

SWT Executive - 28 January 2020

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)

Councillors Benet Allen, Chris Booth, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Peter Pilkington, Mike Rigby and Francesca Smith

Officers: Nick Bryant, Robert Downes, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Mark Leeman, Nicki Maclean, Andrew Penna (Garden Town Coordinator), Andrew Pritchard, Lisa Redston, Clare Rendell, Mark Wathen, Dan Webb and Amy Tregellas

Also Present: Councillors Ian Aldridge, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dave Durdan, Habib Farbahi, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Andrew Sully, Brenda Weston, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

96. Apologies

An apology was received from Councillor R Henley.

97. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke

Councillor F Smith- Roberts further declared a personal interest on agenda item 5, Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Annual Fund Review, as the Chair of RAFT.

Councillor P Pilkington further declared a personal interest on agenda item 5, Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Annual Fund Review, as he had used the West Somerset Advice Bureau.

Councillor N Cavill further declared a personal interest on agenda item 9, Monkton Heathfield: Land south of Manor Farm, Langaller, Masterplan Framework and emerging SS1 Concept Masterplan, as he was a farm owner in the area being discussed.

98. **Public Participation**

Councillor Ian Aldridge presented his report on Agenda Item 5, Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Annual Review 2019/20, which gave information on the West Somerset Advice Bureau as he was the Outside Body Representative for that organisation. His report had been distributed to the Executive prior to the meeting.

Mr Peter Brown made the following statement on Agenda Item 9, Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller, Masterplan and Development Guide:-

I am chair of a Joint Panel set up by the two Parish Councils most affected by Masterplan proposals for Monkton Heathfield; West Monkton and Creech St Michael. I had hoped that our first visit to this committee would have been in better circumstances..... but we have serious reservations about the content of these masterplans and about the way in which we have been involved in the process to date. The gist of our comments is to ask you to defer the public consultation until we have had chance to meet with Councillor Rigby to explain our concerns.

The two parishes contain all of the Monkton Heathfield urban extension. Given the scale of development both PCs are concerned about the implications of the urban extension on local roads. Creech village sits on a well-known cut through between the A38 and A358 avoiding Junction 25; a minor road but it already carries as much traffic as the A378 main road to Langport, over 5000 vehicles per day. West Monkton parish has serious concerns about how traffic will move through the new developments to businesses in other parts of the parish, the potential for rat running on nearby lanes and the positioning of bus gates. Road safety is a major concern and off site works should be funded by Grampian conditions on any future planning approvals.

The first phase of the urban extension MH1 has been built out and the experience of living there should be fully understood and taken on board, before any detailed decisions about design and layout are taken for Manor Farm and

MH2. We are not convinced that your officers and their consultants have understood the reality of living in a development like MH1. Issues such as parking need to be carefully thought through.

In summary our main concerns about the two master plans are Manor Farm. See the map handed out. While we accept the need for small industrial units at this location, uses allowed should be limited to B1 and B2. B8 should not be permitted as this would lead to increased commercial traffic through Creech. Also the suggested link between the proposed industrial area and Hyde Lane is not acceptable and must be removed before any wider consultation. This proposal shows a distinct lack of common sense. Hyde Lane contains a primary school, the surgery and the recreation ground and is being traffic calmed by SCC. Just the sort of road you do not want to see an increase in business traffic on; particularly speeding vans. One other very serious issue not addressed adequately in the Masterplan concerns school places for children living on the estate. Where is the local capacity expected to be found? Turning to MH2. While integrating MH1 and MH2 is supported, the proposal to remove the road link between the two roundabouts at Langaller with a circuitous route through the District Centre is not. The current road should be kept open and traffic calmed.

The urban extension means 4500 new dwellings need to be incorporated into our parishes. That's a lot of change to manage! We experience the implications every day. From our point of view the parish councils will be around as public bodies long after these developments are built out, and we shall be at the sharp end of any community concerns arising. We also have in place adopted Neighbourhood Plans both with over 90% approval. We expect the policies and proposals in these plans to be fully taken on board in these proposals. We are not convinced that is the case so far.

