

SWT Full Council – 28 March 2023

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Richard Lees, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, David Durdan, Kelly Durdan, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, John Hassall, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Dawn Johnson, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Simon Nicholls, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Lesley Dolan, Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, Andrew Pritchard, Sarah Povall, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas, Kevin Williams, Graeme Thompson, Joe Wharton and Alison Blom-Cooper

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

94. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Ian Aldridge, Barrie Hall, Nicole Hawkins, Craig Palmer and Terry Venner.

Councillor Loretta Whetlor would be arriving late.

95. Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council

(Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 7 February 2023 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council held on 7 February 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

96. 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 L Baker	All Items	SCC, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Darch	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoked and Voted
Cllr A Hadley	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Henley	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Town		
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Pugsley	All Items	SCC	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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
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 R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Wakefield	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	SCC & Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

97.

Public Participation

Pauline and Sigurd Reimers submitted the following question:-

Four years ago, Somerset West and Taunton declared a climate emergency. Many good initiatives followed in its wake, and during this period local Extinction Rebellion and other groups had a number of meetings with the Council based on their concerns about climate breakdown. There was still much left to do, and there might now be only a few years left before an irretrievable tipping point in the climate was reached. This Council would be finishing as a local authority in a few weeks' time. Which of its climate change policies was it most concerned about losing in the transition to the new Unitary Authority?

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change gave the following response:-

In order to bring the five authorities together in time for the 1st April, workstreams for all council activities were set up. The workstreams included officer representation from the five authorities and were asked to produce workplans to ensure a successful transition of services into the new Council.

There had been a climate and water workstream for the past year, and covered climate change, nature recovery and flood water management. The workstream met weekly, and was led by a representative from the districts and one from the county council.

As a result of this, the joint working between the five authorities around climate and nature recovery agendas had increased significantly, and the relationships have

become very strong over the last year. Work underway via the workstream included the creation of a combined carbon baseline for the new authority which would be completed this spring, a longer term costed plan, a comms plan, a climate impact assessment tool to better inform the carbon impact of decision making and a new governance structure that would ensure greater internal and external accountability and scrutiny on progress against Net Zero commitments.

The workstream had also been able to pool funds to produce a countywide tree strategy with external partners such as the Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust, as well as commission a Local Area Energy Plan.

Staff were also working across the five authorities, supporting each other to progress this work. For example, officers at Somerset West and Taunton were using the expertise they had gained on EVCPs to support SCC's bid to the Government's Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI) fund to plan and deliver chargepoint infrastructure for residents without off-street parking.

There were further examples of significant pieces of work to come. Somerset Council would be producing a new Local Plan and Local Transport Plans, which both offered huge opportunity to deliver on Net Zero commitments. The Council would also be the host authority for the Local Nature Partnership, responsible for delivery of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Those were all critical strategic pieces of work that would not progress without harmony between the five authorities, so in many ways we were excited about the opportunities to bring policies together rather than concerned about the ones we were losing.

Angus Mather submitted the following questions:-

Questions to be presented in respect of item 8 Wellington Place Plan Adoption at the Full Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 28th March 2023 at 6.15 pm in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

Subject One – Local Travel Concepts [Sarah Elsmore]

With reference to the Wellington Place Plan Consultation Statement Appendix A, the following was listed as a key Point on page 34:

Sustainable transport - Mixed support for the 15-minute neighbourhood concept and concerns around a zero-tolerance approach to private journeys. Responses also suggested the need for development to incorporate EV charging points.

Question 1: 15 minute principles/concepts - The concerns raised were not addressed in the Council's response to this point. To clarify the situation we would appreciate a definitive definition to be provided with reference to specific documents which the Council were using as guidance to define the **15 minute principles/concepts** referred to on two occasions in the draft Wellington Place Plan, and did the term, **zero-tolerance approach to private journeys** originate in Council documents?

Subject Two – Next Steps, Implementation Plan [Diana Hunt]

Reference: Somerset West and Taunton Council Report No. SWT 163/22, Wellington Place Plan – Approval for Public Consultation item 1.4

***It was not appropriate to adopt the Place Plan as part of the Local Development Scheme, at this moment in time, as the Local Plan for the new unitary authority was under consideration.** However, this work would be fundamental in forming and supporting the development of the new Local Plan, which would then be formally adopted as policy.*

Question 2: Could the Council clarify this statement and as the Place Plan was clearly perceived to be an important document to the Council on the way forward could they confirm that it would be properly annotated with an inset page similar to that shown below before it was issued so that updates and revisions could be

tracked?

