

SWT Full Council - 26 February 2020

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Dave Durdan, Kelly Durdan, Caroline Ellis, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Roger Habgood, John Hassall, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, Martin Hill, John Hunt, Marcus Kravis, Andy Milne, Richard Lees, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Peter Pilkington, Andy Pritchard, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Phil Stone, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Tim Bacon, James Barra, Hannah Cook, Lesley Dolan, Robert Downes, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Nicki Maclean, Andrew Pritchard, Lisa Redston, Clare Rendell, Ann Rhodes, Amy Tregellas, Mark Wathen and Joe Wharton

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

129. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors L Baker, P Bolton, H Farbahi, A Hadley, C Morgan, S Pugsley, R Tully and T Venner.

130. **Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council**

(Minutes of the meetings of Full Council held on 3 December 2019, 17 December 2019, 14 January 2020 and 27 January 2020 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of Full Councils held on 3 December 2019, 17 December 2019, 14 January 2020 and 27 January 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

131. **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 M Barr	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Blaker	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Taunton Charter Trustee		
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Govier	All Items	SCC & Wellington	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	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	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 A Milne	All Items	Porlock	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Palmer	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Wedderkopp	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Wedderkopp	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
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The following Councillors further declared a personal interest on agenda item 9, the Future of Local Government in Somerset, as receivers of a Somerset County Council pension: Councillors I Aldridge, M Blaker, R Lees, S Lees, J Lloyd, D Mansell, H Prior-Sankey, F Smith and A Trollope-Bellew.

Councillor S Wakefield further declared a personal interest in agenda item 8, Motion on Local Independent Schools, as a Trustee of the Somerset Community Foundation.

Councillors C Ellis, M Hill, M Kravis and D Perry further declared a personal interest in agenda item 8, Motion on Independent Schools as they had a child that attended an independent school within the district.

Councillor R Habgood further declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in agenda item 14, Capital loan to YMCA Dulverton Group, as he rented land from the YMCA.

Councillor M Kravis further declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in agenda item 14, Capital Loan to YMCA Dulverton Group, as

132. **Public Participation**

Mr Sigurd Reimers made the following statement:-

Nearly half of all investments worldwide are made by pension's schemes (1). A large proportion of these investments are in fossil fuels, which are harmful to the climate and the wider environment, and particularly to the younger generation. County Council pension's schemes up and down this country are also involved in making such investments.

However, some Councils are already using their ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) powers to find attractive alternative investments. Brunel Pensions Partnership, a pension's pool in which Somerset is a stakeholder, have just joined in signing a resolution requesting Barclays Bank to stop investing in fossil fuels. (2)

I have attended nearly all the meetings of Somerset County Council's Pensions Committee in the past three years. At most of these I have asked questions about their policy on fossil fuels investments. I have found little, if any, interest in reducing such investments, as exemplified in one of their few comments about climate change in their most recent annual report: "*For example, the Fund will not require any form of dis-investment from fossil fuels, tobacco or such like.*" (3)

This position is being held despite national resolutions about divestment coming from large constituent bodies such as some of the Unions (4).

Somerset West and Taunton Council staff contribute to and benefit financially from the Somerset County Council pensions scheme, and are therefore, probably unwittingly, contributing to the problem of continued fossil fuel use.

The Pensions Committee carries out a professional and skilful task, and it must understandably not be beholden to the vagaries of local political changes.

However, the question remains: Does this District Council believe that the climate emergency they declared on 21st February 2019 is serious enough to challenge the Pensions Committee on its apparent indifference to the effects of climate change on its future pensioners, their families and communities?

Helen Lawy (Friends of Longrun Meadow) made the following statement on agenda item 10, Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvement Scheme:-
Questions for council re flood alleviation plans for Longrun Meadow

1. Why are the EA not working with nature and following their own guidelines?
2. Where is the evidence for their claims about biodiversity?
3. What confidence can we have in the EA when the scheme designed for flooding of 1 in a 100 years is, 10 years later, not fit for purpose?
4. Why were the Friends of Longrun Meadow not consulted?

