



COUNCIL SUMMONS

YOU ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL TO BE HELD IN THE DEANE HOUSE, BELVEDERE ROAD, TAUNTON ON TUESDAY 14TH OCTOBER 2003 AT 18:30.

AGENDA

The meeting will be preceded by a Prayer to be offered by the Mayor's Chaplain.

1. To receive the Minutes of the Meetings of the Council held on 22 July, 6 August and 8 September 2003
2. To report any apologies for absence
3. To receive any communications
4. To receive petitions from Local Government electors under Standing Order 17
5. To receive questions from Local Government electors under Standing Order 18
6. To deal with questions to and receive recommendations and reports from the following members of the Executive:-
7. Councillor Williams (Leader of the Executive)
Recommendation relating to Leisure Trust - Virement
8. Councillor Bishop (Transportation and Planning)
9. Councillor Mrs. Bradley (Leisure, Arts and Culture)
Recommendation relating Visual Arts and Crafts Improvement in Taunton Deane 2003
10. Councillor Mrs. Bryant (Communications)
11. Councillor Cavill (Economic Development, Property and Tourism)
12. Councillor Edwards (Environmental Services)
13. Councillor Garner (Housing Services)
Recommendation relating to Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plans
14. Councillor Hall (Resources)
15. Councillor Mrs. Lewin - Harris (Community Leadership)

G P DYKE

Member Services Manager

The Deane House
Belvedere Road
TAUNTON
Somerset

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07 October 2003

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, on Tuesday 22 July 2003, at 6.30 pm.

Present: The Mayor (Councillor Govier)
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Allgrove)
Councillors Beaven, Mrs Biscoe, Bishop, Bowrah, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Bryant, N P Cavill, Miss Cavill, Croad, Davies, Denington, Durdan, Edwards, Floyd, Garner, Gill, Guerrier, Hall, Hayward, Henley, Mrs Hill, House, Mrs Jones, Lisgo, Meikle, Mullins, Mrs Nixon, Paul, Ms Peppard, Phillips, Prior-Sanke, Ms Priscott, Slattery, Mrs Smith, Stone, Stuart-Thorn, Trollope, Vail, Wedderkopp, Weston, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams and Mrs Wilson

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Council held on 14 May 2003, a copy having been sent to each member, was signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Bone, C A Cluff, Mrs Cluff, Hindley, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Lees, Morrell and Watson.

3. Public Question Time

Paul Partington asked:

- (a) if the Fairtrade Panel had been formed and, if so, when it would meet?
- (b) what policies the Council now had to promote safety of cyclists and pedestrians and what plans there were to ease traffic congestion in Taunton?

Councillor Hall confirmed that the Fairtrade Panel had been reconstituted and he was keen for it to continue its work.

Councillor Bishop replied that the Council were committed to the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. They would, however, be concerned if cycle paths impeded the free flow of traffic. He confirmed that he was in constant communication with Somerset County Council in an effort to ease traffic congestion, particularly in the Station Road area of Taunton.

4. Recommendations to Council from the Executive

(a) Draft Performance Plan 2003/04

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that the Draft Performance Plan 2003/04 be agreed.

(b) Capital Strategy 2003

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that the Capital Strategy for 2003 be agreed.

(c) Commutation Adjustment

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that:

- (i) the transferring of the backdated commutation adjustment, amounting to £1,823,899 to the General Fund Reserve and the immediate earmarking of these funds for capital purposes (RCCO in 2002/03) be agreed;
- (ii) the transfer of the 2002/03 commutation adjustment amounting to £116,500 to the General Fund Reserve and the immediate earmarking of this for capital purposes (RCCO in 2002/03), be agreed;
- (iii) the transfer of the 2003/04 commutation adjustment amounting to £153,660 to the General Fund Reserve and the immediate earmarking of this for capital purposes (RCCO in 2003/04), be agreed.

(d) Statement of Accounts 2002/03

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Statement of Accounts 2002/03 be agreed;
- (ii) the following determinations be made in respect of the year ended 31 March 2003:-
 - 1. Section 42(2)(g)
that £947,952 of expenditure for capital purposes, which was financed by grant, be capitalised;
 - 2. Section 56(i)
that basic and supplementary credit approvals of £816,189 (after adjustment for capital grants received) be treated as authority to charge to capital accounts expenditure of that amount;
 - 3. Section 60(2)
that £1,875,814 of useable capital receipts be applied to meet capital expenditure;
 - 4. Section 63(i)
that £483,596 be put aside from the revenue accounts in 2002/03 as a provision for credit liabilities.

(e) Disabled Parking Charges

On the motion of Councillor Bishop it was RESOLVED that:-

£50,000 be vired for the funding of the removal of charges on disabled car parking.

(f) Planning Staff

On the motion of Councillor Bishop it was RESOLVED that:-

(i) the virement of £32,180 for the funding of additional staff within the Planning Unit be agreed;

(ii) the allocation of the Planning Delivery Grant within the 2003/04 budget be agreed.

(g) Galmington Playing Field

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Bradley it was RESOLVED that:-

£16,150 be transferred from the General Fund Reserve for the creation of the Permanent Endowment Fund of the Galmington Playing Field Trust.

(h) The Wellsprings Centre

The report of Councillor Mrs Bradley was amended. Details of the amendment were reported.

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Bradley it was RESOLVED that:-

a Supplementary Estimate be made from unallocated Capital Reserves of £34,150 to fund the repair of further structural defects discovered at The Wellsprings Centre.

(i) Asset Management Plan 2003

On the motion of Councillor N Cavill it was RESOLVED that the Asset Management Plan 2003 and its Action Plan be agreed.

(j) Redevelopment of Crescent Car Parking Site, Town Centre Regeneration/ Opportunities for Retail Growth in the Old Market Centre/Crescent Car Park Area

On the motion of Councillor N Cavill it was RESOLVED that:-

(i) it be noted that the current car park scheme was not viable and should not be pursued at the present time;

- (ii) opportunities for retail growth in the Old Market Centre/Crescent Car Park area be investigated and discussions commenced with significant landowners in the area;
- (iii) agreement be sought with the Regional Development Agency, Terence O'Rourke and partners to extend the existing contract to secure master planning of the potential retail growth/redevelopment of the Old Market Centre/Crescent Car Park area;
- (iv) a Supplementary Estimate of £70,000 be made to enable outstanding fees to be met and to enable matters to progress to assist town centre regeneration;
- (v) the existing Crescent Car Park Steering Group form a Steering Group to oversee progress in regenerating the Old Market Centre/Crescent Car Park area.

(k) Supplementary Credit Approval - Air Quality Monitoring

On the motion of Councillor Edwards it was RESOLVED that:-

the DEFRA offers of Supplementary Credit Approval be accepted in the sums of £16,000 and £5,000 for Air Quality Action Planning and for a replacement Meteorological Station respectively and that the General Fund Capital Programme for 2003/04 be amended accordingly.

(l) Community Strategy for Taunton Deane

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that the Community Strategy for Taunton Deane be agreed.

(m) Appointment of Chief Executive

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that the decision taken by the Appointments Sub Committee to agree a Supplementary Estimate from General Fund Reserves to cover an increase in the remuneration package for the new Chief Executive be agreed.

5. Questions to and Reports from the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors

(a) Questions

The following questions were asked:-

- (i) Councillor House asked Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council:

I refer to Sedgemoor Planning application number 37/03/00065 made by S Notaro Ltd for a Regional Business Centre, South of Huntworth. This is for use classes A1, A2, A3, B1, B2 and B8. I understand that this will include a Livestock Market.

I do not consider that it makes sense to be at the same time considering our own Wellington Livestock Market at Chelston.

Whichever site is chosen, Taunton will not be a market town; it will either be known as Wellington market or Bridgwater market.

Could the relevant panel of this Council have the opportunity to discuss this as soon as possible when our Director of Development has properly evaluated all the facts and can put recommendations to us?

It is my view that we should be talking once again with Sedgemoor Council now, as there is no need to have two livestock markets between Wellington and Bridgwater.

Councillor Williams replied that the change of political control of the Council would not affect its preferred site; Junction 26 was considered to be the best site for Taunton Deane. The Council had not been consulted on the Sedgemoor planning application. A full report giving the up to date position would be submitted to the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel on 5 August 2003.

- (ii) Councillor Floyd asked Councillor Bishop (Planning and Transportation):

When disabled parking charges were reviewed in November 2001, I was contacted by residents who were on very limited incomes, needed the use of a car and parked in our car parks. Now the ruling group has decided to 'means test' the car parks, can I encourage essential car users on low incomes to contact you so you can give them the same consideration as you are giving to blue badge holders.

Councillor Bishop replied that the decision to discontinue parking charges for disabled persons was based purely on disability and not income. Taunton Deane had previously been the only local authority in the area that charged.

(b) Reports

The reports submitted by the Leader and Executive Councillors are attached as an Appendix to these Minutes.

(Councillor Stone arrived at the meeting at 7.07 pm).

(Councillor Mrs Biscoe left the meeting at 8.33 pm and Councillor Mrs Hill at 8.43 pm).

(The meeting ended at 9.52 pm).

