

# Full Council Meeting – 5 July 2022

## Report of Councillor Caroline Ellis – Culture

### Cultural Development Team – Annual Update

The Cultural Development Team was created in November 2021 with the key objective to deliver the SWT Cultural Strategy as adopted by full Council on 7 September 2021. Since November, the team has gone from strength to strength and is already making a real difference to the communities in our District in respect of the arts and culture offering and support provided. Below is a snapshot of just a few of the team's achievements to date:

- **Re-invigorated Cultural Forum** - The Cultural Forum is an arena and opportunity for our trusted stakeholders and partners to come together to network, support and ensure that Arts and Culture is firmly on the agenda for our District going forward. The forum meets quarterly and presents the space to collaborate, share ideas as well as giving SWT the opportunity to present essential updates and information relating to the sector. (Newly elected members are very welcome to join)
- **Stakeholder Sub-Group Meetings** – we have established four Cultural Sub-groups to meet with partners and stakeholders on a regular basis. These groups focus on Public Art, Events, Creative People and the Cultural Heritage Assets Taunton (CHAT) group that includes key stakeholders such as The Brewhouse, Museum of Somerset and Halsway Manor.
- **Regular Newsletters/Communications** – we have established strong links with stakeholders and partners and now have a mailing list of over 90 stakeholders.
- **Cultural Funding Support 2021/2022**– the team is now pro-actively liaising with potential projects where funding and support is sought.

Supported and funded projects for the last financial year included:

- Arts Taunton – Taunton Youth Culture and Arts Festival (TYCA)
- Wellington Film Festival
- Pride 2022
- Museum of Somerset – (Sunday opening trial from Oct 21 – Mar 22)
- Take Art Rural Touring Programme
- Museum of the Moon Art Workshop
- Flook House Arts Hub – addressing the lack of artists' studios in Taunton and provides a base for community art activities
- Creative People Workstream – looking at the provision of a digital Arts Hub for young people
- Jubilee Activities – GoCreate – Children's Art Workshops
- A Creatives Funding Workshop
- Sound of the Streets Festival
- The Regal Theatre – support for new programming.
- Through the 'Art at the Heart' scheme a range of community arts projects by groups such as Somerset People's Theatre, Moorvale Creative, Southern Sinfonia and The Milverton Trust
- Core funding to Taunton Brewhouse (Roundup of key achievements in delivering creative experiences for the community and audiences across the district and indeed wider region sent to all members in April)

- Hestercombe Art Gallery

- **Events** – the Cultural Development team works closely with the SWT Events Co-ordinator and Town Centre Resilience and Transformation Officer to ensure the SWT events calendar links in with Cultural Strategy. Recent support and events that the Cultural Development team have been involved in are as follows:
  - Supporting the roll out of the new SWT 'What's on Events and Things to Do' portal.
  - Supporting the Museum of the Moon installation in Taunton - March 2022.
  - Leading on the Big Jubilee Lunch and cultural offering in Vivary Park with the Events Team on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2022.
  - Funding and supporting GoCreate to deliver free children's art workshops and creative activities as part of the Jubilee. Workshops were held in Flook House, Halcon and Priorswood (linking in with the One Teams) which were very well attended



More images can be viewed here:  
[SWT Events | Flickr](#)



(Images from the Big Jubilee Lunch in Vivary Park hosted by SWT)

**Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) Programme** – the SWT Strategic Lead for Culture is now engaged with the 'Culture and Universal Community Services' workstream of the county-wide LGR programme. Alongside this programme, plans are currently underway to create a Somerset

Wide Cultural Strategy with the ambition that the new Somerset unitary authority adopts the strategy. This project has been developed by the five local authorities in Somerset and should result in an exciting vision for the role of culture in our county. The most recent press release can be accessed here: <https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/arts-front-and-centre-thanks-to-funding-award/>

