

SWT Full Council - 7 July 2020

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Paul Bolton, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Kelly Durdan, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, 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, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Phil Stone, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Dawn Adey, James Barrah, Chris Brown, Lesley Dolan, Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, Paul Harding, James Hassett, Andrew Low, Gerry Mills, Alison North, Andrew Pritchard, Clare Rendell, Richard Sealy and Amy Tregellas

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors H Davies, C Morgan, A Trollope-Bellew and T Venner.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council

(Minutes of the meetings of Full Council held on 27 April 2020 and 26 May 2020 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council held on 27 April 2020 and 26 May 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

3. 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 L Baker	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Barr	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Blaker	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr P Bolton	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
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 C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Govier	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	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	Comeytrowe	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 R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Wedderkopp	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D	All Items	Taunton Charter	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Wedderkopp		Trustee		
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

Councillors M Blaker, A Hadley, D Perry and S Pugsley further declared a pecuniary interest on agenda item 8, Discretionary Business Grants Fund and would leave the meeting during the debate.

Councillor M Kravis further declared a pecuniary interest on agenda item 11, Coastal Improvement Works and would leave the meeting during the debate.

The following Councillors further declared a personal interest on agenda item 8, Discretionary Business Grants Fund:-

Councillors R Habgood, L Lisgo, M Lithgow, F Smith, R Tully and B Weston.

The following Councillors further declared a personal interest on agenda item 11, Coastal Improvement Works:-

Councillors R Habgood, P Pilkington, L Whetlor and G Wren.

4. **Public Participation**

Mr Heath spoke on Community Gardening in the Borough.

Along with a small team of fellow volunteers, for the last two years I have been running a community garden at Somerset Square, Taunton, which was previously run by Taunton Transition Town, under an initiative for this instigated by Councillor Jefferson Horsley nearly ten years ago.

Given that this project has shown itself to be enjoyed and valued by very many users of Somerset Square, by people passing through, and by visitors to Taunton too, would the Council please say whether they are willing to endorse a promotion of this kind of a community engagement model into other parts of the district of Somerset West and Taunton?

If so, would the Council also indicate how they would see such projects fitting within the Garden Town agenda for Taunton? Would the Council also please indicate what kinds of support, by way of commitment to community gardening, they would like to actually provide?

Brian Heath

The Riverside Community Garden

The Portfolio Holder for Parks and Leisure gave the following response:-

We have recently reviewed the management of Somerset Square and taken the decision to manage this site through the DLO going forwards and thank The Riverside Community Garden for their work in this area in the past.

We are currently reviewing how the Council can support communities and community projects across Somerset West and Taunton and this will cover a wide range of possible projects and interests, which may include community gardening schemes. We have over many years supported a range of schemes including allotments, the Transition Towns 'Incredible Edibles' project and the Link Power scheme which supports volunteers undertaking gardening work on our housing estates. At this time we are unable to specifically make a statement quantifying how much support we can bring to this in the future. However,

generally we will try to support community projects where it is appropriate to do so.

Carhampton and Old Cleeve Parish Councils spoke on agenda item 11, Coastal Improvement Works.

Members have before them at this meeting a report of the Assistant Director, Climate Change and Assets, proposing certain measures to assist in the protection of the coastline at Blue Anchor.

The works proposed are within the Parish of Old Cleeve but the border with Carhampton Parish is less than half a mile from the site. The effect of doing nothing at this site will have a significant impact on those living in and passing through Carhampton Parish.

Some members of Somerset West and Taunton Council will be aware that Somerset County Council has been consulting with a number of agencies including both Carhampton and Old Cleeve Parish Councils about a "Watchet and Blue Anchor Options Study" in relation to the B3191 details of which are readily available on the County Council's website.

