

At a meeting of the Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday 15 October 2002 at 6.30pm.

Present: The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Govier)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Mrs Angus, Mrs Biscoe, Bone, Mrs Bradley, Bulgin, Croad, Cudlipp, Debenham, Denington, Eckhart, Escott, Farbus, Floyd, Guerrier, Hall, Henley, Mrs Hill, Horsley, House, Hunt, Lee, Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Lisgo, Meikle, Mrs Miller, Mullins, Murphy, R Parrish, Mrs Parrish, Partington, Paul, Miss Phippen, Slattery, Stone, Tolchard, Vail, Mrs Whitmarsh and Williams.

(The Council stood in silence in memory of the late Councillor Roy Squier).

1. Minutes
The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 23 July 2002, a copy having been sent to each Member were signed by the Deputy Mayor.
2. Apologies
The Mayor (Councillor Prior-Sankey), Councillors Bishop, Cavill, Edwards, Gill, Mrs Lippiatt, Tremethick and Warren.
3. Public Question Time
A representative of Friends of the Earth asked for the Council's support for the GMO Free Britain Campaign.

Councillor Horsley replied:

"I thank Taunton Friends of the Earth for letting me have notice of their intention to put a question to this council although they didn't actually specify what the question was.

To remind councillors, Policy Committee of TDBC on 25 November 1999 approved a recommendation concurring with the then Environmental Services Committee that we support a 5 year freeze on genetic engineering of crops. In addition the council also approved the following:-

- All suppliers to the council of food products to label clearly as to whether they contain GM ingredients
- The possibility of GM trials being licensed within the area of TD be recognised
- The release of gm organisms into the local environment be opposed as a precautionary principle
- The County Council stand in banning the growing of gm crops on their farms be supported

We also made clear at the time we had no resources to monitor or pursue this any further

We are three years on since then. We thank Taunton Friends of the Earth for letting us have their latest booklet “Now or Never” with an update on what has happened since with GM as casework evidence builds up about the problems of contamination and other risks that we may be setting in store for ourselves.

I am asking my colleague Melvyn Mullins to consider some of the proposals that you suggest in your booklet and bring it forward in the most appropriate manner. This could take the form of a motion to council or more likely a presentation by you to have your views aired and for your doubt shared with a wider public.”

4. Reports of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors

(a) **Leader of the Council (Councillor Horsley)**

(i) Councillor Williams asked the following question:-

I note the progress being made towards evaluating the viability of and best location for a new livestock market which could be in Taunton Deane or Sedgemoor because of the way the evaluation has been set up.

The Conservative Group would consider it a retrograde step if the livestock market were lost from Taunton Deane.

We would ask that our best endeavours are used to retain the market as it does have the potential of being a £30 million PA business which would be a major loss if re-located to Sedgemoor.

Please could an assurance be given that all possible will be done to ensure the retention of the market and, as it is acknowledged that a new market site is unlikely to be viable without assistance, that this assurance will cover financial support to provide a site or infrastructure as required.

Councillor Horsley replied:-

I thank Councillor Williams for notice of his question.

It is important that the council understands completely what the position is as far as the future of the livestock market is concerned.

In April 2000 the council entered into a 4 year lease with a possible extension for a further year with TMA. Simultaneously we jointly published a Statement of Mutual Understanding to relocate the livestock market within the lifetime of the lease. This was discussed and agreed by the council at the time. Discussions got under way, initiated by the market auctioneers themselves who began the search for a new site.

There followed the closure of the market arising from Foot and Mouth disease and all the upheaval that arose. This inevitably lead to a period of uncertainty about livestock markets which has only just begun to lift.

The TMA then approached TDBC in September 2001 with the suggestion of looking at opening a new market with lairage and other agricultural businesses to establish a rural business centre which would incorporate Taunton and Bridgwater livestock markets. The Executive discussed this idea on 25 November last year and agreed to go ahead with discussions to secure a viable and secure future for the market against the background of the impact of foot and mouth on markets.

Accordingly Taunton Deane Borough Council and Sedgemoor District Council in conjunction with TMA and support and funding from the RDA have employed consultants to look at the possibility of the provision of this centre between junctions 23 and 26. This work is still going on and it would be premature to come to any conclusions at this stage.