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR WILLIAMS - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

We are now in the thirteenth week of our administration and it is the first presentation of the new Executive to Council. I feel the transition has been as seamless as possible and I pay tribute to our officers for the tremendous assistance and understanding given to ensure this occurred. Not least, I also extend my grateful thanks to my colleagues who, when asked, rose to the challenge and accepted the considerable task of Executive Members for the various Portfolios and offices, all requiring a substantial commitment to ensure the smooth running of this organisation.

My grateful thanks to all.

Overview

Taunton Deane is on the brink of exciting and challenging times. The award - or is it imposition of Principal Urban Area Status which dictates that Taunton is to become a sub-regional centre, places great responsibility on all of us to ensure that development is carried out to allow growth, but without destroying the very character of the town that we all cherish. This led to the Vision for Taunton exercise which highlighted what the people of Taunton Deane wanted and provided us with an excellent framework with which to move forward. This clearly identified that although growth was felt necessary, all possible should be done to maintain the market town character of Taunton loved so dearly by most.

At this very time, master planning of Taunton is being carried out together with an urban design extension by our consultants, Terence O'Rourke, who have been jointly commissioned by Somerset County Council, SWERDA and Taunton Deane Borough Council to carry out this work. Following the failure of the Crescent Car Park Scheme as we know it, we are also endeavouring to link the overall design of the Crescent Car Park and Mary Street Car Park within the urban design framework exercise for Taunton town centre as a whole. Of course, I have always stated and I reiterate that without improvements in Taunton's infrastructure and public transport system, the proposed future development and expansion of Taunton will come to nothing. It is imperative and a commitment of this administration that our roads and public transport are improved to ensure the economic growth of Taunton is not constricted.

To inform members, I give a brief report on some of the major projects and considerations ongoing at present.

Vision for Taunton

Our consultants - O'Rourkes - have carried out considerable research and consultation and are in the process of preparing a design framework exercise covering the town centre, the Fire pool site, the Riverside through to Tangier and the Tangier area. In carrying out this exercise, O'Rourkes have identified large areas of land in and around Taunton Town Centre, not

necessarily all in Council ownership, which has potential and provides exciting opportunities for future development. Initial plans have already been presented to councillors and members of the public and feedback to date has been positive. Terence O'Rourke are due to complete their overall plan by the end of the year when we, in conjunction with our partners, will have to take this plan forward for implementation. I have no illusions that this will be easy as it will require consummate skill to bring many vested interests to the negotiating table and vast amounts of finance, all of which will not be found solely from the public sector.

Crescent Car Park Development

As already noted, the scheme we have been negotiating for around three years has now failed on the basis of its financial viability. The suggestion has been made that a much larger scheme could be viable by looking at both the Crescent Car Park area and the Mary Street Car Park area at the other side of the High Street. We are endeavouring to include this with the Terence O'Rourke design framework exercise for Taunton to gain an overall view of the potential viability of these proposals. The financing of this study is being separately reported by Councillor Cavill and I strongly commend this to you.

Urban Extension Study

This again is in the course of preparation by our consultants, Terence O'Rourke, and preliminary plans have been prepared and presented to councillor and members of the public. I would stress that this is not the inception of a Local Plan but our independent consultants' views of where future development of Taunton could possibly take place. If we are to ensure that Taunton has the ability to grow practically and sustainably then we must be prepared to make hard choices. This to ensure that it has sufficient economic development ability to protect ourselves from larger and developing neighbours up and down the motorway. We are receiving a strong message from our local economic development partners that Taunton is already several years behind other major centres and that we will lose out if growth in Taunton does not occur soon.

County Cricket Club

We are all well aware of the aspirations of Somerset County Cricket Club to expand sufficiently to host international cricket matches. Within the Vision and planning process of Taunton we must ensure that if at all physically possible these aspirations are met and that as a Council we give all necessary assistance to achieving this. The County Cricket Ground is one of the jewels in Taunton's crown and it can only aid the economy of Taunton if we assist it to achieve international status and the increased profile that would bring.

Taunton Market Site

As you will be aware, further consultation and planning has been taking place with a view to re-locating Taunton Market to a site adjacent to Junction 26 at Chelston, Wellington. This study has now been completed and the principle has been established that the chosen site will be acceptable and is unlikely to encounter any major problems with planning or highways. Taunton Deane Borough Council is broadly in agreement with the Taunton Market Auctioneers regarding the relocation of the Market; however, before any formal planning application can be submitted there is a need to understand the financial commitments of all parties in order to facilitate this re-location. This process is underway at present, but I must

stress to you that the re-location of the existing market is absolutely essential to the satisfactory re-development of the Firepool area.

Wellsprings Centre

This, by any stretch of the imagination, is not one of the Council's successes. Substantial additional sums of taxpayers' money have been allocated to the completion of this project but, as the new incoming administration, let me reaffirm our commitment to its completion for the benefit of the community of North Taunton. The good news is that work is underway and, despite further setbacks being found requiring additional injection of funds, we are presently on schedule for building works to be completed by the year-end. We are obviously pressing our project managers and contractors to ensure completion of the building sufficiently before Christmas 2003 to allow us to get it up and running for the Christmas period. Regrettably, I am not able to give a commitment to this at present as our contracts are being quite necessarily cautious in case further problems or defects are identified which could cause delay.

Commutated Sum

Much has been said and written about this apparent wonderful sum of £1.8 million that is now available for all to spend. Can I say, categorically, this is not a pot of gold that has been found for use without any cost implications. It is an amount that we have overpaid above our minimum loan repayments that we now have the opportunity to recover which, if taken in total, there are substantial revenue implications which have to be carefully considered. Since its announcement, I have heard many rash statements about what this Council can afford because of this sum being available. I place on record now that any amounts used will be considered very carefully and, unless exceptional circumstances dictate, will only be used for capital projects and to lever in substantially greater funds for the benefit of the residents of Taunton Deane. When it was established that this amount was available to us by way of increased borrowings this administration prudently, in my view, opted to reserve the whole amount for future consideration as to its best use. This process will take place during the impending budget setting process when our priorities are determined and whether all or part only is retained.

COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS
Leader of the Council

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BISHOP - PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill

Last month I attended a meeting, organised by the South West Regional Assembly, to discuss the implications of the proposed changes to Strategic Planning for the area and how the arrangements could be made to work most effectively.

The Government now expects commencement of Parts 1 and 2 of the Bill to be in June/July 2004.

We are fortunate that the stage has been reached with the Taunton Local Plan which will allow the Plan to be adopted under current procedures and it is expected that the Inspector will present his report in October 2003.

Members' Planning Code of Good Practice

The Code of Good Practice has been prepared in response to the Local Government Association's Note on the preparation of Local Codes of Good Practice on Planning matters in the light of the introduction of the new ethical framework and in consultation with the District Audit Service, Local Government Ombudsman and the Standards Board for England.

The aim of the code is to ensure that in the planning process there are no grounds for suggesting that a decision has been biased, partial or not well founded in any way. The draft code will be considered by the Standards Board in July before it is released to members.

SWARMMS - Update

The Secretary of State has responded to the London to South West and Wales Multi-modal (SWARMMS) and agreed recommendations. There is a strong presumption against additional road capacity in areas of environmental sensitivity.

The Highways Agency (HA) have appointment consultants P B Kennedy and Donkin to undertake further work to assess the relative impacts of possible improvements to the A358 and the A303 west of Ilminster. A number of value management exercises have been carried out on the A358 dualling, Somerset County Council have asked W S Atkins to shadow the HA consultants' work on the A358. Dualling of the A358 is largely feasible on line, except for the section at Henlade, where a new dual carriageway is required. One of the most complex issues is the design of the link to and from the A358 onto the M5 in the Exeter direction.

It is anticipated that the HA will report on the options to the Minister in September 2003 and the Regional Planning Body will also consider it.

Employment Land Monitoring Report

At its meeting on 10 June, the Strategic Planning and Economic Development Review Panel considered a report on the Council's Land Monitoring Report 2003. The report provides data on a range of indicators including the estimated employment area in the Borough, the level of employment land 'take up', the supply of vacant employment land, employment density and the quality of employment areas; This is required as part of the Council's monitoring activities relating to the development and planning of the area. The report shows that we are on course to meet the employment land requirement of 115 hectares set down in the Structure Plan and, that in the year ended on 31 March 2003, 3.2 hectares of land were developed for employment uses whilst planning permission was granted for 5.6 hectares. Also at 31 March, there was a total 27.8 hectares of undeveloped employment land available for a range of development.

Tone Mill, Wellington

We are continuing to work with Regeneration Through Heritage (part of the Prince's Foundation) English Heritage and other partners to promote and investigate the possibility of a community-based regeneration project for this important heritage site. A Planning Day was organised at Tone Dale House on 2 June at which a range of local individuals and organisations with a potential interest, including councillors, came together to hear more about the idea and contribute their own views. This was highly successful and it is clear that there is considerable support for this scheme that could help secure the future of Fox Brothers Ltd, provide a visitor attraction and achieve the restoration and maintenance of important Listed Buildings and equipment. The next stage will be to seek financial assistance for a Feasibility Study of the proposal.