The involvement of both Parish Councils in that consultation was only obtained after much badgering of officers of the County Council and County Councillors. On behalf of Carhampton Parish Council and the residents of the Parish, I would ask Members to accept a minor addition to recommendation 2.1.2 as follows: 2.1.2 That Somerset West and Taunton Council, in consultation with Carhampton and Old Cleeve Parish councils, take the leading role on matters of coastal protection in the delivery of any scheme brought forward.

Thank you.

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services gave the following response:-

In bringing forward the recommendations to the Council meeting I of course discussed the matter fully with the officers concerned and gained an understanding of the role of SWT in respect of coastal protection generally and the issues at Blue Anchor in particular. It was important that the Council now gave the necessary authority for SWT and its officers to assume the lead role in initially seeking buy-in and funding from the Environment Agency. If this were to be successful it is hoped that the EA, Somerset County Council (responsible for the adjacent highway) and SWT (those three bodies being likely to be the major funding parties) can reach an understanding (primarily financial in the first instance before the technical work is commissioned) on how to take this coastal protection work forwards to secure not only the coast at this point but also the integrity of the highway at this point. Much of the work in designing the scheme, if and when that stage is reached, will be highly technical and will be based on advice from specialist professional firms or bodies. If SWT were to be successful in securing funds both from the EA and from SCC (neither of which is certain) and were SWT itself to agree to commit funds towards the work (which would necessitate a further Full Council resolution), both of your Parish Councils would of course be included in reviewing any scheme and commenting on it unless for some reason action had to be taken in emergency.

However, I do not consider that SWT should commit itself to consulting with the PC's at every stage of putting this scheme together with the funding partners.

SWT is the coastal protection authority and time is of the essence in getting this matter moving before a further serious collapse takes place, if at all possible. If

SWT were alternatively seeking to abandon a section of coast or to 'let nature take its course' then of course the PC's would both need to know and to be consulted. That is not the case here now. What was confirmed at Tuesday's meeting was authority for SWT to open up a dialogue again following some years of inaction. I will be reporting back to the Council on progress from time to time and am willing to circulate my reports to the PC's also if that would assist you.

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

The Chair of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Chair sent her best wishes to Councillor H Davies for a speedy recovery.
- She clarified the process for Councillors to follow during the debate on Portfolio Holder reports.
- The Chair advised Councillors that agenda item 10, Charter for Compassion, had been withdrawn from the agenda.

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

The Leader of the Council made the following announcement:-

- The Leader sent her continued thanks to the following groups for their hard work and support within the community during the covid pandemic: community organisations, partner organisations, residents of Somerset West and Taunton (SWT), SWT Council Officers and fellow SWT Councillors.

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

Councillor M Blaker asked the following question under procedure rule 13:-
This Council has many significant projects either underway or planned in Taunton. Can the Leader please set out when residents in the rest of the District will expect to see equivalent levels of investment in their communities?

The Leader of the Council gave the following response:-

The Leader agreed that the current administration had invested in the Taunton area as the county town. However, not all investment had been within the Taunton area. Investment had been made in the following: Watchet, Onion Collective, Watchet Harbour Wall Repair, East Quay, Seaward Way Minehead, Wellington Railway Station, along with heritage projects protecting landmarks in the area.

8. **Urgent Officer Decision - Rules and Guidance for applications to Somerset West and Taunton Council's Discretionary Business Grants Fund**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked the officers for their appropriate use of the emergency powers.
- Councillors queried how much the total funding equalled.
The Assistant Director for Customer advised that the initial funding estimate was £48,000,000. The revised figure was £42,000,000 and to date, the authority had paid out £40,000,000 to businesses in the area.
- Councillors queried when the priority three application phase would start.
The Assistant Director advised that he hoped the next phase would be ready by Friday 10 July 2020.
- Councillors queried who could apply for the priority four funds, was it any business or was there certain criteria.
The Assistant Director confirmed that any business could apply for the priority four funds as long as there were funds available.
- Councillors requested clarification on the criteria for market stall holders.
The Assistant Director pointed Councillors to the priority three section of the report.

Resolved that Full Council noted the decisions made.