My final point is in the form of a request to the District Council. We do not want to set out in opposition with you as you take these proposals forward. We want to work with you but that needs a clear commitment to joint working. My request is for real engagement by you with the joint panel at senior member and officer level, in advance of decision making by yourselves... one weeks' notice is not good enough! As local councils we should be able to make real inputs at early stages in the development of these proposals in advance of further planned consultations. I reiterate my request to meet with Councillor Rigby before the consultation on Manor Farm is triggered.

Thank you. Councillor Peter Brown, Chair Creech St Michael and West Monkton Joint Panel.

Mr Alan Hall made the following statement on Agenda Item 9, Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller, Masterplan and Development Guide:-

As Vice Chairman to West Monkton Parish Council and to the joint committee and a resident of MH1 for last 5 years, there are major lessons to be learnt which cannot be ignored moving forward with the 2 planning presentation before you this evening.

The spine road through MH1 has caused controversy from day one, firstly it is not wide enough to have street parking and also a bus route. Although parking for some residents is in courtyard parking this is ignored. If emergency vehicles need to get though there will be problems at certain times of the day. Additional radius zones on some of the bends to allow buses through are being used as

parking. Parking recesses along the pavement would solve some of the problems as has been done on other developments around Taunton.

The road network needs to be phased and adopted by SCC as soon as a phase is completed so that road signage, speed reduction signs and road markings can be put into place. For 5 years we have been lucky that no serious accidents have happened. Thus highlighting the need for tighter contracts with developers on phased completion. Road designs around a square in MH1, which is a children's play area, although conforming to radius guidelines when assembled together as a chicane to reduce speed, drivers cut across the junctions forcing other drivers to brake. Look at Google earth to show the problem it highlights the track of tyre marks.

Rear parking courtyards are a "throwback to the 1960's and, significantly under the POLICE "Secured by Design Guidelines" are discouraged for the following reasons – "They introduce access to the vulnerable rear elevations of dwellings where the majority of burglary is perpetrated. In private developments they are often unlit and therefore increase the risk of crime. Ungated courtyards provide areas of concealment which can encourage anti-social behaviour." Resident's vehicles from the flats are parked on the road all the way up to the A38 Langaller roundabout. As a whole, planning only deals with what is in front of them, here we have a different situation and I highlight this with this overall plan of the area which needs understanding by the planning/executive committee.

Design of the total road structure needs the local experts to be involved at early design stage and not end up with a pre designed plan with no input early enough to safe guard the community i.e. Parish Councils. The Parish Councils, representing the residents, have the local knowledge and expertise to work hand in glove with planning/developer and enable a concise thought out plan to move forward to scrutiny. I do not see what the reluctance is to have meetings very early on and not end up with a presented plan a week before it is presented to the executive.

The situation is that we have reached an agreement with Planning at the presentation on 20th January. and wish it to be duly recorded that Creech St Michael and West Monkton joint panel are to draw an overlay plan to the local road network that will work for all concerned, local current employers included, and still maintain the link for walking/cycling between developments and eliminate the rat running that is now occurring and safeguard Monkton Elm garden centre, Proctors farm and other local businesses. This is will take into account MH2 proposals and future planned developments.

Employment land development for Langaller site needs to be for start-up business only and not end up as the development allowed on MH1 where properties alongside this are fighting to keep the value of their properties. The size of buildings was well over the perception of the local community and should never have been allowed. The road access is designed incorrectly and vehicles have to go across to the wrong side of the road to be able to turn in to the site. The building size was not controlled and were allowed to be 1m higher than specified.

I urge you to take note of all the written submission sent into this assemble, as we have to deal with the consequences of your decisions.

