

Full Council Meeting – 26 February 2020

Report of Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts – Leader of the Council

- 1 It has been a very busy couple of months since my last report to Full Council, I will look to provide a summary of some of the many events and organisations I have met during that time. Under my leadership whilst ensuring that council business runs as smoothly as possible, taking action in line with our corporate strategy, I have challenged the council to be more outward looking than both of its predecessors. This involves greater engagement with local communities, local businesses but also within the membership we have with regional and national bodies.

2. Civic Events

2.1 Sargent at Mace – Sam Smalldon

It was with great sadness that I learned that Sam Smalldon had passed away on 4 November. At the time, Sam was Sergeant at Mace at SWT and was responsible for attending the Mayor at ceremonies. Sam was a well-respected member of SWT and had been a friend for many years. He will be sorely missed by all at Somerset West and Taunton Council.

2.2 Remembrance

- 2.2.1 This year's Remembrance Sunday service was held on 10 November and Two Minutes Silence was observed in Taunton Town Centre at 11.00 am on Monday 11 November. The service is held each year at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, to mark the end of the First World War.

3. Community

3.1 Maggies

- 3.1.1 Following a meeting in October with representatives of Maggies, Friends of Galmington Playing Fields, Musgrove Park Hospital and ward councillors, members of the Executive, James Hassett and I had a further meeting with all those involved and a site visit to MPH to further discuss options for a Maggies Centre. We will be meeting again towards the end of this month to discuss further.

3.2 Minster for Taunton

- 3.2.1 On 20 November, I met with Nigel Birkett, Chair of St Mary Magdalene Taunton Parochial Church Council to discuss minster status. This will bring

many community benefits for the area. I look forward to working with the Church to progress this.

3.3 Exmoor Young Voices

3.3.1 On 10 October I attended the Exmoor Young Voices Summit with the Chief Executive, James Hassett which was held in Exford along with Cllr Fran Smith, Cllr Marcus Kravis and Cllr Peter Pilkington.

3.3.2 Exmoor Young Voices help young residents living and working on Exmoor. Young, resident workers find it hard, often impossible, to stay living in the Park because of barriers to housing, planning, employment, and social mobility. The Summit was attended by key partners, exploring policy and practice, to identify solutions that will reverse this trend. We will be progressing this further this year.

3.4 Exmoor visits and meeting with Town Council

3.4.1 On 17 September the Chief Executive and I visited Exmoor and met with Dulverton Town Council. Whilst there we visited a number of sites including Dulverton Weir and Leat, met with district and town councillors and I had an introductory meeting with the Senior Leadership Team of Exmoor National Park. Our visit was well received and we are going to be visiting again shortly.

3.5 Celebration for a new Ministry

3.5.1 On 6 November I was delighted to attend the Celebration for a new ministry of The Reverend Sr. Elizabeth Shearcroft at All Saints Church, Roman Road, Taunton. It was great to see such community support and spirit.

3.6 Vivary Park Sensory Garden

3.6.1 On 2 October I was pleased to be present at the unveiling of a sensory sculpture - A Tribute to Six Acres in Vivary Park, Taunton. The event was a relaxed and sociable celebration of Six Acres Day Centre which included music and cream teas. A sculpture, entitled Flight of Six Acres Phoenix, was unveiled in the sensory garden. The event was attended by ex-employees and service users of Six Acres Day Centre. The sculpture and celebration was paid for with funds that were raised by Friends of Six Acres.

3.7 Lindley House

3.7.1 On 7 October I visited Lindley House with Chris Booth, Portfolio Holder for Community to see the work undertaken by ARC supporting the most vulnerable in our community.

3.8 **Taunton Food Bank**

- 3.8.1 It was brilliant to be able to donate the food and money given by staff and Councillors to support the work that they do over Christmas. I also dropped off twenty family tickets to the Taunton Ice Rink over the festive season.

