

Council Meeting – 11 December 2018

Report of Councillor Mark Edwards - Economic Development, Asset Management, Arts and Culture, Tourism and Communications

Section 1 – Communications

- 1.1 The new team are starting to come together under the new Head of Communications and Engagement, Robert Hillier.
- 1.2 Robert has worked in journalism and communication for more than 20 years, from BBC Spotlight, to the United Arab Emirates Government and most recently Falmouth University and Cornwall Council.
- 1.3 Alongside building the new team, he has begun a process of modernising our communications operation to build on the success of our own channels to become less reliant on traditional local media. Charlotte Winmill has received training in social media video production and her short film on the arrival of this year's Taunton Christmas tree managed 8,000 views in the first few days on the Council's own Facebook page – against zero coverage in the local press. This has been followed up by a detailed online campaign to increase awareness of Taunton's Christmas offer in conjunction with local businesses. This includes new content on You Tube and LinkedIn. We have set an engagement target in excess of 100,000 for the pre-Christmas period.
- 1.4 The new fortnightly publication "Transformation Tuesday" has been designed to give staff and Members, insights and stories in to the transformation process with a special focus on those individual case studies of personal change. Other face to face meetings with staff representatives have provided an excellent opportunity to cascade information and "myth-bust" to improve positive engagement with the transformation process.
- 1.5 As more members of the team move in to their roles full time and capacity is increased there will be wider focus on increasing coverage outside of Taunton to amplify and support positive stories across the area. This will include support and capacity building to Members to aid them in communicating directly with residents through popular social media channels.
- 1.6 The new website project is continuing at pace and user testing for the site will begin early in the New Year.
- 1.7 We continue to work closely with the organising committee of the Cricket World Cup to ensure Taunton and Somerset benefits from the global exposure the event offers. In addition, we continue to offer support and guidance on a daily basis to all Council functions and our external stakeholders.

- 1.8 Press interest has been generated by several key projects including:-
- The demolition of St James Street Pool, Taunton marking the first stage in the implementation of new plans for Coal Orchard;
 - The introduction of the Pay on Exit system in seven Taunton Town Centre Car Parks which is now due to be launched on 14 January 2019, following comprehensive testing of the system and its links to the Variable Messaging System;
 - The regeneration project at North Taunton where an option has been agreed to refurbish two areas west of Dorchester Road and North of Ludlow Avenue, and undertake a complete regeneration project in the central area which will involve the demolition of existing homes and replacement with new, energy efficient homes;
 - The Public Realm Improvement Project to make Taunton Town Centre more user friendly and improve the area for pedestrians and cyclists. Phase one covering the permanent closure of St James Street between North Street and Lower Middle Street will begin in the New Year. Phase two which will see an 18-month trial closure of Hammet Street and East Street to all vehicles except buses and cyclists, will follow;
 - The introduction of Street Wardens to provide reassurance for shoppers and visitors to Taunton Town Centre following concerns over rough sleeping and anti-social behaviour. The wardens began by working various day and night shifts with a focus on key hotspots in the town. They have been operating on a regular daily basis from 29 November and will continue through to 31 December 2018; and
 - Additionally there has been interest in the recent appointment of the new Chief Executive James Hassett. Arrangements are in hand for media interviews when he takes up his post in the New Year.
- 1.9 The team has also been promoting Christmas news including this years' event 'Winterfest' which incorporated the official switch-on of the Christmas tree lights; late night shopping and the free parking offer on the four Saturdays before Christmas.
- 1.10 This week has seen another milestone in the Accommodation Project with the Police moving in (10 December 2018). The communication teams for both authorities have been working together to promote the shared space and new opening hours.

Section 2 - Events, Place, Retail Marketing and Visitor Centre

Events

- 2.1 **Feast:** Castle Green, Taunton was home to a two day festival on 29 and 30 September 2018, which celebrated local produce with chef demonstrations.

The day was a huge success for the organisers Michelle Beck and Annabel McCabe....and it even attracted ITV West Country News! The success has lead the organisers to look at running this event more frequently.