Land at Odeon Cinema, Taunton

Extension to Existing Five Screen Multiplex Cinema to Provide Eight Screens

On 18 and 19 March 2003, I attended an inquiry and gave evidence in support of the Planning Committee's decision to grant permission for the development. The application was called in for decision by the Secretary of State by a direction made under Section 77 of the 1990 Act on 18 September 2002.

The decision has now been received and I am pleased to report that, after considering all the issues, the Secretary of State accepted the Inspectors' recommendation and concluded that the proposal was in line with the relevant approved development plan policies or consistent with policies in PPG6 and he granted planning permission for the extension.

It is gratifying to Members of the Planning Committee that their decision has been confirmed.

CLIFF BISHOP

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS BRADLEY - LEISURE, ARTS AND CULTURE

Wellsprings Update

Building work is progressing well on the Wellsprings site. Regular meetings between the Council, Symonds and Bluestone indicate that the new leisure centre will open to the public early in the New Year. The Wellsprings Centre Manager, James Curry (currently based at Blackbrook) is now in the process of re-establishing links with potential clubs, hirers and users and is beginning to put the centre programme together.

Sports Service Best Value Review

This is our major success story. Rising above hundreds of leisure inspections nationwide, Taunton Deane's Sports Services have been judged Good with Excellent prospects for improvements. This is affirmation not only of our capable and dedicated staff but also of the new administration now running this Council. This rating from Government's independent Best Value inspectors puts Taunton Deane in the top ten per cent of sports services in the country with few bettering the Council's achievement.

The inspectors visited all the Council's Leisure facilities over one week in May this year and concluded the Council provided a wide range of facilities and services which are well used, with varied and complementary programmes and a generally good standard of presentation and cleanliness. They noted the service is provided at a relatively low operational cost, is well used and has high levels of customer satisfaction.

The three inspectors said the Council has excellent prospects for improvement for a number of reasons such as the Leisure services track record of improving services with many of the improvement plan targets exceeded in the first year. Most of the proposals in the improvement plan properly focus first on improving the Service for customers.

The Sports Service best value review covered leisure facilities management (Blackbrook Pavilion, Taunton Tennis Centre, Castle Sports Centre, St James Street Baths, Station Road Pool, Vivary Golf Course and Wellington Sports Centre) and client services including sports development and an active lifestyles programme.

The Service employs 218 full and part-time staff and has a net budget of £1.38 million this financial year. The scope of the review did not include playing pitches or the use of grants. The Council plans to review these independently. This was the second part of the Council's leisure service to be reviewed. The first part, parks, and amenities service review and completed in January 2001 with that service winning Good rating with Promising prospects for improvement.

The Government has placed a duty on local Councils to deliver services to cost and quality standards by the most economic, efficient and effective means available. Best value is a challenging framework designed to improve local services. Councils are required to assess their own performance and put in place measures to ensure continuous improvement in all of their services.

Leisure Trust Update

Work towards the formation of the Leisure Trust continues to proceed and is placing demands on resources. In particular, the legal documentation and aspects of the lease agreements at Blackbrook and Wellsprings are placing pressure on the proposed implementation timetable. A full update will be presented to the Executive in August.

Playing Pitches Strategy

This strategy has now received its accreditation.

Wheel Sports

We are working out how best to make provision for both MBX and skateboard users, bearing in mind the limited funds available to meet aspirations. I am fully aware that the summer holidays are almost upon us.

Arts Plan 2003

The arts have a cross cutting agenda, particularly addressing economic and environmental priorities of regeneration and sustainability. Delivery is in partnership with other districts and County Councils and key strategic arts organisations, in particular the The Brewhouse, Take Art! Somerset Dance, Action Track, Somerset Arts Week, Somerset Partnership of Arts in Education Development Agency (SPAEDA) and Equata/Disability Arts. We are also involved in exploring the potential for a Somerset Art Gallery with the Somerset Arts Gallery Trust.

Pop and Proms in the Park

Two successful and well-organised events took place in Vivary Park on 11 and 12 July, run by Performing Arts Management, complete with firework displays. The only defect to note was the non-materialisation of the beer tent. From my conversations, it would appear that this company is interested in building up a market to repeat these events. This is all in line with making a fuller and more varied use of this delightful community asset.

The Future

My attendance at a recent ILAM Conference and also the Hammersmith and Fulham Beacon Council Open Day have driven home to me the hard fact that Councils are not going to be given any more money. Our job is to act as enablers for other organisations to draw down funds from the Community Fund, the Livability fund, the new Somerset Community Foundation (£500 to £7,000 for the young disadvantages) and other funds and trusts.

DILLY BRADLEY

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BRYANT - COMMUNICATIONS

I am pleased to include in my first report that the development of a 'communication strategy' for community services is well under way.

Effective internal and external communications is vital to the success of any organisation. During 2002, it was recognised that our communications were less than effective; this was a recurrent theme in a number of meetings with staff and key organisations with whom we work. As a result, it was decided to pilot a methodology for the development and delivery of a communications strategy within Community Services with a view to using it to eventually produce a corporate communications strategy. The work started in March 2003 and a project plan is in place to deliver the strategy and three-year action plan by the end of September. The work undertaken so far includes a communications audit and staff questionnaire. Members will be encouraged to give their comments in a questionnaire to be circulated in the next couple of months. This work supports Investors 9n People, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, the work around developing a healthy workplace, as well as the environmental health and housing best value reviews.

We will continue to place emphasis on factual reporting and promoting good news. Recent press coverage has highlighted many aspects of the Council's work and press releases along with the Weekly Bulletin and reports for meetings have accounted for these items being taken up and reported by the local media.

The next issue of Deane Dispatch will be delivered to homes in Taunton Deane by the end of this month. I am pleased to report that in this 'Year of the Disabled' that it will be available on audio tape contributing to the Council's aim to engage the 'hard to reach' groups. Deane Dispatch plays a vital part in our consultations with the public and we will again be seeking people's views on the shaping of the next year's budget and there will be a special issue in the autumn specifically to address the issue of consultation.

GWYNETH BRYANT

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CAVILL - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PROPERTY AND TOURISM

Crescent Car Park

As you will all be aware by now, the Crescent Car Park Scheme has not been able to be worked up into a viable option. The area being considered now includes an area to the east of High Street. This area, along with Firepool and Tangier, is currently being assessed by Terence O'Rourke as part of their urban design framework study. The consultation is attracting a great deal of interest and comment from our key partners and developers.

Asset Management Plan

The previous AMP was rated as good. We are trying to build on this plan and improve to excellent. A great deal of money is required to maintain the Council's assets. The present budget enables us to do the essential work, but not other work to bring them up to the appropriate/desired standard. When the Somerset Influence Panel was consulted, they rated as their #1 priority the maintenance of the TDBC properties. Although we have a 10-point action plan, I believe that the most challenging targets to achieve will be: the compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, employment sites to serve areas of need in Taunton North and East, Chelston and rural areas and, of course (as mentioned) the level of budget provisions for future maintenance.

Best Value Review of Economic and Community Regeneration

I commend to you the recently produced paper presented to the Community Leadership Panel. If we adopt option 1, over the next three - five years, in partnership with others, we have the opportunity to create and safeguard 200 jobs. At the same time, Taunton's profile as a regional centre will be greatly enhanced.

Tone Mill Partnership

The Prince's Foundation is heading up this partnership, not just to safeguard the building and equipment of the wet finishing works, but also to make a viable scheme of most of that site. Fox Bros wish to bring the wet finishing processes back in house. Further, they hope to develop the production process for educational and tourism purposes. This will act as a catalyst for other activities on that site. The partnership will be a registered charity and it is hoped that its charter will enable it to utilise this trading profits for its benefit.

NORMAN P CAVILL

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR EDWARDS - ENVIORNMENTAL SERVICES

The portfolio that I am responsible for is very broad with many areas that have a direct impact on the lives of everyone that lives in Taunton Deane. I welcome the challenge and thank the new leader of the Council, John Williams, for entrusting me with this portfolio.

There are a number of challenges for the varying departments that sit within my portfolio. Initially, there are three specific areas which I am concentrating on:

Licensing There are changes coming to licensing powers as a result of the Licensing Bill.

- Councillors should be aware that with the changing responsibilities, additional stresses will be on the Licensing department.
- Expansion of Street Trading within Deane now as part of my portfolio in line with other licensing functions. This is a real opportunity to enhance the town centre and aim to bring more vibrancy and encourage the market town. As a first success, I am delighted that the Farmers market has been extended to run every Thursday from 14 August.

Litter/Street Scene I requested a report go forward to Health and Leisure; this highlighted the following:

- Increase in Street Cleansing on Sundays.
- Litter Hotline.
- More communicating with traders, in particular fast food restaurants.
- In addition, we need to look carefully at fines for all littering, in particular fly tipping and the enforcement of these fines.

Noise I have recently requested that a report be prepared with regard the issue of noise and the Council responsibilities. This will be prepared and discussed by the Health and Leisure Panel later in the year. I will be meeting with officers in due course to discuss my ideas in relation to this issue.

Cornhill, Wellington It came to the attention of the new Executive that there was a very specific problem in Cornhill, Wellington, after many years of neglect and inaction. I was tasked with improving the Street Scene with regard litter, street cleansing and the clearance of weeds, moss and algae. I am very satisfied that this first stage has been achieved and I will insist

that we play our part within this area to make sure it is regularly cleaned and inspected.

