

Full Council Meeting – 5 July 2022

Report of Councillor Mike Rigby – Economic Development, Planning and Transportation

A358 Taunton to Southfields dualling scheme National Highways Consultation

The formal public consultation exercise for the proposal to improve and dual the A358 between the Southfields Roundabout in Ilminster and junction 25 of the M5 motorway, ended on 22 November 2021. The Council submitted its response as part of this process and this was reported in the March 2022 report.

National Highways are currently holding a further (non-statutory) consultation on the changes they have made since last Autumn's consultation exercise. This will run until Sunday 26 June 2022. Most of the changes relate to the technical detailing of the alignment of the road and other roads that feed into the new highway. These will largely be matters for the County Council to comment upon as the Highway Authority but it should be noted that it is now proposed to use a signalisation at the Nexus 25 junction instead of a roundabout. This is intended to improve crossing facilities for cyclists, pedestrians and other non-motorised users and the Council will be submitting comments in relation to this element. The amended proposals for the scheme as a whole also include new areas of planting and off-site mitigation. Officers are currently considering their response to these revised proposals and it is hoped that the three Councils (SCC, South Somerset and SWT) can produce a joint response to the overall package of changes now proposed. The comments by the Council to the original consultation exercise will still stand as well.

Following the non-statutory consultation period, the Council will engage with National Highways on the production of a 'Statement of Common Ground' between all of the affected Councils (Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council). The three local authorities are currently working on this collaboratively.

It is now expected that National Highways will be in a position to formally submit their application for a Development Consent Order in late summer /early autumn 2022.

Connecting our Garden Communities – active travel infrastructure for Taunton Garden Town

A report on this project is due to be considered by Corporate Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee on the 6 and 20 July 2022 respectively, seeking approval to consult on a draft plan. Assuming a positive resolution, there will then be a period of public consultation over the summer. For more information please see the upcoming agenda items.

Strategic Solution to Phosphates

As Members are aware, on 5 October 2021, Full Council approved an Interim Strategy of mitigation measures. A Planning Phosphates Sub-Committee has been

set up to oversee this programme. This Sub Committee has considered a number of officer reports on various matters and updates on the interim programme.

In mid March 2022 central government announced £100,000 grant funding, for each catchment area, affected by the advice from Natural England. For the Somerset Levels and Moors, SWT have acted as lead authority, submitted the grant bid and the funding was awarded and received in April 2022.

On the 8 June 2022, Natural England approved in principle the contents of the updated Appropriate Assessment on the interim phosphate mitigation strategy and this will be the subject of a detailed report to the Planning Phosphate Sub Committee in July 2022.

Work has also progressed on other projects associated with the interim strategy including the wetland scheme at Cotford St Luke where preliminary ecological assessments revealed that field survey work was required. This has been commissioned and implemented during Spring 2022. It is nearing completion. To date, no ecological constraints have been identified.

The next briefing and engagement event with development industry and key stakeholders is due to take on the 5 July 2022.

Neighbourhood Planning

West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine (WM&CF) Revised Neighbourhood Plan is at Examination stage following the Parish Councils confirmation that they wished the Revised Plan to be Examined in light of the Independent Examiners conclusion that there were significant and substantive changes which altered the nature of the original Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Councils of West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine have revised a number of policies in the Plan with the aim of: increasing the climate and ecological robustness, conforming with Taunton Garden Town Vision, supporting the Declarations of Climate and Ecological Emergency, and updating Local Green Space designations.

Town Centres health check

To provide evidence for plan making, the Council has commissioned a report on Town Centre Health Checks for Taunton, Wellington, Minehead, Williton and Watchet; a review of the Retail Area Boundary Reviews for these towns; and consideration as to whether an Article 4 Direction should be made.

Stantec were appointed to produce this work. We have received a draft of the first and second outputs, which are currently being reviewed by officers.

Taunton Garden Town Infrastructure Delivery Plan and future stewardship arrangements

Following procurement Ove Arup and partners were commissioned in October 2021 and work has progressed on the production of the Production of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan for Taunton Garden Town with draft chapters now being reviewed by officers. Further work on cost, apportionment and viability testing is underway and will inform the final IDP. Work on a Stewardship Report has also been progressing and

the consultants have reviewed the extent of remaining opportunities for the long term maintenance of community assets across the garden town sites and are currently compiling proposals for engagement with community groups over the next few months. Initial stages of work to scope the requirements of an online infrastructure engagement platform against existing commercially available products has also taken place and will inform engagement with potential suppliers

Taunton Garden Town – Governance

A report is being prepared setting out a proposed governance structure for the Garden Town going forward to ensure collaborative working and effective decision-making among public and private sector partners and stakeholders. This report will be considered at a future meeting of the Executive.