Wellington Place Plan - Document Number SWT 0123456etc.				
	Name	Initials	Signature	Date
Originator				
Approver				
Revision 01				
Originator				
Approver				

Subject Three – Consultation Process [Angus Mather]

With reference to the Wellington Place Plan Consultation Statement Appendix A, the following could be found on page 24:

*The Wellington Place Plan consultation ran from 23 January to 20 February 2023 and followed a visioning exercise with the community in October 2022. The consultation followed the methods set out in our Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out **the minimum requirements** for public participation in the preparation of a Local Plan.*

The Town and Country Planning Regulations referred to covers *Local Plans* and *Supplementary Plans* and these were defined in the Regulations. There was no reference or definition of **Place Plans** in the Regulations so we would contend that the requirements relating to consultation referred to in the Regulations are not applicable in this instance as they related more to clearly defined planning applications which the Wellington Place Plan was not. We think that the Wellington Place Plan would be more accurately described as a Local Development Strategy. Had the Wellington Place Plan been a Local Plan the Council could be regarded as having met, *the minimum requirements of public participation*. However, we contend that even if the Place Plan was actually a Local Plan then much more than *the minimum requirements of consultation* should have been met. This Plan would drastically change the way in which the population of Wellington would conduct their lives.

The consultation with the general public comprised the following:

The consultation process could be summarised as 20 hours face to face contact with the public and an on-line consultation process spread covered a 5 week period which solicited a total of 135 responses. Considering that the population of Wellington was 16,500 people and the population of the surrounding area was estimated to be 188,000 people we would say that 135 responses indicated that the consultation process had been an abject failure. With reference to Somerset West and Taunton Council Report No. SWT 163/22, Wellington Place Plan – Approval for Public Consultation, item 3 Risk Assessment:

The main risk was not managing to reach a representative proportion of all groups in Wellington, meaning that those voices were not heard in this consultation exercise.

We consider those risks to have materialised. The UK Government produced a guidance document, *Consultation Principles 2018* which was perhaps more valid in this situation than the Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012. When considering the Government's guidance we believed that the consultation process was not long enough or detailed enough. For a project of this magnitude and considering the massive effect it would have on everyone's lives we believed that the consultation period should have been much longer, up to 6 months. We believed that this Plan was being rushed through and there had not been an appropriate amount of time between closing the consultation and approving the results of the

consultation process.

Question 3: In view of the low number of respondents to the consultation process do the Council agreed that the consultation process had been a failure, had not met their own guidelines and would the Council agree that a further period of consultation would be appropriate?

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation gave the following response:-

Question 1

The 15-minute neighbourhood was a concept of local living, illustrated in the graphic on page 95. The concept was to promote sustainable and self-sufficient places, where access to 'daily services' such as schools, doctors, public open space, local transport, shops, employment were within a 15 minute walk or short cycle. The 15-minute neighbourhood served as a principle for development and urban life that made life more liveable for residents, by improving air quality and making neighbourhoods safer, quieter, more diverse, inclusive and economically vibrant. The "zero-tolerance approach to private journeys" was a phrase put forward by respondent WPP001.

Question 2

The Somerset Council would be preparing a Local Plan for the entire area. The requirement was to do this within 5 years of vesting day i.e by 1 April 2028. The evidence base from the Wellington Place Plan would inform this.

Changes to the Wellington Place Plan, if any, would be agreed at Full Council this evening and recorded in the final Plan. The document, once adopted, would become a material planning consideration in the determination of planning proposals and for other development management purposes within Wellington until such time as we have developed the strategy for the new Somerset Wide Local Plan.

Question 3

The Wellington Place Plan consultation ran from 23 January to 20 February 2023 and followed a visioning exercise with the community in October 2022. The consultation followed the methods set out in our Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

The Wellington Place Plan was not a Supplementary Planning Document, but we have treated the process and consultation in accordance with the requirements for SPD in order to ensure a thorough and robust process and for us to be able to agree the Plan as policy and a material planning consideration in accordance with best practice. We have consulted in line with the requirements the adoption of a Supplementary Planning Document set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The minimum requirements for public participation in the preparation of a Local Plan, which were to:

- Publicise the consultation on the **Council's website**, with evidence base studies and related information also available to view and download;
- Make hard copies of documents available at **inspection points** at the Council's offices; and
- **Notify** statutory bodies, stakeholders, relevant groups and other individuals or groups on our consultation database – either by email; or letters if they have specifically requested to be contacted by post.

In addition to this, the Place Plan had been informed by a diverse programme of engagement activities, which took place alongside our review of the evidence base, feeding into our understanding of opportunities, constraints and key priorities. This had shaped a clear set of thematic principles, projects and plans which responded to the main outcomes from a wide range of conversations with different stakeholders

and members of the community.