Recycling

We will continue the work with regard recycling and discussions are taking place as to how we can best assess its success as I have expressed a concern that there is a drop in usage which is below my expected levels. This is being investigated and assessed.

I have been visiting as many individuals and departments as I have been able and I have found a great deal of talented, able and determined individuals. I look forward to working with them all in the coming months and years and thank all the officers for their assistance so far.

MARK J EDWARDS

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GARNER - HOUSING SERVICES

1 May 2003 and it was change. It was with great pleasure that I was elected Councillor for Fairwater and great pride that I was given the portfolio for housing. The next four years will be challenging, however my overriding priority is, and always will be, the welfare of the people of Taunton Deane.

Already within my short term in office, a number of decisions have been made, the most significant being authorisation to complete the refurbishment of the Priorswood Place complex in North Taunton. Good work and considerable monies had already been spent on refurbishing the front of the building. However, in order to complete the refurbishment of this significant local asset, authorisation was given to complete the refurbishment to the roof and rear of the building, together with enhanced security.

On a smaller scale, but no less significant, was the decision to grant a three year rent free period to the Link Centre at Halcon in East Taunton. The Link centre provides an extremely useful amenity to the local community and is run on an entirely voluntary basis, my thanks go out to Steve and Sandy and all the other volunteers for their continued effort at 'The Link'.

Naturally, other decisions have also been made but the two examples above represent some of the good points. However, there are some less enjoyable aspects including dealing with neighbour disputes and evictions but its all part of the job.

Looking forward, I have highlighted three core values that I will be promoting for the people of Taunton Deane:

- The provision of affordable homes.
- Enabling the elderly to remain in their own homes.
- Pursue right to buy.

Naturally, these core values are not to the exclusion of all others but I believe that they represent a common sense approach to supporting the welfare of the people of Taunton Deane through the promotion of choice and security of tenure.

In addition to delivery of the core values, there are a number of Government initiatives that will have to be worked through with Officers, the Tenants Forum and the Housing Review Panel during these months. These include:

Housing Stock - Decent Homes

TDBC is required to complete a robust stock option appraisal by July 2005. We are required to demonstrate how we will bring all dwellings up to the decent homes standard. Nine hundred and twenty four houses currently fail the standard and others will fall into this category over time. Work is about to be commissioned to complete our appraisal by December 2003. Taunton Deane is in a good position as we have already completed the pre-requisites (housing needs survey, Council stock condition survey and private stock condition survey).

Housing Stock - Stock Options

TDBC has a stock of approximately 6,500 council houses. As with many other stock holding councils, the role of TDBC as landlord is under review and, therefore, a number of options are under review, eg Housing Association, arms length company, PFI, etc.

The stock option appraisal is a major task due for completion by April 2004.

GREG GARNER

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL - RESOURCES

Personnel

There are a number of key issues affecting staff being actively pursued. We are working towards the appointment of a new Chief Executive, with interviews planned for 4 and 5 August.

A revised absence policy and procedures has been produced and will be considered by the Resources Review Panel on 24 July. I am confident that the adoption of these policies and procedures will lead to a reduction in staff absence.

Final preparations are being made for the Council's assessment in October for the Investors in People award.

Members Services

In addition to the induction day for new councillors, training has been provided in Development Control, use of lap tops ethics and probity. A one-day workshop for newly elected councillors and training in dealing with the media (for Executive Councillors) has been provided.

A detailed report will go to the Resources Review Panel on 24 July, covering the facilities available to members and will look at how these may be improved. To make sure members are aware of the tools available to help them, a booklet will be circulated shortly setting out the wide range of facilities.

Emerging technology continues to play a large part in making members more effective. I, therefore, intend to arrange for the Council to pay the monthly rental costs of Broadband or suitable alternative for all Executive members. Those Councillors themselves would meet installation costs, which is in line with the current arrangement for the installation of second telephone lines. The rental costs can be met from within existing budgets.

A report on the possible use of Broadband technology for all Councillors will go to a future meeting of the Corporate Resources Review Panel.

Financial Services Unit

The Financial Services Unit have been focussing on the closure of the Council's accounts for 2002/03 and, with this completed, the production of the Annual Statement of Accounts are before Council for approval tonight.

In addition, the Unit is gearing up for the budget monitoring exercise which is being undertaken now that we are three months into 2003/04. This information will be key in ascertaining our financial performance so far this year.

Revenue Services Unit

The collection rates for Council Tax and NNDR are monitored monthly. To date, we have been consistently ahead of target for each.

New external bailiffs have been recently appointed to recover Council Tax and NNDR arrears. Initial indicators are that they are being very successful.

A new external debt collection agent has been appointed to collect some of the older sundry debt but with limited success. This was expected because of the nature and age of the debts involved.

The Income, Rents and Control section are concentrating on improving the Direct Debit service by moving towards the implementation of 'paperless' Direct Debit. Once introduced, this will enable us to take instructions over the telephone or via the Internet making the service far more accessible and flexible and lead to an increased take up off DD with beneficial effects on the Council's income.

Information Systems Unit

A new performance management Intranet site will be launched on Monday. It will provide a central access point for all Performance Indicators monitored by TDBC.

We are negotiating with our telephone switch supplier to purchase outright the units at Deane House and Priory Depot. This will cost £3,350 as opposed to the existing annual rental of £5,600.

A new air conditioning unit is being purchased for the machine room, the current units are underpowered and we are seeing problems due to the hardware getting close to over heating in the warm weather we have experienced.

Benefits Section

Our first quarter performance for new and renewal claims puts us in the top quartile. Because of the transfer of change of circumstances to the Supporting People Team, our performance dipped on this BVP1. We expect to bring this back as the year progresses. Recruitment of extra staff recommended by the BV Plan is continuing. The Investigation Team is exceeding its target for sanctions under the SAFE scheme and a new anti fraud and prosecution strategy will be presented for Member approval at the RRP on 24 July, when a breakdown of targets and achievement will be given.

Service Support Group

The main issues within the Service Support Unit are Somerset Direct (the impact on reception and switchboard) and the future of the Old Municipal Buildings, widening the use of GIS across all units a preparation for internal restructuring.

Somerset Direct

By the time of this meeting, members will have had an opportunity for briefing on this.

TERRY HALL

COUNCIL MEETING - 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS LEWIN-HARRIS - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Community Planning

The draft Taunton Deane Community Strategy 'our place our Future' was agreed at the meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership in June and is before you as a separate agenda item with a recommendation that it be adopted by this Council.

The Community Strategy and Action Plan for West Deane and the Brendons was also presented to the same meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership. This Strategy was widely commended and endorsed by the partnership. The wide ranging consultation process that has led to the production of this Strategy has been led by a community partnership with active support from officers off local agencies, with a locally appointed community agent to coordinate the process. The Strategy has been developed under six themes: Housing Health and Community, Economy, Sports Arts and Recreation, Children and Young People, Environment and Coordination and Communication and the action plan, which is divided into actions for 'now' 'soon' (2004-05) and later (2006+) details the way forward.

Work is now underway on developing a Community Strategy for the Wellington area and a stakeholders' meeting is scheduled to take place on 22 July.

Crime and Disorder Strategy

The first Update to the Taunton Deane Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy 2002 - 2005 is just about complete now. The action sheets have been updated and statistics to show whether we are on course to meet our targets have now been collated. The Update and introductory overall summary should be launched and ready for distribution by the middle of July.

Neighbourhood and Parish Wardens

I have been impressed by the value that both the local communities and the police now put on the work done by the Parish and Neighbourhood Wardens. Their uniformed presence on the streets reassures the local community and they have the time to build up relationships in that community and develop a fund of local knowledge which is most valuable. They are the eyes and ears, not only of the police but also of the local authority and I am convinced that they have an important role to play in helping to improve the quality of life in the communities they serve as well as reducing crime and fear of crime.

Future funding for these schemes is still under consideration and we are working closely with partners in the Crime and Disorder Partnership to idn the best way forward.

Local Democracy Week

Local Democracy Week, this year, is from 13 to 19 October and the theme is 'Listening to Tomorrows voters'. The idea is to focus on young people aged 13 - 19, with a view to holding events to attract their interest in local government. We have, in Taunton Deane, one of the youngest Councillors in the country and this gives us an ideal opportunity to engage

with new voters and those who will soon be new voters to explain to them what local government is about, why it is relevant to them and what difference they can make.

JOANNA LEWIN-HARRIS

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, on Wednesday, 6 August 2003, at 6.00 pm.

Present: The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Allgrove)
Councillors Beaven, Bishop, Bowrah, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Bryant, Miss Cavill, Croad, Davies, Denington, Edwards, Floyd, Garner, Gill, Guerrier, Hall, Hayward, Henley, House, Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Ligo, Meikle, Morrell, Mrs Nixon, Paul, Ms Peppard, Phillips, Prior-Sankey, Ms Priscott, Slattery, Mrs Smith, Stuart-Thorn, Trollope, Vail, Watson, Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams and Mrs Wilson

1. Apologies

The Mayor (Councillor Govier), Councillors Mrs Biscoe, Bone, N Cavill, C A Cluff, Mrs Cluff, Durdan, Mrs Jones, Mullins, Murphy and Weston..

