

Watchet, Williton & Quantock Vale Area Panel

21st January 2020

7.00 pm

Council Chamber, Council Offices, Williton

NOTES AND ACTION POINTS

PRESENT:

Councillor David Westcott	Watchet Town Council / Chair
Dave Talling	Holford Parish Council
Peter Gill	Kilve Parish Council
Gordon Tizzard	West Quantoxhead Parish Council
John Richards	WACET
David Peake	SCC Highways Officer
Sally De Renzy Martin	Watchet Town Council
Peter Payne	Williton Parish Council
Rosemary Woods	Williton Parish Council
Sharon Baker	Avon and Somerset Police
Councillor Ian Aldridge	SWT / Williton PC
Samantha Murrell	SWT Engagement Lead
Robert Downes	SWT Project Manager
Jo Humble	SWT Lead Place Specialist
Sue Southwell	SWT Development Enabler

1. Introduction

2. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Loretta Whetlor (SWT/WTC), Tony Murray (Magna Housing), Chris Hall (SWT), Katrina Midgely (Engage), Chris Jones (D&SFRS), Councillor Marcus Kravis (SWT), Councillor Peter Pilkington (SWT)

3. Somerset West and Taunton Council

In order to ensure all points were covered during the meeting, item 8 was brought forward to Item 3.

3.1 Climate Change Consultation – Robert Downes Reports and Notes Attached.

Somerset West and Taunton Council has declared a climate emergency and committed to working towards making the Council and the area which we cover carbon neutral by 2030. Alongside this, it is recognised that it is essential that we prepare our communities, businesses and buildings to ensure they are resilient to the climate change which is already in motion. In preparing a Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan for the district, the Council aims to take a leadership role in starting the conversations on how things need to change, taking action where it can, supporting and enabling others to play their parts, and lobbying Government and other actors to make necessary changes.

SWT is currently consulting on its Local Plan and Climate Change Strategy. Robert Downes outlined the proposal and timescale for the consultation. Various venues within Taunton and West Somerset for public meetings over the next few months.

The consultation will take place from Monday 13th January to Monday 16th March 2020.

The Local Plan will cover the new district area but does not include the area covered by Exmoor National Park. In order to produce a good Local Plan we need to engage with the local communities and businesses to understand what is important to them in their area.

This is the first consultation stage in the Local Plan process. It sets out the key issues and draft objectives for the Local Plan particularly around climate change and development needs over the next 20 years.

Please visit our website to find the documents and an opportunity to have your say: yoursay.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk.

Paper copies of the document will be available to view in all libraries in Somerset West and Taunton, as well as at council office receptions at Deane House (Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE) and West Somerset House (Killick Way, Williton TA4 4QA)

SWT will also be visiting these venues, where you can find out more and ask questions:

- Wellington, Quaker Meeting House – Thursday 23 January, 10am to 3pm
- Williton, West Somerset House – Thursday 30 January, 2pm to 7pm
- Taunton, the Orchard Shopping Centre – Thursday 6 February, 10am to 3pm
- Minehead, Methodist Church – Monday 10 February, 2pm to 7pm
- Watchet, The Sanctuary – Tuesday 11 February, 10am to 3pm
- Wiveliscombe, Community Centre – Thursday 20 February, 10am to 3pm
- Taunton, Deane House – Wednesday 26 February, 2pm to 7pm

Questions Arising

3.1.1 In response to SWT setting aside a large budget to improve and retrofit their own Council housing and buildings bringing them up to an eco-friendly standard: Rosemary Wood asked what plans and money had been set aside to serve West Somerset, as there isn't any council housing in this part of the district? District Council Tax should be shared equally across the whole area not just the former TDBC. Was SWT working with partners such as Magna to carry out retro-fit improvements?

SM advised that Tony Murray from Magna HA was scheduled to present the Magna Housing Annual Report at the March Area Panel Meeting. This question could be put to him at the meeting. Jo Humble also stated that SWT did work with a variety of partners such as RSL's when working on Affordable Housing developments.

- 3.1.2 Cllr Ian Aldridge said it was much easier to build carbon neutrality into new developments, rather than re-vamp existing properties. The planning committee however, did not have any powers to enforce this at present.
- 3.1.3 It's really important at the planning stages on new developments, that existing infrastructure and void spaces are given as much consideration as the housing itself.
- 3.1.4 Williton PC stated that SWT awarding grants to Parish Council's installing an EVCP was welcomed; but that there had been insufficient time for Williton PC to prepare the EOI, seek quotes and consult before the closing date.