Wellington Station

Following the announcement of £5 million worth of funding from DfT's Restoring Your Railway Fund in October 2021, Network Rail is now leading on the project to deliver the station. The funding will be administered by Network Rail as part of the Restoring Your Railway, Rail Network Enhancements budget, and will enable the project to advance significantly through the next stage of project development and design.

The promoters, Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) and Mid Devon District Council (MDDC), continue to work with Network Rail, GWR and other stakeholders through the Working Group, Steering Group and Senior Stakeholder Forum. A programme for delivery of the station is currently being prepared in collaboration with Network Rail and is anticipated by the summer.

Firepool

The LPA and Developer teams continue to meet regularly with regards to the development of a new Masterplan and Design Guidance for Firepool to resolve key issues and move things forward with a view to the LPA approving it as a material consideration in the assessment and determination of relevant planning applications. A series of workshops have been undertaken with key stakeholders to help support refinement of the Draft Masterplan which will be reported to members in due course ahead of public consultation. Planning applications for Block 3, and for the Trenchard Way access and levels and drainage across the site have now been approved.

Development Management Update

Recruitment

Unfortunately no applications were received to the recent advertisement for the vacant Senior Planner and Team Leader roles and we therefore have looked to recruit agency staff. One agency worker started on 4 May 2022 to fill the Senior Planner role and the Team Leader role was filled on an agency basis on 1 June 2022.

The Service Manager has recently resigned and will be leaving the Authority in early August. This role is currently being advertised with a closing date of 27 June 2022.

Performance

Workloads remain high due to the ongoing vacancies and absences due to personal circumstances and some long term sickness and reduced hours across the team, as well as no reduction in applications being received.

Active Travel Projects

Future High Street Fund (FHSF) cycling and walking schemes.

The active travel element of this grant allocation creates cycling improvement schemes that focus on delivering an enhanced cycle route between Taunton Railway Station, through the Firepool and Coal Orchard developments to Vivary Park with additional cycle parking. Although progressing well, the project is faced with significant challenges in terms of budgetary constraints. Costs have risen considerably since the initial 2019 bid application, as seen across the whole construction industry and continue to do so.

The pace of delivery remains a key consideration, with all FHSF spend required by March 2024 but the programme is progressing to schedule.

Consultation with SCC, RNIB and local cycling groups has been undertaken with further consultation to take place in the coming months.

Feasibility work - Cycling schemes

SWT are continuing to work towards feasibility studies with local cycling groups and other stakeholders on cycling infrastructure projects in the District.

- Wellington to Taunton

Collaborative links have been established with key stakeholder groups, including TACC, Citizens UK, Somerset County Council, Wellington Town Council and other community groups. A dedicated committee working on the route has been meeting since March 2021. Feasibility work to assess the south side of the A38 between the Comeytrove and Chelston roundabouts shows a significant lack of highway boundary available to accommodate the route. Estimations show delivery of the central 4.5km section is likely to require multi-millions for construction, land purchase or lease agreements for multiple land parcels, in addition to funding for legal agreements. Officers continue to explore feasibility and seek any funding opportunities that are available.

Heritage at Risk Update

Tonedale Mill

The S48 Repairs notices have been served and discussions continue with the owners on their response to the notices and the emergency works required on site. In January 2022 SWT also issued a S54 Urgent Works Notice for urgent repairs to Block H at Tonedale Mill. This notice was not complied with and SWT have completed the works and handed the site back to the owners. SWT officers are seeking to ensure the stabilisation of structures throughout the site with the owners.

Toneworks

Phase 2 works are now on site for the next phase of targeted repairs using grant funding from Historic England.

Sandhill Park

SWT continues to work with the new owners of Sandhill Park towards the necessary urgent works and long-term plans for the building's future. Emergency works have been deemed to have started by the owner and the Emergency works package is due to be completed in 2022.

Economic Development and Assets

Major and Special Projects Update

Coal Orchard

Since the last update in January, SWT have expended significant resource managing the fallout of the main contractor Midas failing to deliver on the fixed price contract and going into administration. Performance issues that were evident prior to this had led to the project being delayed and many sub-contractors had not been paid, despite SWT paying every invoice on time throughout the duration of the project.