2. Freedom of the Borough

The Community Leadership Review Panel had considered recommending the Council to grant the Freedom of the Borough to 40 Commando Royal Marines.

The appropriate legislation allowed a Borough Council to admit “persons of distinction and persons who have in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the city, borough or royal borough” as Honorary Freeman.

The conferring of the title of Honorary Freeman was the highest honour that a Council of a Borough could bestow.

Under the terms of the Constitution any grant of freedom must be made by Council on the recommendation of the Panel.

40 Commando had been based in Taunton Deane for 20 years and during that time they had made a tremendous contribution to the life of the local community. They had also continued a long tradition of the Services being associated with the area. It was felt, therefore, that the time was now right to recognise their presence in the area by granting them the Freedom of the Borough.

It was therefore unanimously recommended by the Panel that the Freedom of the Borough be granted to 40 Commando Royal Marines in recognition of their service to the Taunton Deane community at a Special Council meeting on 8 September 2003.

RESOLVED that the recommendation of the Community Leadership Review Panel be agreed and the Freedom of the Borough be granted to 40 Commando Royal Marines in recognition of their service to the Taunton Deane community at a Special Council meeting on 8 September 2003.

3. Somerset Direct

Somerset Direct was a Government sponsored Invest to Save Budget Project designed to improve the handling of enquiries by the public to all Somerset Councils. The Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) was funding 75% of initial project costs but not any ongoing funds.

Each partner had now been asked to commit to the benefits, savings and costs of the project to allow the County Council to sign contracts with suppliers on behalf of the Partnership so that the Council could proceed to live operations.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) a Supplementary Estimate from General Fund Reserves of a maximum of £84,638 be agreed;
- (b) the Somerset Direct Project be adopted and Somerset County Council be authorised to sign contracts with suppliers on behalf of this Council and the Partnership;
- (c) a further report be submitted to the Resources Review Panel with full details of design and costing for a remodelled Reception area.

4. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the item numbered 7 on the agenda because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

5. Appointment of Chief Executive

RESOLVED that the recommendation of the Appointments Sub Committee be agreed and Penny James be appointed as the Council's Chief Executive.

(The meeting ended at 6.49 pm)

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a Special Meeting of the Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, on Monday 8 September 2003, at 6.30pm.

Present: The Mayor (Councillor Govier), The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Allgrove)
Councillors Beaven, Mrs Biscoe, Bishop, Bowrah, Mrs Bradley, Miss Cavill, N Cavill, C Cluff, Mrs Cluff, Davies, Durdan, Edwards, Floyd, Garner, Gill, Guerrier, Hall, Hayward, Henley, Hindley, House, Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Lisgo, Meikle, Paul, Phillips, Prior-Sankey, Ms Priscott, Trollope, Vail, Watson, Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams and Mrs Wilson

The Mayor welcomed Lt Col Richard Watts, Commanding Officer, 40 Commando Royal Marines.

1. Apologies

Councillors Bone, Mrs Bryant, Croad, Denington, Mrs Jones, Mullins, Stuart-Thorn and Weston.

2. Freedom of the Borough – 40 Commando Royal Marines

On the motion of Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Henley it was RESOLVED:-

(1) That the Honorary Freedom of the Borough be conferred upon 40 Commando Royal Marines, together with the title, privilege, honour and distinction of marching through the streets of the Borough of Taunton Deane on all ceremonial occasions with Bayonets Fixed, Colours Flying and Bugles Sounding.

(2) That a certificate of Admission to the Honorary Freedom be signed by the Mayor and Chief Executive and be presented to 40 Commando Royal Marines.

The Certificate of Admission was read by the Mayor, Councillor Govier.

The Mayor congratulated Lieutenant Colonel Watts.

Lieutenant Colonel Watts addressed the Council and thanked it for bestowing the Freedom.

(The meeting ended at 7.12 pm)

COUNCIL MEETING - 14 OCTOBER 2003

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL **COUNCILLOR WILLIAMS – LEADER OF THE EXECUTIVE**

1. Leisure Trust - Virement

The original date for the commencement of the new leisure trust, which is to be called Tone Leisure, was October 2003. This allowed a nine-month implementation period which could result in maximising savings during the set up year. As the project has progressed the following issues have caused some delays.

- The transfer of leases on Blackbrook, Wellsprings and Castle
- Complications surrounding the most appropriate form of trust following the Governments' latest proposals
- Some general slippage due to the volume of work/impact of other corporate projects

As a result, the project team and external leisure and legal advisors have recommended that the start dated should now be 1 January 2004. The financial impact of this change is £60,000 although this can be funded from within the existing approved budget.

The Executive have considered this matter and agree that the start date should be revised in accordance with the recommendation of our advisors.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that £60,000 be vired from the Partial Exemption VAT Reserve to the Leisure Trust set up budget, subject to the successful completion of the scheduled VAT inspection in September 2003.

Councillor J R Williams

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR WILIAMS – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

May I take this opportunity of welcoming Penny James as our new Chief Executive to this our first formal Full Council since officially having taken up the position only three weeks ago. We have many challenges ahead and I look forward to meeting these with the sound advice and guidance that has been amply demonstrated to date and secure in the knowledge this will continue in the future. Much has changed since 1 May and, I suspect, will continue to change as we evolve to meet the challenges referred to above, but it is a credit to our Officers that these changes are absorbed and implemented without visible loss of service to our customers, the public at large.

I was particularly proud that we were able to offer the Freedom of the Borough to 40 Commando Royal Marines on the 8 September and it was a wonderful to see them exercise that freedom the following day when they marched through the town, it was a magnificent sight. Also gratifying was the public support for the event with the pavements filled to overflowing to watch the band and Marines march past. A memorable occasion indeed.

Overview

There is much happening in Taunton Deane at present, and the high level of activity is consuming much member and officer time. , The major initiatives are the Vision for Taunton process, Urban Extension Study, analysis of the Local Plan Inspectors report, relocation of the livestock market, redevelopment of the High Street area, completion of Wellsprings Sports Centre, means of reducing traffic congestion and improve public transport, housing stock transfer, setting up the Leisure Trust and implementing the Licensing Act. At Wellington we are pursuing proposals to regenerate Cornhill and to achieve preservation of the all important listed Tonedale Mill Buildings and remaining original machinery. Not least we have commenced the budget setting process with the inevitable grim news from our Head of Finance that we are spending beyond our means. Most of these important initiatives will no doubt be covered by the relevant Portfolio Holder but I will comment on a few.

Terence O'Rourke Study

Work is proceeding apace with design work for the urban renewal and regeneration, urban extension study, transport review, and now the town centre design encompassing the High Street proposed redevelopment and proposals for a cultural area centred on the Castle Green area. Initial plans for the urban renewal and regeneration have been presented to Councillors and our Partners and in general these have been well received. The proposals are imaginative and exciting and augur well for the future economic

development of Taunton Deane. I must however, temper any exuberance for these plans with the health warning that “deliverability” will be the key to success, or failure, and for this we are only the enablers, we must use all our influence and powers to bring our present and prospective partners to the table to ensure delivery.

The proposals are the subject of public consultation later this month and it will be very interesting to receive feedback from this exercise.

With regard to deliverability, our major partners, South West of England Regional Development Agency are carrying out consultation as to how best to progress the development of Taunton and as a preliminary stage are proposing a high-level Advisory Board be formed comprising key public and private organizations and interests. I will know more about these proposals following a meeting on 21 October 2003 to explore possibilities in readiness for completion of the masterplanning process. I am cautious about these proposals until more detail is known as I would not wish to see the development of Taunton as proposed removed from the control of this Council.

Wellsprings Sports Centre

I am pleased to report that the works are proceeding well and completion by Christmas 2003 looks feasible at this stage, I believe we are now past the worst in terms of the budget and it does look as though we should be able to achieve completion within the sum already budgeted. The Wellsprings Steering Group were asked to consider an alternative name to that of Wellsprings but it was decided that the name had achieved public recognition and despite the problems to date, it was best left as existing. We look forward to this excellent sports facility opening early 2004 to provide much needed facilities for the residents of North Taunton and around.

Station Road

On the 29 September we had a very informative and useful joint meeting TDBC/SCC on Taunton’s Transport Strategy which was open to all Councillors and covered a whole range of initiatives to reduce congestion in Taunton. Of special significance was the proposal to carry out improvements to Station Road/Priory Bridge Road junction and from the traffic flow figures presented we certainly have a workable scheme available to us that will ease the misery of the many, many, travellers that are caught in the unacceptably long queues that presently occur. This also has to be good news for the businesses in the area that have suffered terribly because of the congestion. The detailed proposals should be presented to the Strategic Planning and Transportation Panel at their next meeting 20 November with implementation hopefully early 2004.

In addition to proposals for Station Road many other useful initiatives were discussed such as sharing of town centre surveillance information to allow monitoring of traffic, progress on Silk Mills, the Inner Relief Road, action on traffic pinch points and ensuring primary routes into and through town are prioritized for maintenance. It was accepted that

“school runs” were a problem in terms of increasing congestion but “Solomon” was not present to provide a solution! We are still working on this one.

