

Full Council Meeting – 6 December 2022

Portfolio Holder Report 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:

- **Cultural Forum Open Day Success – Thursday 29th September 2022**

We are proud to report the success of the first in-person Cultural Forum Open Day held at the end of September. The event was attended by over 40 valued stakeholders, and we have summarised some of the key messages coming out of the forum below:

- Strong agreement for collaborative working and partnerships (e.g., helping each other with communication and marketing approaches).
- Importance of the Cultural Forum with regards to networking opportunities
- How the sector needs to work collaboratively to continue to raise the profile of Arts and Culture so that it remains a strategic priority
- The need to proactively engage with young people with regards to the creative arts
- The growing appetite for Public Art around the district

Comments from attendees:

- I particularly liked the informal nature of the round-table discussions - I think the fact that they were not structured or formatted encouraged more open conversation. I also really benefitted from hearing about how the Wellington Film Festival came about and has progressed.
- It was all very interesting. Great to meet up with like-minded people
- Great content and to have the chance to meet a wide range of other interested people and hear some of their views on the future of culture in Taunton and Somerset
- Hearing an update on the cultural strategy and how that relates to the incoming county strategy. Also catching up with colleagues, some not seen since before covid.
- I loved being in the company of so many passionate about Arts and Culture people! Listening to some great ideas and feeling really positive about the future with the new Council carrying forward this passion!
- A good range of topics for discussion. I enjoyed the very relaxed nature of it - no dictatorial activities for the breakout groups, just open discussion. It worked really well.

- The whole event was well organised, informative, and interesting. I particularly liked the group chats. Sandwiches were fab too 😊
- I thought it was extremely well organised and was kept to time meticulously. Thank you all very much for your hard work.
- You are doing excellent work.
- This is an excellent initiative. Thank you.
- Thank you for a great day and bringing everyone together.
- Thank you, a useful day
- Please make sure you translate ideas into actions and excellent outcomes!
- A fantastically organised, very relaxed but also informative event. Great work!

Materials for information:

Cultural Strategy Impact Assessment: [Cultural Strategy Impact Report \(September 2021 – March 2022\) - YouTube](#)

Inward Investment Video: [Inward Investment Video - YouTube](#)

Cllr Caroline Ellis's video – Celebrating Arts and Culture in SWT: [Celebrating Arts & Culture in SWT - YouTube](#)

- **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.
- **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 \(somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](#).
 - We are pleased to have led on the cultural activity around the launch of the Coal Orchard Development alongside the Special Major Projects Team to ensure this was a successful opening event on 5th November 2022.
 - New “Arcadia” art gallery opening – VIP Invitation:



Somerset West and Taunton Council has teamed up with local chainsaw artist Matthew Crabb to open a new and exciting art gallery in Taunton. Matthew Crabb the artist behind the eagerly awaited Dragon sculpture due to be installed in Taunton High Street will be opening his art gallery at the new Riverside at Coal Orchard development in Taunton on Tuesday 6th December. The gallery will consist of over 150 pieces of work by Matthew Crabb and other carefully selected artists.

Matthew Crabb, in partnership with SWT, is delighted to invite you to his VIP opening evening on Tuesday 6th December between 7pm - 10pm to view the gallery before it opens to the public.

Cllr Caroline Ellis, Executive Member for Culture, said: "I am delighted that we are able to promote and showcase the work of Matt and other brilliant local artists in the centre of Taunton. It will offer an amazing experience that people of all ages from across the district and beyond can enjoy free of charge. I hope the exhibition will encourage and inspire talented, creative young people to fulfil their ambitions here"

The art gallery will open to the public from Wednesday 7th December and will be open Monday to Saturday from 10am - 4pm. The gallery will also be hosting live workshops where people can meet the artists and watch them work in the studio space.

A video introducing the gallery can be found here: [Arcadia Gallery](#).

- **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. There have been two consultations to collate resident and cultural practitioner views for the strategy which closed on 20th November 2022, and we anticipate a report to be presented to the steering group shortly with the aim for the strategy to be put before members in early January 2023.

