

Full Council Meeting – 7 December 2021

Report of Councillor Marcus Kravis – Asset Management and Economic Development

Major and Special Projects Update

Coal Orchard

Good progress is again being made at Coal Orchard to complete buildings and public realm areas. Block A – The Quay – which faces onto St. James St is now complete and was handed over to the Council during the week of 15 November 2021. The Wharf which faces onto the car park area should be complete in early December, whilst The Jetty and remaining public realm areas are currently planned for completion in February 2022.

Following nationwide materials and labour shortages, which caused delays to progress on site, things are gradually returning to normal, but uncertainty remains within supply chains and the contractor Midas are constantly reviewing availability of site labour, logistics and deliveries. There are plans to create a temporary fenced off footpath through the site from early December and through the Christmas period to help support local traders in the Independent Quarter. Lights, Christmas trees, maps and signage are all being put in place to help encourage footfall to all areas.

Marketing of the residential properties and commercial units began in the Summer and at the time of writing 27 of the 40 apartments are either reserved or let. With the handover of The Quay contracts can now be exchanged, and we hope to see the first owners moving in early in the New Year. Work is progressing to increase interest in the 8 commercial units, with a renewed emphasis on promoting the units as the scheme nears completion

Firepool

NHS Vaccination Centre move to Firepool

The NHS have now commenced vaccinations from the Firepool site, having successfully mobilised and assembled modular buildings in August and September. The site is expected to be used until March 2022.

GWR building / cycle path

The GWR Building is now being used as a site office by the Innovation Centre contractor site management team. As significant civil works are now underway, the temporary cycle path has been closed in order to maintain safe working distances from machinery and material movements. The path will be re-opened whenever it is possible to do so for significant periods.

Digital Innovation Centre

SWT are continuing to work in collaboration with SCC on delivery of a 2400m² Digital Innovation centre on the Firepool site, with construction activity now in progress. Civil and decontamination works started in October 2021, with a delivery programme of circa 18 months.

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 by Full Council on 3 November 2020. The detailed work on this key component has progressed but the impact of phosphates on the ability to commence construction of residential units limits the scope and efficiency of a separate delivery arm at this time, therefore any formation will be delayed until a resolution is available.

Infrastructure, Utilities and Flood work

In response to the constraints of the Phosphate issue on submission of a site wide LDO, officers have agreed a Planning Performance Agreement (a project management tool) between the Council as Local Planning Authority and the Council as Developer to progress a masterplan which will be subject to public consultation and approval as a material planning consideration. This will set out the proposals for delivering the Firepool scheme.

Detailed applications for access and infrastructure have been submitted, with the aim of works starting on site as soon as the NHS Vaccination Centre has demobilised. Ecological surveys continue on the green space between the canal and river up to Obridge, which will feed into any design work on the flood mitigation works, which will seek to find the appropriate balance between flood mitigation, existing habitat retention and opportunities for enhancement and promotion of wildlife.

Future High Streets Fund

The first payment of £4.75m was made to the Council in June 2021. £1m has been used to support the Coal Orchard project. £3m has been allocated for Firepool and £750k to cycling improvement schemes in Taunton. Procurement work has started on the cycling and walking schemes, that will see the creation of a continuous route from Taunton Train Station to Vivary Park, via Firepool, Coal Orchard and the High Street. The project has also secured £1.13m in match funding from CIL and SCC, which provides an overall budget of £3.43m including Future High Street contributions. The work involves making improvements to junctions at North St. High St, St James St, and bridge development work across the river. The contract will be in place to begin work in Spring 22

Bus Station

Work is continuing to build a business case for re-developing the Bus Station site. Surveys to identify key issues and work to understand the costs of refurbishing the buildings have been completed. Proposals have been submitted for pre-application advice has been submitted for a change of use for the hard standing area of the site, for the Council to turn it into a temporary car park, which will inform any future planning application in the future. The Major Projects Team are engaging with the Somerset County Council bid to the Department of Transport for grant funding to improve bus services in the County. This includes a proposal for bringing at least part of the current site back into use as a bus station. The proposals also allow for SWT plans for utilising some of the buildings for commercial uses and providing support for key local services, including a Changing Places facility

West Somerset Employment Land Sites

A feasibility Study was carried out in Summer 2021 to review demand and assess a range of potential sites for Employment Land use in the West Somerset area. Three sites were identified as potentially being viable for the Council to invest in and develop. Since September, more work has been carried to assess each site in more

detail. This has included looking at access and engineering issues, reviewing all potential costs, starting talks with prospective tenants and landowners, and developing concept drawings. This work is leading to the development of development appraisals being carried out on three options for two different sites. One of these appraisals has now been completed, revealing that we have one good financially viable option in the centre of Minehead. A Council report is now being put together, which will be presented to Scrutiny on 5 January 2022, Executive on 19 January 2022 and Full Council on 8 February 2022.

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 been successful in securing further grant funding from Historic England to enable the next stage of targeted works that will bring Toneworks back into use for community and cultural purposes. Procurement for the contractors to carry out these works is underway and it is anticipated that works will begin in the new year.

