Foxes Field. SWT were awarded £348k from the DCMS Cultural Recovery Fund to help progress this.

Tonedale Mill: The S48 Repairs notice has been served and discussions continue with the owners on their response to the notice and the emergency works required on site.

Dulverton Weir: SWT continues to work with the Dulverton Weir and Leat Conservation Trust and other stakeholders to investigate future options for the repair and long term future of the site.

Norton Hillfort: Following the award of a grant from Historic England work is progressing as per the previous report. Trees and scrubs are being cleared to reinstate the boundaries at Hilly Park with the aim to hand over to the South West Heritage trust by the end of Mach 2021.

The National Trust will be giving a presentation to Councillors in April on their works to Wellington Monument.