

## Minehead Area Panel

### Notes of Meeting held on 11 March 2020 In The Hub, Hopcott Road, Minehead

#### Present:

Cllr Andy Kingston-James	Chair, Minehead Town Council
Cllr Mandy Chilcott	Somerset County Council
Cllr Frederica Smith-Roberts	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Cllr Peter Pilkington	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Cllr Marcus Kravis	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Cllr Craig Palmer	Somerset West and Taunton Council and Minehead Town Council
Cllr Mimi Palmer	Minehead Town Council
David Peake	Somerset Highways
Sharon Baker	Avon & Somerset Police
Graham Sizer	Minehead BID
Ray Tew	Minehead Development Trust/Minehead Coastal Community Team
Julian Luke	Minehead Museum
Mark Kingston-James	Resident
John Vicary	Resident
Pete Broom	Resident
Stephen Brown	Resident
Paul Johnson	Resident
Martin Wilsher	Resident
Harold Compton	Observer
Samantha Murrell	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Sarah Wilsher	Somerset West and Taunton Council

#### **1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

Andy welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Andrew Hadley (Somerset West and Taunton Council), Andrew Hopkins (Minehead BID), Colin Isherwood (Resident), Chris Jones (Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service), Cllr Christine Lawrence (Somerset County Council), Cllr Anne Lawton (Minehead Town Council), Bridget O'Brien (Resident), Cllr Sandra Slade (Minehead Town Council), Maureen Smith (Transition Minehead and Alcombe/Forum 21),

A change was made to the order of the agenda, as follows:

#### **2. Minehead BID**

Graham Sizer spoke to the report which had previously been circulated, as follows:

- The BID had three main themes: Public Realm, Marketing and Events. £20,000 was being spent in each of these areas.
- Marketing had been slow to take off, but was now improving and they were working with the Town and District Councils.
- Coach friendly initiatives were being looked at based on the experiences of Burnham-on-Sea.

- Minehead was being promoted in the Visit Somerset brochure, the Exmoor Magazine, What's on Somerset and Word Gets Around.
- More bunting would be set up around the town this year and it was intended to put it up earlier – last year it did not go up until July – in order to offset the doom and gloom of current events.

3. **Somerset Climate Change Emergency – Cllr Peter Pilkington, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT)**

Peter reported that SWT and Somerset County Council (SCC) had declared a climate emergency and were committed to working towards making the Council and the area of the district carbon neutral by 2030. They had been working with Somerset County Council and other district councils to develop a draft countywide Climate Change Framework which had gone through consultation in January and February. 350 people had been to these consultation events. The Framework would be finalised later this year. SWT were also drafting their own Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan and it was proposed for the SWT strategy to be ratified in the Summer. They were slightly behind with data gathering at present, but were working through this. Consultation on both the SWT's climate change strategy and the Issues and Options paper of the new Local Plan were currently ongoing and seven joint roadshows for Climate Change and the Local Plan had taken place within the District in January and February. 60 people had attended the Minehead event. The online survey for the SCC climate change strategy had now closed and had received a very good response. Young people particularly had been targeted.

Three main themes were emerging from the feedback:

- Transport including public transport availability and the reality of whether electric vehicles were financially feasible in rural areas. SWT were providing grants to parish and town councils for the installation of electric charging points and these were proving to be popular.
- Housing – a strategy was being built for housing, but there was already a retrofit programme in place for making Council housing in Taunton more environmentally friendly and efficient and Magna and other housing associations had similar plans.
- Natural Environment including a tree planting strategy and wildflower meadow initiatives.

These themes would be fed into the strategy moving forward. The strategy would be a flexible and working document. Local environmental groups, such as Forum 21 and Somerset Climate Action Network were providing evidence to back up the strategy.

4. **SWT Local Plan Issues and Options Document – Martin Wilsher, former Principal Planning Policy Officer for West Somerset Council**

Martin explained that a new Local Plan was being prepared that would cover the period up to 2040 for the whole of the Somerset West and Taunton area, thus replacing the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 and the various Plans for Taunton Deane. It excluded the Exmoor National Park as the Exmoor National Park Authority were responsible for their own Local Plan. The result would be one consistent policy document for the whole district.

