

Council – 6th September 2022

Portfolio Holder Report of Councillor Mike Rigby – Economic Development, Planning and Transportation

Planning

Taunton Garden Town Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Future Stewardship Arrangements

Arup were commissioned in October 2021 to support the production of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan for Taunton Garden Town. The work is now in the final stages with a draft report having recently been received. Work on taking forward stewardship proposals (a key principle to realise the Council's vision for the Garden Town) has also been progressing. The consultants have baselined existing arrangements and reviewed the potential opportunities for putting in place arrangements for the long-term management and maintenance of community assets (including public open space, allotments, play facilities, community halls) across the garden town sites. Workshops with key stakeholders including the parish councils and Taunton Charter Trustees) are currently being set up to take place in September to test proposals including the objectives and principles for future arrangements. Work to scope the requirements for an online infrastructure engagement platform against existing commercially available products has also taken place. The next stage will be to interview potential suppliers to further understand how our requirements could be met via existing products.

Taunton Garden Town – Governance Arrangements

Proposals are being developed to ensure a governance structure for the Garden Town is in place going forward to ensure collaborative working and effective decision-making among public and private sector partners and stakeholders. Following consultation with key stakeholders a report is due to be considered at a future meeting of the Executive (likely in November).

Connecting our Garden Communities – Active Travel Infrastructure for Taunton Garden Town

Consultation on the draft Connecting our Garden Communities plan was launched on 29 July and runs until 30 September 2022. For more information and to respond to the consultation visit the consultation portal at <https://tauntongardentown.commonplace.is/>. The consultation has received attention in the local press and a significant number of responses already. Associated engagement activities are planned with relevant parish councils, Somerset Youth Parliament, local businesses and with students and staff at Richard Huish College in September. Following consultation, the intention is for the plan to progress towards approval as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications this autumn, and to influence the next iteration of the Taunton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

Mobility hubs – Taunton Garden Town

A brief is being prepared with County colleagues to consider how the Council can support the development of mobility hubs at key locations to facilitate active and sustainable travel across the Garden Town. This will look at a network approach, typical components together with potential

financial and delivery models. This complements work taking place on the Taunton bus station site and is intended to consider opportunities on a range of sites including the allocated Park and Ride sites at strategic sites in Taunton Garden Town.

RTPI Awards 2022 Commendation for Climate Positive Planning Guidance

I am pleased to announce that the Council's Climate Positive Planning Guidance was recently commended as part of the RTPI awards for Best Plan (Excellence in Plan Making Practice) category in recognition of its role as a flexible tool through which the Council's declaration of Climate and Ecological Emergencies have been integrated into planning policy. It provides detailed guidance on how planning applications are expected to demonstrate climate friendly construction methods and design by way of interpretation of adopted planning policies, national guidance, and legislation. It also forms a key action within the Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience (CNCR) Action Plan.

Neighbourhood Planning

SWT has received the Independent Examiners report on the West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine (WM&CF) Revised Neighbourhood Plan. The next steps are for SWT to consider the examiners recommendations and determine whether the plan meets the basic conditions and agree a decision statement. The plan will then go to a referendum with a provisional date of 22 September 2022 agreed with the elections team. Assuming that it is supported by more than 50% of those voting, it will then go to Full Council to be 'Made' and will then form part of the statutory development plan for the purpose of assessing planning proposals in the area. The Parish Councils of West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine have revised a number of policies in the Plan with the aim of: increasing the climate and ecological robustness, conforming with Taunton Garden Town Vision, supporting the Declarations of Climate and Ecological Emergency, and updating Local Green Space designations.

Town Centres Health Check

To provide evidence for plan making, the Council has commissioned work to undertake Town Centre Health Checks for Taunton, Wellington, Minehead, Williton and Watchet; a review of the Retail Area Boundary Reviews for these towns; and consideration as to whether an Article 4 Direction should be made in order to protect town centre uses.

