

Council Meeting – 20 March 2019

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

Section 1 – Communications

- 1.1 Alongside the very busy day to day work of the press office, the Communications and Engagement function has continued to work towards modernising the production and distribution of content to promote the work of the Council. This has included a growing focus on video and daily social media posts. The targeted video campaign to attract new Councillors to attend an information session resulted in 31 attendees, compared to 1 for Sedgemoor!
- 1.2 This has led to requests from local organisations for video production. There has also been significant continuing work to raise awareness of the new Somerset West and Taunton Council, with printed, social, video and audio campaign material produced and distributed. A newsletter to update the community on the various infrastructure projects has been designed for distribution on all platforms, to increase the focus on boosting the presence of “owned” media ensuring a clear message reaches the local population directly.
- 1.3 Officers have run member engagement sessions to help ascertain preferred methods of communication in addition to the bi-weekly newsletter. Staff now benefit from a bi-weekly newsletter, CEO briefings, SMT drop-in sessions and regular bespoke staff communications run by the team. The Taunton Garden Town Plans will go on display at the Market House, before being taken to various community forums in the area.
- 1.4 Work on the new website for 1 April 2019 is on track and the new site – somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk – is now hosted on our own servers for user testing.

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

Events

- 2.1 Work to ensure Taunton and Somerset benefits from the Cricket World Cup (CWC) continues. The Communication and Events Team are working very closely with the CWC organisers to maximise exposure and awareness. This has included the Trophy Tour in Minehead and Taunton, an event at the County Ground and a new mural to celebrate the event.
- 2.2 Support and planning for the Somerfest is continuing. All events on behalf of

the Mayor are managed by the Communications and Engagement function including managing the fundraising for the Mayor's charities.

Place and Retail Marketing

2.3 A video is in production for the Cricket World Cup "world feed" which will be viewed by up to 2 billion people. Updating all the guide books and website collateral ahead of the main tourist season is progressing well.

Visitor Centre

2.4 Ticket sales for the summer concerts have been strong with the promotion of the Visitor Centre as the only place to buy tickets with reduced fees and postage charges seeing long queues for Madness and Tom Jones. The Tom Jones tickets have sold out.

Section 3 – Growth strategy and specific projects

Coal Orchard Redevelopment

- 3.1 Over the last few months there has been good progress. The former St James Swimming Pool was demolished just before Christmas and the site levelled. The OJEU tender process for a main contractor has been completed, albeit the timetable became extended due to requests for extensions of time. Midas Construction have been selected as the preferred contractor and a Pre-Construction Services Contract has been entered into in order for the final contract and scheme details and infrastructure to be resolved. Some investigative survey work has been carried out during February, and this was co-ordinated with the digging of the final three archaeological trenches, so that car park closures were kept to a minimum.
- 3.2 Over the next couple of months the contractors will be working on phasing and construction details leading to building works commencing in late Spring. Prior to this, the contractors will provide information in good time before the erection of hoardings around the site, regarding parking arrangements and temporary changes to pedestrian and cycle routes. The build programme is still being finalised but will be approximately 18 months.
- 3.3 We are working with our commercial agents, JLL, to ensure that the space and design of the units are attractive to leaseholders in the current market. We will be launching a marketing programme in early summer for both commercial and residential. JLL Exeter are already receiving enquiries for the retail units, and our residential agents Connells Taunton are taking details of early interest.

Firepool

- 3.4 A key milestone has been reached with the Section 106 Agreement being finalised with Somerset County Council Highways signing off in March 2019. Consequently site master plan delivery planning is now progressing along

with preparation for some early site enabling works. Site set up and infrastructure works will commence shortly. Initial work involves site clean-up, replacement of fencing to secure the site and construction of access from the Northern Inner Distributor Road. In addition, some minor demolitions will be undertaken including breaking up the concrete slabs. Proposals are being prepared which will be brought to the new Council in due course relating to a masterplan business case and delivery action plan.

Geospatial and Innovation Centre

- 3.5 It is marvellous to see the completion of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office's (UKHO) landmark new HQ building in Taunton. The standard of the building reflects the UKHO's status as the world's leading marine geospatial agency.
- 3.6 We are also working closely with UKHO, Somerset County Council, Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and others on a business case for a new innovation centre in Taunton, focused on digital skills and the commercial application of marine geospatial information. The proposal is recognised by the LEP and Government as a major opportunity to drive business growth and raise productivity levels, in line with local, regional and national policy objectives. Further details will come forward this year.

