

# Full Council Meeting – 8 February 2022

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

### Major and Special Projects Update

#### Coal Orchard

Nationwide materials and labour shortages continue to cause difficulties for the contractor Midas, which is affecting the completion of the public realm that surrounds the Wharf and Jetty buildings.

The temporary footpath through the site from early December and through the Christmas period was popular and well used, which is an exciting indicator as to how the scheme will enhance and improve the area when completed. Lights, Christmas trees, maps and signage were put in place to help encourage footfall to all areas.

Marketing of the residential properties and commercial units began in the summer and at the time of writing 35 of the 40 apartments are reserved or let. With the handover of The Quay contracts can now be exchanged, and we hope to see the first owners moving in early in the New Year, with the Wharf and Jetty as soon as it is safe and practical to do so. Interest in the commercial units continues with regular viewings and enquiries received by the commercial agents.

#### Firepool

##### *NHS Vaccination Centre move to Firepool*

The NHS continued to provide vaccinations from the Firepool site, having successfully mobilised and assembled modular buildings in August and September. The site is expected to be used until the end of March 2022. SWT are actively working with the NHS to locate a longer term site for the continuing programme. A staggering 100,000 jabs have been delivered at Firepool since October 2021.

##### *GWR building / cycle path*

The GWR Building is now being used as a site office by the Innovation Centre contractor site management team. As significant civil works are now underway, the temporary cycle path has been closed in order to maintain safe working distances from machinery and material movements. The path will be re-opened whenever it is possible to do so for significant periods, subject to agreement with the Innovation Centre contractor, Wilmott Dixon.

##### *Digital Innovation Centre*

SWT are continuing to work in collaboration with SCC on delivery of a 2400m<sup>2</sup> Digital Innovation centre on the Firepool site, with construction activity now in progress. Civil and decontamination works started in October 2021, with a delivery programme of circa 18 months.

### *Infrastructure, Utilities and Flood work*

Detailed applications for the Infrastructure work is under consideration from the LPA and is expected to be determined in Feb '22.

Phase 1 of flood defence work at Firepool Lock is due to be completed in Q1 2022, in collaboration with the Environment Agency and Canals and Rivers Trust.

### *Master Planning*

The Councils' development team continue to work closely with the Local Planning Authority to develop a revised masterplan for the whole site.

### **Bus Station**

SWT continue to work with Somerset County Council and bus service providers on proposals for the future of the site whilst decisions on grant funding (Bus Service Improvement Project and Changing Places) are awaited.

### **West Somerset Employment Land Sites**

Following successful feasibility work, further detailed assessment work is being undertaken. Reports to Scrutiny and Full Council have been paused whilst further information and analysis of the proposal is completed.

### **Heritage Assets**

#### Fox's Field

Lease discussions have progressed with the WMCIC for the site at Fox's Field to deliver community amenity space as a community forest garden. The WMCIC have already undertaken some work on the field to cut the grass and create a better walking space for the community as well as planning and securing trees for the forest garden, which they will start planting from December.

#### 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. We received SRA funding for technical work and the Trust have organised and number of community events including an archaeological dig and garden party.

#### Norton Hillfort

The site has now been transferred to the South West Heritage Trust for long term guardianship. The site was formally removed from the Heritage at Risk Register at the start of November and was featured prominently in Historic England's press release. A number of successful volunteer events have already taken place.

### **Hinkley Point C**

The delivery of existing work and S106 funds, approximately £2.5m (11%) is left to spend. Activity is progressing well in all remaining active areas: Economic Development, Skills, Tourism and Housing.

Except for a planning role until 2024/25, the funding for the majority of posts will end in March 2023 under the current agreement. However, due to the HPC project being behind time, the Councils have agreed to extend some posts, including a member of staff in the ED team until 2024/25. This will be crucial in terms of delivering the remaining activity funds in current plans. The Housing post is secured separately through Housing funding until March 2024.