- 2.2 **Carnival:** Taunton Carnival saw a large turnout to support the organisers and the charities they were raising money for, with vintage cars and racing cars in the High Street to help with footfall along with raffles and a tombola.
- 2.3 **Winterfest:** Ben and Charmaine De'vey along with Phil and Rachel Morgan of Pro Sound Solutions teamed up to present Winterfest on 25 November 2018. A mid-winter festival to support the turning on of the Christmas tree and Projector lights in Taunton Town Centre. The switch on was by local man and true hero Jim Booth and was enjoyed by 1000's of people.
- 2.4 **Cricket World Cup:** Plans for the Fan Zone and Cricket World Cup are progressing well. Craig Stone will be liaising with local schools and colleges to assist with raising the awareness of the event. Sub groups are also being organised to deal with specific tasks and the first Committee Steering Group took place on Tuesday, 20 November 2018. The plan is to close North Street, Corporation Street, Hammet Street, East Street and create a Fan Zone in the centre of the town. The Zone will have interactive games promoting cricket for children and families. We will be joining Visit Somerset to increase our reach for engaging and inspiring non cricket fans.
- 2.5 **Future Events:**
- Gin Festival: The Great British Gin Festival have made a provisional booking for Vivary Park, Taunton for 30 March 2019;
 - Ciderthon: To help celebrate Somerset Day, a booking to hold a Ciderthon is planned for 5 May 2019;
 - Party in the Park: Following the success of 2018, LCC Live will be returning to hold another three day music festival in Vivary Park on 12, 13 and 14 July 2019; and
 - Fake Festivals: With two highly successful years, Fake Festivals plan to return to Longrun Meadow, Bishops Hull for a third year.
- 2.6 **Place Marketing:** A new Visitor Guide for 2019 is being commissioned. Social Media: 1.2% growth from the previous month.

Facebook (Followers)	10217
Twitter	7213
Instagram	2311

Section 3 - Growth Strategy and Specific Projects

Coal Orchard Redevelopment

- 3.1 The detailed planning application was granted on 26 September 2018. We started on site with the demolition of St James Swimming Pool on 3 October

with completion due on 3 December 2018.

- 3.2 Our commercial agents have secured one pre-let on the scheme for a wine/tapas bar. We have strong interest from a gym operator, who are currently seeking a franchisee to operate it prior to agreeing terms. We are progressing a Marketing Strategy for both the residential and commercial units in readiness for work commencing. The show flat is due to be ready by the end of September 2019, although the Agents will be starting to market off plan from June. Marketing of the commercial units is already underway but activity will increase from early next year.
- 3.3 Tenders for the main contractor are due to be opened on 7 December 2018. Following this, we will qualify the tenders and hopefully award the contract by 7 January 2019, to achieve a start on site on programme for 4 February 2019. The construction will be undertaken in five phases and is programmed to be completed by the beginning of September 2020.
- 3.4 25 car spaces are due to be completed in Phase 1 of the contract by 31 March 2019, however we will seek to avoid a complete closure of the car park from the beginning of February until these spaces are ready by working with the contractor to provide some spaces on site or close by to assist with parking for the local businesses.

The Brewhouse Development

- 3.5 Architects (MICA) and Project Managers / Cost Consultants (Mace) were appointed in October 2018. Initial kick off and the first design team meetings have been held with the Taunton Theatre Association senior team to start the process of developing the strategic brief for the redevelopment of the building including an increase in the number of seats in the main auditorium and other potential new spaces.
- 3.6 MICA Architects have worked on a number of high profile cultural projects, including the Lyric Theatre in London and bring a wealth of ideas and specialist knowledge to the project. The initial strategic brief stage will be completed by Spring next year after which the output will be subject to a gateway review before proceeding to the next stage.

Firepool Development, Taunton

- 3.7 Since the previous report, the St Modwen and Taunton Deane Partnership has ceased. The Firepool Project is now led by the Commercial Investment and Change functional area of the Council. Since the announcement of St Modwen's departure we have had significant market and stakeholder interest so we will fully explore these opportunities.
- 3.8 The Council as landowner and promoter of the local economy is in a strong position to formulate and take forward a revised Development Strategy to work together with stakeholders to implement the outline planning consent for a mixed use scheme on this prime site. We have cleared the regulatory

hurdles, including flooding issues and ecology, and are in the process of finalising conditions, completing essential land assembly and will be testing the market to identify the most viable and sustainable uses across the site.