- **Public Art Updates:**

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



(Left: Dragon Sculpture due for Taunton High Street)

- Working with Arts Taunton to commission a piece of Public Art in Castle Green, Taunton – interviews for an artist commenced 21st November 2022.
- Installation of the High Street, Taunton Public Artwork (Somerset Dragon Sculpture) - the unveiling of this has been pencilled in for 11th February 2022 to link in with half term activities and to serve as a legacy for SWT.
- Working with Cotford St Luke Parish Council to ensure £32,968 S106 funding is spent on a piece of Public Art in the community.
- Staplegrove Bridge – working with Taunton School/GoCreate to create a mural/piece of Public Art on the Railway Bridge

Cultural Liaison and Events attended by the Portfolio Holder

Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation News

Huge congratulations are in order to: -

- South West Heritage Trust and Contains Art on successful bids to become NPOs for the first time.
- Take Art, Somerset Film and Somerset Artworks who all play key roles in supporting culture across our district and Somerset as a whole and have thankfully held on to their NPO status.
- South Somerset District Council's whose ambitious plans to invest in redeveloping and expanding their theatre, the Octagon, were rewarded by NPO status too.

Video Guides to Arts and Culture in SWT I have been busy making promo videos this autumn for SWT arts and culture – monthly guides to arts and culture event highlights and an overview of all the diverse local creativity the district has to offer – you will find these on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/@carolineellis9658> (plus Facebook if you are on there).

ART

I was thrilled to visit the **Stogursey Arts Festival** in September. Helga Staddon, Mike Bradshaw, and the team had organised a smorgasbord of community events including a brilliant garden art trail around the village, artists talks, live music events and a flower festival. The floral displays in stunning St Andrews, Church were gorgeous, and villagers had devoted their gardens to an



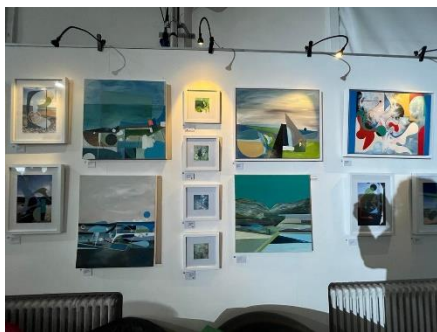
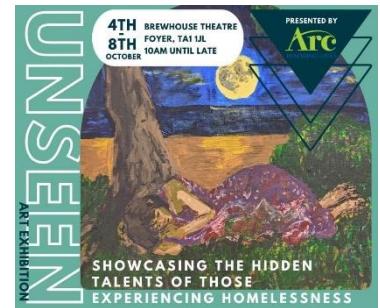
amazing array of public art created by local artists with painted deck chairs and chrysalis bicycles in trees by Alison Jacobs, a stunning plastic flower installation suspended over St Andrews Well, yarn bombing, a rainbow bottle bird by Melanie Deegan and recycled art by Stogursey CofE Primary School in the main square. The team was rewarded with great media coverage including a segment on BBC Points West featuring the children and some of the artists.

This year's **Somerset Art Weeks** were exceptionally strong. I particularly enjoyed: -

- Watching **Robert Blackborow from Washford** creating a piece for his exhibition on Minehead seafront.
- Naomi J Kendall and Lisa Takahashi's exhibition at **The Gallery - Arts Hub - Flook House** on Belvedere Road, Taunton. Stunning folded and woven paperworks by Naomi and colourful, expressive prints and paintings by Lisa complemented each other brilliantly.
- **Somerset Sight's** exhibition of prints made by visually impaired children and adults at workshops with Visually impaired artist Angela Charles and printmaker Gemma Trickey accompanied by a wonderful film by Hannah Earl of Somerset.
- Open studios at **East Quay, Watchet** where colourful cow sculptures could be found all around the centre – this also tied in with the Reveal and Conceal exhibition featuring giant cat sculptures, paintings of human-sized cats in water and watercolour and a fascinating parade of weird, part wonderful/part disturbing child/animal like creatures by Welsh artist Laura Ford.



On 3 Oct I was delighted to attend **Arc's** (formerly Taunton Association for the Homeless) wonderful '**Unseen**' exhibition at Taunton Brewhouse with beautiful paintings, drawings, cross-stitch, and stories by Arc clients whose talents are hidden no more. There was great support for this event from Cllrs.



Local Artist **Keith Crocker, aka Circles Forever Artwork**, held a **solo show at CICCIC** in Sept/Oct – his fabulous abstract seascapes attracted a lot of interest and formed the perfect backdrop to CICCIC's key conference '**The Future of Arts and Culture in Somerset**'. Video with conference highlights

<https://www.facebook.com/ciccictaunton/videos/689621765685449>

Somerset Leaving Care Service presented an important exhibition at Somerset Libraries Taunton during **#CareLeaversweek**. Created and organised by **young care leavers**, it featured art, photography, poems on the theme of identity plus key info about Somerset's support for care leavers. They did a lovely presentation about how they put the expo together – a really inspirational group of young people.



