

SWT Scrutiny Committee - 3 June 2020

Present: Councillor Gwil Wren (Chair)

Councillors Libby Lisgo, Ian Aldridge, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, John Hunt, Dave Mansell, Derek Perry, Phil Stone, Nick Thwaites, Danny Wedderkopp and Keith Wheatley

Officers: Andrew Randell, Marcus Prouse, Gordon Dwyer, James Hassett, Jo Humble, Gerry Mills, Kate Murdoch and Amy Tregellas

Also Present: Councillors Chris Booth, Simon Coles, Roger Habgood, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Sue Lees, Janet Lloyd, Peter Pilkington, Mike Rigby, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Loretta Whetlor and Hazel Prior-Sankey

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

1. **Appointment of Vice-Chair**

Councillor Lisgo was duly appointed as the Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

2. **Apologies**

No apologies were received.

3. **Minutes of the previous meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5 February and 13 May**

(Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5th February and 13th May circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5th February and 13th May be confirmed as a correct record.

4. **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 N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke and Voted

where we asked what passenger engagement will set and requested some clear routes to follow?"

Bert wishes

Bryony

David Redgewell South West transport Network and Railfuture Severnside.

Public statements on Taunton bus and coach station.

It is very important that from a passengers safety point of view regarding social distancing and at bus stops in Taunton town centre. At present the government guidance says that only 20 passengers can travel on a double decker bus and 10 passengers on a single decker bus. When the shops reopen on 15th June if the R rate stays below 1 there is a need for progress to be made with Taunton bus station.

The number of Buses will block the stands in the town centre. Especially at peak times .with departures from castle way to Burnham on sea and Bridgwater on route 21 route 22 to Wellington and Tiverton Connection for Exeter. Also with service s by Hatch green to villages around Taunton and Dartline services to Seaton. In the parade we have to buses on the stands for 1 and 2 route to the wellspring and Monkton Healthfield area and bus route 25 to Dulverton.

Outside the card shop we have 29 Bus service to Street Glastonbury and well s Connection to Bath spa bus station and Bristol bus station. Town service no 6 And bus services to chard 99 and no 30 to chard Axminster for Weymouth. All of the bus stops are not designed for this large number of Bus departures With limited shelter and no castle kerbs for disabled passengers, and passengers cannot social distance or keep dry in wet weather.

The town centre bus stops under social distancing will require barriers and pavements to be marked out and marshals as per government guidance to the local transport authority .Somerset county council and local councils.

The only situation to make situation safe for passengers and to be able to make travelling by public transport in Taunton safe is to reopen the Bus and coach station and layout the passengers facilities, for social distancing. Part of the waiting room could be used for social distancing. Travel centre facilities will need looking at.

It would be possible to reopen the take away cafe with social distancing marking The layout of the bus station for extra buses to operate, as an example 2 buses would be required to operate 28 bus to Minehead to carry just 20 people. 3 double decker busses just to carry 60 people to Wellington at a peak times on route 22. Space is required to keep passengers safe. On National Express Coaches service to London the North Midlands Scotland and the south west.

Taunton is a major interchange facilities for public transport passengers of National Express Coaches which will start a Limited service from July 2020

There is a need for wheelchair access Coaches facilities in castle way and facilities at the bus station will make this safer for the disabled passengers lifts.

There is a very urgent need for Somerset west and Taunton council to reopen the bus station in this covid19 emergency situation. Jointly with first group and National Express Coaches. Whilst the council look at alternatives bus and coach interchange facilities in the town.

It must be noted that Taunton railway station interchange facilities with first Great western railway and Network rail is not designed as a major bus and rail interchange facilities with only 5 bus bays and no bus staff facilities or control centre. Design for west Somerset bus network, unlike St Austell and Penzance bus rail interchange s with full facilities.

In the rest of the south west of England and Somerset most bus and coach stations and interchange are owned by local authorities. Wells bus and coach station at the Shepton Mallet interchange and Frome coach station is owned, by Mendip district council and Bridgwater bus and coach station is owned by Sedgemoor district council. Yeovil bus and coach station Wincanton bus station are owned by south Somerset District council. New Bus and coach station were being built at Weston super mare Exeter and a new bus and coach station has been opened in Gloucester.