Since then, SWT have directly appointed over 30 sub-contractors, the majority of whom were engaged in the project previously to provide continuity of delivery and knowledge of the works. Materials, design and as built records have been secured. Works have restarted across the site and with the vast majority of work to be delivered in the public realm and car parks, a target date of late July / early August is realistic, with a phased opening of the site leading up to that date. One of the major obstacles to setting a definitive project end date has been obtaining a new permit to work within 8m of the Environment Agency, with additional information requested over and above the previous permit. Discussions have been positive, and we hope to receive the permit mid-June to enable the works to the riverside steps and retaining structures.

With 37 of 40 apartments reserved or let, and live enquiries on the remainder, it is anticipated the remaining units will be sold in the summer.

We are dealing with a number of live enquiries for the commercial space, and will shortly be re-launching promotion of the units.

Firepool

GWR building / cycle path

The GWR Building continues to be used as a site office by the Innovation Centre contractor Wilmott Dixon. The temporary cycle path is open for the majority of the time, unless safe working distances from machinery and material movements necessitate a temporary closure.

Digital Innovation Centre

SWT are continuing to work in collaboration with SCC on delivery of a 2400m² Digital Innovation centre on the Firepool site, with construction activity now in progress. Civil and decontamination works started in October 2021, with a delivery programme of circa 18 months.

Infrastructure, Utilities and Flood work

Planning permission has been granted for the Infrastructure work, with a start on site expected July 2022

Phase 1 of flood defence design work at Firepool Lock is due to be completed in Q1 2022, in collaboration with the Environment Agency and Canals and Rivers Trust. Public consultation for this work will take place later in 2022.

Block 3 (north of Canal Road)

Planning permission has also been granted for the block north of Canal Road. Delivery of this element of the site will be coordinated with the works to the Innovation Centre opposite to ensure the two projects do not conflict or compete for space or access.

Boulevard & Public Realm

A separate planning application for the boulevard and public realm works leading down to the river from Canal Road has been submitted.

Master Planning

The Councils' development team continue to work closely with the Local Planning Authority to develop a revised masterplan for the whole site.

Bus Station

NHS Vaccination Centre move from Firepool to Tower St (old bus station site)

The NHS continued to provide vaccinations from the Firepool site until the end of March, before moving across town to the old bus station site at Tower St. The central building had a light touch refurbishment at speed by the NHS before the spring booster jabs started successfully in April.

SWT continue to work with Somerset County Council on proposals for the long term future of the site, subject to decisions on Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) grant funding.

Grant funding has been awarded for a Changing Places facility to be delivered in the bus station buildings. Work to develop the detail of how this will be integrated into the existing fabric can now start.

Heritage Assets

Wellington Green Space & Fox's Field

The acquisition of the Green Space in Wellington is scheduled for a Full Council decision in July 2022. It is intended to hand the site over (alongside Fox's Field) to Wellington Town Council for long-term lease and management working closely with the community.

Hinkley Point C

The delivery of existing work and S106 funds, approximately £2.4m (10%) is left to spend. Activity is progressing well in all remaining active areas: Economic Development, Skills, Tourism and Housing.

Except for a planning role until 2024/25, the funding for the majority of posts will end in March 2023 under the current agreement. However, due to the HPC project being behind time, the Councils have agreed to extend some posts, including a member of staff in the ED team until 2024/25. This will be crucial in terms of delivering the remaining activity funds in current plans. The Housing post is secured separately through Housing funding until March 2024.

Workforce Uplift

The Joint Councils have reached an agreement with EDF on a comprehensive package of mitigation measures to manage the impacts of an additional 3,000 workers required to complete the HPC development. In the past few weeks' officers have worked with EDF to amend all relevant HPC mitigation strategies and plans, and put in place new monitoring arrangements. A Supplementary S106 Agreement has been agreed with EDF and is set to be signed by all parties in the next week.

Officers of the joint Council are meeting weekly with EDF to put in place a number of key interventions to accommodate new workers, and monitor progress. This includes delivering 900 additional caravan and campus spaces for workers, a revised Transport plan, and a range of new Community Safety measures.

Site numbers are currently up to 7,800 with the peak of construction expected to now be in early 2023, when the figure will rise to a maximum of 8,500 workers (One worker is defined as somebody that works at the HPC site for at least 5 days in any given month).

Also, in the past few weeks EDF have reported that there will be a further 12 month delay to the first reactor being up and operational. The new date is June 2027, with the second reactor to follow one year later. The original DCO date was December 2025.