Fox's Field

Lease discussions have progressed with the WMCIC for the site at Fox's Field to deliver community amenity space as a community forest garden. The WMCIC have already undertaken some work on the field to cut the grass and create a better walking space for the community as well as planning and securing trees for the forest garden, which they will start planting from December.

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 and number of community events including an archaeological dig and garden party.

Norton Hillfort

The site has now been transferred to the South West Heritage Trust for long term guardianship. The site was formally removed from the Heritage at Risk Register at the start of November and was featured prominently in Historic England's press release. A number of successful volunteer events have already taken place.

Hinkley Point C

Of the £22.5m that the Councils have received via S106 agreements approximately £19.5m is left to spend. All these funds are committed to specific projects or areas of work. Under the current agreement the funding for the majority of posts will end in March 2023, with some funds remaining to maintain planning posts in 2023/24 and 2024/25. However due to the HPC project being behind time and EDF wishing to increase its workforce by 55%, the Councils have now secured some additional funding (£250k plus inflation) for specific posts past March 2023. This includes

additional support for Economic Development and finance roles until 2024/25, and planning and project management until 2025/26.

In addition to this the Councils have now reached agreement with EDF on a comprehensive package of mitigation measures to manage the impacts of the workforce uplift. This includes an additional payment of £390k to the Council to extend some of the Hinkley Housing initiatives and the Housing post. It also includes funding for the joint Community Safety Officer with Sedgemoor District Council until 2026. The whole package also includes significant spend on measures by EDF and support to the other local authorities involved.

Overall, and although a good package of measures has been agreed, there remains concern about whether all activity can successfully be delivered in the next 12 months before the new peak of construction in early 2023. Significant management and monitoring plans are required to stay on top of issues. Members and communities were given briefings on the uplift situation on 15 November and 18 November 2021. Agreements will be finalised in the coming weeks and new management plans put in place by February 2022.

Economic Development update

Town Centre Resilience and Transformation

The Economic Development team continue to work with Town and Neighbourhood Centre working groups across the District to distribute the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Welcome Back Fund allocated to SWT, and the SWT Town Centre Recovery Fund. The projects funded are achieving the aims of drawing people to our high streets, improving the vibrancy in the public realm, providing events and attractions, and increasing footfall.

- 52 projects are planned across the District of which 28 have been actioned and are in progress.
- Over the summer the Towns and Neighbourhood Centres had a wide variety of events, activities, festivals, and street entertainment. More is planned to encourage shoppers and visitors over the festive period.
- Equipment such as additional benches and bins have been installed with additional cleaning.
- Streets have been lined with flags, bunting, hanging baskets and colourful window displays in empty units.
- Regular engagement with Town and Neighbourhood Working Groups have ensured that the projects are community designed and led, and a forum is in place for the groups to share their ideas and best practise.

Winterfest in Taunton Town Centre is planned and the Christmas tree was ready for the 21 November light switch on, with a packed programme of activities to delight the community and to ensure the businesses in the Town Centre benefit from a wide range of customers over the festive season. During the Christmas period there will be street entertainment, log cabins and markets to encourage visitor numbers to the Town.

Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth

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

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

- HTAP Tourism Innovation Grant Scheme (supporting SMEs) has awarded grants to support 14 businesses projects across the Western area of SWT and Sedgemoor as most impacted from the Hinkley Point C development. 9 projects were supported within Somerset West, 1 joint project covers both areas and 4 projects are within Sedgemoor District.
- Free Digital online business support workshops (supporting SMEs) –
 - 6 'BOOST' Tourism Toolkit workshops running Oct – Dec 2021 with 126 businesses booked to date
 - 6 England Coast Path and walking workshops running Oct – Dec 2021 with 70 businesses booked to date

The contract to refresh the Minehead Economic Plan on behalf of Minehead & Coast Development Trust (MCDT) has been delivered and the 'Minehead Plan - Inspiring People and Place' final plan has been published. Delivery of the plan will see the MCDT, Minehead Town Council, Minehead Bid, Training and Education Providers, SWT, SCC and various other agencies working together to deliver activity that supports the vibrancy of Minehead.

Through the ERDF Welcome Back Fund contracts have been issued to deliver:

- A sustainable central event web portal (one stop shop) that will enable local people and visitors to find out about the events, what's on and things to do in the district, and for organisers to promote their events.
- A Marketing Campaign including the development of a suite of marketing products to market and promote the area as a whole to local people and visitors, this will develop and promote the work of the Town Centre Working Groups to boost visits to our Town Centre.

Additional Restrictions Grant Funds

A further £184,000 of ARG funding was distributed in early November which targeted funds toward businesses which support a significant number of employees. Of the £5.76m of ARG funding received by the Council, £696k remains to be distributed. With the remainder of the funds, the focus is now on steering support toward future business resilience and schemes are being worked up which incorporate innovation and carbon reduction criteria.

West Somerset Employment Site Feasibility complete

The initial feasibility study has identified two potentially viable sites in the Minehead area (see above). A proposal is scheduled to be presented to Council in February 2022.