3.2 S106 Affordable Housing – Sue Southwell / Jo Humble
Presentation Notes Attached.

Questions Arising

- 3.2.1 Peter Gill from Kilve PC asked what minimum Housing Standards Affordable Housing had to meet in terms of room size? JH advised that Homes England used to set a Nationally Prescribed Space Standard, although it was not compulsory. All developers should take this into consideration, although it was abolished some years ago. SWT however, when working with partners on both open market and affordable housing, do factor space and room size into their plans on new developments.
- 3.2.2 Can Eco-Friendly Housing prove more expensive in the long run? I.e. On the purchaser and or tenant? JH said this is considered very carefully at the initial stages of assessing housing need. Protecting affordability and viability for the end user/purchaser is of utmost importance in an Affordable Housing situation. New developments do not want to attract hidden fees, such as ground rents or service charges in addition to housing rent. These creeping charges could mean that the tenant pays more overall, and the viability of sustaining the tenancy decreases.
- 3.2.3 Cllr Ian Aldridge said that legacy planning was of the utmost importance to ensure that Affordable Housing remained available to all those who needed it. Firstly the Right to Buy had depleted Council Housing, and now some of those properties were beyond the budgets of local people both on the open market, and in the private rented sector. Secondly, impacts of developments in the future needs to be assessed sensitively. Is there a point to building demand housing to serve a short term need, if the work was not going to be available long term? (I.e. Hinkley Point Housing).

4. Notes of the Meeting of 17th September 2019 and Matters Arising.

It was agreed that most of the matters arising would be covered under subsequent Agenda Items. (Maintenance of Pavements in Williton covered in Item 8.1)

5. Have Your Say - Community Issues/Concerns

David Talling had sent questions ahead of the meeting, some of which had been dealt with by the Governance Team.

5.1 ACTION POINT 1

Could we have a copy of the Risk Assessment relating to the decision to make more and more forms to be completed on line?

At the last Area Panel it was stated that the SWT Council and Somerset Council had taken the decision to make applications and form filling to be made predominately on line due to cost constraints. This comment was not disputed by the council officers present. Although this may save a small amount of money and may be more convenient for council officials, I question whether it is serving the electorate well. If this is to happen then accessing information, forms etc. on the web MUST be easy and it certainly is NOT. What provision is in place for those without access to the internet? Was a Risk Assessment carried out?

This query has been passed to Jess McVie. SM will follow up.

5.2 Complaints made to the council requires overhaul.

When a complaint is made confirmation of receipt is given by email with the name of the person who is dealing with the complaint but no contact email or Tel. No. The website states that complainant will be notified of the outcome within 20 days. This is incorrect as I had to further my complaint submission after 25 days and I finally got a reply after 26 days. The difference in dates is because the notification of the outcome was within 20 days **not including weekends**. At no point was I contacted or updated. Although I have been told the issue has been resolved – it has NOT.

Complaints Process Update:

SWT have a dedicated Case Manager who manages corporate feedback – Jess McVie. The purpose of Jess's role is to oversee the complaints coming in, record, triage and in the end close them. We have developed a standard template in which to respond to complaints to ensure the quality and consistency of those responses. Therefore responses and comments should be sent to Jess via a comment or attachment within the Firmstep complaint case or via email to cmc@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk.

*From **Monday 3 February 2020** our formal response time, as agreed by the Council Executive, will be reduced to 10 working days therefore there will be a greater expectation across the organisation for complaints to be prioritised.*

5.3 What is the Council position regarding personal information being made public on line?

David said that the practice of West Somerset Council was to conceal personal information before publicizing on the website. He had submitted a TPO request to SWT and it had been posted on-line with all his personal details displayed. He had written to complain and waited a long time to get a response. When it was eventually forthcoming it was beyond the statutory time to answer.

He went on to add, that despite an apology the information was still showing when he received his reply. It was ONLY after he had put forward his concern in advance of the Area Panel meeting that the personal information was removed.

Gordon Tizzard stated that the recent Watchet Harbour Wall breach had highlighted the fact that there was no obvious "Emergency Contact" information available.