The inner relief road, although subject to a planning application already lodged, is, I understand, the subject of further in depth consideration as to its route and its viability is under scrutiny in respect of the overall town planning exercise being carried out by Terence O’Rourke.

SWARMMS, A358 Dualling

It is imperative, in my view, that we achieve the dualling of the A358, this road is the most highly trafficked in Somerset with the exception of the M5 motorway. We need this road upgraded to achieve a bypass for Henlade, resolve the problems with junction 25 and provide for the economic development of Taunton. I ask for all Councillors to promote this and persuade Parish Councils and businesses that they should actively participate in lobbying the South West Regional Assembly to promote the necessity of upgrading this route. It may be thought that the upgrading of the A303 through the AONB area of the Blackdowns would be better to relieve the A358. This, in my view, is seriously flawed, the traffic using the A358 does so because it is the best route for their destination and this traffic will continue to grow, we must therefore seek to upgrade the A358 to avoid the continuing misery presently experienced by residents along the route and travellers alike.

The Budget Process 2004/05

The process has started and we are looking at a serious gap in available finances against the requirements even to maintain a standstill budget. We have started with one hand tied behind our back because of the huge amount stripped out of reserves to support the 2003/04 budget. I objected to this at the time but to no avail, we will now have particularly hard choices to make in order to balance our budget to make up this loss and develop services further for the people of Taunton Deane, as they have the right to expect.

To achieve this we must examine all services we presently provide and ask the following simple questions;

Do we need to continue providing this?

If no, consider ways of doing it better and more economically.

This simple process will highlight some services that we may be able to reduce, amend or simply not provide, I hope we will have the support of all Councillors, Officers and partners in our efforts to provide a balanced budget which inevitably will mean some hard choices to come.

Councillor John Williams
Leader of the Council

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BISHOP – PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION

Taunton Deane Local Plan Inspector's Report

The Inspector's report was received by the Council on Friday 19th September. It is approximately 920 pages in length, and came in both paper and electronic formats.

All TDBC Members were advised of our receipt of the report and a news release was sent out to the media on 24th September. On Thursday 25th, the report was also made available on the Council's website. In addition, letters have been sent to those who have made comments on the Plan during its two Deposit stages.

Because of the size of the Report, and to save resources, copies have not been sent automatically to Members or parish and town councils. We are hoping that by making the report available on the website, people can use the technology to access and read the report. They can then copy those parts that are of most interest to them. Copies are being made available to Members or local councils on demand, although where possible we are doing this in the form of CD Roms rather than on paper. A briefing for Members and local councils has also been arranged.

The public can access the report on the website, and can view paper copies at the Deane House reception, public libraries and the two community offices in the Borough. Copies are also available for purchase, at £30 for paper copies and £5 for CD's.

We are publishing the report before having the chance to check it, which we will now do. Where we find it to be "a crucial lack of clarity in the meaning of any statement, or an omission" which we consider needs to be resolved, the Council has two months from the date of receipt of the report to raise such issues through the Planning Inspectorate.

Local Development Frameworks (LDF)

A bill is being published later this month setting out further details of LDF's, and all LA's will have to put in place a Local Development Scheme (LDS) by the end of 2004.

The new concept for LDF's require Community involvement, speeding up and monitoring the process with an Annual Report. It is designed to minimise the Examination period and produce good quality, **binding** reports..

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 Housing – Influencing the size, type and affordability of Housing

The Strategic Planning and Transportation and Economic Development Panel discussed the consultation papers at their last meeting, and we shall be forwarding their views to the ODPM.

The aim of the proposed change is a policy framework that will secure more affordable housing as part of the timely delivery of agreed housing numbers. The proposed change emphasises that the affordable housing sought should not make development unviable. Whilst any changes that increase the number of affordable housing units are welcome, I do not believe that planning, alone, can secure the number of affordable houses needed to meet the demand.

Transportation Issues

The receipt of the SWARMMS report has been delayed and is expected to be received later this month. The Highways Agency will publish its findings on the A358 and the A303 and the Regional Assembly will be given six weeks to respond to the Minister on the proposals.

First Great Western in conjunction with the Strategic Rail Authority, Somerset County Council and First Somerset & Avon, is improving bus / rail links at Taunton. They have invested in new interchange facilities at Taunton railway station to provide a covered, comfortable and fully accessible route from rail to road to transform public transport between the rail network and communities on the bus route to Minehead. I attended the official opening and was very impressed with the facilities provided – Members, when in the area, should see for themselves the facility, on the South side of the station which will be welcomed by users visiting the area. I was informed that a planning application will soon be submitted to make the North side of the station more user friendly.

We have agreed a Congestion Protocol (The ‘Seven Point Action Plan’) and as a result of the good working relationship between the Deane and the County we are beginning to solve some of the problems. Members will be pleased to learn that consultants have come up with two options to solve the problems associated with the traffic movements at the Station Road / Priory Road junction. A decision will be made on one of the options in the near future and it is anticipated that work will start sometime next year...

A planning application has been submitted for the Inner Relief Road and the Council will be making comments on the application to the County Council, who will be responsible for making the decision on their application.

Councillor Cliff Bishop

COUNCIL MEETING - 14th OCTOBER 2003

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR BRADLEY – LEISURE, ART & CULTURE

1. Visual Arts and Crafts Improvements in Taunton Deane 2003

Terence O'Rourke are currently working on a draft Masterplan for the Tangier and Firepool development sites in Taunton Town Centre. This includes a cultural quarter with stakeholders and key players being drawn into the process. With the creative industries being one of the few expanding sectors of the economy, the arts in their multitude of forms are now recognised as powerful regenerative tools. The Vision for Taunton identified the need to maintain a strong sense of place and identified Castle Green as a landmark public square, providing a focus for a lively Cultural Quarter.

The consultants also identified Hunts Court as a landmark building in a significant location. A regional visual arts centre could create a significant flagship for creating an attractive cultural quarter around Castle Green. This is reflected in the policies contained in the Taunton Deane Arts Plan 2003-2005, the Partnership Agreement 2003/04 between Arts Council England, South West and the Somerset Local Authorities, the SCC Strategy to address property issues in Culture and Heritage adopted in 2003 and the Boyden Report to the SCC.

The meeting of the Health & Leisure Review Panel on 2nd October was attended by key stakeholders from the Somerset Art Gallery Trust, SCAT, the County Council, the Somerset Natural History and Archaeological Society and the joint Working Party on the Future of the County Museum, the Archives and Record office and an Art Gallery for Somerset who all made contributions. In recognition that the way forward is through partnership working with political backing it is RECOMMENDED that:

The Council in exercise of its responsibility for the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Deane, support a step-by-step approach to a cultural quarter around Castle Green starting with Hunts Court; such support to include the formation of a Consortium or Working Party to steer the development.

Councillor Mrs. Dilly Bradley

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS. BRADLEY - LEISURE, ARTS AND CULTURE

Wellsprings Update

Cllr David Gill and I have been making regular site visits and work is progressing well. The Centre Manager James Curry is now taking bookings for the new year.

Sports Development

This team makes a huge contribution to our corporate priorities not just in health improvement but also in reducing crime and disorder and the social inclusion agenda. The project undertaken in Lyngford over the Summer really helped divert some of the more challenging youngsters which has impressed the Police with whom we work

Wellington Sports Centre and Blackbrook both received excellent results in the Camps Ofsted assessments; the Blackbrook Afterschool club achieved accreditation by the Somerset County Council and there was a 25% increase on camp places for children with individual needs.

Health development projects included walks; flexercise, sickness referral programme, the Active Retirement programme, Target tennis and G.P. referral sessions. The Cardiac Rehab. Programme is now awaiting referrals from Musgrove Park Hospital.

There were also the Western Counties Youth Games and the first Duathlon held at Queens College and that is not all.

Wellington

The ski slope has now been landscaped and the surplus soil used for a BMX track. This has involved the young in its construction and I would like to thank Cllr Govier for all his support and input over this project. I would also like to congratulate Cllr Bone for the efficiency with which he dealt with the skate boarding equipment which is now in use in Wiveliscombe.

Work is at last starting on the Rockwell Green Pavilion. My only regret is that the previous administration did not get to grips with pulling down additional funds but chose instead to reduce the specification for the building.

Wellington in Bloom are to be congratulated too on their excellent results. I also attended a most powerful and moving production of "Oh What a Lovely War".

Parks

The Flower Show in Vivary Park was as professional as ever but suffered from the extreme heat. Vivary Park was also the venue for the Big Green Fun Day in August. This was well attended and gave the children of Taunton Deane the chance to learn about wildlife and

environmental issues in an engaging and enjoyable way. Topics covered included food production, energy conservation, green transport, waste recycling and much more. Art in the Park; a series of children's arts activity sessions in parks across the Deane will now develop into a Saturday Art Club in Victoria Park.

Playing Pitch Strategy

This has been reported to Members showing a need for more pitches for mini football played by primary aged children., Further refinement for Taunton and Wellington is needed to ascertain the scale of localised over/under provision.

