

# Annual Report 2019/20

## Report of Councillor Benet Allen – Communications and Culture

### Cultural activity

The Council's commitment to culture is clearly outlined in the Corporate Strategy, with the inclusion of a priority objective to *"Support the enhancement of arts and culture provision within the District"*.

Additionally, the Taunton Garden Town Vision (published Summer 2019) includes a theme *'New shoots and blossom – a dynamic and prosperous community founded on knowledge, culture and business'*, and this aims to:

- 'germinate and grow' sustainable arts and cultural venues as hubs that foster excellence in the region.
- Provide better visitor experiences through a broader range of cultural offers and a strengthened evening economy.
- Attract entrepreneurs to support greater numbers of start-ups, innovation and collaboration amongst the business and cultural community.
- Enable our creative sector to influence and shape our built environment and public realm.
- Support our creative, arts and heritage sectors to provide the best possible cultural experiences for people of all ages and backgrounds
- Enhance Taunton's visibility as a creative, productive, knowledge economy

A **Cultural Strategy** is currently under development, and will articulate our ambitions for culture in more detail, describe our key objectives and start to outline what projects, activities and resource / support the Council is committed to. It is anticipated that this will be published this Spring, and the Cultural Forum (established in 2019) will work with the Council to develop and implement a delivery / action plan. To support development of the Cultural Strategy SWT has provided a recent grant to undertake research over the next 2 months on cultural activity and creative provision for young people across our District.)

Other priority activities and achievements during 2019/20 include:

- **Brewhouse Theatre** – SWT Council has provided an increased amount of £160,000 in grant funding for 2019/20 Financial Year including an additional £28,000 one-off funds, with £132,000 profiled in the Financial Strategy for 20/21. Increasing this expenditure is not currently included in the Council's Financial Strategy or Medium Term Financial Plan, however SWT Council has confirmed its continued financial support for a key member of Taunton's artistic and cultural sector. .
- **Firepool Multi-Purpose Venue** - The Council has an aspiration to closely review the business case for a Multi-Purpose Venue for Taunton. Initial advice from expert consultants, including a review of all our existing research is that the market has the potential to sustain a venue of in

excess of 1500 capacity in Taunton. The aim would be for the venue to operate without an ongoing revenue subsidy, however in order to prove this a detailed business case will be required. This would include analysis of potential operational models, and demonstrate how the use of any space could be maximised commercially. Designs for Firepool have now been commissioned and from more detailed analysis it is possible that a venue with a peak capacity in excess of 2,000 will be feasible. Whilst Firepool is the primary site for consideration, the Council will be considering all potential locations.

- **Funding** for cultural organisations / projects – during 2019/20 SWT Council provided in excess of £50,000 funding support for a number of organisations and some small cultural projects, including: Arts Taunton, Hestercombe, Fuse Performance, Take Art, CICCIC, Somerset Film & Video, and others.
- **Cllr Benet Allen attended a conference (Feb 2020) about 'culture in the rural economy' with the Arts Council and other Local Authorities**, and subsequently also participated in a LGA 'round table' discussion on 'how Councils can support their local creative economy'. The Council's involvement in these events is helping to inform the emerging Cultural Strategy and action planning for the next year and beyond.