The Issues and Options document was currently being consulted on. It highlighted a series of elements that it proposed the Local Plan should focus on, including climate change, sustainability, transport, and future development to 2040. As well as answering the questions put forward in the questionnaire,

participants could ask questions in their answers too. Martin urged everyone to get involved in all the consultation stages of the Local Plan as once adopted it would be too late to influence policies, which would be used to determine future planning applications.

The aim was to adopt the Local Plan by 2021. Martin considered that this timescale would be unlikely to be achieved as in his personal experience it takes the best part of five years to go from the initial stages to adoption. The consultations from the Issues and Options document would need to be studied and a draft Local Plan produced. This would have a six week consultation period and the responses thereto would form part of the submission version, which would go to the Planning Inspectorate and be examined by an independent Planning Inspector. A hearing/inquiry would be held to discuss the representations arising out of this, leading to modifications, consultations on the modifications and finally adoption. Government directives could also change the direction of travel. It had taken 13 years to get the West Somerset District Local Plan (2006) adopted and 6.5 years for the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 to be adopted.

In terms of future housing developments, the Strategic Housing Land Assessment was being currently looked at. This would form part of the evidence base for the Local Plan and would inform future allocations.

Graham Sizer felt that the Issues and Options document was very Taunton and Wellington and M5 corridor biased and was concerned that Minehead was classed as a third tier in importance. Martin advised that the document made reference to the coastal strip but agreed that he would put Minehead before Wellington in significance. He urged everyone to read the document and to agree/disagree with the contents in their representations. In addition, if you participated in this consultation then you would be automatically contacted about future Local Plan consultations.

Mimi Palmer expressed concern about the poor facilities in Minehead, such as the loss of a GP surgery meaning one doctor for every 1,000 people. The hospital and schools were struggling too. There was a need for employment and social housing to keep people in Minehead. Peter Pilkington said that SWT were keen to get more social housing into the area and Frederica Smith-Roberts encouraged people to feed the need for social housing and land for development into the Local Plan. Marcus advised that two commercial units were being built on Council land at Seaward Way and there was planning permission for 40 affordable homes on the same site. Mimi also added that the 50-year plan showed Minehead having areas of heavy flooding and it was important that building did not take place on a flood plain.

## **5. Have Your Say – Community Issues/Concerns**

Issues for Have Your Say, were as follows:

- (a) *John Vicary expressed concern that on the A39 at the Williton roundabout on 5 March at 10.10am there had been a road sign notifying motorists of a road closure and signposting a diversion for Taunton. He had followed the diversion only to find out later that the A358 had not in fact been closed. David Peake advised that the road closure had been between Crowcombe and West Bagborough in the evenings from 6.30pm to 11.30pm on 5 and 6 March. The road closure sign should have been set aside during the day and only put out during these times. He apologised to John for the inconvenience caused.*
- (b) *John Vicary advised that the road at the entrance to The Shires at the junction with Bircham Road was breaking up and needed to be filled in. David reported*

that it would be monitored and risk assessed according to the amount of traffic using the road.

- (c) *Craig Palmer reported that work needed to be carried out on some of the limbs of the Lebanon Cedar tree outside the Texaco Garage on Townsend Road as they were at risk of falling and causing an accident. However, it was not known who was responsible for the tree -Texaco, Somerset County Council or SWT. David Peake agreed to ask the County Arboriculturalist.*

**ACTION: David Peake to ask the County Arboriculturalist about the ownership of the tree outside the Texaco Garage in Minehead.**

- (d) *Pete Broom said that the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Blenheim Gardens was to be celebrated in 2025. A large rose bed had been put in place and he asked whether there were any plans to bring the café back into use. Marcus Kravis replied that SWT wanted the café sorted out before 2025. A full asbestos survey had been done on 9 March and the report on this was awaited. There were also plans to re-paint the bandstand.*
- (e) *Pete Broom reported that despite all the heavy rainfall Minehead had recently experienced The Parade and Park Street had not flooded. He gave thanks to everyone involved. David Peake informed that this had been a multi-disciplinary approach in that much work had been done over a number of years by different organisations, eg, Environment Agency, SWT, Wessex Water, Somerset Rivers Authority.*

Drains needed to be kept unblocked to prevent flooding issues but it was noted that there were blocked drains in Bampton Street. Mandy Chilcott advised that it was best to report such issues online on the Somerset County Council's website at: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-pothole-or-road-defect/> (as per the Somerset County Council Update report circulated with the agenda). Reporting online provided a better response as the customer was notified when the work had been done.

