

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 25 March 2021** as a Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software.

(6.30 pm - 7.50 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Paul Maxwell (Chairman)
Councillor Jenny Kenton (Vice-Chairman)

Jason Baker	Brian Hamilton	Clare Paul
Robin Bastable	Ben Hodgson	Crispin Raikes
Mike Best	Charlie Hull	Paul Rowsell
Dave Bulmer	Kaysar Hussain	Gina Seaton
Hayward Burt	Val Keitch	Peter Seib
Tony Capozzoli	Andy Kendall	Garry Shortland
Martin Carnell	Tim Kerley	Alan Smith
John Clark	Kevin Messenger	Jeny Snell
Nicola Clark	Graham Oakes	Andy Soughton
Adam Dance	Tricia O'Brien	Mike Stanton
Sarah Dyke	Sue Osborne	Lucy Trimnell
Karl Gill	Tiffany Osborne	Martin Wale
David Gubbins	Robin Pailthorpe	William Wallace
Peter Gubbins	Oliver Patrick	Colin Winder

Officers:

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Clare Pestell	Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Martin Woods	Director (Place)
Nicola Hix	Director (Strategy and Support Services)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Karen Watling	Interim Section 151 Officer
Adam Burgan	Arts & Entertainment Manager
Ross Eaton	Specialist - Finance
David Clarke	DCA Consultants
Gary Wright	Charcoal Blue Consultants
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Michelle Mainwaring	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

246. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neil Bloomfield, Malcolm Cavill (dispensation granted), Louise Clarke, Mike Hewiston, Henry Hobhouse,

Michael Lewis, Wes Read, David Recardo, Dean Ruddle, Rob Stickland and Linda Vjeh.

247. Minutes (Agenda Item 2)

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 25th February 2021, copies of which had been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record of the meeting and would be signed by the Chairman.

248. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Karl Gill declared a personal interest in Agenda item 6: Octagon Theatre Development.

249. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

A local resident speaking on behalf of Extinction Rebellion South Somerset asked what the council were planning to do about the permission granted to Conrad Energy to build 2 gas burning “peaker” power plants in Yeovil and Crewkerne, in the light of SSDC’s declared Climate Emergency and the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy? She said that she had submitted her question earlier in the week and had received a response from officers which said they would contact Conrad Energy to pass on the concerns about the impact of the sites and she asked if officers could be relied upon to do this?

Councillor Sarah Dyke, as Portfolio Holder for Environment thanked the resident for raising the matter and said that she was concerned that the power plants had been granted planning permission however, the Council were updating their Local Plan which would be more in line with the Council’s adopted Environment Strategy. She said that she had asked officers to seek more detail from developers at an early stage of planning applications to consider their environmental impacts. She concluded that the response by officers should give assurance that the matter was being taken seriously and Conrad Energy would be contacted and she said that Extinction Rebellion would be kept updated.

A local resident spoke in support of the Octagon Theatre development. He outlined the history of the founder of the theatre, his great grandfather, Stanley Johnson, who generously assisted many projects within Yeovil. He said the opportunity to develop the Octagon Theatre was part of a cultural renaissance for rural theatres and was well timed. The value to the local economy and the community and the outreach and educational programmes benefits were huge and it would allow the very best theatre for the south west.

The Chairman thanked the resident for his supportive comments.

250. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman thanked the Council's Monitoring Officer, Richard Ward, and the Councils Section 151 Officer, Jo Nacey, for their service to the Council during the past 12 months.

The Chairman noted that the last in-person Council meeting had been just over 12 months ago and he had since chaired 9 virtual meetings. He said the country was now in its third lock-down period during a very difficult year and over 126,000 people had died from Covid-19 in the UK. People had lost friends and relatives and businesses had suffered hardships. He asked that Members observe a minute silence for those who had died and suffered during the past year.

A minute of silence was observed.

251. Octagon Theatre Development (Agenda Item 6)

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Well-Being thanked the public speaker for their support for the project. He noted that following investigation, VAT would not be applicable on the project and a grant of £10m had been allocated from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to be managed by the Arts Council for England.

