

Special Full Council - 14 November 2018

Present: Councillor C Herbert (Chair)

Councillors P Watson, A Sully, T Beale, R Lees, R Parrish, R Bowrah, W Brown, N Cavill, S Coles, W Coombes, D Cossey, M Edwards, H Farbahi, M Floyd, J Gage, E Gaines, R Habgood, T Hall, J Blatchford, M Hill, J Hunt, G James, L Lisgo, S Martin-Scott, I Morrell, S Nicholls, C Booth, H Prior-Sankey, J Reed, R Ryan, F Smith-Roberts, F Smith, V Stock-Williams, N Townsend, C Tucker, P Berry, D Webber, D Wedderkopp, J Williams and G Wren

Also Present: Mrs Anne Elder

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm)

11. **Apologies**

Councillors Mrs Adkins, M Adkins, Davies, D Durdan, Govier, Mrs Gunner, Hill, Horsley, Mansell and Mrs Warmington.

12. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Mrs Smith-Roberts declared a personal interest due to her Charity which occupied as part of the Auction House located on the Firepool site.

13. **Public Participation**

- a) Mr Kit Chapman stated that the news of St Modwen pulling away from the Firepool Project was positive news. The project was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and all parties should now work together to focus on the future. Councillor Edwards had shown initiative with the idea of the conference centre and he would certainly encourage this. Work for the Hydrographic Office to have a base on the site was also positive news.

Mr Chapman went on to suggest that a visitor centre located on Firepool should also be considered to promote not only the Taunton Area but the unique surrounding areas such as the Quantock Hills, Exmoor National Park and the Brendon Hills.

- b) Mrs Jackie Calcroft was encouraged by recent plans which appeared to embrace a wider range of uses for the Firepool site. She made reference to the Business Consultation for the Firepool Hotel and Business Case considered at the last Full Council meeting in addition to the item on tackling anti-social behaviour. Initiatives such as the recruitment of Street Wardens was welcomed by both the public and retailers.

Mrs Calcroft put the following specific questions to the Council:-

- When did the Firepool Hotel Investment consultation finish?
- Would these results be made public and if so, when?
- Were there any proposals to link Firepool with direct road access to Trenchard Way?
- Would a shuttle service be considered between the new Railway Station and the Bus Station?
- Was there a Business Plan between Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council to make changes to the existing Park and Ride scheme?
- Had the Task and Finish Group relating to tackling anti-social behaviour completed its brief? When was the decision to employ Street Wardens taken and by whom? What would the costs be and where would the funding come from?

Councillor Williams replied that any questions not answered as part of the forthcoming debate would be picked up outside of the meeting and would be sent to Mrs Calcroft in writing.

- c) Mr Ray Tulley criticised the lack of progress in developing the Firepool site over the last ten years. The loss of revenue over the lack of opportunity was questioned. It was very unsatisfactory that the site had not generated any revenue during this time.
- d) County Councillor John Hunt made a statement in favour of the option of a multi-purpose conference centre being built at Firepool. Retail units were not needed and if such units were provided this would inevitably lead to the loss of jobs from existing retail businesses in the main town centre. Greater inclusion of all parties, businesses, community leaders and stakeholders was needed to progress with the 'correct type' of development which would be of benefit to the residents of Taunton Deane.

14. **Firepool Report**

Reported that in accordance with Clause 27 of the Procedure Rules for Full Council, the Mayor had received and granted a requisition to convene a Special Meeting of Full Council to discuss a Motion relating to the Firepool Project following the withdrawal of St Modwen from the Development Agreement.

The Motion which had been submitted by Councillor Coles read as follows:-

“Dear Madam Mayor,

In light of the decision by St Modwen to withdraw from the Firepool development further delaying the delivery of Tauntons' Vision, we would request that a “Special Full Council” meeting is convened at the earliest opportunity to consider the implications of this move on the economic and commercial future of our County Town's regeneration.

As Leader of the Opposition I ask that the Leader of the Council and the Economic Development Asset Management Portfolio Holder consider standing down ahead of the Special Full Council and handing their roles over to other Members who would enjoy cross party support for this most important regeneration opportunity for the County Town in 150 years.

There is a desperate need for new thinking and transparency in the eyes of the public as well as a genuine desire to bring forward the benefits of the River Tone running through the heart of the County Town.

Simon Coles”.

In accordance with the terms of the Constitution, the requisition and associated Motion had been supported by Councillors Booth, Farbahi, Mrs Hill, Horsley and Mrs Lees.

The Motion was duly proposed by Councillor Coles and seconded by Councillor Farbahi.

A presentation was made to Members by the Head of Localities (Brendan Cleere) and the Head of Commercial, Investment and Change (James Barra) detailing the timeline of the Firepool site, the existing progress and future plans that were under consideration.

Following the presentation, Councillor Williams proposed an amendment to the second paragraph of Councillor Coles’s Motion so that it read as follows:-

“As Leader of the Opposition I ask that the Leader of the Council and the Economic Development Asset Management Portfolio Holder:-

- 1) Carry out a Market Assessment and engagement especially for non-residential uses;
- 2) In recognition of the above and greater Member involvement, we request officers to bring a report to Full Council setting out what resources and funds are required to manage the process and achieve delivery;
- 3) Once agreed, progress can be overseen by the Cross Party Steering Group which will allow clarity of approach and agree the treatment of plots within the context of the outline planning consent;
- 4) Commission specific work regarding the potential multi use Concert/Conference Centre taking account of The Brewhouse Theatre and cinema proposals;
- 5) Commission the necessary project resource and professional team to deliver; and
- 6) Establish a delivery plan for each phase.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Edwards.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements and asked questions which included:-

- Members acknowledged that more needed to be done to work together to build a solution that residents and businesses wanted.
- There was a concern over the lack of commercial specialists within the Council and delays on the project could be encountered again as a result. Attracting the right people to enable the project to move forward was very important.
- The transport hub was considered vital to the success of any proposals on the site and resolving the existing issues with the Park and Ride.
- There appeared to be broad support and confidence in the amendment and the opportunity to reconsider options for the site.
- Greater communication with Councillors and members of the public was encouraged to make them aware of the project with a clear and transparent flow of information.

The amendment was put and was carried and became the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was put and was also carried.

(The Meeting ended at 8.24 pm)