

Full Council Meeting – 8 February 2022

Report of Councillor Caroline Ellis - Culture

Cultural Development Team – progress update

The Cultural Development team has been created to support and deliver the Cultural Strategy - which aligns with the SWT Corporate Strategy. This firmly states the intention to raise the importance of Arts and Culture within our District.

- **Cultural Forum** - 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.
 - A re-launch meeting of the SWT Cultural Forum was held on Thursday 2 December 2021 and was well attended with 60+ internal and external stakeholders.
 - A robust action plan has since been developed based on input and feedback.
 - We aim to hold these meetings quarterly, with the next one being planned for early March 2022
 - The team will also facilitate the creation of thematic sub-groups with external stakeholders to inform and develop the Cultural Strategy, e.g. Creative People, Employment and Skills etc
- **Communications and Engagement plan** – the Cultural Development Team is now fully established, with an on-going priority of communicating and engaging with external organisations, as well as internally with other related parts of SWT – for example:
 - through the creation of internal working groups/taskforce – I.e., Planning/Garden Town, Community Engagement, Events, Employment and Skills, and linking in with Jo O’Hara re: Heritage and creating an assets list of all SWT Arts and Culture assets.
 - A new cultural development newsletter has been established and updates uploaded to the SWT website
- **Cultural funding support** – the team is now proactively liaising with potential projects where funding and support is sought
 - A National Lottery Jubilee Funding Application (requested £50k) has been submitted – we will hear March/April whether this has been successful
 - A Funding Workshop for external stakeholders is planned for February (delivered by the SWT Cultural Development Specialist, Andrew Knutt, and will be hosted at CICCIC)
 - The team will be introducing and developing a tool to capture data on SWT funded projects for future planning and to ensure delivery and monitoring on the SWT cultural strategy

- **Events** – the Cultural Development team works closely with the SWT Events Co-ordinator and Town Centre Resilience and Transformation Officer to ensure the SWT events calendar links in with Cultural Strategy:
 - Supporting the roll out of the new SWT ‘What’s on Events and Things to Do’ portal. A Webinar is organised for organisations 10 February
 - Involved with events and Civic relating to Queens Platinum Jubilee
 - Working with and supporting SCC with the 500th Anniversary of the Municipal Buildings and prospect of commissioning a piece of Public Art in and around Castle Green Area.
 - We have supported bringing the **Museum of the Moon** to Taunton in March 2022.
- **Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) Programme** – the SWT Strategic Lead for Culture is now engaged with the ‘Culture and Universal Community Services’ workstream of the county-wide LGR programme. Alongside this programme, consideration is being given to a new Somerset county-wide Cultural Strategy.

Cultural Liaison and Events attended by the Portfolio Holder – Cllr Caroline Ellis

Public Art: Our Arts Taunton/SWT Liaison meeting in December 2021 focused on Public Art. We discussed how Public Art fits within the new Design Guide and Arts Taunton shared early thinking on a Public Art strategy. Exploratory and high level discussions have since been held with Arts Taunton and the Museum of Somerset towards a new Public Art project for Castle Green.

We will soon have a register of Public Art across the whole district logging, with photos and details of how/when/why the 100+ artworks ranging from memorials to mosaics, sculptures, murals, bridges, tapestries, statues were created and by whom. There are many hidden or forgotten gems out there and it has been fascinating tracking down some of the creators and/or guardians of said artworks to find out exactly what the stories are behind their commissioning/creation.

New public art in the offing includes the ‘Taunton’s Historic Timeline’ artwork commissioned by the Town Centre Manager and produced in conjunction with Museum of Somerset/Somerset Heritage which will be affixed to the Debenhams hoardings soon (by end February) and new artworks planned for Minehead which will double up as plastic recycling (think Goby the fish only better as designed by local metal artist). There is interest from street artists too in doing more work in Taunton town centre.

Events: Go Create delivered a fantastic Taunton’s Got Talent competition this year as part of the Winterfest festivities – so many talented young singers from across the district performed.

Along with many fellow councillors and council colleagues I attended the East Quay Celebratory Party in Watchet at the end of November 2021 – a chance to catch the Shift exhibition - key local artists working with Somerset Wildlife Trust on theme of somerset coast, meet a range of artists from across West Somerset and listen to

how East Quay is and will continue to strive to deliver cultural justice – relevant cultural/creative opportunities for all no matter who they are and where they are from.

Carols around the Bandstand in Vivary Park was an awesome evening – thousands gathered, safely, with Taunton Concert Band Taunton Deane Male Voice Choir, The West Somerset Singers, Taunton Street Pastors and the Mayor of Taunton for a magical, festive celebration. Taunton Town Centre had great markets over the festive period too with live music from the local Rock Choir and an amazing 3D festive light projection wishing shoppers Merry Christmas.

Tacchi Morris Arts Centre's pre-Christmas panto was Beauty and the Beast by Reamba productions with a chorus of local talented youngsters, an absolute joy and performances were sold-out.

Taunton Brewhouse AGM at the end of November was a chance to reflect on the challenges the Brew has successfully overcome in the past year to deliver a rich and exciting programme of comedy, film, art, performance, dance and artist/writer development and to look ahead to plans to boost audiences and community engagement in 2022. CEO Amy Bere, Brewhouse Chair, Val Hammond and their team have done a simply outstanding job. To round off the year their fantastic in-house production of the Wind in the Willows, which saw professional actors performing alongside local children and young people and a range of engagement and art projects running alongside, won massive plaudits and exemplified the triumph of community spirit over adversity. It was so good I went back for a booster.

It has been a great winter for art so far with the unmissable Brian Rice exhibition at the Museum of Somerset and Hestercombe's Changing Atmospheres (showing till 27 February) which got my creative juices going. I was really thrilled to meet local artist Uttam Karmaker in December at his first solo exhibition in the UK at Taunton Library, a brilliant abstract, expressionist artist whose work has previously graced the Venice Biennale.

Engagement with artists and creatives has reiterated the need for affordable artist studios in Taunton (Watchet has amazing studios at East Quay and Wellington benefits from the wonderful Old Brick Workshop but there is a very problematic Taunton gap); discussion has taken place with Go Create and the Creative Industries Centre to attempt to remedy this and provide more community art opportunities into the bargain.