3.9 **Christmas Festivities**

- 3.9.1 It was a fabulous Christmas season and I hope that everyone had a restful period. In the lead up to Christmas there were fantastic events put on throughout the district and whilst I could not attend them all, it is great to hear of the many voluntary groups, parishes, town councils and businesses that help us thrive and support the lonely, isolated and vulnerable. I was able to attend the fantastic light switch on organised by SWT Communications Team, take my family to Carols in the Park and attend the festive business carol service. I also attempted to ice skate at our successful ice rink, without injury. It is also good to note that I have requested the profit made from the ice rink be used to support local services and offset the carbon cost of the festive activity.

3.10 **Pantomines**

- 3.10.1 In the New Year, it was a pleasure to watch the brilliant Wayfarers' Cinderella and Wellington's Dick Whittington. We have such fabulous talent locally and great to see such variety in our theatres locally.

4. **Economic Development**

4.1 **Hinkley**

- 4.1.2 Recently I attended Hinkley C to meet with the Director of Delivery to discuss how the largest construction project in Europe is progressing and to ensure challenges and opportunities are dealt with within the district. It was incredible to see the scale of the project first-hand. However, what is most important is to ensure that our community feel the benefits but they mitigate against the impacts. I recommend all Councillors attend the public tours to see the ever-changing site as it progresses.

4.2 **Meeting with Onion Collective**

- 4.2.1 It is fantastic to see how the Onion Collective are looking to further the prosperity and opportunities in Watchet that will, no doubt, resonate throughout the whole district. I had a brilliant overview in the autumn with all that they have planned and it is good to see how the project at East

Quay is developing. We are working closely with them due to the ongoing issues at Splash Point and the harbour wall repair.

4.3 Meridian Business Support

4.3.1 On 3 October I was delighted to be part of the ribbon cutting ceremony for the official opening of Meridian Business Support which relocated to Deane House. Meridian is the second organisation to share the Council building with SWT - Taunton Police Station opened here in December 2018 after leaving its former home in Shuttern. Deane House is a superb facility within the heart of the community where we are able to offer local people greater convenience by having public services under one roof.

4.3.2 The recently upgraded building also has space to accommodate partners in the private sector and I am delighted to welcome the first of those, Meridian Business Support, to Deane House.

4.4 Somerset Business Awards

4.4.1 On 25 October I attended the Somerset Business Awards held at Weston Super Mare. We have so many fantastic local businesses that are providing a variety of jobs across all industries for local individuals and attracting new opportunities for the district. One of the great successes of the night was Shearwell Data, winning family business of the year and Somerset Manufacturer and Producer.

4.5 Building Thriving Local Economies Launch: Taunton Deane

4.5.1 On 6 November I attended the Building Thriving Local Economies Launch Somerset County Cricket Club. This is an incredible opportunity for us to work across the sector to enhance lives within the district. This is only one of four pilot areas in the country, with Barclays providing resources. Such value is being placed that Sir Ian Cheshire was opening the event and he was interested to discuss all that we were achieving.

5. Placemaking

5.1 Firepool

5.1.1 The next phase of Demolition works are underway and due to be complete in the next 2 weeks. The higher part of the temporary boulevard will be submitted for planning shortly in order to get the temporary boulevard between station and River open in the summer. The Local Development Order has been progressed with Parameter plans prepared to start the scoping study with all Consultees. Ecology and Transport Assessments instructed to support the process. Interviews with the Hotel proposers/developers have been complete and final bids awaited and we expect a circa 130 bed facility. We are also producing the business case for serviced apartments in the building next door. Cinema redesign has produced an 8th screen and the design of this block can now be taken

forward as one. Delivery options and business case with Carter Jonas for review and advice.

- 5.1.2 It was also a worthwhile trip to Hull at the end of January to attend the IPW Conference on regeneration through a multi-purpose venue. I believe that we are now in the art of the possible to make this happen, subject to the feasibility studies and financing which we are progressing.

5.2 **Coal Orchard**

- 5.2.1 The project is progressing well, on time and on budget. Piling is completed and foundations are being poured across the development, with steel work commencing late February.
- 5.2.2 Our agents have received enquiries for both residential and commercial units through the holding page at riverside@coolorchard.co.uk, and marketing material for both has been drafted and is close to being finalised for publication in early spring.

The project is due to complete in Spring 2021.

