

Council – 6th September 2022

Cllr Caroline Ellis - Portfolio Holder for Culture

Cultural Development Team – Quarterly Update

Introduction: The Cultural Development Team was created in November 2021 with the key objective to deliver the SWT Cultural Strategy as adopted by full Council on 7 September 2021. Since November, the team has gone from strength to strength and is already making a real difference to the communities in our District in respect of the arts and culture offering and support provided.

News and Updates:

The team are pleased to present the first Cultural Impact Assessment which covers the period from October 2021 – March 2022 and shows how far the team and strategy have come in the first 6 months and how we are raising the profile of Arts and Culture in our communities: [Cultural Strategy Impact Report \(September 2021 – March 2022\) - YouTube](#)

- **Cultural Forum Open Day – 29 September 2022** – All councillors are invited to join the Cultural Development Team at our first Cultural Forum Open Day on Thursday 29 September in Deane House from 9.30am - 3pm.

Join the team, arts and culture providers and stakeholders for an engaging day and lunch to commemorate the District's Cultural Strategy and help us future gaze on a range of subjects and themes. You'll get the chance to hear about things that have been happening in the District, get updates on projects, hear from local experts, and share your thoughts on things that matter to you. A light lunch will be provided where there will be the opportunity to network and view the new Arts Hub at Flook House.

There will also be a series of round table discussions available to join in the afternoon.

The workshop themes are as follows:

- Somerset Wide Cultural Strategy/Local Government Re-Organisation Workshop
- Creative People/Youth Workshop
- Events Workshop
- Heritage Workshop
- Public Art Workshop
- Firepool Workshop

Full agenda to follow at the beginning of September.

More details can be found here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/swt-cultural-forum-open-day-tickets-398906288447>

- **SWT funded Arts Hub brings new life to Flook House** - Thanks to a Cultural Development Grant of £10,000 awarded to Creative Innovation Centre CIC (CICCIC) towards start-up costs, refurbishments, and minor renovations to modernise the rooms, the future of Flook House is looking much brighter. We are proud to have revived the 17th Century Manor House by repurposing it as a new Arts Hub for cultural and creative activities. Flook House now provides office and studio space for creative organisations and practitioners, as well as a conference-ready meeting room for community-based programmes, workshops, and vocational learning.

As the building's primary tenant and driving force behind the Arts Hub, CICCIC is managing the project in collaboration with GoCreate Taunton and Somerset Youth Theatre, as well as multiple artists and designers.

Activities will also go beyond general provision. Liz Hutchins, director of GoCreate, said: “In the near future we have art workshops for Ukrainian families; rehearsal space for a singing group and youth theatre; health and wellbeing workshops; art classes; and the list keeps growing.

- **Events** – the Cultural Development team works closely with the SWT Events Co-ordinator and Town Centre Resilience and Transformation Officer to ensure the SWT events calendar links in with Cultural Strategy. We have recently created and rolled out an “Events Recce” Programme for venues and providers and more information can be found on our Culture pages on the SWT website: [Cultural Forum and News \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)
- **Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) Programme** – the SWT Strategic Lead for Culture is now engaged with the ‘Culture and Universal Community Services’ workstream of the county-wide LGR programme. Consultants’ “5th Sector” have been appointed as the consultants who will be implementing the Somerset Wide Cultural Strategy and there is an opportunity to meet them at the SABCA Conference on 11 October 2022 (more information can be found here: <https://www.somersetculture.org.uk/events/the-future-of-arts-culture-in-somerset-conference-tues-11th-oct-2022/>)

Press release: [Specialists appointed to take Somerset arts and culture strategy forward \(newsomersetcouncil.org.uk\)](http://www.newsomersetcouncil.org.uk)

- **Public Art Updates:**

Various Public Art Projects to be completed over the next 6 months:

- Working with Arts Taunton to commission a piece of Public Art in Castle Green, Taunton
- Installation of the High Street, Taunton Public Artwork (Somerset Dragon Sculpture)
- Working with Cotford St Luke Parish Council to ensure £32,968 S106 funding is spent on a piece of Public Art in the community by March 2023
- Staplegrove Bridge – working with Taunton School to create a mural/piece of Public Art on the Railway Bridge



Above: Dragon Sculpture due for Taunton High Street

- **Heritage Update:**

- We are currently working to ensure that the Agriculture Sculpture located at Bedford House is protected and relocated – in talks with new leaseholders.
- Working with the Heritage at Risk team with regards to Tone Works and the potential for Cultural use in the future



Right: “Agriculture Statue” at Bedford House



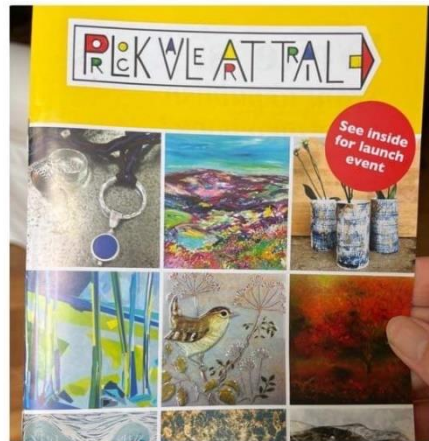
Left: Cultural Team and Cllr Ellis on a visit to Tonedale Mill