Jean Pakes (Pegasus Court Residents Association) made the following statement:-

I am speaking on behalf of the Residents' Association of Pegasus Court which overlooks Somerset Square. We are very concerned about the deterioration of this important Town Centre area. Somerset Square is near a well-used riverside footpath, a busy pedestrian river bridge, the Brewhouse Theatre, the County Cricket Ground and the new Coal Orchard Development. The present arrangement for the maintenance of this public space seems to be wholly informal, unofficial and most irregular.

Originally, Transition Town was responsible for only three raised beds in the square. In 2016 the 2 members who looked after them gave up and other members led by Brian Heath took on their care. They also planted inside the tree grills and alongside the river footpath. They took over a small bed containing a tree and shrubs. In August 2018, Transition Town gave up their responsibility. Brian Heath and his group of volunteers continued unofficially.

Many changes were made to the original shrub bed such as alteration in levels, removal of edging, insertion of steps, wooden structures, willow fencing, wheeled containers, storage boxes covered with Astroturf, pallets, boxes of plants, and a great deal of unsightly and unnecessary clutter. Insurance and Health and Safety Issues seem to have been ignored. Storage facilities were provided in Station Road and a large waste bin from Viridor placed next to the children's play area. Items are also stored now in a partially - open space belonging to "Eat the Bird" restaurant.

In summer 2019 the group was asked to formalise and apply for a licence and in the meantime adhere to certain conditions. Although none of these 3 things happened the Localities Team tried to find them yet more storage space so that when the blocked footpaths were cleared an agreement could be signed. This is still ongoing.

The response to our concerns has been to treat the issue as a dispute about tidiness and appearance. Our concern however is that Somerset Square is not an appropriate place for a community garden as it is being called. Such gardens are usually sited in unused and overgrown areas where a formal group can grow produce, hold events and educational activities. There is no evidence for such a need in the local community.

Somerset Square was the first scheme in the £1bn Taunton Regeneration Initiative. It was carefully landscaped as a public square. It is on the route from Firepool and extends to the area in front of the Brewhouse. The riverside path then takes pedestrians and cyclists to Goodland Gardens. We feel that Somerset Square should be on a par with Goodland Gardens with the whole of both areas being maintained by the Council to ensure continuity and consistency.

Finally, in view of the Coal Orchard development and the high quality landscaping which will be in place, we feel now would be a good time for the Council to clear and reinstate the space used by Mr. Heath's group and to resume maintenance of the whole of Somerset Square. This would ensure the unified, attractive and well-maintained appearance of all public areas in the Town Centre alongside the river.

Nigel Behan made the following statement on agenda item 9, the Future of Local Government in Somerset:-

The Leader of Somerset County Council (SCC) announced, in a Letter to the Secretary of State, last Friday 21 Friday (see SCC's press release and Letter to the Secretary of State by following this link <https://onesomerset.org.uk/>) that "I am now writing to formally ask you to invite me to submit a business case, before the summer recess, defining our unitary proposals for better, more local, joined-up public services in Somerset."

Which, more or less, is Option 3 in the "Future of Local Government in Somerset" (FoLGiS) report. SCC propose that "Therefore there will be opportunities for wider member and public involvement and engagement in these proposals."

Although it is not clear whether this will take place before (or during – to inform) the creation of a Business Case.

The 4 District Councils (Somerset West & Taunton, Mendip, Sedgemoor and South Somerset) are looking to agree a way Forward based on Option 2 (The Collaboration & Integration option, referred to as 'Get Fit + Sharing') with broadly similar reports, as is being proposed, by producing a Business Case by the Summer of 2020.

Q1. What is the SWT position if permission to proceed is granted to SCC (invited)?