With new interchange being built at Weymouth town station and Dorchester south station. All being funded by the department for transport.

With regards to the park and ride service this needs to operate from Gateway to silk mills and via Taunton hospital and the Railway station. With important facilities improvements required for passengers at riverside for Megabus and The falcon coach services to Bristol and Plymouth.

There is a need to put in cycling facilities in the town centre and widening pavements and taking the car out of the Town centre, whilst keeping buses and taxis, these issues need addressing by Somerset county council the transport authority and the south west transport Board.

We welcome progress on Wellington and Cullompton station along with Devizes parkway on The London Paddington to Exeter st David service. With government money from the department for transport for design works. We note at present only 45 people can travel on 3 car train and 60 of a five car train there are lots of social distancing issue on the railway network.

One option for west Somerset is to operate a local rail service from Bishops Lydeard to Watchet and Minehead as local rail service and a Bus service connection to Taunton with a double decker.

This would allow more passengers to travel in west Somerset

Somerset county council as the transport authority could ask The Department for transport to fund the service's from the Covid 19 grant. Please note all bus

services in Somerset and south west England are being operated by the Department for transport Covid 19 bus operators grant via Somerset county council. Including all rural bus services.

An extra £254million pound has just been allocated to public bus service in England. £283 million including tram services.

We would ask the council urgently talk to First group south west and Somerset county council transport authority to reopen Taunton Bus and coach station for emergency bus services to provide social distancing measures on a lease whilst progress is made on a new bus and coach interchange in the town centre. Or on a rebuilt bus and coach station with shops and flat on the Tower Street site which is now owned by Somerset west and Taunton council. Please bring our statement to the scrutiny commission and Council Executive committee.

Joe Summerell

Have SWT ever considered buying/renting the empty Apple & Parrot as Taunton's Central Bus station? Coupled with improvements to bus stop G, in order to accommodate three buses and covered seating?

It would create a quality bus drop-off in town. It would use an iconic building (with irregular, sub-optimal layout) which would otherwise be difficult to fill. Adds to value of Castle Square/Goodlands/Coroporation Street, especially if existing bus station is tastefully redeveloped.

6. **Taunton Bus Station and Bus Services in Somerset West and Taunton.**

Councillors Kravis and Rigby were invited to attend the meeting following the consideration relating to the proposals for the Taunton Bus Station following the Recommendation at the previous Scrutiny Meeting in May. A detailed discussion took place which covered both a temporary opening of the recently closed bus station in light of the Covid-19 pandemic to enable greater social distancing when using public transport; in addition to the long term solution of a bus station.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Correspondence had been sent to the minister for transport by a member of the committee on the bus service enhancements, there was broad support for the idea of a task and finish group.
- Temporary use of the bus station during the Covid-19 crisis was considered and requested as an emergency solution and to enable the town the work from a public transport and climate change perspective.
- Following the representation from Alex carter at the previous committee the impression was given the reopening of the station was possible, it was anticipated this could be a 5 week timescale of reopening the bus station.

- Further concerns were expressed that Taunton was the only major town in the operating area in Somerset without any form of bus station, which was a hole in part of transport operations in the County town of Somerset. Clarity was sought on the way forward in the short and long term questions over service provision.
- Suggestion was made for a task and finish group to be set up to consider improved bus services and future improvements in provision, integrated with the local plan.
- Members were reminded that it remained the decision of First Bus to close the bus station and didn't feel the need for this as part of the ongoing service provision.
- Somerset County Council had experienced financial pressures around transportation. Ongoing conversations had been undertaken with improvements to support the Covid-19 recovery. Conversations around the temporary reopening were still ongoing. Short term extension could be accommodated whilst there was further acknowledgement there was ongoing work required on the park and ride. Further conversations with the County Council were encouraged
- The Loss of bus station impacts negatively on the town's transport offering, the committee supported the suggestion in consulting with stakeholders, which First Bus recognised was lacking in the original closure.