Stantec were appointed to undertake this work. The Town Centre Health Check has been completed and published on our website. The Retail Boundary Review report has been completed and will form part of the evidence base to support a future Somerset Local Plan. Recommendations on the need for Article 4 Directions is due shortly and will help determine the next steps.

Wellington Station

Following the announcement of £5 million worth of funding from DfT's Restoring Your Railway Fund in October 2021, Network Rail is now leading on the project to deliver the station. The funding will be administered by Network Rail as part of the Restoring Your Railway, Rail Network Enhancements budget, and will enable the project to advance significantly through the next stage of project development and design.

The promoters, Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) and Mid Devon District Council (MDDC), continue to work with Network Rail, GWR and other stakeholders through the Working Group, Steering Group and Senior Stakeholder Forum. A programme for delivery of the station is currently being prepared in collaboration with Network Rail and is anticipated by the summer.

Firepool

The LPA and Developer teams continue to meet regularly with regards to the development of a new Masterplan and Design Guidance for Firepool to resolve key issues and move things forward with a view to consultation and adoption by the LPA as a material consideration in the assessment and determination of planning applications for the site. A series of workshops have been undertaken with key stakeholders to help support refinement of the Draft Masterplan which will be reported to members in due course ahead of public consultation. Planning applications for Block 3, and for the Trenchard Way access and levels and drainage across the site have now been approved.

Transportation

A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme National Highways Consultation

The formal public consultation exercise and the subsequent non-statutory consultation exercise for the proposal to improve and dual the A358 between the Southfields Roundabout in Ilminster and junction 25 of the M5 motorway, have now ended. National Highways will now consider whether any further changes to the proposals are required as a result.

Council officers together with colleagues at Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council are continuing to negotiate with National Highways and are involved in various workstreams. The next important milestone in the project will be the joint production of a 'Statement of Common Ground' between all of the affected Councils (Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council). The three local authorities are currently working on this collaboratively.

It is now expected that National Highways will be in a position to formally submit their application for a Development Consent Order in Autumn (2022).

Development Management Update

Performance

Workloads remain high due to the volume of applications, pre-application enquiries and managing the applications held in abeyance due to the advice from Natural England and the need to provide phosphate mitigation. There are ongoing vacancies and absences due to personal circumstances, resignations and some long-term sickness and reduced hours across the team. Performance is also affected by delays in receiving responses from consultees in particular from the Somerset Ecology Service despite a new service level agreement.

Recruitment

Unfortunately, no applications were received to the recent advertisement for the vacant Senior Planner and Team Leader roles and we have therefore recruited agency staff. One agency worker started on 4 May 2022 to fill the Senior Planner role and the Team Leader role was filled on an agency basis on 1 June 2022. The Conservation Officer has resigned and this post has been advertised.

The Service Manager resigned and left the Council in early August. This role was advertised nationally but there were no applicants. There is currently an Interim Service Manager working three days per week.

Major and Special Projects

Future High Street Fund (FHSF) Cycling and Walking Schemes

The active travel element of this grant allocation creates cycling improvement schemes that focus on delivering an enhanced cycle route between Taunton Railway Station, through the Firepool and

Coal Orchard developments to Vivary Park with additional cycle parking. Due to rising costs as seen across the whole construction industry, the total cost to deliver all schemes was forecast £1.4m the FHSF grant funding. This, coupled with the potential impact of bus service improvements along East St and beyond, resulted in the decision to remove the Market House Roundabout from scope *at this time* until additional funding can be secured, and the impact of parallel activity assessed.

Schemes currently being progressed through design stages include a new bridge over the River Tone, a cycle and pedestrian-priority parallel crossing at St James St, and a new crossing from High St to Vivary Park. Cycle parking 'hubs' are also being implemented, with a range of both secure and sheltered cycle parking with public cycle repair stands and pumps.