### Workforce Uplift

In addition to this the Councils have now reached agreement with EDF on a comprehensive package of mitigation measures to manage the impacts of the workforce uplift. This includes key strategic interventions by EDF to increase campus and caravan accommodation, plus funds for SWT and SDC to continue with Hinkley Housing Initiatives and the extension of the joint Community Safety Officer post.

The latest workforce survey shows workforce numbers at 6,656 with 36% of workers home based and 64% non-home based. There has been a 4% increase in home based workers.

We are now moving in to the final stages of the workforce uplift. The aim is to agree to changes to the relevant management plans in April. Before doing this officers will be seeking member approval of the proposals via a key member decision in Feb/Mar 2022. Work is currently going on to finalise topic papers and crucially seek legal advice on the mechanism by which proposed changes can be delivered, and the decision-making process being followed. Papers will be ready for briefing exec members in mid Feb, prior to the key member decision starting.

## **Economic Development update**

### **Town Centre Resilience and Transformation**

#### *Town Centre Resilience and Events*

With the extension of the grant funding until the end of March 2022 work across the town centres in our District continues under the Welcome Back Fund and the Town Centre Recovery Fund.

#### *Town Centre Activity (All)*

- Pop Up Santa's Post Box have been well received with hundreds of letters being posted by Children and enhancing the town centres over the festive period

#### *Town Centre Activity (Taunton)*

- Winterfest was a success with nearly 100K impressions recorded in Taunton Town Centre
- Five new electric charging points for Taunton have received planning permission

- Work continues to look at permanent and improved lighting infrastructure on the market house
- 3D video animation projector (as part of the welcome back fund) which when posted online, received 30,267 impressions and support Taunton's late-night offer
- Taunton's Festive Footfall for December 2021 was up on 2019
- £15K Grant fund has been awarded to the Somerset Museum to support the Sunday operating hours.

### *Events*

In December 2021 – in spite of rising concerns at the time over the Omicron COVID variant – the Council's very popular 'Carols around the Bandstand' event in Vivary Park was implemented safely and with great success. Between 2,000 and 3,000 people attended, gathering in their own small groups to bring light, music and song to the park whilst the Taunton Concert Band played carols and popular Christmas tunes.

More people attended the 2021 event than in 2019, and it was made safe through adherence to the advice and Government guidance provided by Somerset's county-wide COVID Support Events Officer.

Events being planned for some of SWT's parks and open spaces in 2022 include:

- Charity 'Firewalk' on Castle Green on the 17 March 2022, to raise money for the Children's Hospice South West
- Taunton Armed Forces Day at Vivary Park on the 2 July
- Sound of the Streets music festival at Castle Green from 8 – 10 July
- Taunton Pride on 16 July
- Fake Festival music festival at Longrun Meadow on 23 July
- Taunton Flower Show at Vivary Park on 5 and 6 August
- Live in Somerset music concerts in Vivary Park from 26 – 28 August

Discussions have commenced around how the District can best celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and it is anticipated that SWT's parks and open spaces will be utilised to full effect by community groups and the public, with a focus on street parties and town centre decorations over the four-day bank holiday weekend (2 – 5 June). A grant application has been made to the National Lottery for funding to support Jubilee celebrations.

This March, the 'Museum of the Moon' – a touring artwork by UK artist Luke Jerram – will be installed at St Mary Magdalene church from around the 18 March - 1 April 2022. Over its lifetime, the Museum of the Moon will be presented in a number of different ways - both indoors and outdoors - so altering the experience and interpretation of the artwork as it travels from place to place: [About \(my-moon.org\)](http://my-moon.org).

The installation will coincide with and support the granting of Minster status for the church.

### *Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth*

The county wide Visitor Economy Support Programme (VESP) to aid the recovery of the visitor economy strand 1 & 2 activity continues. The VESP strands are funded by the Joint Councils' Business Rates Retention Grants. Strand 3 will concentrate on marketing and positive messaging for the visitor economy. Strand 4 is set to launch a grant scheme aimed at innovation within the visitor economy.

The Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership (HTAP) continues to support the Visitor economy with continued activity as part of their phase 4 action plan. The HTAP digital online business support workshops (supporting SMEs) ran 6 'BOOST' Tourism Toolkit workshops between supported 125 businesses. The 6 England Coast Path and walking workshops supported 70 businesses. There are a further 6 'BOOST' Tourism Toolkit webinars planned between February and April 2022.

The HTAP Tourism Innovation Grant Scheme (supporting SMEs) has awarded 14 grants to a diverse range of projects across Sedgemoor and the West Somerset area to boost and widen the tourism offer as follows:

- new accessibility facilities to attract the purple pound
- adapting an indoor play area and introduction of new Freedom gaming pods (first within the UK)
- a few E- bike schemes aimed to create new visitor experiences for mental wellbeing aimed to boost the active market. One of the E-bike projects is also creating new GPS trails and circular routes to beauty spots and places of interest for visitors
- creation of new and unique innovative events and a strategic marketing plan
- open wildlife garden to the public aimed to attract more visitors
- tailored mental wellbeing tourism itineraries
- weatherproofing a traditional barn to extend the season and creation of farm-to-table experiences and 'foodie' events
- creation of a new drink product
- Augmented Reality technology aimed to attract new audiences and digital interaction
- shared business facility and spa to support local jobs

Through the ERDF Welcome Back Fund delivery of a sustainable central event platform has been completed. The portal enables local people and visitors to find out about events, what's on and things to do in the District. Visit Exmoor and Visit Somerset are running a social media campaign to their 100,000 combined followers to also raise awareness of the portal. We have also been promoting to organisers

who are now able to promote their live events at <https://www.visit-exmoor.co.uk/somerset-west-and-taunton-events/>. The Welcome Back funded marketing campaign continues and includes the development of a suite of marketing products. This initiative is aimed to market and promote the whole area to local people and visitors and promote the work of the Town Centre Working Groups.

#### *Food mapping work*

Following the appointment of consultants a piece of work mapping our District's food and drink producers has been completed. The draft report is with Officers to consider the findings and to look into ways to support the sector moving forward.

#### *Additional Restrictions Grant Funds*

In early December we were poised to launch a scheme for future business resilience, focusing on innovation and carbon reduction. However, with the advance of the Omicron variant, the resilience scheme was withdrawn as it became clear that funds needed to be made available for more urgent business support.

Therefore, a further round of Additional Restriction Grant has been launched with support targeted at businesses which have been most affected by Government advice to limit social contact. At the time of writing over 200 applications had been received.

We have also received a third top-up payment from Government of £305,000. This may allow us to widen the criteria for the scheme slightly.

To date, £6.06m has been received in total. We are on target to have distributed all but the third top up amount by the end of January and are expecting this to be fully-distributed shortly afterwards.

#### *Inward Investment*

As part of the Marketing and Communications plan for Inward Investment, work is now underway on a marketing campaign which will launch in April 2022. Leading up to the launch, work is progressing on re-styling of the invest Taunton website and engagement of Business Ambassadors. Taunton will also feature in the next edition of Commercial Property monthly, the article focussing on the area as an Innovation District.

#### *Innovation District*

Approval has been granted by our procurement team to proceed to appoint the Connected Digital Catapult to work with SWT and the Innovation Leadership Group from January to April 2022.

Work will also commence with the LEP and other Districts on establishing a steering group to oversee the shaping and development of a Research and Innovation Conference aimed for September 2022 receiving financial support through the business rates pilot and the LEP.

### **Employment and Skills**

Somerset West and Taunton Community Employment Hubs (CEH) have:

- Provided individual support to 75 Clients since January 2021
- Recruited 15 Volunteers to support the operation of the hubs on a face to face basis
- Engaged with approaching 40 external partner organisations to support employment and skills in our District
- CEH social media advertising the service and other opportunities is updated on a daily basis now with 1036 followers.

The inhouse SWT online survey for employees facing redundancy to help identify support needs has been finalised and used successfully to support the employees of Service Graphics. To date 8 employees have taken advantage of this tool and been supported to access tailored advice and guidance.