Green Spaces Strategy

The Council is developing a strategy on its greens paces that will be completed before Christmas. It is broadly structured as follows:
Purpose and benefits of parks in the policy context of national regional and local policies impacting on parks.
An audit of local provision - quantity and quality
Consultation on local provision and use, all resulting eventually in an action plan (another one!)

The Arts

The Somerset Arts Conference took place on 13th September and the first Deane Arts Form on 16th September. The latter was attended by 30 representatives of local voluntary and professional arts organisation. The agenda covered visual and performing arts and will be the start of a regular dialogue with the arts community, providing net-working and consultation opportunities for the council with the arts community. I also got to one of the 10 Parishes Art Exhibitions in Milverton which attracted a steady stream of visitors on a Sunday afternoon.

The first consultation meeting held by Terence O'Rourke with stakeholders about a cultural quarter around the Castle Green was very positive. We are still pursuing options with the Somerset Arts Gallery Trust to transform Hunts Court into a contemporary visual arts centre (if it can be secured). In particular I would like to voice my appreciation for the immense amount of energy and hard work that our Arts Officer Caroline Corfe has put into this matter along with all her other work.

The Future

In all our strategies and projects our biggest task is communicating what we are trying to achieve and whatever it may be that it can only be done in partnership with the residents of the Deane, other organisations and funding bodies.

Councillor Mrs. Dilly Bradley

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BRYANT - COMMUNICATIONS

Recent changes at the top, meant that we said good bye to Stephen Fletcher who was extremely supportive of the role communications plays in informing our staff, partners and of course our customers and in delivering the Council's services. We welcome our new Chief Executive, Penny James, who although she is no stranger to the Council has been forging new relationships with our corporate partners and with the media – all of this is an important part of the Council's public relations.

I am pleased to report that the work being done on a Communications Strategy for the Council is progressing well, and we are in the process of consulting with staff and aim to take the draft strategy to the Review Board in December for members input. It is intended that the Communications Strategy will be a corporate document that will support the Corporate Plan and it will play an integral role in all aspects of the Council's policymaking and service delivery.

A couple of weeks ago the Council's 'new look' web site went live. The site has more interactive features so that users can quickly find what is important to them – this has already won praise from its visitors, one responded, "this looks very smart now and easy to navigate. I use the site quite often and appreciate the difference" and another "that's much better Taunton Deane, the style is a great improvement." It meets a number of access standards including a text only version.

Although it contained a few disappointments the Local Plan Inspector's report on the whole was very positive with a high percentage of the proposals being accepted. Communications will play a vital role in presenting accurate information to the public in an understandable way.

We have ongoing commitments to a range of partners as well as the everyday concern that our message gets out about the council's aims and achievements. The Freedom of the Borough was a successful major event and we had close liaison with the national media. We are continuing to work closely with our partners to deliver the public consultation phase of the Taunton Vision to the whole community.

Consultation on budget setting is ongoing – the public are reacting well to our "What matters to you" campaign, we have already had a good number of responses. The Deane Dispatch will carry budget consultation, updates and reports back to the community on the difference their input is making. This will help us meet CPA standards. The next issue of the Deane Dispatch will be published during the first week of December.

Gwyneth Bryant

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CAVILL – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PROPERTY AND TOURISM

Norton Fitzwarren Trading estate

With redevelopment of this area there is a need to relocate some of the existing businesses in order to accommodate the new bridge line and to allow space for the planned new building of units. The present facilities are generally low cost per sq ft.

Many of the businesses currently located in this area employ a considerable number of people, and in some cases are essential service providers. There is at present a shortage of readily available accommodation of the sort required.

Rob Jackson, who is our SAAS officer, has been contacting all rural areas looking for facilities that would fit the bill. Some of the businesses will relocate within the existing site, others won't. This is an ongoing concern as the development of the St Modwen site progresses.

Lyons report

Sir Michael Lyons has been charged with a project to assess the feasibility of the relocation of some 20000 people, who are currently employed in the Civil Service and public sector organisations in London and the SE. His report is with the Treasury Dept at the moment. I believe that it is of a positive nature regarding ourselves and that Taunton would be reasonably well placed. We have made a written presentation to Sir Michael also, SWRA and SWRDA have suggested that major relocations should be into PUAs. A substantial relocation of this type to Taunton would be an important catalyst to our urban renewal programme. The benefits of relocating a public sector activity to us will not be confined to the additional jobs and their multiplier effect, but will be a significant boost to investor confidence and strengthen our urban regeneration programme.

When this report is issued, it will give us a time scale for our redevelopment work, in order to accommodate relocations. The time scale is unlikely to be drawn out.

Market relocation

Land has now been secured, in the vicinity of Jct 26, by Taunton Market Auctioneers. At the same time TMA have continued to draw up and cost plans for a new market, in order to progress the next move which would be a full planning application. Taunton Deane valuers have commissioned an independent valuation of our Firepool site, bearing in mind the Terence O'Rourke proposals. In conjunction with the RDA, this valuation will enable us to plan our schedule for redevelopment at the Firepool site.

NB recent stock sales through Taunton Market on a Saturday are at such high levels that the market was rated third highest market in the country for total through-put. This of course translates to very substantial banking by the Auctioneers in Taunton, with all attendant economic

benefits.

Norman P Cavill

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

In the last few months I have started to appreciate fully the tasks that are ahead. The Environmental Policy and Services portfolio is quite diverse but I am starting to better understand the portfolio and feel that I am developing a strong working relationship with the departments. I thank them for their time and effort and their prompt response to my requests.

Environmental Health

The best value review took place in the summer and was concluded in September. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in particular Gill Knellar as the work involved was immense and the time given should be commended. The whole department should be congratulated on the result.

Waste Management

Recycling for flats is being progressed and I thank all those Councillors who responded to my call for assistance in highlighting flats that could use this service.

In addition consideration is being given to increasing glass collection across the Deane and the financial implications of this are presently under consideration.

We do need to make sure we maximise all opportunities to remind people about the recycling service. I am conscious that not as many bins are being put out for collection now and would encourage all Councillors with this service in their area to encourage use within their wards.

Litter/Street Scene

The Litter Hotline will be implemented soon and the extra funds will also lead to an additional member of staff for the street-cleaning programme.

I have also requested that a report is prepared to introduce Litter fines in Taunton Deane and this report will be progressed in due course. This needs careful consideration and we need to look carefully at the towns and cities where it has been successfully implemented already so we can best assess the results and cost. I would hope that those that litter our environment would take heed of the warning and therefore the need would not arise for this scheme however increasingly I doubt that.

We are also giving consideration to an Environmental Warden scheme to operate within the Deane using volunteers to be our eyes so that we need to properly maximise our

cleaning resources and find the areas of real concern this is all part of our aim to keep Taunton Deane Crisp and Clean. This idea will be progressed in due course but initial discussions have been very positive and I am convinced there are already sufficient individuals that care about their community enough to become a warden.

River Tone

I wish to go on record at Full Council and thank Mike Rigby at Cheddon Recycling and waste for his assistance in cleaning the River Tone. However this was only a short-term measure and I am working with the Environment agency and others to try and realign funding and introduce a specialist firm which will clean the tone on behalf of the River Tone partnership. Very much a working group not a talking shop, action being the aim. This is being progressed

Public Toilets

I have request a review take place of all Public Toilets in the Deane so I can better assess the needs of the communities these facilities are in. The North Street Toilets in Wellington are a priority and it is my aim to either refurbish or probably rebuild this facility. It is difficult to imagine how they could have ever have been left for so long and allowed to get into such a state.

Out of Hours Noise

This is an area, which needs careful consideration. I have asked for a report to be prepared and this will better assess the options that are open to us. I am fully aware from correspondence that this needs addressing. We will however take action against any individual who is creating a true nuisance.

Flooding

The single property flood fund is now in place and we have had a number of applications for grants which are being assessed at the moment.

Councillor Mark J Edwards

COUNCIL MEETING - 14 OCTOBER 2003

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL **COUNCILLOR GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES**

1. Updated Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plans

The Executive have given consideration to the updated Housing Strategy and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plans documents which will contribute towards establishing the Council's baseline position for the HRA stock option appraisal process. This matter has also been considered in detail by the Housing Review Panel at its meeting on 17 September 2003.

Since these documents were produced last year, a number of issues have emerged or the circumstances relating to a range of existing policies and procedures have changed. It has been necessary therefore to modify and update the documents to reflect the latest positions.

During the next financial year it is proposed to revise the two documents and submit them to the Government Office for the South West to seek approval under the "Fit for Purpose" criteria which, if achieved, will reduce the need for the Council to write detailed plans for housing each year.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that the updated Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan documents be adopted.

Councillor G Garner

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES

Within my summary for Full Council in July, I explained how the day to day activities of the various housing departments were continuing with general business as usual and gave examples of recent decisions made.

I also advised that following a number of recent government initiatives Housing will be required to undertake considerable additional work outside of the day to day operations. There are two tasks in particular that are both considerable in workload and far-reaching in impact on the housing and tenants of TDBC. Both tasks must have the bulk of the preliminary work completed by April 2004.

