

# Full Council Meeting – 5 October 2021

## Report of Councillor Marcus Kravis – Asset Management and Economic Development

### Major and Special Projects

#### Coal Orchard

Marketing of the residential properties has started in earnest and bookings are now being taken by Connells, our agent, for the show flat, with several reservations made in the first few weeks. Potential homeowners can now browse a sales brochure and website for Taunton's prime riverside quarter - [www.riversidecoalorchard.co.uk](http://www.riversidecoalorchard.co.uk).

The Council is working with the University of Plymouth's Peninsula Medical School to provide accommodation for medical students who are training at Musgrove Park Hospital and working within a series of hospital and general practice-based community placements for the academic year 21-22.

It is leasing eleven units in the Coal Orchard development to the University giving, access to flexible, quality accommodation for their students near to the hospital whilst being in the heart of the town centre.

Work continues on the project, with significant progress made on all buildings, with the construction of those expected to be completed in September, with the public realm works following shortly afterwards. Nationwide material shortages have had an impact on the finishing programme, with plasterboard, cement and ceramic tiles being affected. A revised completion programme will be issued once the material issues can be assessed and resolved. The contractor has started to de-mobilise their site cabins from the centre of the site to allow work to start on the car park (including EV charge points).

Terms are agreed with two of the eight commercial tenants with active negotiations continuing for the other units. Fit out of the units will commence by the tenants as soon as practicable, subject to access and completion of legal agreements.

#### Firepool

##### NHS Vaccination Centre move to Firepool

Plans are now in place to move the vaccination centre from the existing location at Taunton Racecourse to a new site at Firepool, in Taunton in early October.

Work has started to crane in specialised modular buildings, with fit out and utilities connected during September. Firepool car park will close to the public from 27<sup>th</sup> September, avoiding any clashes with Somerset County Cricket Club fixtures.

##### GWR building / cycle path

The GWR refurbishment work has now completed, securing the building for active use as a site office. The temporary footway from Trenchard Way to Canal Road opened on September 6<sup>th</sup> to provide pedestrians and cyclists with a direct route onto the main site and into the town centre. The cycle path will remain open for as long as construction activity allows.

### **Digital Innovation Centre**

SWT are continuing to work in collaboration with SCC on delivery of a 2400m<sup>2</sup> Digital Innovation centre on the Firepool site. The project teams are continuing to work up the detailed infrastructure and services plans and aligning respective build programmes to allow delivery of the Innovation Centre alongside the key infrastructure work. The contractor will be starting on site in October 2021

Changes in response to feedback from the Design Review Panel have been integrated into the design.

### **Special Purpose Vehicle**

SWT have been exploring the most efficient delivery route for large projects such as Firepool and a dedicated development arm which will be solely focussed on delivery of key regeneration projects was approved a Full Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 20. The detailed work to progress this key component has progressed, with formation likely to take place prior to start on site for infrastructure and engineering works.

### **Infrastructure, Utilities and Flood work**

In response to the constraints of the Phosphate issue on submission of a site wide LDO, officers are working to agree a Planning Performance Agreement (a project management tool) between the Council as Local Planning Authority and the Council as Developer to find the most appropriate planning route to delivering the Firepool scheme.

It is anticipated that detailed applications for vital access and infrastructure will be submitted before the end of the year to allow the works to start as soon as the NHS Vaccination Centre has demobilised.

A preliminary ecological appraisal has been completed on the weir and green space between the canal and river up to Obridge, which will inform the final design of any flood mitigation works.

### **Future High Streets Fund**

On 2 June SWT received its official offer letter from MHCLG confirming its award of £13,962,981 of Future High Street Funds for work in Taunton on Coal Orchard, Firepool and Active Travel. With it came the first payment of £4.75m for the financial year 2021/22. £1m will be used to contribute to the Coal Orchard Development, £3m to support infrastructure around the boulevard and development of Block 3 at Firepool, and £750k to begin work to create a cycle route that will connect the Train Station to Vivary park and East Reach. Next steps include working on details for each project, beginning procurement work and developing a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for MHCLG.

## **Bus Station**

Design progress prior to seeking planning permission to convert the Bus Station to a car park has been delayed slightly to allow for further consideration of the infrastructure requirements of equipment and car park layout, including the potential for electric vehicle charging points. Detailed surveys of the bus station buildings are underway and preliminary discussions have been had with potential end users.