Inward Investment

A Marketing and Communications plan for Inward Investment has been drafted. A key piece of work will focus on developing content for a campaign to launch next year aimed at greater engagement of potential investors.

A358 consultation

The Strategic Economic Development Lead has been involved in the business working group with the National Highways alongside Business West and the HoSWLEP as well as ensuring that Taunton Chamber of Commerce been

involved in the current round of consultation. The Economic Development perspective, including impacts and opportunities for local business have been included in SWTs consultation response.

Community Renewal Funds

Somerset has recently had some success in the Community Renewal Fund bid process with £700k secured for a programme linked to further development of the innovation ecosystem through establishing a further round of a high growth bootcamp for businesses looking to secure investment. The programme also includes AI/Big data training from Exeter University which will help support digital business in Somerset. There was positive news from the Autumn statement that there will be a £200m regional investment fund established for the South West for businesses looking to secure early stage investment.

Innovation District

The team continue to progress activity that will secure SWT as a key location for Innovation and Digital sector growth, the team are working closely with County and district colleagues to join up and align the growth sectors and assets linked to the knowledge economy.

Nuclear Decommissioning Agency

The team are working to secure project funding, resources and expertise from the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency as a result of the decommissioning of Hinkley Point B. Working with Sedgemoor District Council and SCC to work up proposals for investment in the area.

Employment and Skills

SWT Community Employment Hubs

The new SWT Community Employment Hub volunteer policy has been approved by Full Council. The volunteer handbook has been completed along with the volunteer application form to enable recruitment of volunteers who will perform an intrinsic role in the delivery of employment and skills advice at the community hubs across the District. Training is now being delivered to newly recruited and existing volunteers by the 2 Hub Co-ordinators in preparations for the hub openings. A professional volunteer training orientation plan/manual has been developed to support this work. A bespoke client management system is nearing completion. This will greatly enhance the reporting capabilities of the Hubs and provide evidence to support further funding bids.

Virtual support through the Employment Hubs continues via teams/zoom and phone calls. Referrals to partner organisations continue ensuring robust and bespoke individual support for those looking for education, training or work.

The following provides a breakdown of the achievements of the hubs between January and November 2021:

Total of clients contacting the service: 65

Live cases: 34

Current status of the Hubs

Hub	Venue	Day	Time	Operation	Update status
Watchet	The Sanctuary, Swain St, Watchet	Thursday	10:00 – 1:00	Weekly	Open
Minehead Youth Hub	Minehead Eye	Thursday	13:00 – 15:00	Weekly	Open
Minehead Hub	@The Hub, Alcombe, Minehead	Tuesday	10:00 – 12:00	Weekly	Volunteers recruited/training in progress
Williton	Williton Children's centre	Tuesday	10:00 – 12:00	Weekly	Recruiting volunteers
Stogursey	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	Recruiting volunteers
Dulverton	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	Recruiting volunteers
Taunton	United reformed Church	Wednesday	10:00 – 12:00	Weekly	Volunteers recruited/training in progress
Taunton	Halcon, Links Power	TBC	TBC	TBC	Recruiting volunteers
Taunton	Priorswood Community Centre	TBC	TBC	TBC	Recruiting volunteers
Taunton youth Hub	Bold & Brave	TBC	TBC	TBC	Recruiting volunteers
Wellington	Where Centre	TBC	TBC	TBC	Recruiting volunteers

West Coast 360

West Coast 360 is a partnership of local businesses and employers, training providers, statutory agencies, community organisations and the local community college. The Partnership has come together to provide skills and development opportunities for the hospitality and leisure industry, with the aim of raising skills levels and prospects for individuals.

We are currently looking at commissioning a short film to promote different careers paths and **inspire** both young people and adults in **West Somerset** to work in the **hospitality and leisure sectors**. This video would then be used across various digital platforms

Linked with Skill Up and Secro – skills for the workforce to enhance training opportunities for this sector: [Training support for business and individuals | West Coast 360 - Your pathway to Hospitality & Leisure excellence](#)

In partnership with Skill Up, WC360 offers free training to anyone connected to the hospitality and leisure industry. Currently 221 short online courses have been delivered.

Support for those Not In Education Training or Employment (NEETS)

A contract has recently been signed with the Quantocks AONB to deliver a range of practical land management courses to NEETS. The programme will commence early in 2022.

Recruitment and Retention

Two 'Meet the Employer' events have been held with SUEZ, along with bimonthly HPC Virtual Drop In recruitment events.

The Skills and Employment team have worked in partnership with other district local authorities and SCC to create a 'Step into Jobs' event (local jobs for local people). The team have also created a 'Guide to good recruitment and employment practices' to help local businesses to attract and retain employees in response to local labour shortages in key sectors. The team are also working with NHS Foundation Trust to support crisis in the Care sector.

Business Communications

The team continue to send out frequent newsletters to businesses across the District, sharing news, information on support and training available, signposting to grants and providing opportunities for feedback. Subscription to these emails is available on the SWT website.