Q2. Does competition between Local Authorities by creating separate Business Cases send the right message to the Electorate?

A report on previous Unitary (in the North) proposals suggested that as a strategic civic leader, local government is often the lead partner in a locality, engaging the public sector in strategic policy initiatives. This is crucial in joining up and co-ordinating policy development, implementation and regeneration across a range of agendas and governance levels. Working collaboratively with other stakeholders (community and voluntary organisations....), local government co-ordinates and provides a wide variety of essential services to the public. It promotes economic development by attracting and retaining inward investment, marketing the area as an attractive place to live and work. Local government is uniquely positioned to build the vital infrastructure needed to connect physical, environmental, economic and social strategic planning, on a number of governance and spatial levels, to community-led regeneration that could enable citizens, local residents, service users, electors, council taxpayers etc. to shape and foster ownership of the development of their local area.

Q3. The rationale of a reorganisation is to get better services for local people so will all the (forecast) money saved (by Option 2) be put back into public services?

Q4. Will (and how will) Somerset West & Taunton (and the other District Councils - same applies to the County Council) start consulting (including, for example, an indicative referendum) with citizens, local residents, service users, electors, council taxpayers (people of all ages and background) before to the completion of the respective Business Cases, seeking views on what the proposed enhanced

democratic, accountable and transparent local governance structures should look like (and what the forecast savings can be utilised for e.g. rebuilding public services/more Council Houses etc)?

All speakers would be sent a written response to their statements and questions.

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

The Chair of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Chair praised the team that had taken part in the swimathon. They had swam 51 laps which equated to 102 lengths of the pool.
- She reminded Councillors of the Songs for Springtime event being held on 29 February 2020.
- The Chair advised that officers of Somerset West and Taunton Council were due to take part in a charity walk on 17 May 2020 and that Councillors were welcome to join them.
- She reminded Councillors of the procedure to follow for questions on Portfolio Holder Reports.
- Councillor L Whetlor gave thanks on behalf of Watchet Town Council and the residents of Watchet for the work carried out on the harbour wall and that they were all very grateful.

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

The Leader of the Council advised Councillors that following on from the Full Council meeting held on 19 February 2020, the local settlement had gone through and that it had not had any impact on the Council's budget set at that meeting.

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

Councillor M Blaker asked the following question:-

Rev Martin Walker, Rector of Wiveliscombe Hills, has forwarded to Councillor Mansell and myself an interesting suggestion to lay ground source heat pumps, which would need quite a bit of land to lay but once laid were covered over and the land could be used as before, in public parks for the benefit of the Council and the local community. This seemed like a good, innovative thought and I wondered, on Rev Walker's behalf, if this was something the Council might pursue?

Councillor P Pilkington responded:-

We were always open to suggestions from residents on better or innovative ideas for use of our land and parks. We'd obviously need more information in order to be able to review suitability, but was happy to have anything sent over to him.

136. **Motion on Local Independent Schools, proposed by Councillor Libby Lisgo, seconded by Councillor Brenda Weston**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors highlighted that many residents had decided to spend their hard earned money on education rather than on holidays or other luxury items and that parents had the right to educate their children to the best of their ability.
- Councillors believed that the current support system had helped many pupils be educated at a high level.
- Concern was raised that the outreach programs might be affected.
- Councillors highlighted that those parents who paid for their children to be privately educated actually paid for education twice as they also contributed to funds put towards state education.
- Councillors mentioned that independent schools offered some students bursaries to assist with their tuition fees.
- Councillors advised that many of the independent schools offered their facilities out to the public to use and that Councillors had positive experiences of that in the local area through sporting events and through conversations they had with the students.
- Councillors understood the sentiment of the motion due to the inequality in society but thought the motion was not detailed enough and that dialogue with the schools and further consultation should have been had prior to the motion being raised.
- Concern was raised on the charitable status many of the independent schools had and that they were a business that benefited from tax advantages.
- Councillors highlighted that some of the schools were on a financial 'knife edge'.
- The Proposer was disappointed by the lack of support from fellow Councillors and gave information on the figures that could be achieved if the motion was passed compared to the cost of fees and that it would have a low impact it would have on the independent schools.
- The seconder recognised that local independent school offered access to many high quality facilities but that those often involved charges which many low income families could not afford, and the motion gave independent schools an opportunity to support local state schools.