5.3 **Build it Beautifully**

- 5.3.1 On 9 October I attended an RIBA Build it Beautifully event. The event was held to explore the creative opportunities of the Garden Town. Following on from The Vision for the Garden Town the Council's draft Design Guide was launched at the event - as part of a six week process of consultation. The event brought together a range of local stakeholders to identify what is distinctive about Taunton's architecture and landscape and how this can be built on, as the Garden Town takes shape.
- 5.3.2 The event showcased design excellence in Taunton and nationally and offered creative opportunities to expand on the draft Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town and meet the challenge of a climate emergency. An article appeared on RIBA Architecture.com and click [here](#) for the link.

6. **Local Government**

6.1 **Transformation – Lessons Learned**

- 6.1.1 We have now received the South West Audit Partnership's audit into the Transformation programme that was led by the previous administrations of Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council. This report has confirmed the challenges I have faced since becoming Leader in May. There are many lessons to be learned and the report demonstrates how we have been hampered both financially and resource wise to go at an even greater pace to achieve our aspirations.

6.2 **FOLGIS**

- 6.2.1 The Leaders of Somerset's four District Councils have come together to move forward with plans for unprecedented and deep-rooted collaboration to deliver a better system of local Government in the county that will be more integrated, efficient and work better for communities.
- 6.2.2 This followed a lengthy and detailed set of discussions, studies and proposals involving all five authorities and experts in local government. It is also contrary to a proposal from the Leader of Somerset County Council for the District Councils of South Somerset, Mendip, Sedgemoor and Somerset West and Taunton to become a single unitary authority with Somerset County Council. The announcement from the Leader of SCC came as a surprise to us. Of the options presented to all of us in the final report, full unitary status does not provide the biggest cash savings, it causes the most disruption to services and it takes away that vital link the district councils have with their local communities in our large and diverse area.
- 6.2.3 As district councils our aim is to create a better Somerset for everyone by working to improve services and life for all our residents, businesses and visitors. District councils in Somerset have already undertaken radical change and transformation programmes and as a result are financially sustainable and protecting services to communities. Where we have worked together it has been a success. From legal services to waste collection our partnerships have been efficient and cost-effective. We have a track record of collaboration that works. We want to build on that and take it to the next stage.
- 6.2.4 The leadership of Somerset County Council want to spend millions of pounds of your money on a unitary plan that will take years to implement. We think that time and money can be better spent on our communities and the services they rely on. The aim is not to simply cut costs, our intention is to find a way, through the better use of our resources, to sustain vital services now and for the future

6.3 **Heart of the South West LEP**

- 6.3.1 The Joint Committee is the Leaders of Somerset and Devon working together to have one voice to Government and to work on the challenges and opportunities that we all face. Recent discussions have included devolution, combined authorities, climate emergency and local industrial strategy.

6.4 **LGA Annual Local Government Finance Conference**

- 6.4.1 At the beginning of January I attended Smith Square for the annual conference. Keynote speakers included government ministers, LGA officers and commentators. We received updates on the current government position, what the future may look like and also the extent of cuts over the past 10 years along with the EU withdrawal.

6.5 **South West Councils**

- 6.5.1 At the end of January representatives from Dorset, Gloucester, Devon and Somerset met to discuss climate emergency, EU withdrawal and the Government's new resettlement scheme. I am keen to progress this and working with officers to help more refugees and asylum seekers in need.

6.6. **District Councils Network Annual Conference**

- 6.6.1 On 6 and 7 February I attend the DCN Annual Conference in Kenilworth. The District Council Network Conference held in Kenilworth was a two day event for all districts across England to come together to share ideas.
- 6.6.2 Discussion took place on a range of subjects including finance, the future of local government and the role of unitary authorities and how we can help support the high streets in a changing retail environment.

