

Full Council Meeting – 7 December 2021

Report of Councillor Caroline Ellis - Culture

New Cultural Development Team

We have successfully recruited for a new, short term (to April 2023) post of Cultural Development Specialist to ensure that we deliver the best we can against the Cultural Strategy in the short time left to us. The Cultural Development team has been created to support and deliver the Cultural Strategy - which aligns with the SWT Corporate Strategy - which firmly states the intention to raise the importance of Arts and Culture within our District. The team is:

- **Dan Webb - Strategic Lead (Arts, Culture and Creative)**
Dan is moving over to take on another key council project for 4 days a week for a period of 6 months - we retain him for 1 day a week (pew), to oversee the Cultural Development Programme as a whole and provide strategic vision and direction for the team
- **Andrew Knutt – Cultural Development Specialist**
Andrew joined us on Monday 1 November. He has a wealth of experience in delivering arts projects, running a successful venue as well as capacity building in and establishing partnerships across the creative sector. Andrew is responsible for ensuring the Cultural Strategy is developed into a tangible delivery programme. He is responsible for funding identification and bids and offers a wealth of knowledge in business support from being in the arts and culture sector for more than 25 years. He is also the lead for all external stakeholder and partner engagement.
- **Chloe Gamblin - Cultural Project Delivery Lead**
Chloe has been temporarily redeployed from the 'People' function to back-fill Dan (see above). Chloe is highly respected among colleagues, passionate about arts and culture and brings a fresh and vital perspective, a wealth of creative ideas and many transferable skills. Chloe is responsible for programme delivery and works alongside Andrew in ensuring objectives in the Cultural Strategy are delivered. Chloe is the lead for all internal engagement across Somerset West and Taunton and mainstream Communications.

Cultural Strategy Delivery Plan

The team are currently working on the following priorities:

- Cultural strategy delivery programme planning and implementation including emerging projects/activities from "Creative People" workstream. This is currently underway – we have a new working group (run by CICCIC) looking at 3 specific areas – Health and Wellbeing, Equality of Access and Activity for Young People.
- Developing both internal and external communication plans to ensure the cultural strategy profile and actions are raised across the district.
- Identifying alternative internal and external funding streams.
- Establishing and encouraging positive working relationships with our trusted partners, agencies and organisations.

Cultural Sector liaison

- **Cultural Forum** - With the new Cultural Development team in place, we are delighted to be re-launching the SWT Cultural Forum on Thursday 2nd December 2021 (4pm – 5.30pm). We aim to hold these quarterly, with the first one being an initial “welcome back” meeting held virtually via Microsoft TEAMS. The Cultural Forum is an arena and opportunity for our trusted stakeholders and partners to come together to network, support and ensure that Arts and Culture is firmly on the agenda for our district going forward. The forum presents the space to collaborate, share ideas as well as giving SWT the opportunity to present essential updates and information relating to the sector.
- **Arts Council England** - Dan Webb and I met Phil Gibby, South West Regional Director for Arts Council England at the end of October. They are keen to work with us to: embed culture and the creative industries at heart of the new unitary’s objectives; preserve and build on our existing solid cultural infrastructure and define and maximise growth potential across SWT.
- **Take Art** – Liaison meeting On 23rd October - Dan Webb, Strategy Specialist and I visited Take Art’s HQ in South Petherton for a catch up session and to meet their new rural touring manager, Danny Pedler who is taking over from the renowned and awesome Sarah Peterkin who is retiring. SWT provide grant support to Take Art’s Rural Touring service - a very well-established and successful scheme with an exemplary track record in bringing professional, high quality music, theatre, dance and performance to local venues and communities across Somerset, working in partnership with local promoters in villages/small towns such as Churchinford, Dulverton, Hatch-Beauchamp, Holford, Porlock and Roadwater. These events are memorable social as well as cultural events, playing a vital role in keeping villages alive and vibrant, strengthening communities and improving health and wellbeing. We discussed their autumn/spring touring programme and the importance of continuing local authority funding – which among other things enables reduced price shows in our district. <https://takeart.org/rural-touring/promoters>
- **Wellington Film Festival** – local councillors working with Somerset Film and backed by Wellington Town Council are planning a brilliant Film Festival for autumn 2022 with a programme that offers ‘something for everyone’ and lots of opportunities for local creatives and young people to develop and showcase their skills. It will be important for us to do what we can to help facilitate this project as it will be a great thing for the town and the wider District.
- **Minehead Museum** have been in touch with us as they are looking to expand. Currently they have two rooms at the Beach Hotel but have hopefully an option to move to bigger premises. There is clearly huge potential here given the amazing stories Minehead has to tell, the expertise of Julian and his team and the need for cultural growth in our second biggest town.
- We are currently liaising with Luke Jerram’s team to see about bringing the **Museum of the Moon** to Taunton, hopefully in the new year.