Resolved that the Motion was not carried.

137. **The Future of Local Government in Somerset**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Some Councillors were against a unitary authority as the area would be too big and supported the option to work together with the other districts.
- Councillors gave further information on the current schemes where joint working with the other districts had been successful.
- Concern was raised on protecting local services. Councillors had been made aware that Somerset County Council spent 70% of their budget on adult social

care and that when any money needed to be saved, it came from the other 30% which would impact on other services.

- Some Councillors did not support another Ignite Transformation programme and agreed that a unitary authority would be too big and would not work for the local residents.
- Concern was raised on the pressure placed on Parish Councils if the unitary option was pursued, because they were voluntary organisations.
- Some Councillors believed that collaborative working was the best option for the local residents.
- Some Councillors were convinced that the unitary model should be pursued and did not believe that there was enough evidence to vote on the other options.
- Some Councillors thought that change was needed and supported the option for a unitary authority and believed that it would make Councillors roles easier.
- Some Councillors were conflicted on the issue. They further highlighted that the confusion that the public had on the issue was palpable.
- Councillors agreed that further debate on the subject was required and that a full business case should be compiled.

Resolved that Full Council approved:-

- 1) A full business case be prepared, which fully explored Option 2 (Collaboration and Integration), being the preferred way forward at this time. The business case should come back to Executive in July 2020, along with clear recommendations and a delivery plan;
- 2) A joint Project Board be created, with the Leader of the Council being the representative from Somerset West and Taunton Council, to oversee the work during the next stage;
- 3) Option 2 – Collaboration and Integration, as Somerset West and Taunton Council's current preferred option for the future of local government in Somerset to take forward through community consultation and engagement;
- 4) It noted that in the best interests of the communities and residents of the District, the Council would continue to work with colleagues across all tiers of local government and public service in Somerset; and
- 5) Investigation into Option 4 be started as soon as officer time was available to do so.

138. **Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS)**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised on other areas located further upstream and the impact of flooding in those areas.
- Councillors requested managing the flow of water through natural means rather than through the flood plan.
- Councillors advised that some areas were desperate for flood defences and action needed to be taken.
- Councillors wanted community engagement in the early stages of the works.
- Councillors thanked the Environment Agency for the work they had carried out in the wider district.
- Councillors agreed that water management was difficult and that flooding hugely affected the area and more funding was needed.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 1) Accepted the findings of the project development plan report and endorsed the recommended strategic and long term approach to the management of flood risk in Taunton, listed in section 6 of the non-technical summary;
- 2) In partnership with EA, progressed the identified short term priorities of: Longrun Meadow, the town centre defence improvements on the left bank of the River Tone (Frieze Hill to Town Bridge) and Firepool Lock to an appropriate design standard to secure the necessary consents and implementation;
- 3) Approved the allocation of £6m capital funding from already earmarked Community Infrastructure Levy, New Homes Bonus and s106 contributions, to be apportioned in consultation with the S151 Officer, to progress the identified short term priorities of Longrun Meadow and improvements to the left bank of the River Tone (Frieze Hill to Town Bridge);
- 4) Use the project development plan as a basis for future investment planning. Developed a funding strategy to support implementation of the entire preferred approach, noted that a number of schemes had wider benefits such as increased bio-diversity and public amenity that may attract sources of funding other than flood defence related. Worked with partners and stakeholders including the Environment Agency to secure appropriate national 'Flood Defence Grant in Aid' ((FDGiA) and Local Levy; Somerset River Authority grant; as well as partnership opportunities with Somerset County Council, Wessex Water; Natural England; Canal and Rivers Trust and others towards these schemes;
- 5) Noted that consultation and engagement would take place with residents, stakeholders and partners on the individual schemes in the preferred approach as they progressed to detailed design and necessary consents for implementation; and
- 6) Supported the appointment of dedicated project management capacity, to be funded from the capital allocation referred to above for an initial period of two years, to secure the necessary expertise and approvals to progress the shorter term priorities identified in recommendation 3, and to identify funding and wider opportunities as they arose.

