

## SWT Full Council - 29 September 2020

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Mark Blaker, Paul Bolton, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Dave Durdan, 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, Chris Morgan, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Phil Stone, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Terry Venner, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Lesley Dolan, Marcus Prouse, Amy Tregellas, Andrew Pritchard, James Hassett, Nick Bryant, Gordon Dwyer, Chris Hall, Sarah Povall, Lisa Redston, Graeme Thompson, Jo Comer and Alison North

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

### 38. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Aldridge, Booth, Davies, Pilkington and Wheatley.

### 39. Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council

(Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 7 July 2020 and Special Full Council on 25 August 2020 circulated with the agenda)

**Resolved** that the minutes of Full Council held on 7 July 2020 and Special Full Council on 25 August 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

### 40. 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 Blaker	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr P Bolton	All Items	Minehead	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 C Morgan	All Items	Stogursey	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 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 T Venner	All Items	Minehead	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

Councillors Blaker, Kravis, Lithgow, Lloyd, Mansell, Milne, Thwaites and Whetlor declared personal interests in respect of Item 9, as they were all involved in their own localities in the groups set up to receive the proposed grants.

Councillor Buller, Thwaites and Trollope-Bellew declared a personal interest in respect of Item 10 as an owner of Solar Panels.

Councillor Cavill, Farbahi, Trollope-Bellew declared personal interests in respect of Item 11 as landowners in the District.

Councillor Wren declared a personal interest in respect of Item 11 as a Director of a Community Interest Company related to this matter.

41. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

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

The Chair advised the Council that it had been a quiet month in respect of Civic duties. The Chair notified Councillors of a charity walk being undertaken by Councillor Roger Habgood in aid of Somerset Wildlife Trust and how Councillors could make a donation if so wished.

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

The Leader advised that in relation to Covid-19, all Councillors were now in receipt of a dashboard this last week which showed that cases were rising in Somerset slightly and to be mindful of this. She urged Councillors to take care of themselves and their communities and remember the Hands, Face and Space guidance. In relation to the Stronger Somerset bid, a letter had been sent to Luke Hall MP, the minister who had replaced Simon Clarke in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government setting out the District's position and how we awaited a letter from the Government. Finally, Somerset West and Taunton had just launched a tree planting scheme using the profits offset from the Ice Rink to enable Parish and Town Councils to come forward and have access to free trees to plant in their communities.

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

The Chair advised Councillors that no questions had been notified in advance under Procedure Rule 13.

45. **Small Scale Industrial Space Local Development Order Report**

The report was introduced by the Executive Councillor Mike Rigby, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation and the recommendations seconded by Councillor Sully.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The criteria based LDO was one of the recommendations of the Affordable Employment Land Task and Finish Group and was pleasing to see come to fruition.
- The Portfolio Holder assured Councillors that the Council material would emphasise the 'affordable employment land' aspect.
- Councillors felt there were risks associated with the project and were pleased to see a review stage built into the process.
- Concern was raised over the level of staff resources in planning enforcement.
- The Portfolio Holder reassured Councillors there a number of safeguards had been built into the Design Guide, and that after ten uses of this scheme there was an opportunity to pause and review, however there was a recognised need for more enforcement capacity.
- A query was raised as to the impact of the proposed Government Planning White Paper on this scheme.
- The Portfolio Holder confirmed that Live/Work Units were not specifically permitted under this scheme.
- Councillors queried the definitions of micro-businesses and SME's and the preciseness of the terminology.
- Councillors hoped this policy would help the entrepreneurs of the future.

**Resolved** to adopt as policy for the Somerset West and Taunton council area:

1. the Small Scale Industrial Space (Employment) Local Development Order;
2. the accompanying Design Guide;
3. and associated fees/charges.

Councillor Morgan abstained from voting.

46. **Emergency Town Centre Recovery and back-fill of Economic Growth and Prosperity Fund Report**

The report was introduced by the Executive Councillor Marcus Kravis, Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and Economic Development and the recommendations seconded by Councillor Lithgow.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised over the time taken to implement the scheme and receive feedback on the proposed use of funding and authorisation to start spending.
- Councillors praised the scheme and stated that it was incumbent on the public sector to step up when major shocks take place to the economy.