The pace of delivery remains a key consideration, with all FHSF spend required by March 2024 but the programme is progressing to schedule.

Consultation with SCC, RNIB and local cycling groups has been undertaken with further consultation to take place in the coming months.

Feasibility Work - Cycling Schemes

SWT are continuing to work towards feasibility studies with local cycling groups and other stakeholders on cycling infrastructure projects in the District.

- Wellington to Taunton

Collaborative links have been established with key stakeholder groups, including TACC, Citizens UK, Somerset County Council, Wellington Town Council and other community groups. A dedicated committee working on the route has been meeting since March 2021. Feasibility work to assess the south side of the A38 between the Comeytrowe and Chelston roundabouts shows a significant lack of highway boundary available to accommodate the route. Estimations show delivery of the central 4.5km section is likely to require multi-millions for construction, land purchase or lease agreements for multiple land parcels, in addition to funding for legal agreements. Officers continue to explore feasibility and seek any funding opportunities that are available.

Heritage at Risk

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. In January 2022 SWT also issued a S54 Urgent Works Notice for urgent repairs to Block H at Tonedale Mill. This notice was not complied with and SWT have completed the works and handed the site back to the owners. A S55 which seeks the recovery of the funds in default has now been issued. Officers continue to work with the owners to try and secure the other buildings throughout the site.

Toneworks

Phase 2 works are now on site for the next phase of targeted repairs using grant funding from Historic England, this is due for completion by the end of 2022.

Sandhill Park

SWT continues to work with the new owners of Sandhill Park towards the necessary urgent works and long-term plans for the building's future. Emergency works have been deemed to have started by the owner and the Emergency works package is underway.

Regen Programme

Coal Orchard

Since the last update, SWT continue to push the project forward, with 30+ sub-contractors, the majority of whom were engaged in the project previously to provide continuity of delivery and knowledge of the works.

Following lengthy negotiations with the Environment Agency, the license to work in the river was secured in June, allowing the works to the river steps and retaining walls to recommence. These key activities are pivotal in finishing remainder of the public realm, but also contain key utility supplies so accurate coordination is essential.

Some of the key routes through the site have opened, with very positive feedback received from local businesses and residents.

All 40 apartments are now sold or let.

We are dealing with a number of live enquiries for the commercial space, and will shortly be re-launching promotion of the units.

Bus Station

NHS Vaccination Centre move from Firepool to Tower St (old bus station site)

The NHS continued to provide vaccinations from the Firepool site until the end of March, before moving across town to the old bus station site at Tower St. The central building had a light touch refurbishment at speed by the NHS before the spring booster jabs started successfully in April.

SWT continue to work with Somerset County Council on proposals for the long term future of the site. The Department for Transport has confirmed the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) grant funding, allowing initial discussions about the longer term use of the site and its wider uses (see Mobility Hubs update above) to move forward with more certainty.

Integration of the Changing Places facility into any new proposals for bus station use will be a priority.

Firepool

GWR Building/Cycle Path

The GWR Building continues to be used as a site office by the Innovation Centre contractor Wilmott Dixon. The temporary cycle path will remain open until the end of September when it will close due to overlapping construction works.

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.

Infrastructure, Utilities and Flood work

Planning permission has been granted for the Infrastructure work but start on site has been delayed as the contractor has experienced delays on a preceding job that has prevented mobilisation at Firepool. The team continue to explore all options to ensure this work gets to site as soon as possible.

Phase 1 of flood defence design work at Firepool Lock is due to be completed in Q1 2022, in collaboration with the Environment Agency and Canals and Rivers Trust. A public consultation for this work will take place in July / August, with over approx. 50 responses received. These are being collated and the feedback analysed, before any further design work will be undertaken.

Block 3 (north of Canal Road)

Planning permission has also been granted for the block north of Canal Road. Delivery of this element of the site will be coordinated with the works to the Innovation Centre opposite to ensure the two projects do not conflict or compete for space or access.