Engagement activities were held as follows:

- Officers workshop: 11th October 2022 10am-12pm (virtual)
- Members workshop: 18th October 2022 6-8pm (virtual)
- Drop-in event: 20th October 2022 11am-3pm (in-person - Quaker Meeting House)
- Community workshop: 20th October 2022 5.30-7pm (in-person - Wellington Community Centre)
- Survey: 10th-21st October 2022 (virtual and in-person)
- Schools engagement

For information, and as set out in the Consultation Statement (Appendix 1), Section 3, consultation took place with the following, from 23 January to 20 February 2023:

- Statutory consultees (defined in the Regulations);
- General public (residents)
- Local businesses
- Parish/town councils
- Special interest groups and organisations
- Community/residents groups, including individuals/groups protected under the Equalities Act
- Consultee database (those who have expressed an interest previously)
- Under-represented groups – in Wellington these have been identified as being residents on low incomes, ethnic minority groups and young people (0-17 years)

The methods of consultation included the following:

Website On the Planning Policy home page at:

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/> and on our consultation portal: <https://yoursay.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk>. Baseline Report, Vision Summary, related information and questionnaire available to view and download

Inspection Points Hard copies of documents and questionnaires available to view at the Wellington Town Council's offices and Wellington Library

Email Notifications sent from the generic email address

strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk to all statutory consultees, stakeholders and relevant groups and other individuals and organisations on our consultation database.

Information boards at Wellington Library

Public exhibitions Three events at the Pop-Up Shop in Wellington

Robert Barnes spoke on many issues within the Taunton Town Centre area, which included concerns on homelessness, street cleanliness, cost of living crisis and the condition of some of the flower beds.

The Leader of the Council thanked Mr Barnes for his comments and would look into the issues raised.

98. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Chair of the Council**

The Chair of Council thanked everyone who attended the civic service.

99. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council advised councillors that as part of the closing of the council, sixty-five trees had been planted across the district, to represent each of the councillors.

100. **To receive any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13**

No questions had been received.

101. **Wellington Place Plan – Adoption**

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors supported the adoption of the Plan.
- Councillors highlighted certain aspects of Wellington that had shown progression and advancement.
- Councillors commended officers for the report.
- Councillors were surprised by the amount of public that had attended the Full Council meeting, as there had not been any signs of contention at previous events on the Place Plan.
- Councillors had attended previous events and advised that they had been very good for information sharing.
- Concern was raised on the low level of responses that had been received.
- Councillors highlighted that lessons could be learned from the process for future plans and consultations.
- Councillors were pleased to see that accessibility had been included to facilitate disabled users.
- Councillors were pleased to see a planning document implemented with such positive feedback.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- Adopted the Wellington Place Plan as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the area of the Plan; and that;
- The Portfolio Holder, in consultation with the Assistant Director Strategic Place and Planning, be authorised to make minor amendments to the Place Plan prior to publication.

102. **Firepool Masterplan – Adoption**

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors were pleased to see works had started on the site.
- Councillors were pleased to see that there was inbuilt flexibility in the plans.
- Councillors were sad to see the loss of the multi-purpose venue (MPV) from the plans.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation advised that the MPV was still an aspiration but would depend on the economic outturn on other parts of the project.

- Councillors agreed that they needed to continue to look to the future because it was an important project for the town.
- Councillors praised the amount of work that had been put into the master plan and that it was positive project and would bring vitality to the town.

- Concern was raised on the zero carbon designs in the risk section of the report. *The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation took on the comments made on the risks.*
- Concern was raised on behalf of the local businesses and lack of trade once the boulevard had been installed. *The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation understood their concern but highlighted the other areas of town that had promoted their trade and built-up good levels of business.*
- Councillors highlighted that it was fundamentally important that the system embedded accessibility at the early stages of the project.
- Councillors were pleased with the progress made on the project over the past four years and were happy to support the report.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 2.1 Adopted the Firepool Masterplan (see Appendix A) as a material planning consideration in the preparation of pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes.
- 2.2 Adopted the conclusions of the Habitat Regulations Assessment Report (see Appendix C) which stated that the Firepool Masterplan would not adversely affect the integrity of Hestercombe House SAC or the Somerset Level and Moors Ramsar site, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects, subject to mitigation identified within.
- 2.3 Agreed that the Assistant Director Strategic Place and Planning in consultation with the Economic Development, Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder be authorised to approve and make minor amendments prior to the final publication of the Firepool Masterplan.

103. **Chair's Annual Reports**

The Chair's Annual Reports were presented for each of the following committee:-

- Audit and Governance Committee
- Community Scrutiny Committee
- Corporate Scrutiny Committee
- Standards Committee

All the Chair's thanked all their committee members and officers for all their hard work put in over the past year.

104. **Minutes from the last meeting of each of the Committees**

Resolved that Full Council noted the minutes of the following committees:-

Audit and Governance Committee 13 March 2023

Community Scrutiny Committee 22 February 2023

Corporate Scrutiny Committee 1 March 2023

Standards Committee 23 February 2023

Executive 15 March 2023

Licensing Committee 20 March 2023 – the minutes for this meeting would be taken to the first meeting of Full Council for the Somerset Council.

105. **To consider reports from Executive Councillors - For Information Only**

Resolved that Full Council noted the reports.

Moments of Reflection

The Group Leader for the Independents made the following points of reflection:-

Thanked all the councillors for their help and support;

Thanked the staff for the same;

Thanked her fellow Independents for making her their leader last year and thanked the previous leader for his sterling work;

She spoke of how excited she was when she was made a councillor back in 2019 little knowing what it entailed and what the future would bring;

She was proud to have been part of SWT and was very sad to see it go as it was just beginning to make its mark;

Now taking a long and well-earned rest but would be around to keep the New Council on its toes;

Wished everyone well for the future;

Goodbye and good luck to those who would be on the New Council and best wishes to those that wouldn't be there but sure they would still continue to help their communities.

The Group Leader for the Conservatives made the following points of reflection:-

What an inheritance SWT had left for the community!

Tonight was a celebration of SWT;

He mentioned past leaders of the party and the hard work they had put into the role;

So much work had been done by councillors over the years (West Somerset Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and now SWT);

He highlighted many projects that had been worked on in the area over the years and that he was very proud of what had been achieved;

Thanked all the officers for their work;

He wished everyone the best for the future;

He commended the work achieved by SWT.

The Group Leader for the Labour Party made the following points of reflection:-

Thanked all for the opportunity to speak;

SWT had been the shortest-lived district council in the land;

She highlighted it had been a long four years with all the challenges that the Council had faced;

She highlighted that being part of the opposition group was not about being against the leading party but about challenging and holding the leading party to account by questioning their proposals and working collaboratively;

Spoke on big projects, like the North Taunton Woolaway Project and the Community Governance Review of the Unparished Area of Taunton;

Thanked the officers for their hard work and wished them well for the future;

Thanked the Chair and all the councillors;

Thanked the voters.

The Leader of the Council made the following points of reflection:-

She was excited about the future ahead at Somerset Council and embedding the SWT successes to benefit all of Somerset residents, she had, as the time got nearer to vesting day, felt a sense of sadness and loss;

SWT had achieved so much over the past four years despite the challenges

and curveballs that had been thrown at the Council, that the letting go of something that for many, gave so much energy and sacrifice, was a moment in time and consideration;

In May 2019, after the Lib Dems took office and their Executive was formed, the reality of quite what the situation was in bringing the Councils together; It was thanks to many of the officers who were sat in the room today and many who had gone on to pastures new, that we built up from the challenging start to what we were today and whilst needing to stabilise the Council as an organisation they took it in their stride the pace that was set by the Leader along with the Executive to achieve the ambitions that they not only set out in the manifesto which turned into their Corporate Plan but to deal with many of the unforeseen events that had happened;

She highlighted many of the achievements made in the first year which included dozens of Full Council meetings;

SWT then faced the pandemic, something that would leave an imprint on all of them as individuals and their communities though over the almost two years of measures, she was extremely proud of the Council and how it looked to support not just the most vulnerable in society but many others, in a variety of different ways;

Even during the pandemic they still looked to push on with what they wanted to achieve in line with our manifesto/corporate plan ethos;

She had spent several hours re-reading the Full Council agendas and looked at all that they as a collective had achieved, in her view it had truly been phenomenal, she knew that it had not been perfect and there were always things that could have been done better but she truly believed as a collective of all of the councillors and the wonderful staff, they had saved lives and made the area better for many of the residents and the environment;

She thanked all the Chief Executive's and their Senior Management Team, along with her Executive Assistant and all the officers in the Democratic Services Team;

To all of the councillors, those that stood down and to those who sadly passed away, they together, regardless of their political allegiance had stood up for their communities and looked to make it better, it took a lot to stand up and be in the firing line and it had been a pleasure to do that alongside all of them;

She closed by thanking all of her family for their support in her role as Leader of SWT.

The Chair of the Council made the following points of reflection:-

She gave a huge thank you to the officers for all their hard work;

Thanked all the councillors for their collaborative working over the four years;

Thanked the Leader of the Council for their achievements over the four years;

It had been a momentous four years;

She highlighted it had been a joy to represent the Council;

She closed by giving her final farewell to all of those present at the meeting and wished everyone well for the future.

(The Meeting ended at 8.30 pm)