- Councillor Lisgo wished to record her thanks to the Executive for taking on board the discussions that had taken place at Scrutiny.
- Further understanding of the allocations were sought.
- A query was raised as to the status of Taunton BID proposal.

**Resolved** that Full Council:

1. Noted that £535,000 has been repurposed for Emergency Town Centre Recovery following Covid-19 Lockdown utilising the Council's Economic Growth and Prosperity Fund held in earmarked reserves.
2. Approved a budget allocation of £500,000, funded from General Reserves, to backfill the Economic Growth and Prosperity fund.
3. Delegate authority to approve expenditure of the budget allocation of £500,000 to the Director of Development and Place in consultation with the Economic Development Portfolio Holder.
4. Agreed that the Director of Development and Place and Economic Development Portfolio Holder consult with councillors from the Taunton Charter Trustees alongside the Taunton Chamber of Commerce as part of the Working Group for Taunton.

47. **Motion to support the Local Electricity Bill. To consider a motion proposed by Councillor Peter Pilkington, seconded by Councillor Sarah Wakefield (attached). An assessment of the implications for the Council should the motion be carried will also be attached.**

Councillor Wakefield proposed the motion in the absence of Councillor Pilkington, with Councillor Ellis seconding the motion. Councillor Wakefield stated that the intention of the bill was to address the monopoly of electricity companies in accessing spare capacity from solar panels, to enable it to be sold locally rather than back to the Grid and the expensive agreements to do so. It would be good for the environment and good for local producers. The second reading of the bill was not due until January 2021. The bill was widely supported by groups as varied as the National Association of Local Councils and Greenpeace amongst others.

Councillor Ellis stated this was a key part of tackling the Climate Emergency, which nationally the country was off track with only 11 percent of all energy coming from renewable sources. The Government had admitted that there was huge scope for renewables, but this could only be achieved if administrative barriers could be removed. Ofgem would create a system of local licenses for local businesses to start up and sell renewable local energy to local people. Community renewable energy delivered twelve to thirteen times social and community benefit than commercial installations due to more skilled jobs and money circulating in the local economy. This bill was a cross party initiative and she hoped that the Council would send a really strong message in backing community renewable energy and gather the support of local Members of Parliament.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised that whilst change was needed this proposal had flaws within it, such as those around grid capacity and the bill not specifying renewables.
- Other Councillors understood improvements to the Grid were on track and were planned.
- It was felt that when writing to Members of Parliament and others, the lack of specific reference to renewables should be mentioned as a concern.

**Resolved to;**

1. Support the Local Electricity Bill, supported by 187 MPs which, if made law, would establish a Right to Local Supply which would promote local renewable electricity supply companies and co-operatives by making the setup and running costs of selling renewable electricity to local customers proportionate to the size of the supply operation; and
2. Inform the local media of this decision; and
3. Write to local MPs, asking them to support the Bill, and; 4. Write to the organisers of the campaign for the Bill, Power for People, (at 8 Delancey Passage, Camden, London NW1 7NN or info@powerforpeople.org.uk) expressing its support.

Councillor Mansell abstained from voting due to a declared prejudicial interest relating to his involvement with a community energy company.

48. **Motion to declare an Ecological Emergency. To consider a motion proposed by Councillor Dave Mansell, seconded by Councillor Dixie Darch (attached). An assessment of the implications for the Council should the motion be carried will also be attached.**

Councillor Mansell proposed the motion with Councillor Darch seconding the motion. Councillor Mansell stated that the human and natural worlds were completely intertwined, with our reliance on nature to live and to stay healthy. Scientists have been telling us we have been over-exploiting the earth and altering it from a local to a global level. Between 1970 -2016, many wildlife populations reduced by two thirds. Species extinction rates are many times higher than historical averages. The causes of this include overuse and climate change. We currently face several global emergencies such as the climate crisis and Covid-19 which were linked in many ways. Somerset West and Taunton Council could play its part by backing the motion which pave the way for an Action plan and costed projects following on.