The meeting were advised that the Government were providing funding to undertake preventative work on the roads – patching, gully work, potholes, etc. The sum was less than last year when much work had been done on the A39 to strengthen/repair the gullies. Mandy reported that there were 10,000 less potholes in Somerset than ten years ago.

Paul Johnson asked if roadside gullies were cleared as there was much flooding due to blocked drains at the garage at Nether Stowey on the A39. Mandy advised that the County Council had a programme of works to address this. A resident reported that there were blocked drains in the Middlecombe/Periton area. David Peake said it would be investigated.

**ACTION: David Peake to arrange for the blocked drains in Middlecombe/Periton and Bampton Street to be investigated.**

- (f) *Mimi Palmer asked who owned the gullies in front of Morrisons. Mandy advised that Morrisons was the owner, but that there were many gullies around Minehead with different riparian owners. All the owners needed to maintain their waterways in order to keep the water free flowing. Concerns should be raised with the Somerset Drainage Board Consortium who could enforce the clearing of gullies. Peter said that SWT ensured theirs were kept clear.*

## 6. Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 September 2019

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

### Matters Arising

*Item 4(a) – Stephen Brown asked if there were any updates regarding the Japanese knotweed on Culvercliffe. Mimi advised that SWT were monitoring its presence on a regular basis.*

*Item 4(b) – Stephen Brown asked if there was an update on the tree which was breaking up the road surface in Marshfield Road now that the construction works were ongoing for the new houses. Sarah to find out what was happening about the tree.*

**ACTION: Sarah to find out what was happening about the tree at Marshfield Road.**

***Since the meeting Sarah has been in touch with the planning agent for the new houses who will be getting the developers to address the tree issue.***

## 7. Minehead Coastal Communities Team – An Update

Ray Tew reported that he had taken on the Chair of MCCT when Katrina Midgley could no longer continue as Chair due to her work commitments with Engage.

Ray explained the background to MCCT in that a Coastal Communities fund had been set up by the Government. Minehead had set up a Team and applied for funding. 70 different Coastal Communities Teams had been set up in the UK. There were Teams in Porlock and Watchet and there was a need for the three Teams to engage with each other for the benefit of the coastal strip.

Representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had chosen Minehead as one of a number of areas they wished to visit to see how the funding was being spent. They had been taken on a steam bus tour of Minehead and given a map highlighting key areas. Ray would provide Sarah with a copy of an informative document and the map produced by MCCT, to be circulated with the minutes.

**ACTION: Ray to provide Sarah with an MCCT information document and map to be circulated with the minutes.**

## 8. Minehead Development Trust – An Update

Ray Tew reported that Minehead Development Trust ran Minehead Information Centre. Electronic counters were used to monitor footfall but as the Centre shared space with the Museum at the Beach Hotel there were a number of access/entrances so the data collected was unlikely to be accurate. In 2018 footfall was 27,193 and in 2019 footfall was 30,135.

Summer opening hours would commence at the end of March. Staff attended local tourism events and had social media training. A new map for 2020 would shortly be published.

## 9. Police Report

A report had previously been circulated. Sharon Baker reported that the pilot model for policing had highlighted the need for an extra sergeant to cover the area from Exmoor to Wellington. Sergeant Dan Bishop would therefore share

the area with Sgt Hugh Jenkins from 1 April 2020, with Hugh looking after Williton to Exmoor. He would divide his time between Williton and Minehead and would supervise the PCOs and PCSOs in his patch. Sharon's current post would be ending and she was being promoted to PCSO Supervisor in Taunton.

A new PCSO had been appointed for Minehead – Joe Norris. He lived locally, had been on local radio and was looking at issues such as road safety, homelessness, etc.

There had been incidences of thefts of lead in the rural Wellington and Taunton areas, in Wellington town centre and in Pitminster. It was believed to be part of a national crime. Messages had been sent out to all churches asking them to be aware of the issue. The word was also being spread via social media.