139. **Hinkley Tourism Strategy Phase 4 Action Plan 2020 - 2023**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors welcomed the document and requested that it included information on disabilities.
- Councillors highlighted we needed jobs in the area that were based on the natural environment, such as tourism.
- Councillors agreed that tourism needed to be protected and commended the report.
- Councillors were delighted to support the recommendations.

Resolved that Full Council approved:-

- 1) The Phase 4 Action Plan for delivery from March 2020 onward; and
- 2) The request for drawing down £635,594 of Hinkley Point C Section 106 allocations available for tourism to deliver the Phase 4 plan.

140. **Prosperity and Economic Development Strategy**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors advised that some small businesses in the area had shown concern on lack of consultation.

Details were given on the smaller groups available to independent traders to join to enable further engagement.

- Councillors were happy to see Local Development Orders, West Somerset Railway and Wellington Rail Station included in the document.
- Councillors requested more economic activity in the area.
- Councillors praised voluntary workers.
- Councillors thanked officers for their work.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 1) Adopted the Strategy, after which a detailed operational workplan would be agreed in consultation with the Portfolio Holder during March 2020 to progress during the financial year 2020-2021; and
- 2) Agreed to the development of targeted messaging and communication materials for the different audiences.

141. **Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 - 2023**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked officers for their work on the Strategy.
- Councillors highlighted the good work carried out by the Salvation Army.
- The Portfolio Holder for Community gave further information on the rough sleeper count and invited Councillors to join him on the next count.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 1) Adopted the proposed Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (2019-2023); and
- 2) Provided any comment in relation to the supporting action plan for consideration by Homelessness Managers Group (the action plan to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis).

142. **Time Extension**

The Chair proposed a 30 minute time extension which was carried.

143. **Capital Loan to YMCA Dulverton Group**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors agreed with the scheme and thought it was an excellent way to support the community.
- Concern was raised on the valuation of the deficit and if it was lower than the value of the loan.
- Councillors supported the loan and the assistance it would give to a local organisation that added value to the area and who helped the community.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 1) Agreed the principle of a secured capital loan expected to be for 3 years but not exceeding 5 years, repayment terms to YMCA Dulverton Group of £325,000 at beneficial terms to the Council – with detailed terms as identified in section 6 of the report, to be determined through delegated authority by the S151 Officer and Portfolio holder;

- 2) Approved a £325,000 Supplementary Budget as an Investment Loan for Service Purposes in the Council's 2019/20 Capital Programme. As a capital loan, the principal payments would be treated as capital receipts and would offset the up-front expenditure; and
- 3) Delegated the Portfolio Holder and S151 Officer authority to agree the final detailed terms and conditions of the loan.

144. **Access to Information - Exclusion of Press and Public**

Resolved that the press and the public be excluded from the meeting for the items numbered 16 and 17 on the Agenda as the items contained exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

145. **Procurement Report**

Resolved that Full Council approved the confidential recommendations as written in the report.

146. **Time Extension**

The Chair proposed a 30 minute time extension which was carried.

147. **Land Acquisition Report**

Resolved that Full Council approved the confidential recommendations as written in the report.

148. **Coastal Improvement Works - report to follow**

Resolved that this item was withdrawn from the agenda.

(The Meeting ended at 10.10 pm)