Boulevard & Public Realm

A separate planning application for the boulevard and public realm works leading down to the river from Canal Road has been submitted.

Master Planning

The Councils' development team continue to work closely with the Local Planning Authority to develop a revised masterplan for the whole site (see update above).

Heritage Assets

Wellington Green Space & Fox's Field

The acquisition of the Green Space in Wellington is scheduled for a Full Council decision in July 2022. It is intended to hand the site over (alongside Fox's Field) to Wellington Town Council for long-term lease and management working closely with the community.

Hinkley Point C

The latest Summer 2022 workforce survey confirmed that there were 7,875 workers on site in June 2022 (these are the number of workers that are on site for 5 days or more each month). Up from 6,656 since December 2021. This rate of increase is as expected and according to plans for the workforce uplift from the original 5,600 workers at peak to 8,500 by early 2023.

36% of the workforce is home based, whilst the rest (about 5,040 workers) have had to secure accommodation in the local area. Of these workers 68% of the non-home based workers are based in Sedgemoor and 24% in Somerset West and Taunton. Although numbers have gone up in Sedgemoor the overall percentage has dropped by 5%. This time significant rises have been seen in Taunton and Stogursey and surrounding villages. This does suggest that Bridgwater has reached capacity and new workers are looking further afield for accommodation. There has also been a rise in workers living in the private rented sector.

Work continues with EDF to put in place agreed measures to mitigate the impacts on the private rented sector. This includes 900 bed spaces in four expanded caravan sites that are currently being used by workers. These are reliant on full planning application processes. The additional bed spaces will be ready for occupation in the first few months of 2023.

The Supplementary S106 agreement has now been signed by all parties, which will release an additional £390k funds for Housing teams to deliver initiatives that create new bed spaces and support the most vulnerable people. Since 2014 HPC Housing funds have created over 800 bed spaces and supported nearly 1,200 people. The agreement also releases additional funds to support some staff roles from April 2023 in economic development, planning and housing related activity.

After more than 46 years, Hinkley Point B has this summer stopped generating electricity. This has seen a gradual decline of business rates, but this was expected and has been planned for in budgets.

Economic Development

Town Centre Resilience and Transformation

Town Centre Resilience and Events

Taunton Wellington and Minehead received 25K to support the on-going high street recovery efforts.

A giant deckchair has been erected on Castle Green and will stay there until the end of summer. (September/October).

Town Centre Activity (All)

Working with HUQ who use Mobility data products to access footfall metrics, visitor travel, place engagement, demographic data retail success and benchmark places with direct equivalence. Working with District Town BIDS and Council's to produce a high street vitality dashboard to show intelligence but allows us to evidence the impact of events and other town centre activity.

High Street Task Force are working SWT to help identify ways to unlock the potential of the High Street through training, workshops and sharing best practice case studies.

