

SWT Executive - 20 May 2020

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)

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

Officers: Dawn Adey, James Barrahan, Nick Bryant, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Alison North, Andrew Penna (Garden Town Coordinator), Sarah Povall, Andrew Pritchard, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell and Amy Tregellas

Also Present: Councillors Ian Aldridge, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Andrew Sully, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Brenda Weston and Gwil Wren

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

129. **Apologies**

No apologies were received.

130. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive**

(Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 March 2020 circulated with the agenda)

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillor G Wren queried: at the briefing to councillors prior to the acquisition of the bus station, it was made clear that the decision to close the bus station was made by First Bus alone for their own commercial reasons. However, at Scrutiny Committee on 20 May 2020, the Southwest Director of First Bus, Mr Alex Carter, stated that negotiations for the acquisition had included a facility for First Bus to leaseback the bus station for a period of time. However, as the completion date neared, the offer of a lease was withdrawn by the Council. Could the Portfolio Holder please clarify if a leaseback arrangement was part of the negotiations and if so, why it was withdrawn at the last minute?

The Portfolio Holder advised that the initial approach to purchase the bus station was made by First Bus Group as they had already made the decision to close the bus station and wondered if Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) would be interested in purchasing the site. That was the initial contact that had been explained at the briefing. During the deal being finalised, discussions were had with Somerset County Council and further options were debated on whether SWT could lease back the site to First Bus Group. Due to the regulations on the building, it meant that only a short term lease could be granted to allow them to park their buses on site. The decision to close the bus station was that of First Bus Group. Another complication with the negotiations was that SWT felt pressure to conclude the deal by 31 March 2020, due to time constraints

on First Bus financial year end. The final agreement was to lease back the site for 6 months to be used as a bus storage and driver layover facility.

- Councillor B Weston requested sight of the written responses to questions raised by the public speakers about the Bus Station and alternative arrangements raised at the Executive meeting on 18 March 2020. *The Portfolio Holder would arrange for the answers to be distributed to all Councillors.*
- Councillor B Weston also took the opportunity to ask a question about the pigeon nuisance and repeated installations of failed deterrents under Kingston Road Bridge. *The Chief Executive advised from an operational stand point, the bridge was owned by the rail company, therefore, negotiations would always be required to apply any infrastructure on the bridge. Ordinarily, the Council would have carried out operation clean sweep two, which would involve a jet wash of the area amongst other work. However, due to the Covid Pandemic, the work had to be reprioritised and other work had been deemed to be more important during the lockdown period. The Portfolio Holder was happy to include the work in the project being undertaken to improve the layout and concourse of the railway station.*

Resolved that the minutes of the Executive held on 18 March 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

131. **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 H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Lydeard		
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 R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke

132. **Public Participation**

Mr Tony Laurence spoke on agenda item 7, Monkton Heathfield: SS1 Policy Area and MH2 Concept Plan and Design Principles.

I am speaking in my capacity as Chair of the Conservation of West Monkton Society. Over the past three years, we have raised concerns with Councillors and officials about the impact on our community of proposed changes to highways connected with the Monkton Heathfield development - in particular the proposed bus-gate on the A3259, which, we believe, will lead through traffic to use local roads, including those through our village, as a rat-run and defeat the purpose of having the bus-gate. We have consistently been told that the installation of the bus-gate was a legal requirement arising from the section 106 agreement. So earlier this year, when Persimmon were consulting on traffic calming measures on the A3259, we took legal advice.

The legal advice we received is that the proposal for the bus-gate was indicative only and that therefore there is and never has been a decision or legal or contractual requirement to install the bus-gate. Persimmon's consultation was therefore invalid. I conveyed this information to officers and Councillors of both Somerset County Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council in May.

Despite this, para 4.31 of Mr Penna's summary paper for item 7 (SWT 83/20) states that the bus-gate is to go ahead because it is 'is required by legal agreements dating from the first phase of the Monkton scheme'.

I am calling on the Council now to rescind this statement - or to justify it. We are asking for the proposal for the bus-gate to be re-considered along with the other proposed solutions to road and traffic issues as suggested at para 4.30 of the same paper.

Thank you, Tony Laurance

The Portfolio Holder responded: The County who were responsible for the legal agreement and the bus gate had confirmed that the position set out in the Report was correct.

Mr Mark Besley spoke on agenda item 7, Monkton Heathfield: SS1 Policy Area and MH2 Concept Plan and Design Principles.

The Parish Council supports the majority of the aims of the Concept Plan and Design Principles and has had positive engagement with the project lead from SWT. It is heartening to see that the plan has been changed following discussions on the first draft plan presented to the PC in January. There are however three points that I would like to make.....

Firstly, the text of the Design Principles Section 9 states that 'the existing A38 is to be retained for local traffic provision' however later under 'Potential positive interventions' it states that 'Consideration should be given to potential for part/total pedestrianisation of the current road subject to ensuring continued local road access to existing homes and businesses'.

There is real concern that closing the A38 between the Langaller and Cricket Club roundabouts will result in high levels of local business traffic (including HGV's) having to go through the District Centre. This is contra to the Garden Town ethos and conflicts with the objective of the District Centre (Section 8) which is to 'produce an environment that is safe, well-enclosed and a focus for social interaction'.

It is unclear how the 'total pedestrianisation' of this stretch of the current A38 could still maintain the road being retained for local traffic provision. We request that the reference to the option of 'total pedestrianisation' is removed from the document to correct this contradiction.

Secondly, in the Design Principles in Section 10 The downgrading of the existing A38 alignment under 'Barriers to integration' the document states 'The road can be retained for local traffic provision' and 'Local traffic will still have to be allowed along this route to access the existing dwellings'. The document also states that 'consideration should be given to bus only routes or bus gates' - please clarify how this can be achieved – what is the mechanism used to facilitate a bus gate and still allow local traffic?

Finally the installation of a bus gate on the A3259 is a contentious issue with concerns that it will force unsuitable traffic along unsuitable roads. The main Concept Plan and Design Principles document - section 4.31 states 'The bus gate location is required by legal agreements dating from the first phase of the Monkton scheme'. There is a genuine question of whether the bus gate is a legal requirement or was 'indicative' in previous plans (this is being challenged by some residents). Prompted by requests from the Parish Council in 2015 it received correspondence from SCC that 'no traffic modelling run or minuted meeting can be provided which evidences the original decision to locate the bus gate where currently proposed or what consultation took place'. Traffic calming measures required by the Western Relief Road, Hartnells Farm development and further up the A38 should be aimed at deterring through traffic and making the road used by local residents and local business users only. The Parish Council requests that decisions regarding bus gates on the A3259/A38 are made based on traffic flows after traffic calming has been installed on the A38/A3259 and on modelling that considers actual and projected traffic flows covering the entirety of the development and is not based on decisions made a considerable time ago when the highways infrastructure and pressures were very different. In order to maintain the cohesion of the village it may be that the more suitable location for the bus gate would be where the new ERR branches off the old A38.

The Portfolio Holder responded: Thank you for those helpful comments which would be considered in full as part of the public consultation on the draft plans and supporting design document.

Simon Hutchings spoke on agenda item 7, Monkton Heathfield: SS1 Policy Area and MH2 Concept Plan and Design Principles.

You will recall that representatives of both West Monkton (WM) and Creech St Michael (CSM) Parish Councils (PC) attended the Executive on the 28th January 2020 to further voice the concerns that had been previously raised in the preceding months, in writing with Officers, on the lack of consultation, the failure to take on board points being made, to express a need for real consultation prior to the issuing of future reports to the Executive and to set out a number of specific issues about proposals for the Developments causing concern to the Parish Councils.

Since then a meeting was held on the 15 March 2020 in CSM with the Leader and Portfolio Holder, representatives of sec and officers which unfortunately, I was unable to attend. This included a minibus tour of the sites in order to demonstrate the key issues on the ground. At that meeting a number of principles were agreed alongside discussion of each of the major shortcomings of the plans and our Parish Councillors (PCllrs) came away believing that there was finally an acceptance on the need for proactive consultation and acceptance of the points raised.

Since then our clerk has had to frequently ask to discuss the contents of the report planned for this Executive, and despite written assurances that we would be informed, once again this has not happened. No further consultation has taken place and we have had to wait until the report was published on the 13 May to obtain a copy.

CSM PCllrs are very disappointed to learn that despite the statement in Para 1.6 "that changes have been made" that our main concerns have been totally disregarded as the plans attached to the report still show, for example, the road between the Cricket Ground and the Langaller Roundabout to be pedestrianised, the exit from the rear of the Employment site at Manor Farm onto Hyde Lane is still in situ, and vehicle access to the School is not from the existing A38, etc. We are however pleased to see that the report does now acknowledge the need for impacts on the wider road network to be assessed (para 4.27).

We feel strongly that far from a community-based approach there is a continuing disregard of the practical views about these developments of the two Parish Councils, Creech St Michael and West Monkton & Cheddon Fitzpaine, who will represent this area in future. For example, the site visit and meeting in March is mentioned in the covering paper but the report does not set out what our concerns are. For the benefit of members not involved in that meeting these should have been reported in detail in the report. Our views are the result of experiencing living and working in the area, and reflect the knowledge of how MH1 is performing as a residential environment.

Hopefully, in the future we can work closer together as proposals for MH2 progress, as the majority of the build will be within the Parish of Creech St Michael.

KEY ISSUES:

(1). Hyde Lane. CSM & WM & CF PCs don't want an exit onto Hyde Lane from the proposed industrial site; the entrance should be off the ERR roundabout. Hyde Lane is a safe route to school and an exit would require students to cross the road, with 50 tonne lorries, vans and cars exiting and then "rat running", as a short cut through CSM village past the village infant/junior school and medical centre, and connecting to the A358/MS. The PC want pedestrians and cyclists only to have access from employment site.

- (2). Access to the Playing Fields. Hyde Lane is subject to access from rugby club following pedestrianisation but would like access; this need to be discussed along with the playing fields. The heap of spoil adjacent to the Hyde Lane Cottages needs to be removed and looked at as part of those discussion.
 - (3). ERR. The ERR needs to have another lane to prevent queueing to enable turning right and left at the Bathpool roundabout and adjacent junction. There is room though there may be an issue on how far back it can come. It can do approx. 100 metres.
 - (4). Milton Hill. The issue is the bus stop; every time a bus stops there it will grid lock the traffic and prevent use of both routes.
 - (5). Road between Cricket Ground and Langaller roundabouts. This road needs to be kept, with trees and the bunds and fences removed in order to open up the development.
 - (6). Highways. The CSM & WM & CF PCs asked for a copy of the Highways scoping documentation. We were advised in March that it was an ongoing commercially sensitive discussion at present which could not be shared as the data would all need to be collected and processed to enable the impacts to be understood. We have still not seen this document.
 - (7). Bus Gates. Further discussion on Bus gating is required. Current proposal with a bus gate on the A38 is not supported by CSM PC.
 - (8). CSM Road Safety. We were reassured that the problems are now understood but no conversation on mitigation has yet been discussed.
 - (9). School. Design, Facilities to be provided, Vehicle Access and Parking (to be off Existing A38 not District Centre).
- Simon Hutchings, Chairperson, CSM PC.

The Portfolio Holder responded: The Report set out that the Plans had changed since they were first reported to Executive in January 2020. As agreed with the Parish Councils when the Leader and PFH met with them in March 2020, the Report made clear that no options were ruled in or out at this stage. The Plans were being published, as also agreed with the Parishes, for public consultation so that the views of local residents and businesses could be gathered.

David Redgewell gave the following statement:

Can you please forward our statement to the Executive meeting as the need to make progress on the designing of the Bus and coach station?

We would very much support the lease of the operational area of the Bus Station to First Group and for the use by National Express Coaches. The layout need to allow social distancing and marking and signage on platform areas. The bays need to allow social distancing and disabled access. The waiting room will need the seating layout changed to be safe for passengers with social distancing. The Council can also make money from bringing back the take away cafe in the future. As this is an emergency and we need to make our public transport network safe in Somerset and Taunton, progress on the lease is very important as it is not possible to social distance buses on Castle Way and the Parade as departure points in line with the Department for Transport regulations. Under the guidance a double decker bus can only carry 20 passengers to route 22 Wellington or route 21 Bridgwater and Burnham on Sea with just 10 bus passengers on the Minehead route 28. For example it will require 3 buses to Wellington at peak time to carry just 60 passengers.

Finally laying out emergency social distancing bays is the only safe option for passengers as Taunton and Somerset slowly return to work. The alternative is to barrier off bus stops in the Parade and provide marshals for bus services and line up buses on the street similar in Castle Way which is not a very safe practice. Castle Way will need to be used by Hatch Green bus services. Travel Watch South West Railfuture Severnside and South West Transport Network would welcome urgent action on the bus station lease. Somerset County Council, the transport authority, needs to be involved in the discussions, as the rest of the bus and coach station and interchanges in the south west are local authorities owned. We would welcome signage in the bus station showing it's owned by Somerset West and Taunton Council. David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside.

The Portfolio Holder responded: that the answer was covered in the response given to the question raised when the minutes of the previous meeting were debated.

133. **Executive Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Executive Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

The Governance Specialist advised the Committee that the Forward Plan had been updated after the agenda was published and gave details on what items were due to be on the agenda for the June meeting of the Executive.

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

134. **Wellington and Cullompton Railway Station Project: Phase 1 (Strategic Outline Business Case) - Approval of Project Governance Arrangements**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Leader reminded the Committee that the discussion was on the governance arrangements.
- Councillors were pleased to see the report coming forward and that progress was being made.
- Councillors queried how often would the Project Board meet?
Officers advised that not much had changed at the Steering Board level and that they would meet every 6 weeks.
- Councillors supported the report and that it was a good project for the South West and the people of Wellington.
- Councillors queried why the County Councils were not able to support the project financially. Wellington Town Council and the former Taunton Deane Borough Council had given money towards the project, but they queried why Somerset County Council (SCC) had pulled away from the project and were only a silent partner, even though they were the Transport Authority for the area.

The Portfolio Holder agreed it was regrettable that the Transport Authority were not engaged in the project. However, it was indicative of the financial positive that SCC were in.

- Councillors queried how funds from the New Homes Bonus could be given to support the project and requested clarification on what New Homes Bonus could be spent on.

Officers advised that New Homes Bonus could be spent on local infrastructure and gave clarification.

- Councillors queried that the Project Board was the only place an elected councillor appeared in the process, even though Somerset West and Taunton Council were contributing financially. They further queried how often would information be fed back to Full Council and Scrutiny.

The Portfolio Holder advised that he would be happy to attend Scrutiny to feedback information from the Project Board.

Resolved that the Executive approved the governance arrangements set out in Appendix A.

135. **Monkton Heathfield: SS1 Policy Area and MH2 Concept Plan and Design Principles**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were pleased to see the report and that it included work on sustainability and climate change. It was exciting to see a new site for generations to come and that developers had taken the report on board with carbon neutrality.
- Councillors were committed to the report and agreed that the viability of residents should be taken into account.
- Concern was raised that during MH1, local residents were not listened to during the consultation stage and Councillors did not want to repeat that with MH2. Councillors requested that if decisions were made against that of local feedback, they should be told why those decisions had been made.
- Councillors queried how the strategies that had been introduced after MH1 would be included in MH2, for example, Garden Town and the New Design Guide.

All strategies fed into the process, all material planning considerations and setting out the masterplan gave officers something to use for the proposals and in their judgement of the plans. Viability was still important within the planning consideration.

- Councillors requested an update on the district centre in MH1 and what had happened and how the implementation would be improved in MH2. *Officers highlighted that there were many reasons why the district centre had not been finished but agreed that it needed to be delivered in MH2.*
- Councillors queried whether housing orientation was included in the design.

Officers advised that the District Design Guide advised on housing orientation.

- Councillors queried the figures given on electric vehicle charging points and what was deemed as 'significant'.
The charging points were part of the product design and could be located in garages or on driveways, the figures were aspirations as this was a high level report, so more detailed figures would be given later on in the project.
- Concern was raised on the chaos caused by the lack of parking near the school and whether the district centre would resolve that.
Councillors were advised that the area allocated for parking had not been tarmacked and that planning officers had been in contact with the developers to find out what progress could be made. They also wanted to check that the contractors hadn't breached any of the planning conditions. Councillors were advised that progress had been slow.
- Councillors highlighted that other garden towns had been mentioned within the report, but that they wanted the project to be carried out based on local merits.
Officers advised that the reference to garden towns was to illustrate that the Council could deliver quality spaces and bring forward MH2 as a garden community in a modern context.
- Concern was raised on the lack of infrastructure in MH1 and who had been responsible for that.
Clarification was given.
- Councillors urged that the project needed design principles that would be delivered. Further details were given on the Section 106 agreement for MH1.
- Councillors agreed that they were pleased with the report and that good communications were in place with the local Parish Councils and that feedback from their experience with MH1 had been welcomed and they looked forward to moving forward with MH2.
- The Leader advised that she had been out and met with the Parish Councils to discuss the work being done. She reminded the public to take part in the consultation and feedback any concerns or information they had. She wanted to ensure that all concerns could be resolved.

Resolved that the Executive recommended that:-

- 1) The draft SS1 Policy area Framework Plan, the draft MH2 Concept Plan and the draft MH2 Design Guidance be published for public consultation; and
- 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 Plans and Guidance for Development Management decision making purposes.

(The Meeting ended at 7.45 pm)