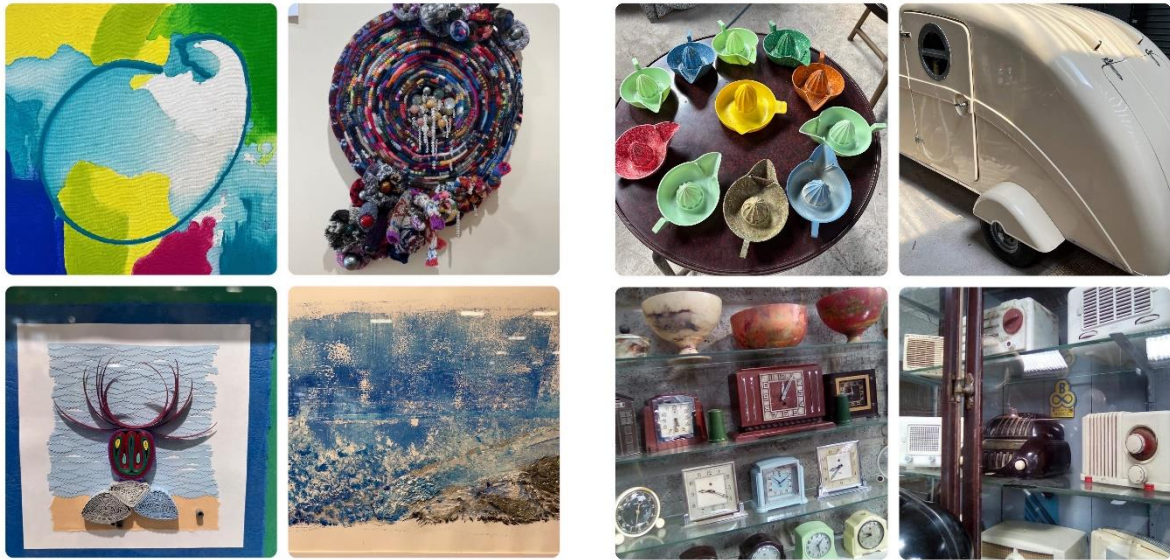
Cultural Liaison and Events attended by the Portfolio Holder – Cllr Caroline Ellis

Art highlights

SWT was delighted to support this year’s Porlock Vale Art Trail organised by the amazing Deb Stanyon and colleagues. The Trail is partly a permanent feature as many artists and artisans are based in the town and surrounding villages but since last summer there is a weekend of open studios and special events towards the end of June where you can meet and chat to many wonderful artists. This year I had the pleasure of meeting Jenny Barron, Veronica Wilburn and Melody Hawtin (ahhh her studio!!) among others, drooling over Sarah Fox Bespoke Jewellery’s amazing Courtenay Collection and catching up with community artist Terry Gable who was running a workshop in St Dubricius Church in support of the spire project.

GoCreate Taunton’s annual members showcase took place at Somerset Libraries Taunton in July - nine wonderful local artists were exhibiting with a great range of work from gorgeous abstracts, quilled paper creations, textile wonders and beautiful prints.





It was a pleasure to meet Evelyn from Court Fields School in Wellington Park in July with Cllr Dixie Darch and Mayor of Wellington, Cllr Mark Lithgow. Evelyn designed the winning entry in our 'Recycling On-The-Go' poster competition, helping to promote our new public litter and recycling bins.

A popular theme for recent exhibitions has been to explore art and sustainability in the face of the climate emergency and declining biodiversity. Hestercombe Gallery's intriguing and beguiling 'A Rose is a Rose is a Rose' is where you can see work by five brilliant artists - Brendan Barry, Feral Practice, John Newling, Sophy Rickett and Marjolaine Ryley (with gorgeous bonus Bronwen Coe art in the café!). This could only have been conceived and made at Hestercombe. One room has been turned into a camera obscura, another has beautiful art made out of soil, another has a rooks nest and badger sett Very cleverly put together. This runs till October 23rd.



Latterly, I took in the Pennie Elfick exhibition curated by Close Ltd at Taunton Brewhouse. Pennie is an acclaimed local artist in whose abstract compositions (arrangements of horizontal & vertical bands in a range of muted colours using acrylic & oil paints) you can lose yourself; they invite contemplation and are beautiful to boot.

Our Cultural Heritage

Patrick Cook and Imogen Smith from the Bakelite Museum were kind enough to take me to see their amazing Bakelite collection, currently in storage at a barn on the Levels while a new permanent location can be found for it (when on show previously at Orchard Mill in Williton it was an internationally-known attraction) Bakelite 'the material of a thousand uses' was invented in 1907, the precursor to modern plastics. Patrick and Imogen have one of the most comprehensive collections of vintage plastics anywhere in the world and aspirations to link it to education and innovation on eco alternatives. The intrepid pair have been holding open days so others can come and sample the delights of Bakelite. It is the most wonderful collection and - for us oldies, also a massive nostalgia trip. Amongst the Bakelite classics and other design classics of the era, there are also a range of Patrick's awesome creations including the most lush camping car.