Economic Development update

Town Centre Resilience and Transformation

Town Centre Resilience and Events

Taunton Wellington and Minehead received 25K to support the on-going high street recovery efforts.

Taunton investing in performance/busking areas for the town centre to bring more musicians and performers into town to enhance the experience for visitors.

A giant deckchair will be erected over the school summer period in Taunton at various locations for families to enjoy and links back to the experience-based enjoyment for the town.

Town Centre Activity (All)

- 25k has been allocated to Taunton, Wellington and Minehead.

Wellington and Minehead have used to funds to help promote and support the Jubilee Celebrations across their town.

Monthly meetings with Minehead, Taunton and Wellington take place to support, collaboration and bring cohesion to the District on projects and work through barriers and share knowledge and working practices.

Town Centre Activity (Taunton)

- Town Centre Dressing of giant union flags and window dressing installed to improve the visitor experience and in support for Jubilee Celebrations.
- Three new electric charging points for Taunton have received planning permission and work to connect them to the main electric supplies will be complete in July. Slight delays due to scaffolding works near the agreed works.
- The appointment of a heritage consultation to support the Listed Building Consent (LBC) and Consultation with Historic England (HE) on the lighting up of the Market House (Grade II*). Project completion date October 2022

Events

Jubilee Picnic in the park was attended by over 3,000 people and was a great success for the town and brought the community together. Front page of County Gazette and positive feedback from stakeholders, different internal departments and members of the public.

Events being planned for some of SWT's parks and open spaces in 2022 include:

- Taunton Armed Forces Day at Vivary Park on the 2 July
- Sound of the Streets music festival at Castle Green from 8 – 10 July
- Taunton Pride on 16 July
- Fake Festival music festival at Longrun Meadow on 23 July
- Taunton Flower Show at Vivary Park on 5 and 6 August
- Live in Somerset music concerts in Vivary Park from 26 – 28 August

Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth

The county wide Visitor Economy Support Programme (VESP) to aid the recovery of the visitor economy strand 1 & 2 activity final reports are being compiled. The VESP strands are funded by the Joint Councils' Business Rates Retention Grants. Strand 3 is for marketing and positive messaging for the visitor economy that has yet to be commissioned. Strand 4 has launched an innovation grant scheme aimed at innovation within the visitor economy which is supporting recovery and growth within the sector.

The Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership (HTAP) continues to support the Visitor economy with various initiatives part of their phase 4 action plan. The HTAP digital online business support workshops for 2022 held x6 'BOOST' Tourism Toolkit webinars up to April 2022 which supported a further 40 businesses.

The HTAP Tourism Innovation Grant Scheme (supporting SMEs) awarded 14 grants to a diverse range of projects across Sedgemoor and the West Somerset area to boost and widen the tourism offer are well under way.

HTAP recently commissioned a 12 month Somerset visitor survey that will run until June 2023.

The HTAP partnership has developed a proposal that will see four themes of work for the use of the remaining HTAP funds available –

1. Cluster networks & business support
2. Packaging of activities and itineraries
3. Publicity
4. Events

The new Minehead People and Place Partnership held their inaugural meeting in April to start delivery of the new economic plan for Minehead called Minehead Plan – Inspiring People and Place.

Four year agreements have been finalised with Minehead, Watchet and Porlock Tourist Information Centres (TIC's) to cover 2022/23, 2023/4, 2024/5 and 2025/6 for the use of the remaining Hinkley funding allocations for the Centres. The TIC's have to deliver against an annually reviewed action plan of outputs for the funding received.

Sector support: Food and drink

Detailed mapping and consultation with the food and drink sector has been completed. This has given us insight to the support required to support them. Teaming up with partners SDC and the Growth Hub we have organised a breakfast event on the 5 July - the programme of speakers a direct response to the cumulation of the findings; workshops/ speakers are to address the issues raised, [Spotlight on Somerset Food and Drink - Growth Hub \(heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk\)](https://heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk)

Additional Restrictions Grant Funds

The discretionary funds awarded to the Council by Government for this scheme to support businesses during Covid have been utilised fully.

The third top up amount of ARG funding received from Government in January 2022, along with any remaining budget funds were disseminated throughout January and February with all outstanding application administration and payments completed by 10 March before the Government deadline of 31 March 2022.

Since November 2020, the scheme has provided financial support totalling £6,066,639 in 4,267 separate grant payments to over 1,560 businesses. These are businesses which either would not have qualified for the Government's mandatory schemes, or did not qualify at the time that a particular round of the ARG scheme was made available.