Alan Hall, Vice Chairman West Monkton Parish Council

Mr Mark Besley made the following statement on Agenda Item 9, Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller, Masterplan and Development Guide:-

Good evening members of the Executive my name is Mark Besley, I am the highways officer for West Monkton Parish Council. I live at Prockters Farm and would like to represent local businesses (including the Monkton Inn pub, local farms and businesses at Prockters) who would be affected by the proposed highways design for Monkton Heathfield phase 2 development.

Mike Lind a director of Monkton Elm garden centre will speak separately regarding his concerns.

I would like to implore you, the Executive Committee to require that the Highways Authority and the Council reconsider the closure of the main road between the Cricket Club and Langaller roundabouts.

It's very disappointing that the concerns already identified by the parish council regarding the road closure and communicated to the town council on the 25th of April 2019 have not been addressed by this Concept Plan (I have a copy of that communication here if any-one would like to see it).

At Prockters we have 15 independent businesses on site including which rely on access to their businesses by an adequate road system. The farm has 220 acres of land to the east that as the plan stands could only be accessed using unsuitable 'estate type' roads – we regularly transport hay, silage, manure, cattle and sheep using 30 foot tractor and trailers and articulated commercial 55 foot long lorries.

We also operate a car boot sale at Prockters (which has full planning permission) and regularly generates over 4,500 car movements between 7am and 2pm on a Sunday. The fields which hold the car boot sales are not in our ownership but we have an agreement that they will not be developed for at least the next four years.

The combined businesses at Prockters employ 55 people and contribute between £10–15,000 in business rates per year.

The effects of forcing Coaches, Milk Tankers, Agricultural Vehicles and Articulated Lorries accessing local farms and businesses and the thousands of visitors to Monkton Elms and Prockters has not been thought through by this plan. The District Centre has 90 degree bend and is marked as a 'node' or joining point and is likely to have a high pedestrian use.

My understanding is that there has been no traffic modelling carried out to see the effects of this highway design on car flows it seems incredible that no real analysis of traffic flows was made prior to the Plan being published – now is the time to get the Plan redesigned.

The aim of the pedestrianisation of the road is (as we have been told) to link the two phases of the development together – there is sufficient space as it stands for the existing road between the roundabouts to be made much more attractive and achieve this objective – traffic can be calmed considerably – the road made into a tree-lined open boulevard with pedestrian crossings and bus stops. Forcing all traffic through the District Centre will detract from the 'Garden Town' ethos of the development.

I think it's fair to say that the community feel very let down by both developers and the authorities regarding MH phase 1 – assurances, indeed legal agreements have been reneged upon or diluted so that what has been delivered in MH1 bares little relationship to what the community was promised. Without going into detail now on MH1 the density of housing has increased significantly,

employment land has not been delivered, retain units are likely to become residential, the social housing element has been significantly reduced, relief roads have not been built and Phase One local centre has been greatly reduced in size.

Members of the Executive Committee I would like to request that you insist that the highways design shown is changed and not just make a commitment to 'look at the design' – we are asking for your help as the Executive of this Council- the road should be kept open albeit changed in design and the wishes of the parish councils, local residents and local businesses respected.

Thank you.

Mr Steve Altria made the following statement on Agenda Item 9, Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller, Masterplan and Development Guide:-
Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller and MH2 Masterplan - The need for a Grampian S106 agreement to address existing Road Safety and Traffic Volumes. One of the lessons of MH1 is that the impact upon Creech St Michael (CSM) was not identified or addressed.

Last year a planning application was unsuccessfully appealed by Gladmans Developers for a site off Langaller Lane. The developer suggested improvements accepted by sec Highways as a result of the 200 homes they had hoped to build. Yet a planned development of 4500 houses adjacent has had no proposals forthcoming to date to address the road safety issues that exist in the adjacent communities.

There has been no assessment or strategy on the traffic impact upon CSM from MH1, the development of the Land South of Langaller or MH2. Certainly not one shared with the joint panel.

It is therefore suggested that there has been an over focus on the development site and the late involvement of local Parish Councillors have led to the wider impact of the development and existing residents being over looked.

Highways England provided figures as they measured traffic volumes in 2017 in preparation for the A358 duelling. These showed 5,308 vehicles daily! Since the ERRI has been opened the traffic has grown through CSM Village; since the ERRI opening traffic has doubled through the village. CSM has an "A" road traffic volumes yet there are homes and road safety issues along the village's length. There are 4 bridges with poor sight lines, no, low or narrow footpaths, junctions at sharp angles and no pedestrian crossing. All with an industrial estate in the middle complete with two companies operating 44 tonne cranes. Taking a walk, the length of the Village - either side of the road is dangerous and for a wide buggy user or person using a wheelchair means literally taking life in their own hands. Even two vans passing necessitate their wing mirrors overhanging the pavements leading to walkers being hit. Traffic at peak times is 'nose to tail'. At quieter times cars speed through with little regard.

Addressing this oversight should be top priority. For this reason, a "Grampian" planning S106 condition is demanded in order to ensure that the developer address the road safety issues in CSM and West Monkton (WM) ahead of any building on either site.

In WM the Parish Council is seeking closing off Boome Lane at its junction with Adsborough Hill on the A38 to prevent rat running.

Bringing forward the Land South of Manor Farm scheme or MH2 to the Executive is premature. We've no assessment of the traffic impacts. As you will have learnt tonight having a "backdoor" from the employment land onto Hyde Lane thereby permitting traffic to use an even narrower road and to increase traffic in the village centre. Hyde Lane has homes alongside but also a primary school, a nursery school, a recreation park and a health centre and suggesting this demonstrates a lack of consideration for existing residents. Having this exit would cut the safe route to school used by the village children walking out to Monkton Heathfield Secondary School and would require the Children to cross it twice daily. A Traffic Impact Assessment across the east of Taunton is required. You've have heard this evening of some of the difficulties the MH2 proposals will create for both residents and businesses. These needs addressing and should have been addressed before now; it's in the public domain. We also suggest the ERR2 should be built in total ahead of the MH2 development to avoid adversely impacting on the two Parishes (including the existing MH1 Development). The current HIF bid does not provide for it. We are unaware how this will be fully funded ahead of the build out of MH2. In summary their needs to be proper engagement, further planning done and the road safety issues addressed by way of the requirement to have a Grampian S106 agreement, the removal of the Industrial Estate exit onto Hyde Lane, the A38 retained but calmed between Cricket Ground and Langaller and the ERR2 being built out ahead of the MH2 development.

Steve Altria, Clerk, CSM and WM PC Joint Panel (Monkton Heathfield Development).

Mr Michael Lind made the following statement on Agenda Item 9, Land South of Manor Farm, Langaller, Masterplan and Development Guide:-
Good Evening. Thank you for the opportunity to address you. My name is Michael Lind. I am a solicitor and the Managing Director of Monkton Elm Garden Centre, a family run business approaching its fourth decade serving residents of Taunton and neighbouring local communities.
I briefly wanted to address three points:
1. Our business and its role in the community
2. The impact of the proposed highways design for Monkton Heathfield phase
3. Confirm our intention to work with SWT Executive Committee to address these challenges
Our site has been part of the local community for more than 100 years. Currently, we are a 'bricks and mortar' business where customers choose to visit in their quest to find specific products or services. As a green, environmentally conscious business, we help keep Taunton's gardens, schools and green spaces full of healthy flourishing trees and plants. We are helping Taunton to reduce its carbon emissions. Hands-on educational activities and events are run throughout the year and we also act a meeting space for local residents, care homes and individuals with special needs. Our restaurant provides a range of food and drinks all day – many of whom do so by bus or pedestrian routes from MH1. We are (possibly) the largest employer in the area with over 120 loyal and long-serving members of staff. In some cases third generation family members work with us. Importantly, we also employ a number of older members of staff who normally find it challenging to travel great distances and hold down jobs. We also

support and work with a number of local businesses and growers – we are proud to be part of a thriving Somerset business community.

Central to our ability to continue to serve our community and remain a sustainable and viable business is the essential requirement of appropriate access to the national road infrastructure. This impacts staff, customers and delivery access to the property.

Madam Chair and members of the Executive Committee: The proposed highways design plan for MH2, if implemented as is, will have a significant and detrimental effect on our business, the staff we employ, the customers who visit us as well as numerous local businesses and south west regional suppliers who are dependent on our viability. The effects are numerous but for the purposes of this evening, I will only focus on three:

Pollution. The proposed plans will increase journey time for staff, customer and delivery vehicle movements arriving from north of the garden centre, who will be required to go into Taunton and back up the A3259 to the garden centre. This will result in an increase of carbon emissions and resultant air pollution.

Congestion. Delivery vehicles, whether arriving from the south or the north, will be required to travel into Taunton and back up the A3259 to the garden centre. These vehicle movements will impact traffic volumes in and around Creech Castle, the Toneway Roundabout and Obridge, in addition to the residential zones created in MH1.

Employment. Monkton Elm will be more difficult to visit as a result of these plans. This will directly impact the viability of the business to continue to trade and employ staff.

Whether it's once in a generation, once a year or every day, it is not enough to just build houses to meet government targets, we have to plan for and create sustainable, vibrant environments. Households generate demand for goods of all types from cars to coffee to plants to clothes, the design needs to accommodate these and also focus on how an established community centric business can contribute to your climate change policies.

The South West has just under 2.5 vehicle movements per household per day. For the projected 1,500 homes in Monkton Heathfield Phase 2, that amounts to 3,750 vehicle movements per day, not taking into account existing daily commuter movements from north of Taunton, deliveries/failed deliveries and return logistics which are set to increase significantly with the growth of online retailing.

We therefore request the Committee reviews the plan to pedestrianize the A38, particularly the section between the roundabout adjacent to the cricket ground and the Langaller roundabout at the base of the new Eastern Relief Road. It cannot be sustainable to funnel all the traffic through the new District Centre. We also seek the Council's assurance that they will commission a comprehensive transport study to understand the wider infrastructure requirements to meet the needs of the proposed Monkton Heathfield Phase 2 developments taking into account the changes in consumer behaviour.

Monkton Elm has the capacity to continue to be part of a wider, environmentally sustainable solution, which can also help address some of the wider climate change needs of the local community:

- As a community meeting place
- Through the sale of relevant local products (reducing the need to unnecessary car journeys and encouraging carbon off-setting)

- As a local employer supporting over 120 families Monkton Elm welcome the opportunity to engage with the Somerset West and Taunton Council together with other authorities, and the Monkton Heathfield Parish Council, to address the above and find a workable solution to the wider the challenges faced by the development of MH2.

Thank you.

99. **Monkton Heathfield: Land south of Manor Farm, Langaller, Masterplan Framework and emerging SS1 Concept Masterplan**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors were glad that this was a draft document and that more consultation would take place. They wanted to ensure that the Parish Councils would know more about what was planned in the future.
- Concern was raised on the opening of Hyde Lane. *Officers understood the concern raised on 'rat-running', they had suggested a ban on the use of the lane to Heavy Goods Vehicle's and commercial traffic. Somerset County Council were committed to the inclusion of the District Council in the consultation.*
- Councillors highlighted that during MH1, the Parish Councils had been actively involved, hence the approach that had been taken at the meeting and the comments made during Public Question Time.
- Concern was raised on the pedestrianisation of the link and that it could cause problems.
- Councillors explained how the local farmers used the roads in the area and the high volume of farm traffic that used the roads to enable them to carry out their daily work.
- The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that he would take on all the comments made at the meeting especially those about the restriction on commercial traffic on Hyde Lane.
- The Leader thanked all the speakers for their comments and wanted to ensure that Parish Councils were involved and engaged in works in the future.