Public Art highlights

With umpteen new public art projects currently on the go it is great sometimes to relish and appreciate what we already have. Local schools often blaze a trail in art commissioning and involving pupils and the school community in public art projects. On a recent visit to meet Gareth Jones, Head of Parkfield Primary School in Taunton it was great to take in all the amazing murals created by the children working with local artists and meet Dilwyn created for the school in 2017 by Matt Crabbe who is creating the Taunton High Street Dragon.



Music, Theatre and Event highlights



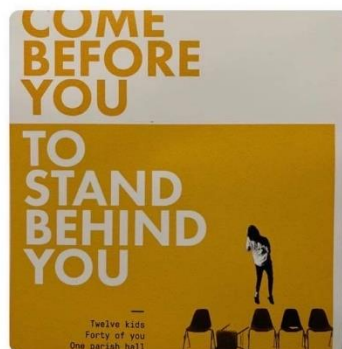
MUSIC: Sound of the Streets blasted into town in early July for an amazing new three day street music festival. The brainchild of the legendary Tim Hill, the festival showcased an exciting mix of international as well as local street music bands and encompassed a range of education and workshop activities designed to inspire and skill up the next generation of street musicians. The vibe on Castle Green and elsewhere was amazing with the event attracting a great mix of people of all ages who readily succumbed to the amazing music. The event rang alongside an extended Taunton Independent Market - combos like this seem to work really well. Highlights for me included La Tromba who travelled all the way from Chile, London-based company Kinetika Bloco with their 'unique British carnival sound' and high energy and seeing youngsters who Tim and team have been working with over the past few months perform.

EVENTS – TAUNTON LIVE AND PRIDE:

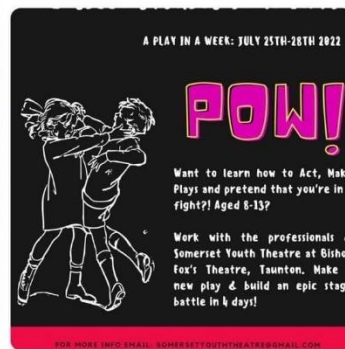
Taunton's historic first Pride Parade took place on 16th July. Deputy Mayor, Brenda, Cllr Weston and me were delighted to take part in the raising of the Pride flag at Deane House prior to the weekend's festivities. The Parade, from Goodlands Gardens to Vivary was bursting with joy and rainbow wonders - we bore a gorgeous giant flag through the streets dancing along with street bands as we went with a wonderful reception from crowds who had gathered to watch. Taunton Live and Pride Festival itself was fabulous - coordinated by the indefatigable Jenny and Liz of Go Create. We were treated to a huge community celebration of arts and inclusivity. There were two stages with live music all day hosted by the fabulous Queens Arina Fox & Virina Flower, artist's quarter where local artists helped us make amazing prints, abstract art and sculptures, well-being zone, commitment ceremonies and a wide range of awareness stalls, food, and bars. We enjoyed brilliant theatre shows by Bluebird Theatre and Farm Yard Circus as well.



THEATRE: Porlock-based Stacked Wonky are doing some of the most exciting creative work with young people anywhere - it was a great privilege to see Team Wonky in action at Holford Village Hall as part of Take Art's touring programme. Twelve young people have created a completely unique, largely improvised performance piece that defies categorisation - astonishing in its authenticity and verve and brilliantly unsettling as well as entertaining. Determined to engineer a performance at Deane House or indeed County Hall. Fellow Cllrs brace yourselves!



Somerset Youth Theatre very kindly invited me to watch the performance put together at the end of their awesome 'Stage Combat and Silly Stories - play in a week' project for 8-13 year olds at Bishop Fox's School's theatre (funded through the Happy Healthy Holidays programme I believe). Absolutely brilliant! A completely original play created by the kids supported by professional actors complete with incredibly convincing stage fighting. Every child shone. SYT are starting regular sessions in Taunton at Flook House Arts Hub.



The SPACE Somerset (our district's centre for Level 3 performing arts qualifications) simply put on the best musicals and this summer's cracking production of 9 to 5 the Musical at Tacchi Morris was no exception. Performers received well earned standing ovations - some real stars in the making I reckon.

Taunton Brewhouse's summer programme was really outstanding this year - highlights included Shakespeare's Globe on Tour production of Julius Caesar (first performed in 1599, could have been written yesterday) and the HandleBards' (so called because they travel on bikes and do Shakespeare) production of Twelfth Night in Castle Gardens. Four genius HandleBards actors had the audience in Castle Gardens enraptured - oh my they did the bard proud, utterly hilarious, supremely anarchic, and brilliant.

Community- based Chameleon Theatre company's Jungle Book production at Sheppey's this year was huge fun - we are truly blessed with myriad talented thespian groups, long may that continue!

Finally, just a note to say a massive bravo to the organisers of this season's other amazing festivals full of creativity and fabulous entertainment- Somerset Armed Forces Day, Taunton Flower Show and Watchet Carnival Weekend.