

Full Council Meeting – 29 September 2020

Report of Councillor Marcus Kravis – Asset Management and Economic Development

Economic Development

Digital Innovation Centre – Somerset County Council and Somerset West and Taunton have submitted a joint application and business case to the LEP's Getting Britain Building fund for £5.5m to deliver a 3000m² Digital Innovation Centre, in addition to the ERDF £1.6m submitted in March. The final funding decisions are anticipated at the end of October 2020 and if fully approved, a build out by January 2022 on Firepool.

Innovation Park feasibility work – the first phase of an innovation park feasibility study is being undertaken, which has involved significant stakeholder and business engagement in the area of healthcare, digital/big data and cleantech low carbon. The findings of this first phase will be shared with senior executive and officers at the end of September to determine next steps.

SWT Economic Recovery and Growth Plan – the Economic Development team has been developing the SWT Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, ensuring projects and activities are aligned to the Heart of the SW LEP recovery plan themes and to the collective Somerset Recovery plan activities. Following the expression of interest submitted to Government in July for financial support to deliver ambitious recovery and growth plans for Somerset, SWT are working with other LAs and partners to develop the final action plan and request by the end of November 2020, this work is being overseen by James Hassett.

Emergency Town Centre Fund – to support the recovery of our essential Town Centre businesses a £535,000 fund has been made available by SWT to enable Town and Parish Councils and business representative groups to work together to deliver essential training, activities, events and public realm improvements that will support and strengthen the districts Town Centres and Neighbourhood Retail Centres and encourage shoppers and visitors to 'go local' while staying safe and following government Covid19 guidance. Implementation plans are being developed for each area following consultation with businesses and visitors, with delivery to begin in October 2020.

Employment Hubs – The Economic Development team have been successful in securing £50,000 from the Business Rates Retention fund to support the continuation of Community Employment Hubs and introduce a new Youth Employment Hub in the west of the district. The funding will also enable the introduction of 4 new employment hubs across the east of the district, in areas of low income and social mobility. A further bid for £83,000 has been made to the DWP to support this work, and to provide Access to Training and Employment Grants for those struggling with barriers into work.

Redundancy Support Packages and Employment and Skills Support - The Economic Development Team have developed a cohesive Redundancy Support Package for employers facing the difficult decision to reduce their staff or to close as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, and for employees who find themselves facing redundancy. This includes a range of employment and training advice and grants, signposting to support and financial assistance for businesses, and 1 to 1 support from members of our Economic Development Team. SWT Customer Advisors have received training on how to help those contacting the council for help. The Redundancy support package has been piloted successfully to a large employer

and influential business in our District and is now available for any business facing difficulties through the SWT website.

Tourism and Coastal Communities Regeneration – The Economic Development Team continue to work with partners to deliver phase 4 of the Hinkley Tourism Action plan through the Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership, with £160,000 ring-fenced to support post Covid19 recovery of the Tourism sector across the Somerset West and Taunton and Sedgemoor Districts. The team continue to influence the Visitor Economy Support Programme, with £500,000 secured from the Business Rates Retention fund to aid recovery of the visitor economy and to work with partners on the Exmoor Covid 19 recovery plan. The Enterprising Minehead programme of projects to improve the seafront and harbour areas including the installation of new play and leisure equipment and the provision of attractive public realm and events space continues to be rolled out. The team are also continuing to fund and work with Minehead, Porlock and Watchet Tourist information Centres to maximise their offer.

Re-Opening of The High Streets Customer relations and enquiries - We are continuing to receive customer related enquires concerning the re-opening of the High Streets. The dedicated email address has provided the Business and wider Community a single focal point to contact the Economic Development team directly with areas of concern and suggestions. Feedback is collated and used to inform further safety measures such as the continuation of the temporary pedestrianisation of East Street Taunton.

Improving use of Data and Business Account Management - SWT has invested in an Company Information, Enquiry and Property Customer Relationship Management System 'Evolutive' to enable the Economic Development and Property teams to manage and report on Business Customer enquiries and to support Business Account Management, in particular with our key employers and most influential local businesses and inward investors.

Asset Management and Economic Development

Coal Orchard

The contractor continued to work through the Covid19 lockdown period, albeit at a reduced pace due to social distancing restrictions and the slow down due to supply chain impact. Following an intense period of risk assessment and implementation of the necessary physical and organisational changes to ensure the site can work safely, the project is running at maximum capacity given the new measures. The revised programme is now to complete all three blocks and the public realm for May 2021.

Seaward Way light industrial build

The main build programme for Seaward Way light industrial units was delayed by approx. 6 weeks via the Covid19 lockdown. Now back to maximum operating capacity under the new social distancing measures, the site is due for completion in late October 2020.

We have now secured a tenant for both units.

The design of the residential build is being progressed by the Housing team and will be submitted for planning in the near future.

Firepool

GWR building / cycle path

Work to refurbish the GWR building and bring it back into working use, and build the temporary cycle path between Canal Road and Trenchard Way will start Q3/Q4 2020.

Further enabling works on the old cattle market site to break up the concrete to enable infrastructure and utility work will also commence in the same period.

Digital Innovation Centre

SWT are working in collaboration with SCC on delivery of a 3000m² Digital Innovation centre on the Firepool site. SCC were successful in their application to the HotSW LEP Getting Building Fund for £5.5m, which complements further funding successes and will enable the site to come forward in 2021. SWT have committed to supplying the site for the centre on Firepool and will be providing the necessary infrastructure and utilities to the build.

Special Purpose Vehicle

SWT have been exploring the most efficient delivery route large projects such as Firepool and are considering a dedicated development arm which will be solely focussed on delivery of key regeneration projects. The proposal will be debated at Full Council on 29th September.

Infrastructure, Utilities and Flood work

Detailed design and specification work to address the many civil and engineering issues on the main Firepool site has been continuing, and work will start in earnest in Q1 2021. These works, such as service and sewer diversions and upgrades are necessary to enable the rest of the development and are a key part of the delivery package for Firepool, working with utility providers and other external bodies such as the Environment Agency.

Heritage

Tonedale Mill

The S48 Repairs notice has been served and discussions continue with the owners on their response to the notice and the emergency works required on site. A Site Security Plan has been promised to the LPA by the 11/9/20.

Assets

Dulverton Weir

An application has gone into the SRA for a large project to fully restore the weir and leat in 2022. Future reports will confirm the status of the application. Temporary works were carried out in 2020 to prevent the leat running dry (statutory obligation to keep water running). Generally relations with the local trust are excellent and discussions are ongoing about the trust taking over the site once works are complete.

Norton Hillfort

After renewed effort over the summer the lease is coming closer to allow the site to transfer to the SWHT. Funding is currently being sought for a programme of works for the winter to allow the smooth handover of the site.

Bus Station

Work is underway to submit a planning application to convert the Bus Station into a temporary pay and display car park. This is in parallel with the development of longer term uses for the site, in relation to the other leisure and commercial uses in that part of town and the Heritage and Conservation context.