6.7 **LGA Training**

- 6.7.1 Since becoming Leader I have attended a Local Government Association Leadership Academy Programme, accredited by the ILM and also the Commercial Investment Training.
- 6.7.2 The Leadership Academy is the LGA's flagship development programme for councillors in leadership positions. Tailored for the current challenges faced across local government, the Leadership Academy delivers for local leaders a step change in leadership behaviours, strategies, skills and mind-set.
- 6.7.3 The training comprised of three modules focusing on:
- **leading through relationships** - how councillors can develop, maintain and use relationships (both internal and external) to provide effective leadership at the political, organisational and wider community levels.
 - **leading innovation and change** - develop councillors' ability to lead and manage complex change to improve effectiveness and efficiency and to achieve better outcomes for the community
 - **leading communities and place** - focus on helping councillors to communicate with and provide leadership to their communities and within partnerships to achieve growth and prosperity
- 6.7.4 The Commercial Investment Programme gave further insight into the changing nature of local government finance, the challenges of providing excellent services with limited funding from central government.
- 6.7.5 I found the course extremely useful and it was a great opportunity to meet Leaders of other Councils. We have a development budget for all Councillors to use and would be good for all to look to see about attending.

Environment and Climate Emergency

7.1 Taunton Environmental Network

- 7.1.1 It has been informative to have met with TEN and to update them all on we are doing locally. We are organising a briefing with them to update them on our plans for the district along with organising a meeting with West Somerset groups.

7.2 Extinction Rebellion

- 7.2.1 Members of the Executive and I have met with members of Extinction Rebellion a couple of times recently. They have been a great support in promoting our climate consultation events and feeding into what we are looking to achieve.

7.3 Bereavement Services

Our Bereavement Team are starting to progress their Business Plan to provide even better services along with providing a variety of options that also fit within our environmental aspirations.

7.4 Somerset Waste Partnership – Feed My Face, Slim my Waste Campaign

- 7.4.1 SWP are currently rolling out their new campaign to promote further food waste recycling. You will see, in the coming days, stickers and promotional advertising to make our recycling percentages even better than they are. Whilst we are waiting for the roll-out of 'recycle more' with the additional kerbside collections, I recommend that you all see what our recycling centres can take. I look to recycle my plastic waste there whilst awaiting the kerbside launch in 2021. This can, therefore, mean we are all individually playing our part to assist in reducing our carbon footprint. It also helps you to see what you are using and how you can make changes to reduce your plastic consumption.

7.5 SRA

- 7.5.1 The SRA recently met to plan the projects for the year. It was positive to see the continued support of TSFAI project along with some funding for smaller projects in the district.

8 Arts and Culture

8.1 Finding the Lost Words

- 8.1.1 On 24 October I attended Finding the Lost Words at Queens College, Taunton, an event co-organised with Arts Taunton and Go Create as part of Arts Taunton's inaugural Taunton Youth Culture and Arts festival (TYCA) inspired by the beautiful book 'The Lost Words', written by renowned

nature writer Robert MacFarlane and illustrated by Jackie Morris in response to the loss of nature in children's lives and a celebration of nature in all its glory. The event was hosted by our president Stephen Moss, a BBC Natural History producer and writer.

- 8.1.2 Somerset Wildlife Trust delivered nature connection sessions to around 180 children in four Taunton schools (3 primary and one secondary) and these were followed up by Arts Taunton poets and Go Create artists to help the children create lovely visual and spoken work all inspired by the nature they have discovered around them. At the event the children, teachers and parents came together in celebration to display their art work and read their poems aloud to the audience.

8.2 **An Evening with Sir Tim Rice**

- 8.2.1 On 31 October I was delighted to attend an Evening with Sir Tim Rice in conversation with his songs performed by talented young singers from across Somerset hosted by Arts Taunton. The charity gala evening was held to mark the opening of the first Tyca festival.

8.3 **Arts Taunton Statue**

- 8.3.1 It was a pleasure to meet with Arts Taunton on 9 January and support their plans for a statue at Creechbarrow Hill beside the main entrance to the town as an iconic statement of Taunton's rich past, its aspirations today and its belief in a vibrant town.

8.4 **Brewhouse**

- 8.4.1 I was sorry to hear that Vanessa LeFrancois is stepping down as CEO of the Brewhouse. I wish her all the best for the future. We are keen to continue to support the Brewhouse with the £132,000 grant and maintenance support. I recommend you all see what they are showing in the springtime. I have seen some excellent productions in recent months.

Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts