

# **Council Meeting – 2 October 2018**

## **Report of Councillor John Williams – Leader of the Council**

### **1. Taunton Marine Geospatial Innovation Centre**

1.1 I am pleased to report that the Council is working closely with key partners including the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO), Somerset County Council (SCC), Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, Bridgwater and Taunton College, University Centre Somerset and Exeter University, to create a marine geospatial innovation centre in Taunton. All partners are committed to the project, which has several elements:-

- The creation of a pioneering digital innovation centre in Taunton, aimed at catalysing commercial innovation and collaboration. The focus will be on maximising the economic, academic and entrepreneurial opportunities associated with the UKHO's world-leading marine geospatial data, as a core component of the centre's offer.
- This innovation centre will be a highly digitally enabled facility, combining flexible office space and meeting rooms with a set of collaboration, learning and socialisation spaces. Fully equipped for on-site functions, the centre will also provide larger spaces for workshops and investor events – the perfect expansion environment for businesses where digital innovation and geospatial data are growth catalysts.
- The centre will act as a hub for business growth support for its target business community, fostering innovation and enabling further links with academia – facilitating communications and collaboration with businesses and institutions around the world.
- Driving the development of Taunton as a “smart Garden Town” and regional hub for digital innovation and skills, with the UKHO at the forefront of the UK Government's Geospatial Commission aims to support private sector growth by making best use of Government geospatial data assets.

1.2 Over the coming months, we will be working with our partners to develop a business case for the project and seek support from the Government and others to take it forward.

### **2. Quantock House and Lyngford House, Taunton**

2.1 At the Planning Committee on 12 April 2018, approval was given for 88 assisted extra care apartments at Quantock House and the redevelopment of the Lyngford House site into 45 assisted living dwellings.

### **3. Transport Schemes**

- 3.1 The Junction 25 improvement works are expected to start in Spring 2019, with completion anticipated for Spring 2021 (this is dependent on the programme put forward by the contractors). Good progress is being made by SCC with necessary land acquisition agreements and detailed design now complete, Road Safety Audits are underway and procurement documents and additional traffic modelling are nearing completion.
- 3.2 The Toneway Corridor improvements work is expected to start in Spring/Summer 2020 to be complete by the Summer of 2021.

### **4. Taunton Park and Ride**

- 4.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council has pledged a one-off contribution to keep the Park and Ride sites at Silk Mills and Gateway open until at least September 2019 after Somerset County Council put forward proposals to suspend them in a bid to make financial savings.
- 4.2 Taunton Deane met its SCC counterparts on 6 September 2018 so the authorities could find a solution in light of the continuing squeeze on the public purse.
- 4.3 The Council will provide the initial financial support that will allow the service to continue to operate while a commercially viable service is developed by the authorities and First Bus to complement existing parking provision.
- 4.4 I am pleased that we are able to secure the future of these important edge of town transport links. They are essential for drivers looking for an efficient, cost-effective way of getting into the town centre and are extremely beneficial to the local economy. Park and Ride schemes enhance our excellent transport links in Taunton Deane, they help to reduce congestion and pollution and are an integral element of our status as the first Garden Town in the South West.
- 4.5 Whilst our one-off contribution cannot guarantee the long term future of the service, it does provide a crucial window of opportunity to work with our SCC partners and the bus operating company to put the service on a commercially sound footing. As partners, we are convinced there is potential to create a sustainable future for the service and we will leave no stone unturned in our pursuit of that objective.

### **5. Shadow Council**

- 5.1 The Shadow Council, consisting of all Members of the two existing Councils, has now met twice. Most recently on 10 September 2018 to consider and agree a set of Employment Procedure Rules in relation to Statutory Officers for the Shadow Council and to consider the recommendations regarding the recruitment to the Chief Executive post for the new Council. That recruitment is now underway, with the indicative timeline anticipating an appointment decision during November 2018.

- 5.2 A full schedule of meeting dates has been agreed and circulated through to April 2019.
- 5.3 The Boundary Commission are presently considering the representations made in response to their public consultation on the warding pattern for the new Council, in respect of which Members and officers delivered two well attended promotional events at the Dunster Show and in Taunton Town Centre. The Commission's proposals are expected during late October and will, of course, be shared with all Members once received.

## **6. Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget Update**

- 6.1 The initial starting point for the 2019/2020 budget will be the combined base budgets of Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils. It is proposed that the new Council undertakes a full base budget review after April 2019 to build on the experience of working as a single Council and the new operating model.
- 6.2 The latest Medium Term Financial Plan summary shows that there is a broadly balanced position up to 2021/2022 with a predicted budget gap of £407,000 by 2023/2024. However, this is dependent in particular upon the accuracy of the forecast funding position beyond 2019/2020 and full delivery of the Transformation and one Council savings.

## **7. The Deane House Refurbishment**

- 7.1 The Accommodation Team will be opening up the remainder of the first floor at The Deane House during the week of the 1 October 2018. This represents an agreed occupation, one week later than expected and is entirely attributed to the excessive temperatures experienced within the roof space during the summer. This significantly slowed progress on cabling and ventilation works with a knock on effect on ceiling and lighting installations and commissioning of ventilation systems.
- 7.2 By the end of the week (5 October 2018) we will have 215 hot desks available for staff and Councillors to work from. None of the hot desks will have fixed terminals so Councillors will need to use their mobile technology to access files and information when working from The Deane House.
- 7.3 Any Councillor who has any difficulty with their IT equipment can obtain assistance through the IT helpdesk [ithelpdesk@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:ithelpdesk@tauntondeane.gov.uk) or by contacting Andrew Randell [a.randell@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:a.randell@tauntondeane.gov.uk)
- 7.4 The new area will have an additional eight meeting rooms, 2 x 12 person rooms, 4 x 4 person rooms and 2 x 2 person rooms.
- 7.5 As of the week commencing 8 October 2018, isolation works and demolition will take place on the second floor, in the John Meikle Room and adjoining corridor. These areas will be out of bounds to staff. Contractors will access the

second floor by the carpark staircase. This will be a shared route with employees accessing the first floor only.

7.6 The project remains on course for a February 2019 completion.

## 8. **Recruitment Update**

8.1 The recent appointment of 64 staff including Head of Finance and Strategic Finance Adviser/Section 151 Officer really starts to bring our new organisational model to life.

8.2 I would like to congratulate everyone that has a new role and wish them every success in it.

8.3 I would also like to formally welcome Christine Fraser, our new Head of Performance and Governance and Robert Hillier, our new Head of Communications and Engagement to the Council. They both start on 8 October 2018.

8.4 This has also been a difficult time for those that were unsuccessful in applying for Phase 1 roles. In addition, some people have chosen to take voluntary redundancy. We say goodbye to 33 people in total. Leaving dates vary as several people are staying on beyond the end of September to help with transition and Business as Usual.

8.5 I would personally like to thank all of those leaving the Council for their dedication, commitment and hard work during the time they have been with us. I wish everyone well for the future.

Councillor John Williams