### **Future priorities 2022/23**

- The team continue to liaise with a range of cultural organisations and projects which are delivering towards the council's Cultural Strategy. Future reports will provide detail (including funding) as agreements are made.
- Cultural Forum Open Day – to be held September 2022 (newly elected members will receive an invitation). This will be a chance to review our progress and delivery a year since the adoption of the Cultural Strategy in September 2021.
- Various Public Art Projects to be completed over the next 6 months:
  - Working with Arts Taunton to commission a piece of Public Art in Castle Green, Taunton
  - Installation of the High Street, Taunton Public Artwork (Somerset Dragon Sculpture)
  - Working with Cotford St Luke Parish Council to ensure £32,968 S106 funding is spent on a piece of Public Art in the community by 08/03/2023
  - Staplegrove Bridge – working with Taunton School to create a mural/piece of Public Art on the Railway Bridge
- Heritage – ensuring the Agriculture Sculpture at Bedford House is protected and relocated
- Somerset Wide Cultural Strategy - <https://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk/arts-front-and-centre-thanks-to-funding-award/>
- LGR – ensuring culture and art is firmly on the radar.
- Gaumont feasibility study.
- Developing closer alignment between Cultural Development and other SWT functions – Tourism, Heritage, Community Development, Climate Change programme, Taunton Garden Town and Leisure.
- Government Shared Prosperity Fund: Culture team attended county wide workshops to help devise possible arts and culture projects for a potential £7.2m programme for Somerset.
- Innovation – ensuring the creative sector are engaged in all SWT and SCC innovation opportunities
- Public Arts Register



## Cultural Liaison and Events attended by the Portfolio Holder – Cllr Caroline Ellis

### Art highlights

- I met Brian Rice in Feb!! The Museum of Somerset's exhibition was awesome but so was the show at Taunton Library featuring the work of youngsters from The Taunton Academy and Bishop Henderson Primary School who, aided by artists Liz Hutchin and Keith Crocker produced fabulous abstract work inspired by him – another project and exhibition organised by the awesome Arts Taunton and TYCA.



- As part of Taunton Live and Pride, I attended the launch of Q Collaborative CIC's 'Connect' exhibition showcasing work by LGBTQIA artists from across the region, meeting some of the artists and catching up with Taunton based Zahra Hoccom who plays a major leadership role here, putting SWT on the map for queer creativity.

- Climate Curious, an exhibition held by Climate Action Taunton at the end of May was incredibly powerful – demonstrating the power of the arts to reflect and inspire environmental awareness and activity. Alongside stunning textile art by Sandra Leech and Alicia Merrett, Matthew Shooter's terrifying and fascinating 'Cider Sea and Bay of Avalon' map (post sea level rise), there were amazing climate action posters by students from Richard Huish College and digital stories with spoken word performances by young artists and local environmentalists talking about brilliant nature recovery and environmental stewardship projects. People could share their climate action stories from their own lives and localities too.

- Bridgwater & Taunton College's 2022 end of year Creative Arts exhibition comprised of an amazing array of projects by students from Level 1 Creative Arts right through to Foundation Degree level. Student art shows are just the best – just mind boggling the level of originality and creativity. There is an incredible amount of creative talent in the pipeline and our job is to ensure this district enables it to blossom so these young people can make their careers here.

### Community culture initiatives

- Seeing the work that Go Create and other creatives have done in transforming Flook House into an Arts Hub is such a thrill. They have barely even begun but already the Marriage Room has been transformed into a venue for community art activities, the once empty offices are now amazing art studios or home to theatre groups. This has such huge potential for the future!

- Recently I met the man behind County Classics Motor Museum, Patrick Hawkins, for a 'behind the scenes' tour of his amazing collection of vintage cars and motorbikes. He will also offer educational days and it is clear this is going to be such a great attraction, a cultural gem and boon for our town centre visitor economy. Patrick is hoping to open towards end July.



- I also met up with Patch Jobson to get the lowdown on Tone FM's ambitions for the future – quite apart from being a brilliant community radio station, Tone FM plays a major role in covering and promoting all things arts and culture, in giving communities a voice, being a lynchpin of community

events such as the fabulous Jubilee Party in the Park and providing students at Richard Huish with hands on radio experience, enabling them to produce regular shows.

### **Music highlights**

- During the Museum of the Moon's incredibly successful sojourn at Taunton Minster, a highlight was the Moonlight Serenade initially just featuring Simon Chalk of Southern Sinfonia and Ed Jenkins of Queens but a young home educated child by the name of Hussam stole the show taking to the grand piano for an impromptu solo and jamming with Simon and Ed who were blown away by his talent.
- Along with many other Members I attended the amazing, unforgettable fundraising concert for the Red Cross Ukraine Crisis Appeal at Taunton Minster at the end of May with the awesome Guy Robinson, Amici, Elizabeth Watts, Suzanne Manuel, Naomi Harvey, Olivia Mace and Iryna Ilnytska a mezzo-soprano from Ukraine whose performance brought the house down.
- I attended Taunton's new chamber choir Voce's first ever concert at St George's in Wilton in April - such a diverse programme from sacred works to pop and original compositions by Tauntonians to boot.
- Recently I went to my first Music on the Quantocks concert at St James Church, Taunton – The European Union Chamber Orchestra were amazing. I would strongly recommend getting on their mailing list email [quantocks@live.co.uk](mailto:quantocks@live.co.uk).
- Award winning musician Luis Martelo's Roots show at Taunton Minster was notable not just for the amazing music (the Minster transports music to a whole other level in my view) but for the way it highlighted the relationship between an outstanding artist and his community.