Resolved that the Executive approved:-

- a) The draft Masterplan and Development Guide be published for stakeholder and statutory consultation; and
- b) That, subject to there being no issues raised requiring substantive changes during the consultation, the Head Strategy and the Portfolio Holder for Planning be authorised to approve the document for Development Management decision making and to inform and guide pre-application discussions with prospective developers and landowners.

100. **Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillor were pleased to see that place-making had been included in the document which linked to other priorities.

- Councillors found the document very educational and detailed especially on the look of buildings.
- Councillors welcomed the document and that it would ensure that developments were well designed and included space for storage, for example storage for bins and bikes.
- Councillors believed that the design guide would ensure that the town would have an identity and heritage.
- Councillors stated that the document was essential and was a pillar in the Core Strategy.
- Councillors stated that the document would empower the Planning Committee and commended it to the Executive.
- Concern was raised on the location of electric car charging points within the document.
Officers were in ongoing discussion with Somerset County Council about the location of the charging points and would feed the concerns back to them.
- Concern was raised on the lack of climate change ambition.
Officers confirmed that the document was governed by the National Planning Policy and that they could not set a local policy as it would not be held up at an appeal.
- Councillors would like the document to acknowledge the natural character of an area.
Officers suggested that the cues in the document should be made stronger about natural landscapes and the built environment.

Resolved that the Executive approved:-

- 1) That the draft districtwide Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document be approved as the basis for a public consultation period of eight weeks;
- 2) That the outcome of the public consultation, including any appropriate suggested amendments, be reported back to the Executive as soon as possible with a view to seek approval to adopt the draft districtwide Design Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document;
- 3) That authority be delegated to the Head of Strategy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to carry out any minor amendments of a drafting or similar nature necessary, prior to consulting on the draft Design Guide; and
- 4) That the creation and launch of a District-wide 'Quality of Place' award scheme be explored, which would be linked to the Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide, and the Taunton Garden Town Vision, Design Charter and Checklist.

101. **Taunton Garden Town Public Realm Guide**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors were pleased to see yet another good set of design guidance.
- Councillors welcomed the guide but suggested it needed to work alongside other strategies and guides especially those for transport. The document was a good starting point.

- The Leader welcomed the document and the Garden Town Vision.

Resolved that the Executive approved:-

- 1) That the draft Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town be approved as the basis for key stakeholder consultation for a period of eight weeks;
- 2) That the outcome of the key stakeholder consultations, including any appropriate suggested amendments, be reported back to the Executive as soon as possible with a view to seek approval to adopt the draft Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town a material consideration when determining planning applications and will inform discussions with our statutory consultees;
- 3) That authority be delegated to the Head of Strategy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to carry out any minor amendments of a drafting or similar nature necessary, prior to consulting on the draft Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town.

102. **Hinkley Point C Section 106 Tourism Delivery Plan**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were delighted to learn more about the project.
- Concern was raised on sections of the Steam Coast Trail.
Officers gave more information on work to be done on improvements to the trail and to make it more cycle-friendly along the whole route.
- Councillors stated that it was a good document and that a good legacy was being built by the biggest project in the district, Hinkley Point.
- Councillors thanked officers for their presentation.

Executive **recommended** that Council approved:-

- 1) The Phase 4 Action Plan for delivery from March 2020 onward; and
- 2) The request for drawing down £635,594 of Hinkley Point C Section 106 allocations available for tourism to deliver the Phase 4 plan.