Resolved:- The Committee resolved to establish a task and finish group to examine the current provision in relation to public transport in the district and what is required to increase provision and improved modal links including consideration of carbon neutrality

7. **Call-in, by Councillors Norman Cavill, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Vivienne Stock-Williams and Libby Lisgo of the decision made by Executive Councillor Mike Rigby to approve an allocation of £91,518.06 of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds to provide enhanced materials for the repaving of the forecourt at Taunton Railway Station**

The following Call-in was considered by the Scrutiny Committee:-

Details of decision: In January 2015 a working group comprising TDBC, SCC, GWR and Network Rail submitted a strategic case to the Local Transport Board of the LEP and successfully secured funding towards the overall cost of the redevelopment of Taunton Station comprising the following elements:

- Ticket Office moved to south side of the station for improved access and orientation towards the town centre
- Transport interchange created - Improved capacity, efficiency and amenity for users facilitating more journeys
- Provision of a multi-storey car park - Additional parking spaces to facilitate modal switch and forecast increase in rail demand
- An environment for redevelopment of land around the station – efficient use of space, enhanced facilities and economic growth

The project includes the repaving of the entire station forecourt and adjoining areas. Since the time of going to tender for the work, Somerset West and Taunton's Garden Town Design Guidance has been developed which identifies the forecourt area as a Core area where the Council should aim to achieve high standards in public realm. However, there is a difference of £91,518.06 in the cost of using the standard materials for the paving which were costed out in the original tender and the higher standard York Stone advised in the guidance. The project is therefore requesting that £91,518.06 of CIL funds are made available to ensure that the highest standards of public realm can be achieved.

Reasons for proposed decision:

The proposed decision to provide enhanced materials for the station forecourt aligns with the Council's draft Public Realm - Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town. This funding will ensure higher design standards are met in the identified 'Core Area' in the draft design guide, where the station is a key gateway to Taunton.

The proposed CIL allocation falls within the £500k CIL budget for Taunton town centre regeneration, approved by Full Council as part of the Capital Programme on 21/02/20.

Detailed reasons for challenge:

We would like to call in the above decision on the grounds that all the relevant facts have not been taken into account and properly assessed.

The original plans included the total area outside the new entrance to the Station. The investment outlined in the PFH Decision shows that this is no longer the case, leaving a section unimproved will detract and be to the detriment of the whole scheme. As far as I am aware there has been no debate of the subject prior to the decision. It would be beneficial for Scrutiny to have the opportunity to review the plans. Furthermore failure to complete the whole scheme will adversely affect the Historic setting of the Great Western Hotel and area.

During consideration of this item the following points were raised:-

- Council were included to assist the GWR project, planning permission for their scheme was not required. SWT offered CIL funding to use York stone as opposed to composite stone for the station concourse. There was limited scope of control with GWR. The plan was better than the previous version, which needed to be delivered on time and not delayed.
- Concerns were expressed that the opportunity had been lost to resolve this as part of the GWR loan arrangements.
- Network rail managed the maintenance.
- York stone was chosen as due to the material being part of the garden town guidance
- A Request was made for alternative options to be considered in examining the scope of the enhancements and members supported the use of CIL for enhancements but requested that the enhancements were reconsidered as part of the whole area of enhancements to go further and cover the whole project area.

- The committee requested that Councillors and officers are consulted with by GWR in advance of the final decision.

Resolved:- that The Scrutiny Committee did not support Call-in.

8. **SWT Performance Update - For Information Report (to defer)**

The committee noted the deferral of the performance report to the next meeting.

9. **Scrutiny Committee Action Plan**

(Copy of the Scrutiny Committee Action Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee Action Plan be noted.

10. **Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan be noted.

11. **Full Council Forward Plan**

Resolved that the Full Council Forward Plan be noted.

12. **Executive Forward Plan**

Resolved that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

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

Resolved that the press and public be excluded during consideration of agenda item 12 on the grounds that, if the press and public were present during the item, there would be likely to be a disclosure to them of exempt information of the class specified in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended as follows:

The item contained information that could release confidential information that related to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). It was therefore agreed that after consideration of all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

14. **Commercial Investment Update**

The Chief Executive Officer set out to the Committee that due to delays with the Covid-19 pandemic, progress had been stalled in respect of the Commercial Investment Update.

Commitment was given to provide further details of projects in the pipeline to the committee. The committee voiced their unease about commercial investments outside of the public and community interest, details impacts of Covid-19 on potential decisions were also requested.

(The Meeting ended at 8.30 pm)