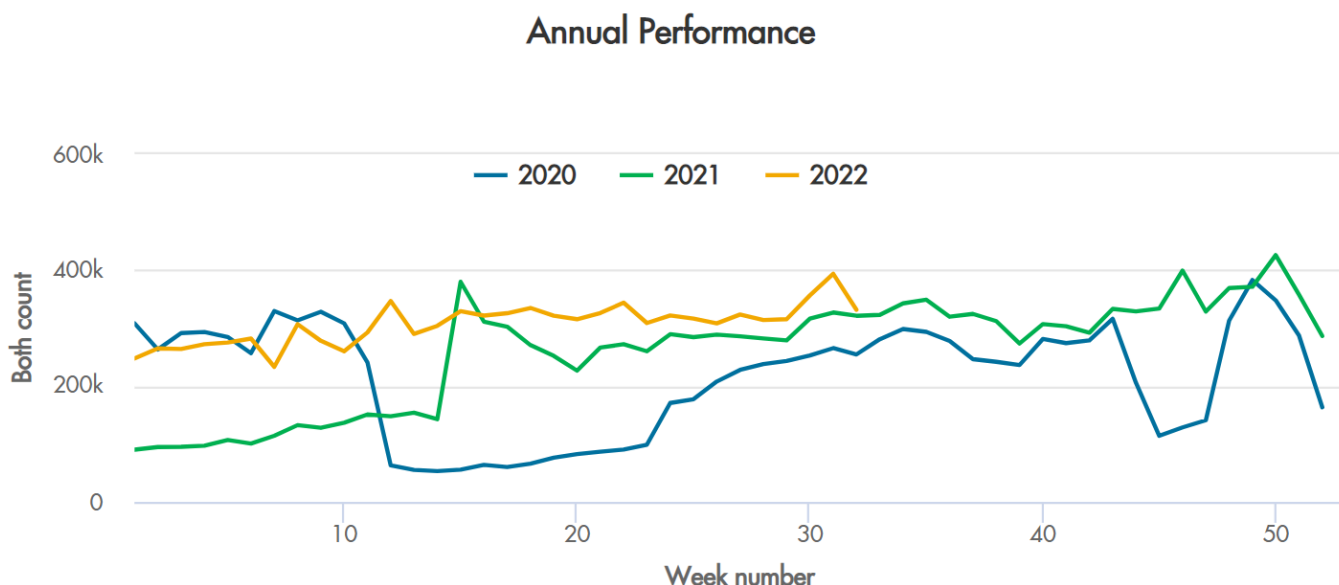
Town Centre Activity (Taunton)

Work is complete on the electrical supplies in High Street and Fore Street, SWT Electricians are safety checking the units and once passed, they will be in use. EOI's are being called from street traders to occupy the top end of the High Street.

The heritage statement is ready for submitting, but final tweaks are needed to the proposed elevation drawings.

Digital promotion has been used to support the town centre activities this year through Facebook via boosting posts. Reach exceeding 120k views.

Footfall:



Events

Jubilee Picnic in the park was attended by over 3,000 people and was a great success for the town and brought the community together. Front page of County Gazette and positive feedback from stakeholders, different internal departments and members of the public.

Forthcoming events for some of SWT's parks and open spaces in 2022 include:

- Live in Somerset music concerts in Vivary Park on 27 and 28 August
- Minehead Bay Festival on Minehead Esplanade and seafront on 3 September
- Wellington Film Festival in Wellington Park on 2 October
- Moonlit Meadow Run through Longrun Meadow and French Weir Park in Taunton on 29 October

Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth

The county wide Visitor Economy Support Programme (VESP) to aid the recovery of the visitor economy strand 1 & 2 activity final reports are now completed. The VESP strands are funded by the Joint Councils' Business Rates Retention Grants (BRR). Strand 3 is for marketing and positive messaging for the visitor economy that is about to be commissioned. Strand 4 has launched an innovation grant scheme aimed at innovation within the visitor economy which is supporting recovery and growth within the sector. Entry to the grant programme has now closed.

The Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership (HTAP) continues to support the Visitor economy with various initiatives as part of their phase 4 action plan. The HTAP digital online business support workshops for 2022 held x 6 'BOOST' Tourism Toolkit webinars up to April 2022 which supported a further 40 businesses. The number of businesses supported was lower than anticipated. However, the supplier has agreed to deliver further toolkit workshops in the autumn within contract.

The HTAP Tourism Innovation Grant Scheme (supporting SMEs) awarded 14 grants to a diverse range of projects across Sedgemoor and the West Somerset area to boost and widen the tourism offer.

The recently commissioned 12-month Somerset visitor survey first quarter survey results have been collated.

Annual SLA's have been put in place for each of the Destination Management Organisations Visit Somerset and Visit Exmoor.