### **Our cultural heritage**

- In March Kubla Khan returned to Somerset!!! On loan from the British Library, Coleridge's masterpiece, penned in Culbone, the only known manuscript of the poem written in Coleridge's hand has been on display at The Museum of Somerset as part of an awesome exhibition that demonstrates the importance of Somerset in the romantic movement. 'In Xanadu- Coleridge and the West Country' continues to 25 June.
- As well as fantastic live music and comedy, the Creative Innovation Centre is the place to find fascinating talks on our cultural heritage – Tim Milton's talk "Maypoles and Mischief: Merrymaking and Mayhem" gave the lowdown on the fascinating history of local May celebrations.

### **Public Art highlights**

- In February, I watched Olivia Sanders's awe-inspiring Time and Place public artwork (consisting of ancient sandstone and hamstone obelisks) being installed at Quantock House and grabbed a chat with her in which she explained its genesis to me – this is council-required developer-commissioned public art and demonstrates the key role planning can play in boosting public art provision.

- Chloe and I visited Matt Crabb in his workshop near Fitzhead in March to talk about our public art commission – this amazing chainsaw artist has produced outstanding work for clients across the world and has brilliant ideas for putting Somerset on the map chainsaw art wise! We then popped to Brompton Ralph to see their amazing village mural created nearly fifty years ago – their local art group is still going strong and their mural has been cared for and is a stunning example of community public art at its best.



- The Museum of the Moon's tenure at Taunton Minster was a roaring success – such a joy to see so many people streaming through the doors to bask in the glow of this incredible public art installation. We are scoping out with the team there what the next installation might be!

- Massive congratulations to Cllr Lithgow and colleagues at Wellington Town Council on commissioning Sam Gaden to create an amazing Jubilee mural, to all those involved in Stogumber's supremely awesome Floral Cascade and of course to Wivey Square Post Box for another outstanding contribution to public textile art in relation to their stunning Platinum Jubilee Offering. Sam Gaden was also commissioned to create the Jubilee Emblem in Vivary Park for the Big Jubilee Lunch in Taunton.

## Theatre highlights

- TYCA was able to put on their outstanding (in both senses of the word) performances in March at Tacchi Morris and Taunton Brewhouse involving children of all musical abilities improvising with the world class Southern Sinfonia and local theatre and dance groups showcasing amazing devised theatre - a great testament to the values of self-expression, empowerment, joy and creativity underpinning the TYCA and Arts Taunton mission. Then followed an amazing Jubilee Jamboree at Taunton Brewhouse in partnership with Go Create where children from Bishop Fox's and Lyngford Primary lit up Somerset Square with dancing queens, song and dance and enjoyed creative performances and workshops to boot. This enabled young people who would not normally get to perform to discover they not only can, but they are amazing at it!

- Taunton Brewhouse is THE place for extraordinary theatrical experiences and the Wardrobe Ensemble's South Western a West Country Spaghetti Western with thrills, spills, pathos and hilarity and amazing folk music by Hannah Cumming & Jon Dyer did not disappoint. The Brewhouse celebrated its 45th anniversary in May with a lovely exhibition on its history, bringing back great memories for me, as I was brought up on Brewhouse theatre. Nowadays, the cultural offer is light years ahead of course with such a diverse programme, so many opportunities to 'take part' and develop creativity with the Distillery supporting the creation of exciting new material. Here's to another 45 years of great art, creativity, music, film, theatre, comedy and dance in the heart of Taunton!

- I am a huge fan of the work of Somerset Youth Theatre and Selina Keedwell who is a genius at engaging the most disadvantaged young people in the arts and performance – we met a few weeks ago so I could gain a better understanding of their work and I am thrilled that they are now based at Flook House. Ditto I have had various discussions with Sarah Shorten of Stacked Wonky in Porlock who is similarly doing ground breaking work with young people (we are eager that Members get to experience their latest production as it involves interactive performances in town halls) and has set up a creative network now in Porlock. Abby and Richard of Tall Tails Theatre pictured



here brought one of their amazing shows to my garden in April for a home ed audience – they are another creative force to watch out for.

- I go to as many community based performances as I physically can manage for example Chameleon Theatre Company's latest family show – The Jungle Book, at Sheppy's (note it also runs at Oake Village hall on 13th and 14th August). Well worth getting on Emma's mailing list – [chameleontc@hotmail.com](mailto:chameleontc@hotmail.com).