Recognition for the Regal Theatre Volunteers

I heartily congratulate The Regal Theatre on receiving the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award a voluntary group can receive in the UK and well-earned indeed. Regal volunteers work a total of 70,000 hours a year – equating to a contribution worth around £200,000 – in pursuit of their ethos 'For the Community, By the Community'. Their work enables the Regal to present 150 events to audiences (totalling some 25,000 a year), in a varied programme including drama, ballet, opera, concerts, films and live screenings. clashed with full council.

Cultural Events

The autumn has seen an amazing programme of cultural events across the District. Some of the events I have attended include:

- **Sound of the Streets** - a very successful one day street band festival on 25 September on Castle Green in Taunton with funding from the High Street Emergency Fund. This is a precursor to a bigger three-year programme which has won Arts Council backing.
- **Welly Welcome Weekend** I would like to congratulate Wellington Town Council and the Friends of Wellington park on their very successful Welly Welcome Weekend at the of September. I didn't manage to get to the Saturday Street Fair which looked awesome, but I did make it to the Proms in the Park to enjoy Welly Operatic Society and the Silver Band. I look forward to the Christmas lights switch on and entertainment next weekend and to catching one of the amazing shows on the Wellington Arts Centre programme.
- **East Quay, Watchet exhibitions** Along with many other councillors I made a beeline for East Quay once it opened in September. WOW! What an achievement. They have had a number of spreads in national media – most recently the Guardian. It opened with open studios (the range of artists there is awesome) and an excellent exhibition.
- **Black History Month** Taunton Brewhouse marked Black History Month with a series of events at the beginning of October in partnership with Black Artists on the Move. I caught one of the events – Part 1 of 'History is Now! A Black History month extravaganza' which was livestreamed so had an audience from all over the world. It was an amazing event with Jamaican Folk Culture Group, Tan Teddy performing, a link up with acclaimed jazz pianist Guy Marc Vadeleux at his studio in Martinique followed by a talk from acclaimed writer Lemn Sissay MBE with extracts from his incredible autobiography (totally gripping, moving, quite an experience).
- **Museum of Somerset Town History Tours** –I did the society and architecture tour on 16 October with very knowledgeable tour guides Jill and Jacqui - an eye-opening experience! So much fascinating history! I left a glowing review to help promote the tours. Highly recommend. Watchet, Porlock and other towns also have awesome looking tours – looking forward to experiencing and promoting those too come the spring.
- **Taunton Carnival Day** On 16 October I attended Taunton Carnival Day where the Carnival Cttee and Mayor of Taunton were helping to raise vital

funds for the return of Carnival proper next year. A highlight was to see Bootstrap Border Morris in action – I made myself useful and filmed one of their dances and shared on social media which I think they appreciated, they are an enthusiastic and energetic Border Morris side based in Wellington.

- **Guys and Dolls by The Space Somerset** I was thrilled to experience The Space Somerset's outstanding performance of Guys and Dolls at Tacchi Morris to packed houses in mid-October – highlights just how brilliant a Level 3 performing arts course and experience they provide.
- **Inclusive theatre for people with PMLD** Cllr Mark Blaker was kind enough to invite me up to Hestercombe to see an outdoor performance by Frozen Light Theatre who specialise in devising and performing original, multi-sensory theatre for people with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities. As you know, Mark is a Director of Reflect PMLD which has a fantastic base up at Hestercombe, from which they provide specialist one-to-one support to clients. In keeping with their approach to bring great inclusive and creative experiences to their clients and others with PMLD, they had arranged three days of performances and invited small groups of people with PMLD from across the district and further afield to come along with their carers. Each performance – an awesome, immersive multi-sensory experience - was for a small group and socially distanced. This kind of inclusive theatre is now firmly imprinted on me as something we need more of for the future.
- **Louisa – Pleasure Dome Theatre on tour** - I was really thrilled to see this amazing production telling an inspiring local story of courage and community at Holford & District Village Hall – the village hall team did a brilliant job welcoming audiences back to their first theatrical event since the pandemic began creating a safe environment in a lovely setting. It was also a chance to meet the head of the Buddhist group that has taken on nearby Alfoxton House which they have begun restoring (no mean feat) and hosting cultural retreats at with a view to hosting cultural events next summer.
- **Making Marks: Mark-making in the 21st Century** – running till 26th November this is a superb, 'must see' exhibition at the Creative Innovation Centre curated by Adam Grose featuring six amazing local artists.
- **Taunton Thespians' 'The Hollow'**. The Thespians were on top form as ever for this acclaimed production at the Brewhouse – fantastic to see them perform again.

Taunton Youth Culture and Arts Festival

Thursday 23 October 2021 should have seen the start of TYCA Taunton Youth Culture & Arts Festival with an array of performances lined up at Tacchi Morris and the Brewhouse over two consecutive weekends. This is a Festival we support with a £10K grant. This year's theme is 'Empowerment'. A crew of young people were recruited back in the summer and they have been out and about engaging and encouraging others to get involved. Covid unfortunately intervened. With so many events premised on showcases by young performers and so many unable to perform due to rising cases and schools' concerns to stem transmission it was decided the best thing to do would be to POSTPONE and look for dates in the New Year. This decision affected the Spoken Word, Music, Dance, Film and Drama Festivals and

the music/animation/Popera House workshops. As soon as we have new dates I will let you know. However, the TYCA visual arts competition exhibition involving students and young people up to the age of 25 at CICCIC went ahead as planned as did the awesome Tyca Art and Fashion exhibition at the Taunton Brewhouse Gallery from 1 – 6 November. This was a collaboration with Bridgwater and Taunton College Level 3 Art and Design Students. The ONwords and UPwords Online Showcase (the product of brilliant workshops delivered by Clementines Live Arts) premiered on 15 November – I watched live and you can catch it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lepHPaOQ86w&t=148s>

On the subject of young people and access to culture, the home education group I am involved in has started a programme of outdoor theatre events, taking advantage of tours planned by Tall Tails Theatre (Makaton accredited) and Wassail Theatre and subsidised by the Arts Council. We will be ensuring schools, home ed and other children/young people's groups in the district know about the opportunities to have theatre groups visit and encourage them to take advantage of this.

Marketing and Communications

On 20 October I gave a presentation at Government Events' 'The Supporting Local Tourism and Hospitality Conference'. My presentation was entitled 'Supporting the Local Creative Economy to Boost Tourism and Local Business' and highlighted how we at SWT are harnessing the power of arts, culture and heritage to reshape the district around a creative economy to deliver prosperity and enhance wellbeing post Covid and highlight the amazing contributions and achievements of the culture sector to the district. I am told it was well-received. I was sure to give delegates a good flavour of how amazing a holiday/visit to our district would be and the cultural riches that await and encouraged them to come!

I responded to a letter in the gazette bemoaning the lack of a major arts festival in Taunton to highlight the amazing festivals that take place across the district thanks to the creativity and ingenuity of so many creatives and communities and our ambition to build on this. <https://www.somersetcountygazette.co.uk/news/19678273.tauntons-amazing-arts-culture-offering--like-see/>

Chloe Gamblin has produced a new brochure introducing the Cultural Development team with FAQs about our work supporting arts and culture which I have circulated to all councillors and which you can find online here: [Introducing the Cultural Development Team \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/cultural-development-team)

At the time of writing I am doing radio interviews to promote Winterfest 2021 and we have just uploaded the first of what is likely to be many videos on our cultural development work to our You Tube channel.