CARNIVALS, STREET FAIRS & FESTIVALS

Minehead Community Development Trust organised a brilliant **Minehead Bay Festival** in September with circus, street art from Aerosol Art and others, music - loads of stuff for kids (pop up skate ramps, busy arts tent by East Quay, Watchet- saw some awesome mini hobby horses emerging from it! - and forest school activities from Wild Wellies). Bravo to the organisers!!



It was fantastic to see the return of **Taunton Carnival** and **Wellington Carnival** post pandemic disruption– with great community support. I captured the whole Taunton carnival on my I phone.

This year's **Wivey Street Fair and Carnival Procession** was typically joyous and convivial and in keeping with other years as well as an array of great craft and food stalls and live music also featured a lovely art exhibition. Very exciting to hear that a new **10 Parishes Digital Creative Artist Gallery** launches 24th November to support and enhance the profile and marketing of work by local artists, grant aided by Somerset County Council.



COMEDY

So many superb comedy shows on offer in SWT, so little time! I did manage to catch **'Marcel Lucont: Le Best of' at Tacchi Morris** in October – hilarious gallic condescension and funny songs are just an irresistible combo. Meanwhile Taunton Brewhouse and Taunton Comedy Club/CICCIC's offer goes from strength to strength.



DANCE

Coleridge Unbound at Alfoxton Park which explored the history of Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's life in the West Country, in particular his stance as an abolitionist, was quite something. State of Trust and partners created a mesmerising and powerful site-based performance based on dance, music, spoken word and film. It was also performed at the Unitarian Chapel in Taunton where Coleridge preached against the transatlantic slave trade.





FILM

The inaugural **Wellington Film Festival** at the end of Sept was a huge success. Initiated by the Wellington Town Council Working Group and funded by Wellington Town Council and SWT it was delivered by talented locals working with Somerset Film. Well over 1,000 people came to 21 events over the three-day festival. Everyone got involved from local schools, students, Friends of Welly Park and Welly's awesome arts community. Highlights included a sell-out showing of *Odette* at Odette's Tearoom, Q and A with Director, Julian Temple at the Wellesley, a programme of classic children's films with animation workshops, outdoor projections, Sci-Fi Sunday in the park.

My highlights were seeing the utterly charming 1924 version of *Peter Pan* at Wellington Arts Association set to a beautiful live music score courtesy of world renowned harpist Elizabeth Jane Baldry and the heritage films screenings at St Johns Church exploring Welly history and culture, with footage of Fox Brothers Tonedale and Relyon, locals celebrating the 1936 Coronation, history of the Wellington Basins, a fab 'semi-legal' go-kart race from yesteryear, the story of how a community came together to support restoration of Wellington Monument and a look ahead at fabulous potential of Toneworks. Long live Welly Film Fest! Watch a wonderful film about the weekend here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feqWELDBrpk>

MUSIC

In what seems like an ago now, I hugely enjoyed **Rag and Bone Man at Live in Somerset** in Vivary at the end of the summer. While it's great to have Vivary and the Cricket Ground for large concerts it is a reminder of the perennial need for a bigger indoor venue, given the huge demand for pop concerts.



Although I've missed a huge number of folk gigs (too many evening meetings!) it was great to experience live music laid on by **Taunton Brewhouse at the Coal Orchard opening** and get to know local folk bands, **Razzomo** and **3 Daft Monkeys**.

Hullabaloo improv lunchtime Concert at CICCIC this month was great - featuring word weaving

and sound smithery by Alice Maddicott and Tim Hill.

PUBLIC ART

Friends of **Comeytrove Park** asked Jenny and Liz of Go Create Taunton to give the beautiful mural in the games area a face-lift in September. They did a grand job, even adding a very special Georgie canine in honour of the late Cllr Alan Wedderkopp who I think would have been delighted.





I was honoured to attend the unveiling of a unique sculpture in October in memory of **Watchet's** world famous web-footed harbour dweller. An homage to **Derek the Female Goose**, on the Esplanade, was the brainchild of Cllr Loretta Whetlor and Carron Scott and lovingly created by local artist Chris Phillingham (Creative Fusionz) Bravo to all involved for making this beautiful thing happen and congratulations on the world-wide media coverage!

With excitement building for the unveiling of



an exciting new public artwork for the town in the High Street by local chainsaw artist, **Matt Crabbe** early next year, me and Cllr Andy Sully and teams enjoyed a new exhibition put together by Matt at his workshop near Milverton showcasing his amazing creations along with several other local artists. That exhibition has now moved to a vacant unit at Coal Orchard and will open soon providing a big draw to the Independent Quarter.