Councillor Darch stated that it was pleasing this was a cross-party initiative and that the declaration of an ecological emergency would complement the existing strength of the Council work in this area. She felt that the Climate Strategy coming forward meant that there was momentum to build on in this area. Expectations would have to be managed as the Council would still have to work within planning constraints. This motion would make our policy and actions around ecological impacts explicit and firmly embedded and push the Council to do more. The importance of bringing local community groups along was also important, such as Longrun Meadow, Wellington Transition Town and Netherclay Reserve.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors suggested minor amendments to resolution seven which were all accepted for inclusion by the proposer and seconder.
- The Leader of the Council welcomed this motion which built on the work already being undertaken and that work was already underway e.g. Design Guide and Management Plan for Open Spaces and Parks including tree maintenance and the roll-out of the Recycle More scheme.
- Councillor Habgood read out statements obtained from the two local Members of Parliament.
- The importance of insects in pollination was noted.
- A suggestion was made of a campaign to increase the rates of recycling.
- Concern was raised of the state of England's rivers, with even the River Tone being polluted.
- A query was raised as to the difference between the Climate and Ecological emergencies.
- The link between the Planning system and ecology was discussed.

**Resolved to:**

1. Declare an ecological emergency.
2. Address ecological issues alongside climate emergency actions and ensure that opportunities to gain co-benefits from addressing both the climate and the ecological emergencies are maximised.
3. Add ecological implications alongside those for climate and sustainability in committee and council reports.
4. Where possible, embed climate action and ecological initiatives within all council work areas, including COVID-19 recovery projects and programmes.
5. Promote woodland planting and rewilding in the right places and with the right species, peatland restoration, natural flood management, wild flower meadows, and habitat creation and restoration. As well as being important for biodiversity, these actions can often have an important co-benefit of storing carbon, so helping to address climate change.
6. Reduce energy and material consumption by promoting waste reduction, reuse and recycling, product durability, energy efficiency and renewable energy generation. Avoid consumption that threatens further destruction of globally important wildlife habitats and the use of single-use plastics without effective and on-going recycling in place.
7. Work with local, county, regional and national partners, including land managers and DEFRA, Town and Parish Councils and the two Local Members of Parliament to increase wildlife habitats, green infrastructure and natural capital in Somerset West and Taunton.
8. Ensure that addressing the climate and ecological emergencies and nature recovery are strategic priorities for planning policies and design guides for new development, including by identifying appropriate areas for habitat restoration and biodiversity gain.
9. Manage Council services, buildings and land in a biodiversity-friendly manner, including by reviewing use of harmful chemicals, such as pesticides, and taking opportunities to create new wildlife habitats.

10. Provide advice for local communities on how to incorporate biodiversity, green infrastructure and natural capital into Neighbourhood Plans and other initiatives.
11. Encourage residents to take biodiversity measures in their own homes by, for example, wildlife gardening and home composting.
12. Agree with the principles set out in recommendations 1-11 and requests that officers do a feasibility study and draw up a costed plan as part of the budget setting process for 2021/22 onwards. This would be to allow the production of an ecological emergency action plan and to report annually to Scrutiny Committee, Executive and Full Council on progress, continuing work and future projects to address both the climate and ecological emergencies.

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

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Executive Councillors were requested to limit the use of acronyms in their reports without first using the full term.
- A further specific update was requested into the repairs notice served at Tonedale Mill and it was confirmed a written answer could be provided.
- Further clarity was sought on how the s106 funding linked into the Unparished Area of Taunton.
- Further clarity was sought on the Taunton Cultural Forum and its membership and when a renewed Cultural Strategy could be expected.
- The Leader stated that the Stronger Somerset team were using a variety of communication channels and welcomed feedback on this.
- The Leader confirmed that the Council continued to work to the timescales in relation to Stronger Somerset despite not yet receiving a letter from government.
- It was confirmed that Planning training for Parish Councils had not yet taken place, with a priority on training for the Committee first.
- Concern was raised by a Councillor over the communications of key strategic plans for the Council, and the Leader invited those concerns to be shared with her afterward.
- Concern was raised over the provision of radios in Taunton, with it being reported as being out of action by businesses for several months.
- A written answer would be provided on the number of residents who had been living in the former Woolaway properties that had been re-housed in the Pyrland Fields development.

(The Meeting ended at 9.15 pm)