5.4 ACTION POINT 2

Is there an Out of Hours emergency number for Civic Disasters such as the Watchet Harbour Wall Breach? It was unclear who to contact, or how to reach the Duty Officer. Can this information be made more publically available?

David Westcott was quick to point out that Watchet Town Council were very pleased with the SWT speedy response to this emergency. Attendance on site by senior officers and Councillors over the weekend and pre-Christmas period had been noted. The temporary repair to the Harbour Wall had been undertaken with all speed to ensure that further damage was not incurred over Christmas.

6. Police Report – Sharon Baker attended the meeting. - Crime Report is attached.

7. Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service – Not present

8. Highways Report – David Peake

8.1 Proposed closure of A39 at Washford for 5 days/nights

Prior to the Area Panel meeting taking place, SM asked David for an update on the proposed A39 road closures at Washford. Notices had gone up notifying of the dates, but no times or further information was provided. David checked the Travel Somerset website, and learnt that the work is being undertaken by Wessex Water. (He had no prior knowledge and said he would look into the matter). Subsequent to the meeting we have learnt that the road closure has been postponed to enable a proper consultation period with the parish and other agencies.

8.2 Pavements in Williton – Highlighted at Sept19 Meeting

Williton Parish Council now involved and Cllr Ian Aldridge had written to SCC requesting site meeting. He was unhappy that he had not received an acknowledgement from the Highways Team. David Peake apologised stating that they had been undertaking reactive maintenance due to a number of civic emergencies and had got behind on correspondence.

The Williton pavements had been inspected and were in the scheduled maintenance budget for the 2020/21 Financial Year. The work was likely to be undertaken in October 2020, and out of the main tourist season. Due to the narrow pavements this work would necessitate a partial road closure and traffic control on the main arterial routes through the village. It was therefore decided to leave these repairs until the autumn.

8.3 Road Closure at Cleeve Hill, Watchet

David Peake said that text alerts had been triggered over the Christmas period, following movements in sensory equipment at Cleeve Hill. It was gratifying to know that the trigger alarms worked, and within an hour of being notified an engineer was on site and made the decision to close the road. This was a precautionary measure whilst further investigations took place.

The following statement was released by Andrew Turner Chartered Civil Engineer with specialisms in Highway, Transport and Flood Risk Management at Somerset County Council

Issued 4th Jan 2020

I am pleased to confirm the B3191 West Street, Cleeve Hill has now been re-opened to traffic.

You will recall the road was closed due to alerts from sensors placed on the cliff face. Following a detailed survey of the cliff face, and examination of the data information from the site, it has been concluded the road is safe to re-open.

The geotechnical challenges affecting the cliff face are complex requiring a high degree of electronic stability monitoring. Unfortunately, one of the in-situ sensors suffered a failure triggering the alert. The sensor has been replaced and the telemetry reset.

Setting aside the technology failure, the current contingency arrangements worked well and the Somerset County Council Highways team was mobilised within minutes of the original alert and the road was closed quickly.

The patience and support from local residents and adjacent communities is appreciated'.

It was asked whether suspected fly-tipping over the cliff edge could have caused the sensory failure? David Peake said this was a possibility as the damaged sensor had been moved significantly, with no obvious cause. This was alarming however beyond just the environmental impact as Cleeve Hill is a dangerous place to stop on a narrow public highway. Anyone dumping rubbish over the cliff is at serious risk of injuring themselves or walkers on the beach.

8.4 Flooding – District Wide

Following 5 months of excessively wet weather the Highways Team, had been working hard across the District to keep Somerset moving. This has meant a delay in completing scheduled works and responding to correspondence. Flood gates were in use across the Somerset Levels over the Christmas period.

8.5 Monksilver Drainage Works

The one million pound drainage relief scheme concentrated around the Monksilver Parish has now been successfully completed. The work was undertaken by the Somerset Rivers Authority, and meant that road closures were in operation around the village for several weeks. Drainage channels

and the camber of the road had been altered to deflect the water away from houses in the valley where run-off converged.

9. Meeting closed at 9:00pm

Dates of Future Meetings

Tuesday 17th March 2020

Further meetings for 2020 to be scheduled soon.

The West Somerset House Council Chamber has been reserved for this purpose.

DRAFT