Inward Investment

This period has seen the completion of a new promotional investment-focused website for the district and production of an investment video as part of a 'SWITCH' campaign, inviting potential investors to switch to Somerset West and Taunton. The campaign highlights the area's locational, strengths as well as current growth industries such as healthcare and med-tech, the circular economy, digital and creative, global marine and current construction opportunities in the energy sector.

12 business ambassadors from varying sectors of the economy have also been recruited to act as business ambassadors for the area.

A launch event with a key business audience of commercial agents and developers took place in May 2022. This has formed a key part of the delivery of the Marketing and Communications plan for Inward Investment.

Innovation District

Connected Places Catapult has completed their work and made recommendations on how to progress the development of an Innovation District across Somerset West and Taunton.

Work is well underway on developing content for an innovation event which will be held in Taunton on 27 September 2022 under the title of 'Somerset Innovation Exchange'. Funding for the event has been secured from the business rate pilot and the LEP and content for is being worked up with relevant business and local authority partners.

This is the first event of its kind and aims to showcase local innovation, improve innovation networking and knowledge sharing among local businesses, as well as raising awareness of support services and build Government engagement with innovation activities across Somerset.

External Ops/Assets update:

Lidl: Disposal of part of Tangier car park, Castle St Taunton.

- Disposal approved at Executive 10th February 2020
- Purchase price: £1,050,000.00 (One Million and Fifty Thousand Pounds)
- Contracts exchanged 7th March, £50,000 deposit received.
- Completion of the sale is on grant of planning - Planning application now validated, target date for decision 29th June.
- Estimated completion: 20 days after grant of an acceptable planning permission with no onerous conditions.
- Site surveys are currently being carried out by Lidl under licence.

West Somerset Railway: Disposal of car park and toilets, off Station Road Bishops Lydeard.

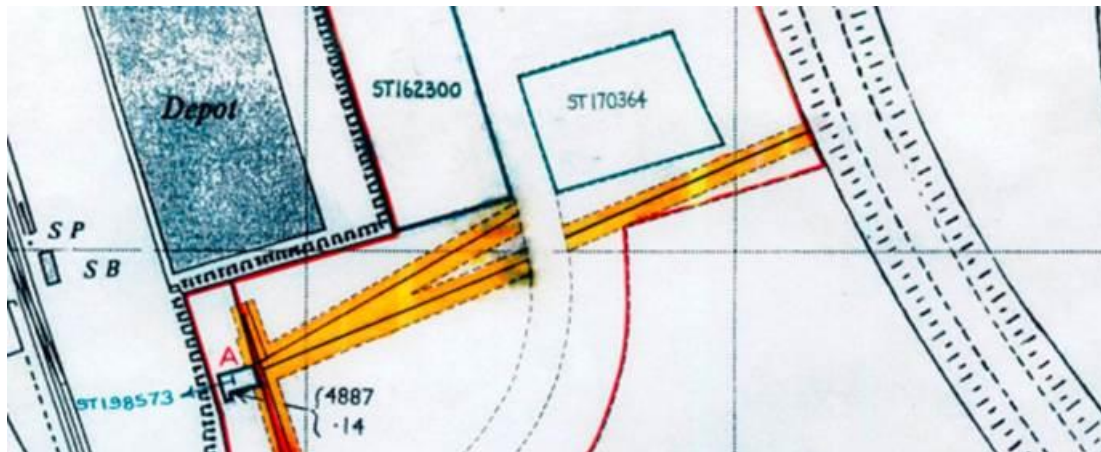
SWT has received an offer to purchase the car park and public conveniences off Station Road Bishops Lydeard. Due to the location the facilities are used solely by those using the railway

- WSR have made an offer of £50,000 to buy the car park and public conveniences adjacent to the station at Bishops Lydeard.
- the toilets are in a poor condition and will need significant improvements, and the surface of the car park is unmade, in a poor condition with pot holes.
- The offer is being considered and would be subject to a restriction on use to a public car park and public conveniences. To prevent unjust enrichment by any future owner, a restriction on charging for parking will be imposed unless the proceeds are applied to WST (or similar) charitable/community purposes.
- An external independent valuation has been received which demonstrates that the offer price is in excess of the open market value with use restrictions.
- Previous maintenance costs have been difficult to ascertain as repairs have been coded to 'general repairs' rather than individual properties. Operating costs of the public conveniences include cleaning, electric and water charges, legionella testing and business rates.
 - Business rates previous 5 years £32,274.
 - Legionella and water estimate for previous 5 years based on 21/22 charges in the region of £6,200
 - Estimate for bringing the electrics up to modern standard £1,000
- Restrictions on title prevent any buildings over the land coloured yellow.

sewers or any manhole or chamber on the sewers or to interfere with the rights

(b) Not to erect any buildings walls or other structure on the yellow land other than roads driveways and reasonable fences marking the boundaries of land and not to carry out any other development thereon

(c) Not to lay or permit to be laid in over or upon the yellow land any sewers drains pipes conduits cables ducts wires or similar thing without the prior written consent of the Company



U3 Blackdown Business Park

The Blackdown Business Park is in Sylvan Road, Wellington.