The Brewhouse Theatre

- 3.7 Good progress has been made on the Royal Institute of British Architects Stage 0/1 report (Strategic Brief) in conjunction with Taunton Theatre Association by MICA Architects, and associated specialist theatre consultants Sound Space Vision to provide options for expansion. The options explore potential additional facilities as a dedicated studio theatre, cinema and gallery space, to provide greater scope for delivery of an improved cultural, educational, community and wellbeing programme for the region. Delivery of the end of stage report is due in mid-March, which will include outline costs and a programme for construction, to be supported by a revised business case for consideration by the newly formed Somerset West and Taunton Council.

High Street Fund Bid

- 3.8 Officers are working on the High Street Fund bid for Taunton, due to be submitted on 22 March 2019. The fund provides potential capital funding for up to £25,000,000, although the Government prospectus states that most successful areas will receive approximately £5-10,000,000.
- 3.9 There will be two rounds of the Fund, both with a two-phase application process. Phase 1 of the application process is an Expression of Interest (EOIs) stage and will be assessed on the vision for the town centre, the challenges facing the centre and the need for funding. EOIs that pass Phase 1 will be invited to develop a detailed funding bid for Phase 2 in summer 2019.

- 3.10 The High Street Fund prospectus expects bidding local authorities to put forward a single, transformative submission covering one high street or town centre in their area. On this basis Taunton Town Centre was identified as the most appropriate area to submit for the bid. Government funding will not be provided for surface-level projects that only make a difference to the appearance, rather than the use, of the area or those that would not have a long-term impact. Projects are also expected to identify co-funding by either public and/or private sector partners.
- 3.11 The Council held a Taunton High Street Fund workshop on Thursday, 28 February 2019, to gather views from local residents and businesses on emerging ideas for the High Street Fund bid, with approximately 30 people attending. This information has informed the developing EOI and will also help inform future work on the review of the Local Plan.

Section 4 – Asset Management Service Update

- 4.1 The Asset Estates Team members are heavily involved in 'Business as Usual' transactions and ensuring that systems and processes are robust for the new service as well as working to maximise income in conjunction with Property and Development Business Support and Finance functions. Two consultants and three agency staff have been extended for a short period to cover recruitment and training under the new structure and some team members have already been appointed as Assets Specialists.
- 4.2 Some of the key project work completed during this period includes:-
- **Leisure Procurement – Assets Impacts:** Following the award of the Leisure Contract, Assets Specialists are continuing to assist with the property aspects of demobilisation / mobilisation and the completion of leases to a new operator.
 - **Accommodation Project:** Whilst the project has been managed by the Accommodation Team, Asset Specialists have provided advice on lease documents and proposed lettings of vacant areas. Alder King are to be instructed as joint agents.
 - **Blackdown Business Park:** Two units have recently been let and are now producing income. One unit remains vacant with agents actively marketing in order to reach full occupation. The new block has benefitted from recent works to clean down the cladding and driveway / loading areas.
 - **Cornhill Development:** In discussion with the developer in lieu of a significant payment to grant access into this proposed residential development.
 - **Annual Asset Valuations:** Wilks Head Eve has been engaged to conduct the annual Asset Valuation work which is well underway with draft valuations already received in preparation for the Valuation date of 31 March 2019.

- **Asset Management System (Open Assets by Capita):** Progress is continuing to be made in line with the agreed Project Plan. There have been some issues encountered due the condition of the existing data but these are being resolved as work progresses, wherever possible.

In addition:-

- Significant detailed configuration work has been carried out;
- Components and attributes have been successfully data loaded into the OpenAssets test server;
- Decent homes parameters have been agreed;
- Kick-off meetings have been held for both RDSAP (Energy) data and asbestos data;
- Initial training sessions for stock condition, RDSAP and asbestos have been planned;
- A Project Initialisation Document (PID) is being reviewed prior to agreement with Capita. The PID will incorporate a Project R.A.I.D. Log for:-
 - Risks
 - Actions
 - Issues
 - Dependencies

4.3 Risks are constantly being reviewed and additional administrative resources are being sought to help support the project.

Section 5

Tackling Unauthorised Encampments

- 5.1 Following on from the petition received last October by residents of the Wellsprings Road area, we have looked at what we can do to try and protect this site in particular from further unauthorised encampments. Having reviewed several options, we now have a plan for landscaping work on this site and are liaising with the local residents on the detail.
- 5.2 Scrutiny Members received an update last week and were supportive of the action being taken. We hope to have this work done in the next few weeks to try and protect this important area of open space that is very well used and valued by the community.
- 5.3 Other sites across the Borough area are also being reviewed - with minor additional works planned for Blackbrook and Hamilton Park.
- 5.4 Further updates will be shared with the new Council later this year on the potential for use of injunctions, and progress on other permanent sites.

Councillor Mark Edwards