103. **Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Annual Fund Review**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors spoke on the amazing work carried out by the Advice Bureaus and the support they gave to the customers across the whole district.
- The Leader was proud of the work that the Council achieved with its grants and wanted to ensure that the funds were given to those that it would impact positively and help the majority that it could.
- Councillors believed that every organisation that received funds, gave value for money.
- Councillors suggested match funding, as it was important that groups needed to be sustainable.
- Concern was raised on the consultancy process being used and whether the Council was comfortable that there would be no legal challenge.
Officers advised that other Councils have had to revise the funding that they issued to organisations and that there were many options that could

have been undertaken but they felt that a review was the best way forward and had involved consultants to undertake the work and that they would include the other districts in the area.

- Councillors were disappointed that Somerset County Council had cut their grants to the Advice Bureaus and that had made the work Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) did with grants more difficult.
- Councillors queried that West Somerset Advice Bureau (WSAB) was moving premises and whether the Taunton Citizen Advice Bureau (TCAB) was in the best location.

Officers advised that the TCAB was in ongoing discussions with SWT's Asset Team but that the configuration arrangements needed to be looked at.

- Councillors wanted assurance that the Advice Bureaus wanted help from the consultants and that they were not there to tell the Advice Bureau how to work.

Officers gave clarification and assurance that the review was exploratory and that there was plenty of dialogue between SWT and the Advice Bureaus. The Council had not forced the Advice Bureaus to be part of the wider network but they had seen the benefit of doing so.

- Councillors believed that the working model of the Advice Bureaus needed to be relooked at and that the Citizen Advice Bureaus needed to carry out a nationwide review.

The WSAB and TCAB had independent discussions on working together due to financial implications.

Executive **recommended** that Full Council approved in relation to the VCS grants within the scope of the review:-

- 1) To continue funding VCS organisations at current levels for 2020/21 whilst the key points raised during the review detailed in this paper were addressed;
- 2) In June/July 2020 carried out a review of current areas of funding and set new funding objectives in line with the Councils corporate objectives and current needs within the community and report to the Scrutiny Committee in September 2020; and
- 3) During 2020/21 officers should work closely with all grant recipients to ensure targets were met and grants were offering value for money.

Executive **recommended** that Full Council approved in relation to the Taunton and West Somerset Citizens Advice Organisations:-

- 1) To agree an additional allocation of £25000 within the Councils 2020/21 budget for a 'one off' grant in order to help maintain the Local Assistance Scheme and to provide staffing capacity to enable Citizens Advice Managers to engage with transformation related work;
- 2) To agree an additional allocation of £8000 within the Councils 2020/21 budget to enable the joint commissioning of a consultant to work alongside the Citizens Advice (CA) services;
- 3) To jointly commission (with other District Councils and Somerset County Council) a consultant to work with the CAs to explore different operating models, transformation of service delivery, use of technology and interventions to reduce service demand;

- 4) To undertake a comprehensive review of SWT financial support for CA services during Summer/Autumn 2020 following receipt of the consultant's report; and
- 5) To work proactively with Citizens Advice Taunton (CAT) and West Somerset Advice (WSA) to explore suitable accommodation options.

104. **Somerset West and Taunton Prosperity/Economic Development Strategy**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked officers for their work and gave further background on the work that had been carried out by the former Taunton Deane Borough Councillors. They urged that the work needed to be carried out as soon as possible.

The Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and Economic Development supported the comments made and wanted the work to be delivered as quickly as possible where it could be, but that it was a new council and administration, so it had taken extra time to compile the new Strategy.

- Councillors were pleased with the content of the Strategy and queried how the Council moved forward with the document.
- Councillors queried how councillors could be involved and submit feedback on the work.

Officers advised that the Deyton Bell document was made up of suggestions and feedback and that it did not mean that all actions were viable, sensible or deliverable and that they were working with the Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive on those and welcomed comments from other Councillors.

Executive **recommended** that Full Council approved:-

- a) That the Strategy should progress to the Full Council meeting for adoption, after which a detailed operational work plan would be agreed in consultation with the Portfolio Holder during March 2020 to progress during the financial year 2020-2021; and
- b) To the development of targeted messaging and communications materials for the different audiences.

(The Meeting ended at 9.15 pm)