## **West Somerset Employment Land Sites**

Work has begun to tackle the longstanding challenge of identifying new employment land in the West Somerset area to meet increased demand by local businesses to expand and develop. Consultants have been engaged following a procurement process and are now looking to assess various sites to determine their suitability and establish what needs to be done to bring something new to market. Work is taking place over a 12-week period, with a report being drafted for publication to members in December.

## **Heritage**

### **Tonedale Mill**

The S48 Repairs notices have been served and discussions continue with the owners on their response to the notices and the emergency works required on site.

### **Toneworks**

Following completion of the first phase of repair works, SWT have applied for further grant funding from the Government's Levelling Up Fund and Historic England to enable further targeted works that will bring Toneworks back into use for community and cultural purposes.

### **Fox's Field**

Lease discussions continue with the WMCIC for the site at Fox's Field to deliver community amenity space as a community forest garden.

### **Dulverton Weir**

SWT continues to work with the Dulverton Weir and Leat Conservation Trust and other stakeholders to investigate future options for the repair and long-term future of the site. We received SRA funding for technical work and the Trust have organised an event in the summer.

### **Norton Hillfort**

The site has now been transferred to the South West Heritage Trust for long term guardianship. Both organisations will be meeting on site to make sure all the final bits of work are complete until the autumn programme. The SWHT are hosting an event on the 31<sup>st</sup> July to formally hand over the site and celebrate the removal from the Heritage at Risk Register.

### **Hinkley Point C**

EDF have now submitted their official proposals to local councils for increasing their workforce from 5,600 to 8,600 workers at peak of construction in early 2023. SWT is working with other local authorities to assess these proposals and work through the potential impacts that this change could have on a range of areas, including in housing, skills, community safety, transport, health and the environment. Next steps include responding to EDF and discussing key issues with them during June and July.

## **Economic Development**

### **Support for recovery and growth of the visitor economy:**

Phase 2 of the county wide Visitor Economy Support Programme (VESP) to aid the recovery of the visitor economy is progressing well with ongoing activity planned until mid 2022.

The Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership (HTAP) continues its activities to support the Visitor economy with activity including:

- Grants (supporting SMEs) - the HTAP tourism innovation grant scheme has been launched, closing date 10 September.
- Free Digital online business support workshops (supporting SMEs) –
- 6 'BOOST' Tourism Toolkit workshops developed to run Oct – Dec 2021
- 6 England Coast Path and walking workshops running Oct – Dec 2021

SWT are supporting Visit Exmoor and Visit Somerset through funding streams available to the Council and officer resource to develop AI big data proposals and destination marketing activity.

The Minehead and Coast Development Trust have been supported through Hinkley Point C section 106 funding and the Economic Development Team to develop the 'Minehead Plan - Inspiring People and Place', a community and economic plan for Minehead. Consultation on the draft plan concludes 13 September, and the plan will be launched by the end of September. SWT continues to fund consultant support to undertake the establishment of the new Minehead People and Place partnership to ensure delivery of the plan.

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.

SWT have invested in 3 cameras along Minehead seafront as a part of a larger Welcome Back safely initiative. The cameras will support an app, that will enable beach goers to assess how busy the beach is before setting off on their journey. More information on this will follow shortly.

### **SWT Emergency Town Centre Recovery Fund**

As a result of the grants provided to parishes and Towns across the District through SWTs Emergency Town Centre Covid Recovery Fund, a wide range of community and business led initiatives have been delivered, with more in the pipeline over the next 6 months, the projects completed to date include:

Taunton ('Taunton Together'):

- Window wrapping for empty shop premises including Taunton Together 'selfie' windows and Museum of Somerset Art exhibitions.
- Taunton Together flower bunting has been installed around the town centre to welcome people back to Taunton.
- Grants to enhance of St James Street planters and a Sounds of the Street music festival.

Wellington:

- Promotion and marketing of the town and farmers markets.
- Live street entertainment to attract shoppers and visitors.

Minehead:

- Subsidised car parking over the Christmas period
- 1-1 business mentoring
- The introduction of a Minehead Gift Card Scheme
- New footfall counters to monitor active footfall and the impact of events on footfall in the Town Centre.
- Marketing campaigns encouraging visitors including shopping and visitor guides.

Watchet:

- Provision of Christmas public realm decoration and lights.
- Refurbishment of Notice Boards to promote activity.
- New flags and bunting across the town.
- Refurbishment of public seating to provide attractive outdoor space for socialising.

Dunster:

- Digital Media Promotion
- New banners in the town and at the gateway welcoming visitors.
- A new webcam linked to the Dunster website.
- New decorative outdoor lighting to promote the night-time economy.
- New planters and benches to improve the public realm.

Porlock:

- Improvements to the public realm, with new planters.
- A publicity and promotion campaign for the area.
- New signage to help visitors wayfind around the area.
- A range of events to attract residents and visitors to the centre of Porlock.

Wiveliscombe:

- Branded merchandise including umbrellas to support social distancing, those queuing to access businesses and to promote the town.
- Installation of new hanging baskets throughout the Town.
- Renovation of benches and seating areas.
- Redesign of the website to help promotion of the area.
- Events and activities
- A range of events to attract residents and visitors to the centre of Porlock.

Williton:

- Promotion of businesses to local people and supporting the re-opening of public toilets in the centre of Williton.

Dulverton:

- A range of events to attract residents and visitors to Dulverton.
- A marketing and promotion campaign.
- Installation of an electricity infrastructure to enable events in open spaces.

### **SME support:**

The Economic Development team have commissioned a mapping exercise of food and drink producers, suppliers and retailers in partnership with Sedgemoor District Council. The study aims to understand the interactions providers have with other local businesses and associated supply chains. A survey will also be completed as part of this work to identify any additional business support requirements businesses may have to ensure their future viability and growth. These businesses are one of the bedrock sectors in SWT and need to be promoted and supported. This intelligence will then feed into both the South West Food hub initiative and a wider piece of work that is planned across the Heart of the South West (HoSW) and greater south west.

The Economic Development team works closely with the HoSW Growth Hub to deliver a webinar in partnership with the Home Office for businesses to raise awareness of the EU Settlement scheme and the obligations of employers to ensure compliance. This was held on Monday 14th June and was well attended.

The Economic Development Team links closely with colleagues across the LEP area and regularly attend and input to the Better Business for All partnership - a partnership of regulatory and advisory functions of Local Authorities. This group works hard to navigate businesses through the 'system' including complexities surrounding covid/ EU exit to ensure they are operating safely and lawfully.

### **West Somerset Opportunity Area**

HPC Employment and skills funding has been allocated to support the WSOA by funding refurbishment of workshops and the purchase of equipment to deliver pre employment construction courses (formally referred to as Mechanical, Electrical and Heating (MEH) support operatives) at West Somerset College, commencing on 16th June, courses included CSCS card to provide opportunities for employment in the construction sector.

SWT continues to administer Access to Employment and Learning Grants to enable individuals to access employment or training including access to the CSCS exam.

The Economic Development team are supporting the WSOA through the co-ordination of workshops and provision of step-by-step guides that help upskill parents in the West Somerset area to support their children with online schooling and homework.

The team are supporting a working group set up by WSOA to tackle issues around recruitment and retention of teaching staff in West Somerset including developing a strong local pathway, introducing new talent, and exploring business transformation to strengthen village schools and developing the school workforce through professional courses.

### **Support for those Not in Education Employment or Training (NEETS).**

SWT has provided funding through the HPC section 106 funds to the Quantock Hills AONB to provide a land-based skills programme in partnership with Somerset Works (a county wide NEETS project). The programme includes team building, practical land management skills, and competency qualifications.

The Employment Youth Hub based at the Minehead Eye opened in early July 2021. The youth hub is running in partnership with DWP Youth Coaches, Somerset Works and Somerset Skills and learning to support 16–24-year-olds into education, training or employment. This is currently on an appointment basis to ensure safety is retained.

The Economic Development team have worked with Somerset Works on their Community Renewal Fund submission for a transitional college for NEETS to provide intensive support back into mainstream education, training or employment.

### **Employment hubs.**

Due to Covid, face to face delivery of the service was not possible during lockdown but the service has continued to support 51 clients through telephone and online support by the Economic Development team. Since July 2021 the service has begun to reopen in a few locations on a face-to-face basis, appointment only weekly in Youth Hub at Minehead Eye/Watchet.