- 3.9 Following the recent Full Council meeting on this subject and recent feedback and Member involvement officers now have some clear next steps to progress.
- 3.10 Officers have been asked to bring a report to Council setting out what resources and funds are required to manage the process and achieve a delivery plan. A new approach using the Growth Steering Group to oversee emerging proposals for each development plot, within the context of the outline consent but with a wider Board of experts to help and assist in achieving our aims.
- 3.11 Existing place-making proposals including a cinema will be looked at again in conjunction with other flexible assets providing multi-uses, such as a potential option for new Concert Space or Conference Centre. Project resource and a professional team will be commissioned to establish and deliver a revised development programme.

Firepool Land Assembly

- 3.12 Agreement has been reached to acquire the land and interests from the remaining third parties. We are on course to finalise contracts and anticipate these will be completed by the end of 2018. The completion of land assembly will give the Council full control of the whole of the Firepool Development site, enables progress to continue with design and planned installation of key infrastructure, such as the boulevard adjacent to the Railway Station.

Firepool Section 106 Agreement

- 3.13 The Council as landowner and Local Planning Authority and Somerset County Council Highways have reached an agreement on the key conditions for the comprehensive Firepool Development to be progressed. This is due to be finalised by Legal ideally before Christmas 2018.

Section 4 - Asset Management Service Update

- 4.1 Resourcing of the Asset Management Team has been sustained with the replacement of the Principal Estates Surveyor at the end of October 2018 as well as a Senior Estates Surveyor, both to replace staff who have moved on to take up other external roles. Asset Management have welcomed these new members of the team as well as the replacement Technical Compliance Manager, and two replacement Asset / Stock Condition Surveyors (resulting in a team of four Asset Surveyors).
- 4.2 With two existing team members (GIS Technician – work going with them – and Leasehold Estates Officer) starting roles in the new structure on 1

December 2018 and one voluntary redundancy at the end of December (a West Somerset Council Estates Officer) we are recruiting interim contract resource to cover the two roles not taking their work to the new structure.

4.3 The delegation of authority of the Corporate Property Function has been updated with delegation from the Director to the Asset Manager/ Head of Asset Manager (or interim) and provisions for managers reporting into this role to provide authority alongside a Director in the absence of the Asset Manager/ Head of Asset Management.

4.4 Key project work updates include:-

- **New Asset Management System**

The new Asset Management System contract was completed at the end of September 2018 and implementation has commenced to ensure the new system will be up and running in March 2019 ready for the New Council. Beyond April 2019 the system will gradually be developed to integrate various Asset related data sets.

- **Leisure Procurement Facilities – Assets and Leases**

Asset Management has continued to support the Leisure Procurement Team with the Leisure Procurement tender process which is at an advanced stage, recently attending the Competitive Dialogue.

- **Proposed Country Park (Near Nerrols Farm, Taunton)**

Land near Nerrols Farm, Taunton was acquired in October and a licence was granted to the Parish Councils for the World War One Memorial Works. The Parishes of West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine plan to undertake extensive tree planting with sponsorship and support from external Charities.

The Parish Councils will take maintenance and management responsibility for the park. The intention is that a Trust and Management Agreement between Taunton Deane and the Parish Councils currently in draft will be implemented before the end of March 2019.

4.5 Other ongoing service area project work:

- **Annual Asset and Insurance Valuations**

Asset Management have instructed Wilkes Head Eve to commence the Annual Asset Valuations for completion by the end of March 2019. The phased programme of Insurance Reinstatement Valuations commenced with the first tranche of assets in October 2018.

- **Landlord and Tenant Advice for Projects Managed by Development and Regeneration Teams**

In addition to continuing Estates Case Work, Asset Management continues to provide advice and support where required on Estates, Asset and Landlord and Tenant matters for Council led development and regeneration projects.

- **Income Recovery Efficiency Improvements**

A project to improve efficiency in this area has already seen improvements in Asset related income recovery, however more work is planned in this area related to existing General Fund Assets and tenant contractual obligations.

- **Unauthorised Traveller Encampments**

Incidents of unauthorised traveller encampments have reduced since the end of September 2018. However Asset Management and Planning are liaising with Somerset County Council on potential solutions to improving continuing management challenges in this area as well as investigating possible ways to reduce impact on the local community where there has been concern in some cases.

Councillor Mark Edwards