Issues closer to home included the recent shooting at Winsford.

Community speedwatch schemes had been set up in the last six months in Blue Anchor, Carhampton, Exmoor and Holford. Three volunteers were required to run each scheme. There was no current scheme in Minehead. The schemes were restricted to 20, 30 and 40mph, data was collected on a regular basis and repeat offenders would get a visit from a police officer.

The local police would be moving into the Council Offices in Williton and there would be a hub in Minehead. Sharon reassured the meeting that Minehead/West Somerset was still a low crime area.

## **10. Highway Matters**

David Peake reported the following:

### **Completed Highway Works:**

- Carriageway resurfacing at Green Hill on the A358 at West Bagborough.
- Tree works on highway verges along Bratton Straight and at Middlecombe Cross to restore sight lines and attend to dead and diseased trees.
- Tree works on highway verges on the A39 at the Dunster Steep junction to restore sight lines to traffic signals and attend to dead and diseased trees.

### **Ongoing Highway Works:**

- Small Improvement Scheme (SIS) to install dropped crossing points across side roads in order to improve accessibility for wheelchair and pushchair users on Hopcott Road from 2 to 13 March 2020.

### **Future Highway Works:**

- Carriageway resurfacing on the A39 at Cannington from 20 to 21 March with a temporary road closure for one night between 6pm and 7am.
- Carriageway resurfacing at Allerford with a temporary road closure between 6.30pm and 11.30pm on 2 and 3 April (two evenings).
- Carriageway resurfacing on Sainsbury Close with a temporary road closure on 7 May.

Storm Ciara caused 90 trees to fall down across the County and Storm Dennis resulted in 70-80 fallen trees. When the trees close to the traffic lights on the A39 at Dunster Steep were cut back to make the traffic lights more visible it was found that some of the trees had ash dieback. These were recently removed on highway safety grounds. There had also been works to trees along Bratton Straight and at Middlecombe Cross to increase road visibility (as above).

Investigative works following the recent floods had been undertaken on the B3190 between Stickle Path and Ralegh's Cross on 6 March and remedial works would need to be done in the new financial year when funding would be available. Until then the site was being protected.

In response to a query from a resident regarding replacement highway trees, Mandy advised that the SCC's usual policy was not to replace trees. However, for climate change it had been agreed to plant a new tree for every baby born in 2020. In addition the Council had created a one-off £1million climate and emergency reserve fund which would be open to bids from town and parish councils for green initiatives in their areas, such as community orchards. Peter added that where Exmoor National park Authority had to cut down trees in a wood because of ash die back, they would be replacing the removed trees plus increasing planting where possible. SWT were working on a Tree planting strategy including a Parish tree give away and larger woodland projects. This would be announced in the near future.

As a point of interest at the meeting David advised that the cattle grid at Crowcombe Combe was where the boundary sat between SWT and Sedgemoor District Council.

**11. Burning Issues**

A written report had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

**12. Town Council Update**

A written report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. There were no comments or queries from the meeting.

**13. District Council Update**

Frederica Smith-Roberts, Leader of SWT, reported that a balanced budget had been achieved for 2020 and there was no plan to cut services. The transformation put in place by the previous administration had cost £10m including £6.4m in redundancies. When SWT first came into being it had taken 45 minutes for a call to the Council's general tel. no. to be answered as there was insufficient staff on frontline customer service. Work was being done to stabilise the Council. New Directors had recently been appointed and a new organisation structure set up. There had also been an increase in the number of Council meetings. It was hoped that this would result in an improved service to the public.

The District was large with a journey of 1 hour and 25 minutes from Porlock to Burrowbridge. There were ongoing projects in Taunton including Firepool, which was a £100million+ project. A Cleansweep scheme was to be set up to spring clean and brighten up towns in conjunction with the town councils. This had happened in Taunton in the lead to the World Cup and would now be introduced to all towns in the district. SWT were also setting up a commercial investment programme

About £1million was needed to fix the hole in the harbour wall at Splashpoint in Watchet following the flooding and storms in December 2019 and February 2020. Insurance would not cover this and there was no money from Central Government. SWT would have to find the funds.

There had been a 64% cut in funding from Central Government. The future of local government in Somerset was being looked at. The District Councils wished to work together in collaboration across party lines and did not believe that one

Council would work for the community of Somerset, whilst the County Council believed a unitary council was the best option for Somerset.

## **Minehead**

Frederica reported that two commercial units were being built on land at Seaward Way and agreed with the meeting that there was a need for social housing for those people who could not get on the property ladder. In this respect there was the need to get involved in the Local Plan which looked at all types of housing.

A resident asked if new homes in Minehead would be for local people. Frederica explained that Homefinder was for all people across the County and there were currently 4,000 people in the SWT district area on Homefinder. Affordable housing meant 80% of the rental cost. Social housing meant 60% of the rental cost.

Frederica had enjoyed a walk around Blenheim Gardens and wished to see a café up and running in the future. Other issues included the removal of sand from the seafront and wildflowers being planted at Culvercliffe. Andrew Pritchard, the new Director for External Operations, would be visiting Minehead on 17 March.

SWT were working with Sedgemoor District Council and North Somerset Council on a coastal management strategy.

Frederica advised that she lived in Taunton and did not wish the Council to be Taunton-centric in its focus, however, as it was the county town funds needed to be used to ensure that it flourished and prospered economically.

A resident asked about the increase in car parking charges. Frederica explained that this was to help fund the Taunton Park and Ride which had moved from County's control to SWT's. The Park and Ride benefitted all vehicle users, particularly those outside of Taunton.

## **14 . Somerset County Council Update**

A report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Mandy Chilcott reported the following:

- There were some helpful telephone numbers and websites in the report. A copy would also be given to Minehead Town Council.
- She would like to see all doctors working out of the hospital with consultants. The hospital system in the County was being looked at.
- A Fit for My Future event had been held on 7 March at the Beach Hotel in connection with the public consultation on the use of community and health care services. Sadly this had been poorly attended. The consultation would end on 12 April. Mandy encouraged everyone to participate (online link to the consultation in the County Council Update report).
- It was hoped to get the buses running between Minehead and Taunton to go via Musgrove Park Hospital.
- Public health sat with Somerset County Council. In respect of covid-19, please ring 111 and self-isolate if suffering. Do not go to the surgery or hospital.

On the issue of coronavirus, Mark Kingston-James stated that there would be problems for small businesses if Easter didn't happen due to Covid-19 and asked if there would be any financial assistance for them. Mandy

advised that help for small businesses had been outlined in the Government's new budget.

Mandy further advised of the following:

- Minehead's parking review was ongoing.
- There would be an advisory speed limit of 20mph put around every school in Somerset over the next two years.
- Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission were looking at children's services in Somerset.
- Village agents with responsibility for mental health had been introduced into the service run by the Community Council for Somerset.
- A unitary authority for Somerset was a huge issue. The County Council had written to the Secretary of State asking if SCC would be invited to put forward a business case. Mandy offered to arrange for a speaker from the County Council to talk about a unitary authority for Somerset at the next Minehead Area Panel meeting.

**ACTION: Mandy Chilcott to arrange for a speaker on a unitary authority for Somerset to attend the Minehead Area Panel meeting to be held on 11 June 2020.**

**15. Any Other Business**

**Minehead Museum**

A report had kindly been provided by Julian Luke for the Minehead Museum and had been previously circulated. Julian advised that the museum would re-open on 21 March.

**EAT Festival**

Sam Murrell advised that the next EAT Festival, organised by Minehead BID, would take place on 4 April along The Avenue from the junction with Blenheim Road to The Esplanade.

**West Somerset College's Spring Concert**

Sam advised that this inaugural concert would take place at the Regal Theatre on 18 March. Arts had been cut back at the College this concert had been organised to enable the students to technically manage and participate in their own artistic event. Monies raised would go back to the College. Sam asked everyone to support it.

**16. Dates & Venues of Future Meetings**

**Future meeting to be held on:**

Wednesday, 11 June 2020 at 6.30pm at The Hub, Hopcott Road, Minehead.  
Thursday, 17 September 2020 at 6.30pm at The Hub, Hopcott Road, Minehead.  
Thursday, 3 December 2020 at 6.30pm at The Hub, Hopcott Road, Minehead.  
Wednesday, 3 March 2021 at 6.30pm at The Hub, Hopcott Road, Minehead.