The HTAP partnership has developed a proposal that will see four themes of work for the use of the remaining HTAP funds available, for Cluster networks & business support, Packaging of activities and itineraries, Publicity and Events. The HTAP partners are currently assessing tender submissions where projects are expected to start in September.

The England Coast Path project supported by HTAP has now launched 20 Storywalks.

<https://englandcoastpath.storywalks.info/> –

1. The new Minehead People and Place Partnership meets bi-monthly at present, delivery of the new economic plan for Minehead called Minehead Plan – Inspiring People and Place is underway.

Four year agreements have been finalised with Minehead, Watchet and Porlock Tourist Information Centres (TIC's) to cover 2022/23, 2023/4, 2024/5 and 2025/6 for the use of the remaining Hinkley funding allocations for the Centres. The TIC's have to deliver against an annually reviewed action plan of outputs for the funding received.

Sector support: Food and drink

A [Spotlight on Somerset Food and Drink - Growth Hub \(heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk\)](https://heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk) event was held on 5 July 2022 and was successful with a soft launch of the sector support package given to the audience.

A Guide to support businesses with their recruitment and retention of staff has been published on the website and it is hoped that this will be a useful tool for businesses struggling with staffing issues. <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/3426/recruitment-and-retention-of-staff-guidance.pdf>

The team are also part of a LEP wide task and finish group looking for solutions.

Additional Restrictions Grant Funds

The discretionary funds awarded to the Council by Government for this scheme to support businesses during Covid has been fully utilised.

Since November 2020, the scheme has provided financial support totalling £6,066,639 in 4,267 separate grant payments to over 1,560 businesses. These are businesses which either would not have qualified for the Government's mandatory schemes, or did not qualify at the time that a particular round of the ARG scheme was made available.

Inward Investment

The LEP has begun its 18 month programme of Somerset wide inward investment activity which includes the appointment of a design agency to develop the Somerset wide inward investment proposition which will incorporate the Switch website. The team will continue to be involved in ensuring that all aspects of our activity aligns to the wider Somerset programme as well as development in readiness for vesting day 2023.

Innovation District

A meeting of the Innovation Leadership Group was held in July and will continue to meet on a quarterly basis. The next meeting will be in October. Future issues to be discussed include:

- the next steps on the outcome of the Shared Prosperity Fund submission
 - a review and feedback on the ILG's involvement in the Innovation Exchange conference
 - an update on the organisation appointed to deliver the first phase of the innovation support service
- During July, a workshop facilitated by the Connected Places Catapult was held with officers from the County and District Councils; the Local Authorities all agreed that the model of a distributed innovation district (hub and spoke) was favoured.

Somerset Innovation Exchange 2022

Good progress has been in preparation for the event on 27 September 2022. The collaborative event will showcase innovation in Somerset. Themes include the future of transport and mobility, the legacy of nuclear and future energy, digital health innovation, and Agri tech. More information is available on the website [Somerset Innovation Exchange – Showcasing innovation in Somerset](http://www.somersetinnovationexchange.co.uk)
www.somersetinnovationexchange.co.uk
<http://www.somersetinnovationexchange.co.uk/>

Shared Prosperity Fund

The economic development team has supported the final submission of the prospectus to Government submitted on 1 August for review and feedback by Government in September/October.

This covered three key themes of community, business support and skills. Key themes for our economic development team were town centre regeneration, innovation and skills development.

Somerset Future Economic Scenarios Project

The first stage of the project to review Somerset wide economic priorities has been completed. The next stage is to consider themes to support the development of a Somerset wide economic development strategy including:

- A business as usual base case
- A quality of life driven health and wellbeing scenario A vitality and dynamism scenario A clean green nature recovery scenario

Community Employment Hubs

The DWP funded project reaches its conclusion at the end of December 2022. As at 10/8/2022 the following headline outcomes have been achieved:

- 591 people have engaged with the service + 97% *versus DWP target*
- 125 gained employment including apprenticeships + 56% *versus DWP target*
- Engaged with over 100 businesses + 50% *versus DWP target*
- Engaged with over 30 support agencies – *no target*
- 285 improved their ability to secure work by engaging in training, skills enhancement, work experience, more active job seeking, education or volunteering +26% *versus DWP target* (as listed below)

40 referred to start up their own business

44 referred onto partners support organisations

40 supported towards volunteering

80 moved on to training (Government and other)

40 undertaken new experience

40 attended workshops

A proposal is currently being drawn up with DWP to sustain the Employment Hub model for a further 12 months

Events delivered by the Community Employment Hubs in previous 3 month period		
Date	Event	Attendance numbers
10 May 2022	NHS careers job opportunity virtual event	6
31 May 2022	SWT Housing Support officers recruitment event (organised and attended by Housing team)	5
29 June 2022	Recruitment/jobs fair	162
14 July 2022	Support organisations and disability confident employers' event for all	15
14 July 2022	Educational Business Partnership sponsorship awards evening	
20 July 2022	Support event for Ukraine RE: jobs fair and support towards work at Minehead Job Centre	45
27 July 2022	Support event for Ukraine RE: jobs fair and support towards work at Taunton Job Centre	187
9 August 2022	HPC recruitment/drop in event at Alcombe Community Hub Minehead	6
Planned events		
23 August 2022	HPC recruitment/drop in event at Alcombe Community Hub Minehead	

September - Date TBC	Cost of Living Crisis support event date in September at Taunton. . Partnership event with the DWP. Exhibitors to include DWP, Centre for Sustainable Energy, Somerset Independence Plus, Wessex Water, Food Banks/Pantries	
28 September 2022	Big Jobs Fair. Somerset County Cricket Ground	

Hub venues;

- Minehead Eye Youth Hub, TA4 5BJ. 1:30pm to 2:30pm (every Thursday weekly)
- Priorswood Community Centre, Taunton, TA2 7JW 10am to 12pm (4th Tuesday of the month)
- Halcon Link Centre, Taunton, TA1 2DD 12:30pm to 2:30pm (4th Thursday of the month)
- @ The hub, Alcombe Minehead (next to fire station) TA24 6DJ 10am to 12pm (2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month)
- Stogursey Hub at the Stogursey Youth Hub TA5 1PR, (next to the Victory Hall) on a Tuesday once a month, please use employment support email below to book an appointment
- Taunton United Reform Church, TA1 3PF 10am to 12pm (1st Tuesday of the month)
- Wellington Baptist Church, TA21 8NS 10am to 12pm (1st Wednesday of the month)
- Williton, Parish Council, TA4 4PY 10am to 12pm (3rd Tuesday of the month)

Volunteer Update

23 volunteers recruited

10 volunteers fully trained

13 volunteers complete training by October 2022

Volunteer handbook now in print and electronic [Community Employment Hub Volunteer Handbook.pdf](#)

We have been working in partnership with CHARIS (the refugee resettlement charity) supporting Ukrainian guests access employment and training opportunities. To increase the value of this ongoing relationship, the Community Employment Hubs will deliver employment and skills training to CHARIS volunteers and Employment Hub volunteers will receive training on working with people who have experienced trauma. Plans are underway to provide a CEH service at the Ukrainian Welcome Hubs in Taunton and Watchet.

External Operations & Assets

West Somerset Railway: Disposal of car park and toilets, off Station Road Bishops Lydeard

The sale of the gravel car park and WC block adjacent to the West Somerset Railway Station at Bishops Lydeard is progressing smoothly with solicitors appointed on both sides.

A sales figure of £50,000 has been agreed. The only users of this car park are those who park to use the railway and it is sensible that the control of this asset, and the WC block alongside, is transferred.

Lease of the Monkton Heathfield Country Park to Parish Councils

This long running project has now been concluded and the lease has been signed and the transfer is now official.

