

Full Council Meeting – 5 October 2021

Report of Councillor Caroline Ellis - Culture

SWT Cultural Strategy

This was approved unanimously at Full Council 7th September, and now acts as the 'framework' upon which an iterative delivery plan can be further developed and implemented in partnership.

To enable and facilitate the delivery of the plan, a new Cultural Development Specialist role is in the process of being recruited (fixed-term until March 2023).

Grants and funding

- Cultural Development Fund - an Expression of Interest was submitted to Arts Council England in July for a 'Creative Tonedale' project, however this was unfortunately not successful in progressing to full funding bid stage. We still await the outcome of our application for Levelling Up Funding for the Tonedale regeneration scheme.
- UK Community Renewal Fund – the Creative Industries Growth and Development Bid (backed by SWT and other Somerset partners) is still pending an announcement – expected sometime in September
- SWT have been able to provide funding support for a number of cultural and arts projects in recent months (from a variety of grants funds):
 - Museum of Somerset – 6 month trial for Sunday opening (Oct – March)
 - Contribution to Arts Taunton's Art at the Heart scheme toward:
 - Milverton Cultural and Heritage Fairs
 - Regal Theatre Minehead
 - Hear me Roar project (Moorvale Creative CIC)
 - Southern Sinfonia Call the musician project
 - Somerset People's Theatre Wassail and Brewhouse collaboration
 - Arts and wellbeing projects in North Taunton
 - Somerset Art Works - Labyrinth community garden, and remote art workshops
 - Fuse Performance
 - Reductions in some outdoor space hire fees to encourage external cultural activities
 - The SWT Emergency Town Centre Recovery Fund continues to support a range of arts and cultural projects and activities in towns across the District – more detail is provided within the report of the Economic Development and Assets Portfolio Holder

Cultural sector liaison

Thanks to the efforts of the indomitable Trish Caller (Genius PR and Events) and great programming by the Brewhouse and Creative Innovation Centre, live comedy/stand up has burst back into life in the district's centre – I attended the BrewHaHa Comedy Festival and 'Stand up for Cider' Comedy heats at CICCIC in the summer and am delighted that there is now a regular Taunton Comedy Club at CICCIC.

Music wise, SWT Bandstand concerts in Vivary over the summer have been a great success (not even the odd electrical hiccup, as JW3 experienced, can dint that) and I would also congratulate Minehead and Wellington Town Councils on their successful live music programmes. I have enjoyed music from the awesome West Somerset Brass Band and local bands including Redfoot and Bottle Top Boogie Band among others. I had a good meeting with Tim Hill who has created 'Sound of the Streets' (event in Taunton on 25th Sept) a brilliant initiative to promote outdoor music and street bands and enable wider participation in music. We are hoping the event this autumn, which features a big community sing-along will be the precursor to something bigger next year. I will never arrange another holiday that clashes with Watchet Music Festival – a major event in the South West cultural calendar and a huge boon for Watchet and West Somerset.

Since my last report visual arts-wise, I have attended/supported as many exhibitions across the district as physically possible including:

- the Georgia Morley exhibition at The Old Brick Workshop in Wellington – this young artist creates gorgeous evocative seascapes with plant based home-made paint on eco materials
- Go Create's annual member exhibition at the Creative Innovation Centre – a chance not just to see great art but also to meet the artists behind them and this led to a meeting with Debbi Sutton who provides community art classes including dementia friendly sessions (these are running in Bridgwater, and have been well attended in past in Taunton) and is keen, like me, to establish artists studios in Taunton.
- Somerset Art Gallery Trust's eARTH exhibition at the Brewhouse featuring an array of top local artists.
- Taunton Home Education's summer exhibition at Brazz featuring art by home educated children aged between 3 and 19, inspired by a range of modern and contemporary artists (I devise the projects and run the groups classes).
- The World of Martin Brown at the Museum of Somerset
- Dulverton Weir and Leat Trust's Kinetic Sculpture Exhibition in July (fabulous and inspiring)
- Artists exhibiting for the 10 Parishes Festival including the Wiveliscombe Artist Collective among others – also caught the Wivey Carnival Procession which was a combined visual/performance/musical delight
- District artists taking part in Somerset Art Weeks (running until 3rd October) – at the time of writing have made a start with a visit to talented paper artist Naomi J Kendall's studio in Taunton; this year SAW has an app available so

you can navigate the 200 odd open studios; information is also available on Somerset Art Works website.

Theatre-wise, I have been lucky enough to experience some of the amazing performances venues and local communities instigated over the summer:-

- The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by awesome Tor Theatre a real tour de force, bringing poetry to life as never before – this reinforced for me the importance of our support for rural touring theatre as this was through a partnership with Take Art and Churchstanton Parish Council who worked incredibly hard to set up their gorgeous Community Field in Churchinford for the occasion.
- The inaugural production of Wellington based Chameleon Theatre Company featuring three young actors who gave an amazing performance of The Three Musketeers in Sheppy's Orchard.
- A hugely vibrant and accessible version of Romeo and Juliet by the Three Inch Fools (open air) at the Brewhouse.
- Pleasuredome Theatre Company's outstanding 'A Midsummer Nights Dream' which thanks to a collaboration between the Brewhouse and Museum of Somerset was staged in Castle gardens.

I have connected with producer/writer/creative extraordinaire Emma Bettridge who is leading the drive to reopen Wivey Town Hall as an arts venue and is devising an amazing new production – she confirmed what I see as a general trend for artists and creatives to increasingly gravitate to our district.

Taunton Thespians gave me a very warm welcome to their Open Day where I learned more about their illustrious history and exciting plans for the future as did Tacchi Morris Arts Centre whose open day this weekend past was buzzing with families trying out dance, drama and music taster sessions, enjoying Popera House performances along with music from the Community Rock Choir and local band, A Minor Crisis and photo opps with the cast of Tacchi Morris' forthcoming Panto, Beauty and the Beast. Andy Pulleyn had a fantastic programme set up at Tacchi for the autumn and with support from West Monkton Parish Council they have revamped their foyer café as a great new community café which will be open early evenings Monday to Thursday and Saturday mornings.

At the time of writing the Onion Collective have literally just opened East Quay to the public (part of it at least) for exhibitions as part of Somerset Art Week – an amazing artistic programme is in the pipeline once they are fully open.

I was absolutely gutted to miss Dulverton's awesome Vintage Fair but managed to get myself to Watchet for the 1940s weekend – as usual Watchet did themselves proud and from the accents detected around town many visitors come especially from far afield.

At the beginning of August me and fellow Cllrs Booth, Weston and Blaker and Will Bourdillon (Brewhouse Artistic Director) met talented Muslim cinematographer and film producer/director Rizwan Wadan in Taunton with the team from Pixeleyed

Pictures. Riz has worked on major films such as “Rogue One: A Star Wars Story” and Academy Award winning “The Favourite” amongst others. He is also known in the industry for pioneering camera stabilising solutions. Now he is running a campaign called #TheErrorinError which aims to combat hatred, extremism and terrorism. He has some truly powerful short films that counter both stereotyping of Muslims and the notion that terrorism is associated with Islamic teachings. He is travelling around the country to break down barriers and bring communities together. Café Espresso in the High Street let him take over for the day so he could have a base. He was eager to find out about challenges facing young people and communities in deprived areas of the district and is keen to work with partners locally on a film making and training project.

I had a meeting with State of Trust in early August – they have a project lined up to empower young people across the district with the knowledge, skills and confidence to pursue a range of careers in the arts locally – more on that anon.

Later this week I will be meeting the Taunton Live and Taunton Pride team to discuss how we can support them to follow up the amazing success of Pride 21 next year.

Marketing and communications

A procurement exercise is in progress to deliver a sustainable central event calendar for ‘what’s on’ and ‘things to do’ across the district; develop a suite of marketing products that promote the area as a whole and promote visitor offer links between areas. The central online calendar will enable visitors and residents to search for things to do and provide Towns and Villages a place to advertise their events and activities. This work is funded through the European Regional Development Fund ‘Welcome Back’ Fund.

Following the approval of the SWT Cultural Strategy, a new Culture web page is now live on the SWT website, which will be further developed over the next few weeks and months.