The two projects in question are:

1. Housing Stock Transfer Options
2. Housing Best Value Review

1. What is Housing Stock Transfer Options and why are we doing it?

Stock Options is where a stock holding council undertakes an appraisal on how it delivers its service taking account of its financial position. The purpose of this is to determine what additional investment may be required in our stock, whether we can continue to manage the housing stock and to consider other available options.

The Government has requested that all stock holding councils carry out this review by July 2005. Following a financial appraisal completed a year ago, indications then were that we would start to run at a loss in the next four to five years, however a more recent evaluation now suggests that the decision to transfer may be more marginal than first thought.

During the next six months, there will be a great deal of consultation and discussion with tenants. A steering group has been formed comprising 4 Members, 4 Officers and 4 Tenants together with representatives of specialist interest groups. Specialist advisors have also been commissioned to work with Members, staff and tenants to help guide us through the evaluation to help us arrive at the best possible decision for all concerned. A required feature of this process will be regular updates in an open and transparent manner.

As a council, we have decided to undertake this appraisal alongside the Housing Best Value Review and have this exercise completed by April 2004. The results of the Stock Options appraisal will be put before Full Council in May 2004.

In summary, I believe the stock options work undertaken in the next six months will be critical as we consider the future of our housing stock.

2. Housing Services Best Value Review

A comprehensive review of all Housing Services commenced in October 2002. At the start of the review, 26 distinct service areas were identified and an initial assessment of them was carried out to determine if there were service quality issues that needed to be addressed.

Following this initial work, the detailed scope of the review was agreed by the Housing Review Panel, concluding that the review needed to be focussed on three principle cross service areas –

- Customer services
- Decent Homes (in all housing sectors)
- Capacity Building (ensuring the systems are in place to ensure good management, monitoring and decision making)

A number of significant projects and reports that will contribute to the review process include: the mock inspection report produced by HACAS Chapman Hendy at the start of the review, a report on the Housing IT system carried out by Acclaim Consulting, work on a Communications Strategy for the Community Services Directorate, the completion of a major satisfaction survey of all council tenants, the production of new strategies on Homelessness and Private Sector Renewal and the HRA Stock Options Appraisal process. A draft initial improvement plan has already been drawn up identifying over 100 potential service improvements.

An officer in the role of Best Value Project Co-ordinator has been seconded to work with David Woolnough, Community Services Policy Unit Manager, who is leading the review.

A report updating progress on the review and providing a project plan for the remaining work up until the end of April 2004 will be provided to the Housing Review Panel in November.

Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL - RESOURCES

1 E-GOVERNMENT

We have submitted our IEG 3 report to Government, which shows we are on target to meet Government objectives, if funding, is maintained.

In July District Audit undertook a review of our progress towards the 2005 E Government target. They reported as follows “ The results of our questionnaire show that Taunton Deane has made good progress on e-government. Its comparative position against other authorities on all of the areas reviewed shows it to be in a strong position”

2 MEMBERS SERVICES

Since May there has been a considerable increase in the number of serving Councillors in full time employment or who have other major commitments. It has become clear that we need to look afresh at how they can be best assisted to meet the requirements of being Councillors. The Resources Review Panel will be considering a report at its meeting in November, which will look at ways in which Councillors with these competing demands can be better supported.

By the date of this meeting the Independent Members Allowance Panel will have held its first meeting to consider its recommendations for members allowances for 2004/5. For the first time the Panel will be making recommendations in respect of Parish Council Allowances

3 FINANCIAL SERVICES

The Financial Services Unit have been liaising with our external auditors over the closure of the Council’s accounts for 2002/3 and have started work in earnest on the 2004/5-budget process. This has entailed meeting all managers within the Council and pulling together preliminary indications on future spending requirements. In addition we have hosted a visit from HM Customs and Excise following a recent VAT inspection

4 REVENUE SERVICES

The in year collection rates for Council Tax and NNDR, both of which are BVPIs, remained ahead of target at the end of the second quarter. This indicates we should achieve top quartile performance this year.

We are continuing to make inroads into the level of previous years arrears. I have decided not to fill the post of the in-house bailiff, who, at his own request, transferred to other work within the Council. His work will be contracted to our external bailiff who makes no charge to the Council for collection.

The IT Development Plan for Revenues providing a number of enhancements will be finalised during October. These enhancements to be introduced over the next two years will, improve collection rates, improve take up of direct debit and enable us to introduce the significant legislative changes coming into force over that period

5 INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The new Taunton Deane web site was successfully launched over the weekend 4/5th October. It provides improved use ability and accessibility to service information.

Changes to Housing Benefit regulations, commencing in October were implemented correctly on to the Benefits systems.

Major works have been completed in the machine room including air conditioning, power supply and accommodation changes to provide for the Somerset Direct Hardware

6 BENEFITS

The Benefit unit continues to perform in the top quartile for both new and renewal claims and improvements in performance have been made in adjusting benefit following a change in customer circumstances.

However absence through long term sickness and maternity leave is beginning to take their toll and achievement of local targets looks less certain.

Take up of benefit by those legitimately entitled to it has been greatly assisted by our new Welfare visiting officer.

7 FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS

In Quarter 2, the Investigation Team successfully prosecuted several claimants, including two persons whose combined fraud totalled nearly £30,000. Details of these fraud cases may be found on the Web Site.

Inspection of the Benefit Fraud unit is part of CPA and preparations are well underway in anticipation of this.

8 SOMERSET DIRECT

The Executive has had an initial presentation of proposals for a remodelled Reception area. The plans look very exciting and are currently being worked on to bring them to a position where they can be recommended to Full Council.

Work is also in progress in creating electronic data banks for the system. A Customer Service Manager is due to appointed shortly. Full scale planning for rehearsals is now taking place to get the service live by the target date of 1st April.

Terry Hall

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS. LEWIN – HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Consultation on Corporate Priorities

As I write this, the public consultation on our corporate priorities is nearly at an end and the response rate has been excellent. To date we have received over 1000 responses as compared with around 200 from a similar exercise last year carried out through the Deane Dispatch. The responses so far show a remarkable degree of consistency on the top two priorities on which we should focus next year: reducing traffic congestion and targeting anti-social behaviour. This consultation was carried out through the Somerset Influence Panel, with staff, on the website, and through various outlets such as sports centres, community centres, libraries etc. A special effort has been made to contact young people with a specially designed post card and again the feedback has been very encouraging. The full results of the consultation will be analysed and fed back to the Review Board and to members of the public in the December edition of Deane Dispatch.

Crime and Disorder Issues

I spent a Friday evening out with the police in Taunton and Wellington last month, and have already written about this in the Weekly Bulletin. Suffice it to say here that I was shocked by the violence that I witnessed and the experience has certainly influenced my thinking. I am not prepared to accept that it is the “norm” for street fighting to take place in Taunton on weekend evenings, and will be working through the Crime and Disorder Partnership to see what measures it may be possible to take to tackle this issue.

The Community Leadership Review Panel has recommended that proposals for a relocatable CCTV camera be taken forward and a bid to the Crime and Disorder Partnership for capital funding for this project is being prepared. Work on a protocol to determine the priorities for use of the camera is ongoing, and there is also a need to work with the County Council so that some of their structures can be used to mount a camera.

Community Planning

I attended a seminar at Wiltshire County Council a couple of weeks ago, and listened to a presentation by the Leader of Kent County Council. I quote his words:

“It must be recognised that of all the world’s major democracies, the United Kingdom government exacts the greatest degree of control over local government. Government has increasingly sought to drive up standards through an array of new legislation, regulations, guidelines, inspection regimes, financial bidding systems and central

specifications. This burden of bureaucracy and central control has sapped the initiative and enterprise of local councils and of those who work at the forefront of delivering public services”.

There was a similar theme to a presentation given by a representative of Somerset County Council’s Community Planning team at a meeting of Communities First in Rural Somerset in Bridgwater just a few days ago. The speaker described how a simple idea of finding out what people want and then working out how to deliver it (i.e. community planning) has been swamped by the massive change that has come about in the way the public sector is organised and the growing number of Non Departmental Public Bodies that we have to deal with. There is Government pressure for greater consistency and conformity that can lead to a tension between local and national targets. We have a complicated system of bidding for a plethora of initiatives and an increasing burden of inspection that has to be paid for. A multitude of strategies and partnerships often lead to confused priorities and get in the way of delivery.

The point was made that we have more information that we have ever had before and technically better means of engaging with the public, but the over-complicated structures make it difficult for the voluntary and community sector to participate and voter apathy is increasing.

Nonetheless this Council must strive to find a way through this maze and develop community strategies that have real meaning to local people. I do thank the members of the Community Planning team who are working on these. Current focus is on the Wellington area Community Plan and the Consultation Draft of the Blackdown Hills Community Strategy was brought to the last meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership.

We need to find ways to make the Local Strategic Partnership work more effectively. This means addressing the issue of funding. I am concerned that at the moment the Local Strategic Partnership is seen as Taunton Deane Borough Council’s project and we need to find ways of giving our partners more ownership. I believe this will make the partnership more effective. A review of membership is taking place with the aim of clarifying the relationship with other partners and partnerships and I want to encourage others to have more input into the agendas for the meetings and would like to hold some meetings at a venue other than the Deane House.

Joanna Lewin-Harris