The Arts and Entertainment Venues Manager provided Members with a short presentation on the proposals for the Octagon Theatre. Although the venue was currently closed, he hoped that it would re-open soon. He introduced representatives of Charcoal Blue and DCA Consultants who had assisted in developing the business plan. They noted that:-

- audience numbers had doubled over the past 10 years with visitors coming from across the south west.
- the theatre was in need of upgrading and modernising generally
- there were no disabled facilities back-stage so accessibility needed to be addressed.
- the seat capacity would be increased to 900 with the construction of a circle.
- national and international touring companies would be attracted to the new improved venue.
- a new accessible entrance from the car park would be created.
- green building materials and a sustainable design would be used to meet the Councils environmental objectives.
- a cinema, community space and outreach work was proposed.
- a fly tower would attract West End productions.
- amateur and community groups which used the theatre were key and it was important that they were retained.

The Arts and Entertainment Venues Manager concluded by outlining the funding sources for the project, including a repayable loan and a ticket levy. He also

outlined the economic impact to the wider community of the proposal and the arts engagement and outreach service across the district.

In response to questions, the Arts and Entertainment Venues Manager advised:

- the Arts needed to more to reach a wider audience and for more people to experience the theatre.
- Tickets currently started at £5.00 and the school visits to the annual pantomime were important and were often supported by the schools PTA.
- Education and outreach would be developed further and some concerts were free for schools to attend.
- Abri Housing subsidised theatre tickets for their residents.
- There was a ticket levy for the Westland complex (currently £1.50) and also one for the Octagon Theatre (currently £1.00).
- SSDC would underwrite the project to £12.76m through a loan.
- The Octagon Theatre currently received a subsidy from SSDC but it was envisaged that would not be required in the future.

The Director for Commercial Services and Income Generation confirmed that part of the de-carbonisation grant funding which the Council had recently been awarded would be used to install green energy efficient measures during the development work.

The Chairman said that the meeting could retire to a confidential session if there were any specific questions raised on the confidential business plan.

During discussion, several Members voiced their support for the project which they felt could attract new businesses to the town.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Portfolio Holder for Health and Well-Being thanked the Arts and Entertainment Venues Manager and his team for their work in bringing the redevelopment project forward. He said that it was a big project which could eventually reach a point where a subsidy was no longer required. He proposed that the recommendations be agreed and they were seconded by Councillor John Clark. A named vote was taken and Members unanimously confirmed the recommendations (voting: unanimous in favour).

The Chairman said he was pleased with the result of the vote and he thanked the Arts and Entertainment Venues Manager for his achievements during his time with SSDC and for what he was about to achieve with the new project.

RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed to:-

- a. note the confidential appendices, including the report by Charcoal Blue and associated business case documents, to refurbish the existing site and facilities; and to extend the site with both additional educational and income earning facilities, which will assist in repaying the costs of the proposed project over time;

- b. approve the underwriting of the project costs by SSDC, of up to £23.01m, to be offset by grant funding applications, yet to be applied for; and £10million of government funding already allocated in the March 2021 budget, (subject to accepting and meeting terms and conditions, which are yet to be received);
- c. delegate authority to a Project Board that consists of the Portfolio Holder for Health & Well-Being (Chair), the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Legal Services, the Director of Commercial Services and S151 Officer to progress the project, take appropriate decisions for the project governance set up and reporting arrangements to District Executive on project progress;
- d. approve the cashflow forecast in the business plan.

Reason: To agree to refurbish and develop The Octagon Theatre and underwrite the full value of the project, up to £23.01 million (excluding VAT that is recoverable in respect of this project), subject to the successful application for various forms of grant funding which would partially offset the overall project costs.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

252. Appointment of an Interim Section 151 Officer (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised that the Council were obliged to appoint a Section 151 officer to ensure that the necessary financial roles and functions were delivered effectively. He proposed that Karen Watling be appointed as interim Section 151 officer for 6 months and this was seconded by Councillor Val Keitch.

A named vote was taken and Members unanimously confirmed Karen Watling as the interim Section 151 officer for SSDC with immediate effect.

RESOLVED: That Council agreed to formally appoint Karen Watling as Interim Section 151 Officer with immediate effect, for an initial period of up to 6 months.

Reason: To approve the interim appointment of one of the Council's Statutory Roles, the Section 151 Officer.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

253. Report of Executive Decisions (Agenda Item 8)

The report of Executive Decisions was noted.

254. Motions (Agenda Item 9)

There were no Motions submitted by Members.

255. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 10)

There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.

256. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Full Council would be held on **Thursday, 15th April 2021** as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting software commencing at **6.30 p.m.**

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Chairman

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Date