9. **Parking Charging**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors suggested that parking charges should resume in the town centre car parks and that the park and ride should be free of charge to encourage the use of that service.
- Councillors supported the proposal because it would support businesses across the whole of the district.
- Concern was raised on section 3.2 of the report and the financial implications and that it had highlighted areas that could be impacted by the loss of income. Councillors advised that the income created by the parking charges should not be relied upon to balance the budget.
- Councillors queried why previous data could not have been used to assist in calculating the potential income lost through lockdown.
- Councillors thanked residents and volunteers for their cooperation and work in the area.

Resolved that Full Council suspended parking charges until 30 August 2020.

10. **Charter for Compassion**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

11. **Coastal Improvement Works Report**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were pleased to see that powers had been acted upon to rectify the situation.

- Councillors pointed out some corrections to some of the wording used within the report.
- Councillors requested a member briefing on the topic.
- Concern was raised on the engineering schemes and Councillors wanted to ensure the works were carried out correctly.
The Assistant Director for Climate Change and Assets felt sorry that concern had been raised but due to the location by the B3191, action was necessary.
- Councillors queried who would be responsible for the maintenance of the area in the future.
- Councillors requested to see the project costs and works programme as soon as they were available.
- Concern was raised on section 5.5 of the report on liability and Councillors requested assurance and that the report returned to Full Council once further details had been collated.
The Assistant Director gave assurance that the questions on liability would be answered and only then, would the works be continued. He was hopeful that the Environment Agency would support the bid this time.
- Councillors queried whether the costs of the professional engineer would be shared between all the organisations involved in the project.
The Assistant Director confirmed he would bring a report back to Full Council once all the costs and liability was known.
- Councillors were happy to see the report come forward as it was vital to protect the road for the local residents and the community. It would be catastrophic for the district if no action was taken.
The Assistant Director for Climate Change and Assets thanked the Councillors for all their support.

Resolved that Full Council approved:-

- 1) That Somerset West and Taunton Council officers supported the work necessary to submit a bid to the Environment Agency to fund any Somerset County Council schemes intended to protect the B3191, Watchet to Blue Anchor;
- 2) That Somerset West and Taunton Council took the leading role on matters of coastal protection in the delivery of any scheme brought forward; and
- 3) Gave authority for the Director for External Operations and Climate Change and/or Assistant Director, Climate Change and Assets, in consultation with the Lead Member for Environment, the authority to negotiate and approve any Memorandum of Understanding across relevant professional partners associated with any scheme brought forward.

The following Councillors abstained from the vote:-

Councillors L Lisgo, D Mansell, A Wedderkopp, B Weston and G Wren.

12. **Council Governance Arrangements Report**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors welcomed the report.

- Councillors requested that the first meeting of the working group be set up as soon as possible.
The Monitoring Officer advised that the work would not be delayed due to the pandemic and hoped that the new rules on social distancing would allow for an away day, even if it meant that multiple locations were used and joined together via a video link.
- Concern was raised on the Terms of Reference and that it referred to a certain type of structure that would suit Somerset West and Taunton Council, but that it should suit the residents and be able to deliver to the wider community.
- Councillors requested clarification that the Constitutional Working Group and the Governance Arrangements Working Group carried out their reviews separately.
- Concern was raised on whether it was the right time to start up any reviews on the Governance Arrangements, Constitution or Community Governance, due to the threat of the Unitary Authority business case being submitted by Somerset County Council.
- Councillors requested reassurance that the working group composition included cross party involvement.
The Monitoring Officer advised that all Councillors would be involved and would be sent a survey to gain their initial thoughts on the review and how the work would be carried out. She wanted the review to be as transparent as possible.

Resolved that Full Council approved:-

- a) An all Member 'away day' was arranged to consider the items listed at section 4.5;
- b) A cross party Members Working Group was established to investigate the options and to report back through the appropriate democratic pathway;
- c) The Terms of Reference for the Council Governance Arrangements Working Group (Appendix A) were approved; and
- d) Seven Councillors were selected to form the Working Group along with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources.

13. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved that the press and the public be excluded from the meeting for the items numbered 14 (appendices only) and 15 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.

14. **Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors agreed that it was an exciting project for the community and they were happy to see that Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) were leading with a pilot scheme.

- Councillors highlighted that the locations mentioned within the report were predominantly within the Taunton area and queried whether it would be rolled out to the wider area of SWT.
The Assistant Director for Housing Development and Regeneration and Portfolio Holder for Housing advised that they would look to find supplementary sites to join the scheme.
- Concern was raised that the investment could be lost in the right to buy scheme.
The Assistant Director and Portfolio Holder advised that the properties would be protected for 15 years before they were available to be sold.
- Councillors requested that all types of housing were included in the scheme, including those that required disabled access.
- Councillors requested assurance that the houses being built provided for our residents and reflected the housing needs assessment.
The Portfolio Holder advised that they had requested different types of property were included but that they would be built based on the local housing need.
- Councillors were pleased to see that officers had gathered data and evidence to support the scheme and that there was a show home included for residents to view.
- Councillors were in favour of the project and that it showed that SWT were taking climate change seriously and also what could be achieved by a Council.
- Councillors hoped that the project would show developers what could be achieved.
- Councillors hoped that all new builds would be able to be built in the same manner in the future.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- a) Approved the development of up to fifty (50) Zero Carbon Affordable Homes;
- b) Allocated a Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Capital budget of £10.8m to deliver up to fifty (50) new homes which would include Right to Buy Receipts on all eligible units plus additional borrowing. This comprised a supplementary capital budget increase of £9.3m and a transfer of £1.5m from the social housing development budget within the existing approved capital programme;
- c) Supported the use of underused SWT garage sites and one temporary housing site for new zero carbon affordable homes;
- d) Delegated authority to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Assistant Director – Finance (Section 151 Officer), to sign off the plans for each site;
- e) Delegated authority to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing and Section 151 Officer to determine the final funding profile for this scheme once the development plans of each individual site had been finalised to identify which elements qualified for RTB funding;
- f) Noted the use of affordable rents for new build HRA homes in line with the 2020 Rent Setting Policy. The affordable rents would be set to ensure scheme viability at between 60% and 80% of market rent; and

- g) Agreed to suspend investment and letting of garages on the identified sites and supported the negotiation of alternative garage accommodation for garage tenants and garage owners, and where required the Director of Housing and Communities negotiated and completed the purchase of privately owned garages.

15. **Commercial Investment Portfolio Update**

Resolved that Full Council received and reviewed the delivery of the Commercial Strategy and performance of the Investment Property Portfolio covering the period 17 December 2019 to 31 May 2020.

16. **To Re-admit the Press and Public**

Resolved that the Press and Public be re-admitted to the meeting.

17. **Time Extension**

Resolved that the meeting be extended by 30 minutes.

18. **To consider reports from Executive Councillors**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- An update on the Future of Local Government in Somerset was requested and Councillors suggested a member briefing could be held.
- Praise was given on the Canonsgrove Project and the support given to those vulnerable residents.
- Clarification was requested on the Kingsmead Academy solar panels application. There appeared to be many objections which had not reached the Chair of the Planning Committee.
- An update was requested on the installation of electric car charging points in some car parks, as the applications had been submitted in 2018/19.
- Councillors praised the use of the weekly newsletter during the lockdown period and that it had provided them with much needed information for their constituents.
- More consistent reports were requested from the Portfolio Holders.
- Further detailed figures were requested on the housing service, especially the homelessness section.
- Councillors thanked the Portfolio Holder for his work on economic development within the area.
- An update was requested on when the Members Portal would be implemented.

19. **Scrutiny Annual Report - For Information**

Resolved that Full Council noted the report.

20. **Audit Annual Report - For Information**

Resolved that Full Council noted the report.

(The Meeting ended at 9.45 pm)