I was delighted to be on the panel to select artists to deliver an amazing new **public art project for Cotford St Luke** (using S106 monies) last month. Cllr Matt Woodford of Cotford St Luke, Public Art Consultant Suzanne Heath, Chloe and me met some amazing teams but plumped for renowned duo Denman+Gould who, fresh from a site visit, had inspiring ideas. With their track record of award winning, beautifully crafted, site-specific art responding to unique locales and harnessing community creativity they are sure to deliver something amazing for the village.

Coming up imminently are interviews for the **Arts Taunton Castle Green Project** – again some amazing artists are on the shortlist for an ambitious new site-specific temporary (6 month) artwork that responds to the history of the town to delight residents and visitors alike.

Museum of Somerset Exhibitions

The Museum of Somerset have had two amazing exhibitions over the past few months. **Myths and Monsters** (featuring amazing illustrations by top Children's book illustrators, two fabulous sculptures - The Boy Giant and Iron Man, and 'monsters in a jar' made by visitors) was awesome. As for **"In Fashion: How a changing world shaped what we wear"** which has just



opened well, wow! It is beautifully curated, with a fabulous array of original christening gowns and wedding dresses, dresses, suits, uniforms, and outfits from the 18th Century through to the late 20th century it's a fascinating and fun social and cultural history of clothes.

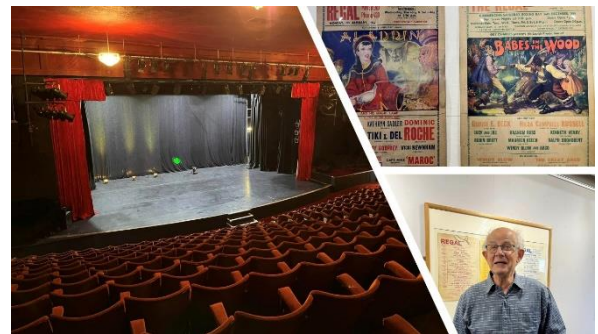
New lease of life for Wyndham Hall

It is brilliant to see The Wyndham Hall by the Museum coming back into use thanks to **Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society** – they are busily restoring, have laid on open days and family events and I am especially excited about their independent cinema plan!



THEATRE

I had a brilliant afternoon at **The Regal Theatre Open Day** in mid-October with behind-the-scenes tour and displays by the many wonderful companies who make up MATA. There was lots of interest from potential future volunteers eager to be part of this amazing place - the theatre's lifeblood as it is entirely volunteer lead and run. It was lovely to meet John Welch who bought the theatre back in the 70s and has been key benefactor. Alongside the fabulous Art Deco auditorium there is a brilliant cafe bar area and ground floor space with frontage to the Avenue - such a key asset for the town. I took the chance to pop into Minehead **Museum** - again massive potential for development there with so many amazing stories to tell, fingers crossed their dream of bigger premises comes to fruition in near future, they've done an amazing fundraising job so far.



Taunton Brewhouse

Congratulations to **Vickie Hobbs** newly appointed as Executive Director of Taunton Brewhouse – formerly finance manager of the theatre, Vickie has an arts background, a real commitment to the theatre and heads up a strong team.

Taunton Brewhouse prides itself on showcasing the best touring work and contemporary performance. **Richard II** by Tangle Theatre company was an innovative take on the Shakespeare classic about the politics of power and succession– performed in South African Township style with an original score of Zimbabwean music. I found it moving and compelling. The Guardian reviewer was impressed too, especially by what she called a 'tremendous professional debut' by young actor Daniel Rock as Richard.



Quite apart from being hugely entertaining, **Taunton Thespians** latest production '**Pride and Prejudice**' which has just ended its run at Taunton Brewhouse, was notable for highlighting the talents of 9 young local actors. If ever there was an advert for the huge benefits



of quality, committed amateur dramatics, quality performing arts education and a community theatre to showcase them in, well that was it!

The Guardian has billed the Brewhouse's Christmas show, awesome circus musical extravaganza, **The Little Prince, as one of the top 25 theatre shows to see in the UK this Christmas.** It will also be one of the most accessible shows with a relaxed performance, audio-described performance, BSL interpreted performance and a show with Ukrainian captions.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2022/nov/09/the-best-25-stage-shows-to-see-this-christmas>

*And finally, congratulations to the **Wiveliscombe Literary Festival** (a first), **The Dulverton Exmoor Literary Festival** (another first!) and the more well-established **Taunton Literary Festival** for laying on such impressive programmes – am just sorry I haven't had time to enjoy them in person!*