From the end of January 2022, the Employment Support contract with Abri will not be renewed and the CEH will support all SWT housing tenants

West Coast 360 video has been commissioned and is being designed to promote hospitality as a career of choice using apprenticeship/students from YMCA (the Beach Hotel), Foxes Academy and Wimbleball Reservoir. Arrangements for filming are being made to start at the end of January 2022.

Dulverton Hub – looking at Dulverton School as possible CEH venue. Plans being discussed to recruit and train volunteers. Underspend from year 4 WSOA SWT funding allocation agreed to be used for purchase of furnishing the hub for student/adult and business use.

*Employment and Skills officers* are working with:

Wiveliscombe - exploring the potential of a CEH to be set up in the town. Discussions and evidence gathering are underway to identify need and the funds to support the concept. We are also working with the business group on a skills needs survey that we hope will produce information to better support businesses filling their vacancies and future proofing their business skills requirements.

Somerset Strategic Partnership – Workforce and Recruitment. Using employment and skills experience to explore the training, recruitment and development of the SCC workforce to support the new Strategic Partnership model (delivering Children's Homes, High Needs Fostering and Therapeutic Education)

SCC and other Districts working on the delivery of the Community Renewal Fund project - Step into Mobile Outreach project. The aim of the to provide advice, signposting support on employment, skills, and digital information across Somerset to our more rural communities via an outreach vehicle

Minehead JCP and Butlins meeting to start arrangements for 2022 WS Careers Fair to be held at Butlins on the 9 March 2022.

Ongoing membership and attendance at SCC Education Business Partnership, HPC Workforce Development Strategy group and West Somerset Opportunities Area year 5 Legacy working group

*Employment and Skills Events:*

Somerset Foundation Trust – A Meet the Employer event is planned for 25 January 2022 between 11am - 12pm and 7pm - 8pm. Organised in partnership between SWT and SDC Employment and Skills teams. The aim is to encourage recruitment for the max vaccination programme and NHS jobs across Somerset. This event will be offered to all four districts following a planning meeting.

West Somerset Kite Project launch event 13 January which I attended. The aim of the project is for local organisations led by Minehead Eye and Homestart to work collaboratively with families in West Somerset to develop and improve their children's well being, engagement and aspiration via the creation of a one stop shop offering continuity and access to a range of support services. The CEH will form part of the service and Employment and Skills will be part of the board of members. Following the showcase presentations from some of West Somerset's leading family service providers the event was opened up to the public to find out more.

Winter Readiness Support webinar held by SCC for health and care professionals, paid staff and volunteers on support available for people and communities who may be more vulnerable in Somerset this winter. The event gave an overview of who is more vulnerable in winter and how to signpost to the range of support available in Somerset, with a view to minimising pressures on health and care services. Follow on will be Trigger Training delivered by the Centre for Sustainable Energy for hub coordinators and will form part of the volunteer training to help volunteers identify flags in relation to debt, housing, and other types of support

**External Ops/Assets update:**

- Completion of sale of land at Liddymore Farm, Watchet with a capital receipt of £675,000 plus fees.
- Completion of Blenheim Gardens Café lease documents and commencement of tenant works.
- Setting up the management of Block A (The Quay), Coal Orchard following the letting of part to Plymouth University.
- Completion of a further short term lease for Bus Layover spaces at Tower Street Former Bus Station.
- Completion of lease renewal at Unit 3 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre with a 10% rent increase.
- Specification and tendering for remedial works at Goodlands Gardens and Wellington Sports Centre, including replacement of air handling unit which will reduce the energy used to heat air by 60%. A percentage of this work will be funded by the Council's CNCR budget.
- Progression of lease for a catch fence to facilitate works to the church wall at St Andrew's Stogursey.
- The new wall at East Quay, Watchet is complete and the new road and railings that run along East Quay are also now complete.

- The transfer agreement relating to the new playing field at Norton Fitzwarren has been completed and the deed of easement has also been signed and sealed. We have a final design completed and are now at tender stage seeking a suitable contractor to deliver the project in spring 2022.