- We have received an offer from the occupying tenant of Unit 3 to purchase his unit, at a price of £230,000
- an external valuation report which states a value in the region of £250,000. We consider that the offered price of £230,000 is the maximum obtainable within the parameters of supporting this local business.
- The building requires expenditure estimated at £50,000-£100,000 for roof repairs and decarbonisation works. This would be a Council expense if we retained the unit as the tenant has limited repair responsibility in the present lease.
- The asset is marked for disposal in the Commercial Investment Strategy Review.
- Other tenants of the older buildings may also seek to acquire and a sale at this level sets a good benchmark.
- The offer was discussed at Commercial Investment panel 20th June and will be put to the board on 5th July

Lease of Country Park to Parish Council's Monkton Heathfield

- A draft lease has been agreed and is now with the parish council's solicitor. We are waiting for the Parish Council's representatives to sign.

- SWT solicitors continue to chase on a regular basis and we are informed that signing will take place within 2 weeks.

Lease of Blenheim Gardens Café, Minehead.

The café was closed in 2018 and was in poor condition.

Expressions of interest were invited to refurbish and lease the café in 2020

5 EOI returned including a CAT request at nil value from MTC.

Summary of the 5 returns were reported to Executive on 3rd November 2020.

[Decision - Lease of Blenheim Gardens Cafe - Modern Council \(somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

Heads Of Terms for a licence for works and lease were agreed and legal instructed 3rd February 2021

Licence and Agreement for Lease finally completed November 2021.

Tenant commenced stripping out works straight away but has not completed the refurbishment despite frequent requests.

Tenant has reported some unexpected structural work that is required and has appointed a structural engineer and architect to prepare and submit a planning application. The application is still awaited.

Assets continue to chase for regular updates and have asked for legal opinion on terminating the licence and lease because of non-performance.

Taunton Green Pavilion

The sports pavilion at Taunton Green, Cheddon Road is being transferred to the Muskats Baseball Club who will take on the building as their clubhouse.

Some investment is needed to bring it to standard before transfer but the club will finish the development using self help if required and would hope the building becomes a community hub as well as a clubhouse in the future.

Minor Works

The painting of the Esplanade railings at Watchet began in May and will be followed by the repainting of the Watchet Lighthouse at the end of the West Pier.

The required underpinning works to the bandstand in Vivary Park have been postponed for the summer season and will commence in once the 'band season' is completed.

Dulverton Weir & Leat

SWT own the weir and leat across and alongside the River Barle in Dulverton

The Council secured £50,000 of funding from the Somerset Rivers Trust to finalise designs for a rebuilt weir. An ecology survey has been completed and initial

discussions about planning have taken place with the Exmoor National Park Authority – a further meeting is scheduled for mid July.

A topographical survey was completed on 23rd May, currently awaiting final detailed designs from engineers Mann Williams, expected by the end of June.

The final designs will include an indicative price of the works which will provide us with the financial requirement for the restoration. Funding & future decision on SWT approach will be required on receipt of final designs.

We are working with the Dulverton Weir and Leat Conservation Trust to explore renovation options – if repaired the trust would take over the lease for the weir and leat and maintain it in the future.

Former Mount Street Nursery

Following the supported application by Taunton Deane Cricket Club for some additional land for parking and ongoing Rough Sleeping activity in the area, a further review of the former Mount Street Nursery remainder land is underway.

The site has been empty since closure of the former nursery in the mid 2000's and is considered to be unsuitable for building development due to planning restrictions (traffic on Mount Street) and flood issues.

The site is not fenced, is largely overgrown and has developed ecological considerations including the possibility of badger setts.

The draft solution for ongoing management is to:

1. Progress the supported long lease to TDCC for a new parking area in the north west corner of the site.
2. Undertake a formal ecological survey to assess options for the remainder of the site which may be a possible area for additional tree planting