A Volunteering Policy and Handbook has been written by the Employment Hub co-ordinators and was submitted to the Executive for adoption in July, this has now been adopted. The volunteering policy and procedures will enable SWT to recruit, train and manage approximately 60 volunteers to expand this vital service across the district.

### **Bike recycling project**

SWT have awarded £10,000 to Community Council for Somerset to provide a bicycle recycling project across the district. By the end of the project 49 bikes, equipment and training will be delivered to those accessing the scheme to help access job interviews, employment, training and education, as well as promoting active travel.

### **West Coast 360**

Through co-ordination of the West Coast 360 project, focussed on training, upskilling and employment in the Hospitality and Leisure industry, a total of 214 free online courses have been delivered to support people and businesses in West Somerset to reopen after lockdown. Courses include manual handling, food safety, first aid, food allergy awareness and Customer Service.

SWT Officers have worked with Somerset County Council, District Councils, Somerset Education Business Partnership and industry representatives to link young people in colleges and training centres to a central online hospitality vacancy platform. Vacancies will be advertised at a low cost on the West Coast 360 platform, with the offer extended to business until the end of September 2021.

## **Innovation**

An Innovation Leadership Group event was held on 9th July with representatives of major innovation sector leaders, Bridgwater and Taunton College, SCC and the NHS Trust. This group will now be formalised and will determine how partners work together, define and solidify sector opportunities, identify gaps in the innovation network and systems and prioritise workstreams needed to develop SWT as the leading Innovation District in the region.

The Economic Development team is engaging with the Government's selected body that leads on Innovation Districts across the country. The body has access to tried and tested toolkits for the establishment of innovation zones, parks and corridors and can help guide SWT, stakeholders and private sector partners to focus on the districts unique opportunities and strengths and support the SWTs Innovation ambitions.

## **Inward Investment**

Having delivered a significant amount of activity to support the recovery of the local economy to bounce back from the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic the Economic Development Team have refocussed on driving Inward Investment across the District.

In July 2021 SWT engaged Astley Media to develop an Inward Investment place marketing communications plan for the next 2 years.

The communications plan is expected to be completed within the next quarter. Once completed, this will help articulate our key messages to potential investors, to encourage growth, expansion and relocation of current businesses within the district and to attract new business into SWT. The marketing and communications plan will include specific sector propositions through which we will aim to target businesses and supply chain investment in our area.

There are certain commercial drivers which companies look for in identifying their preferred location and it is important to understand these in order to be able to pull together a compelling offer for the area. In the post Covid world, there are opportunities emerging to position ourselves for the future; for example, with the trend of people moving out of the larger cities and by focussing on our growth sectors.

Astley Media will also be assisting with specific media communications to ensure that the district is highlighted as an attractive place to do business.

The communications plan will be used to shape our communications materials and website to best target Inward Investment opportunities. It will also involve more

proactive joint working across the Council teams and with our external agents, developers and other influencers to help champion the place narrative.

There is strong synergy between the Inward Investment place marketing activity, Taunton Garden Town, Nexus 25 and the Innovation District ambitions of the Council. Astley Media are adding value to this work through their leadership of Tech South West and access to over 2,500 businesses in high growth sectors.

## **Asset Management**

### **Assets**

- Probation service have now completed the move into Deane House, Occupying the ground floor.
- CMT services have also moved onto the second floor of Deane House.
- Lease of workshop space at SWT depot, Wellington will complete this month.
- Negotiations have been taking place to identify tenants for the vacant space in the Alcombe centre that complement the Nursery, which will result in all vacant space being occupied.

### **Lease Negotiations**

Lease renewals - terms have been agreed and legal instructed:

- Lease renewals have been agreed with 3 tenants, and the Roughmoor Enterprise Centre remains fully let.
- Priorswood Place - lease renewal ongoing

### **Rental Opportunities**

- 2x Units at Blackdown Business Park will be coming vacant later this year
- The Gazebo Office space at Longforth Road, Wellington will shortly be vacant

### **Collaboration with the projects team.**

- Coal Orchard – ongoing support for the sale of flats and letting of the commercial units.
- Firepool. Licence to NHS to facilitate their Covid vaccination centre
- Bus station. Negotiated the short-term lease renewal to First SW Ltd whilst redevelopment proposals are formalised