Sale of Unit 3 Blackdown Business Park, Wellington

We received an acceptable offer of £230,000 from the occupying tenant of Unit 3 to purchase the unit.

The building requires expenditure for repairs and decarbonisation and this would remain a Council expense if we didn't accept the proposal.

It is considered that the offer is a fair one and helps us to support a local business. The asset is marked for disposal in the Commercial Investment Strategy.

The sale was discussed at the Commercial Investment Panel in June and the Board in July and once the SCC S24 Officer has approved the sale it will proceed. It is expected that the decision will be ratified in August 2022.

Lease of Blenheim Gardens Café, Minehead

The tenant recently proposed an ambitious scheme for the café involving extensions as well as refurbishment to the existing building. Our view was that this would be difficult to progress for several reasons and we asked them to revert to a refurbishment option.

Following correspondence in early August the tenant has committed to undertaking internal refurbishment rather than full scale redevelopment. The main reason is to accelerate opening. We are monitoring closely with monthly visits and if sufficient progress has not been made by 31/12/22 then we will seek a surrender of the lease.

This has become a frustrating project but we are determined that a café will be opened in the park in time for spring.

Minor Works

The painting of the Esplanade railings at Watchet began is complete and will be followed by the repainting of the Watchet Lighthouse at the end of the West Pier. This work will begin in late August 2022.

The required underpinning works to the bandstand in Vivary Park have been postponed for the summer season and will commence in once the 'band season' is completed.

Electrical compliance works on the East Quay at Watchet is complete. The works were to ensure a compliant supply to the boatyard and Marina Impounding gate. Further works have been ordered to bring the electrical system to the pontoons up to a compliant standard.

Former Mount Street Nursery

Following the supported application by Taunton Deane Cricket Club for some additional land for parking and ongoing Rough Sleeping activity in the area, a further review of the former Mount Street Nursery remainder land is underway.

The site has been empty since closure of the former nursery in the mid 2000's and is considered to be unsuitable for building development due to planning restrictions (traffic on Mount Street) and flood issues.

The site is bounded by the Taunton Deane Cricket Club ground (owned by SWT and leased to the club), Vivary Park golf course, a retirement living development and Ash Priors Road at the 'rear' of Vivary Park. It is largely overgrown and has developed ecological considerations including the possibility of badger setts.

The draft solution for ongoing management is to:

1. Progress the supported long lease to TDCC for a new parking area in the north west corner of the site.

2. Undertake a formal ecological survey to assess options for the remainder of the site which may be a possible area for additional tree planting

3.

A further site familiarisation visit is taking place in August to assess the potential for the proposed uses.

Commercial Services

Car Park Improvement Projects

We have completed the install of 25 new parking terminals within the West Somerset Area of the district, which have allowed customers to pay for parking sessions using contactless card payments as well as cash. The old machines were old and prone to breakdowns. The new machines also give much better information on usage to bases future decisions on.

The team have commissioned the below improvement works;

- Blue Anchor - Patching potholes
- Springfield Road, Wellington - Patching potholes
- Duke Street, Taunton – Patching work to entrance
- Fons George, Taunton – Resurface main area
- Swain Street, Watchet – Relining
- North Road, Minehead – Relining
- Anchor Street, watchet – Relining
- South Street, Wellington – Relining
- Whirligig, Taunton – Relining
- Quay West, Minehead – Relining
- Parson Street, Porlock – Relining
- OMS Level 5 & 5a – Relining
- Swain Street, Watchet – Loading Bay lining
- Deane House Staff car park – Relining
- Williton Central – dropped kerb installation at pay station

Crescent Car Park Improvement Project

Our design team are drafting the final designs for approval prior to tender of the work to be completed in 22/23. The redesigned car park will include 19 EV charging points, an improved layout, introduction of trees and a cycle hub. Contractors have been appointed to refurbish the boundary wall on the south side of the car park, works commenced 27/07/2022.