Of course we hope that this regional agricultural centre will be established within Taunton Deane. We have doubts about the figure that Councillor Williams has quoted as to what it is worth to the local economy. There is a tendency to exaggerate if it suits a particular political purpose. What is vital is that (a) it is financially viable in the longer term, (b) it does promote the wider aspects of business within the rural community and (c) that it is acceptable to the farming community at large. From everything we have heard so far, we believe that the Taunton and Bridgwater branches of the NFU are fully behind this joint initiative and that the RDA are supportive of it.

The farming community have made it quite clear to us that rationalisation may be the only way to survive and working with colleagues on a sub regional basis could be the oxygen that the market requires. The future of the Market cannot be dictated by TDBC alone, we must work with our partners to ensure a sustainable future.

(ii) **Report of Councillor Horsley**

The pace has not lessened over the summer months which are traditionally quiet. The Council has been involved in many discussions which are ongoing and this note is an attempt to brief you on these projects and other things.

It would be wrong of me not to express sorrow at the death of Roy Squier. He was a man of principle and integrity, if not always the most comfortable of colleagues to be with because of his tenacity and persistence to get the answers he wanted. His devotion to his tasks will be sadly missed in this Council. My thoughts and prayers go out to his wife and family.

WELLSPRINGS CENTRE

This sorry story continues. The report commissioned by us from Symonds revealed defects in the building and the Wellsprings Panel felt obliged to cancel the full council meeting scheduled for 22 August. Our hopes of completing the building this year were dashed because of the remedial work and associated costs.

We have now extended the Panel to include members from Somerset County Council and Ladymead School to help draw up plans which will (a) fund the cost of the completion and (b) ensure a proper process is carried out with full accountability and best value in mind. Members of the panel are now receiving a weekly update from the officers of progress in the negotiations. Sport England are working closely with us to help us bring the project to a successful conclusion.

The work by the District Auditor on the problems that this contract has caused us is to be welcomed and I hope it will enable us to identify any learning lessons. It certainly should assist the Health and Leisure Panel in conducting its own review into the project.

FUTURE OF THE LIVESTOCK MARKET

A report will be available in the next 6 weeks or so on the negotiations that have been taking place on the creation of a Regional Agricultural Business Centre which will incorporate a livestock market. The consultants have been asked to look at the suitability of Junctions 23, 24, 25 and 26 in turn.

It is unlikely that any of the options will be able to be funded by the private sector alone bearing in mind the strict requirements now needed since the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The RDA have funded the research into the feasibility of this exercise.

We very much hope that tourism and other economic goals will feature in the final outcome and recommendations which come before the council.

VISION FOR TAUNTON

This has been one of the most rewarding cross party and cross councils exercise I have ever taken part in. We have overcome the prejudice of those who thought that this might be just another form of land use planning. It was broad, expansive with plenty of thinking "outside the box". We met 8 times, read over 150 submissions and listened to a number of excellent presentations given by a range of people from Chief Executives and Chairmen to a School boy.

The collaboration and unity of purpose shown in identifying what is best for Taunton has been extraordinary. My thanks to all who have made that possible.

It is important that this is now owned by the local people. This can be best achieved by asking the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership to oversee a public consultation on the vision document and to be responsible for furthering progress on the projects that arise and monitoring its development. I would suggest that this can be best done by establishing a Reference Group within the TDLSP to undertake the responsibility for overseeing the consultation and the progress. Clearly senior councillors will still be involved.

CRESCENT CAR PARK

We have lost a year as a result of our negotiations with our preferred developers and the likely completion date has been put back to 2006. There is a pink paper for further discussion on this topic tonight.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The next meeting of the Executive on 23 October will contain an up date on the Corporate Priorities for the future. The emphasis is on improving services and maintaining this council's record of targeting resources at those who are most disadvantaged and excluded from the benefits which we often take for granted.

This will be the basis on which the Medium Term Financial Strategy will be taken forward and also lead onto the beginning of the budget process for 2003/4.

We have an obligation to consult on the budget this year arising from the Local Government Act 2000 and I would be interested in any ideas on what sort of topics/spends that we should consult on from members.

LEISURE SERVICES

Negotiations are well under way about the future delivery of all our Leisure Services. Ross Henley will be bringing a paper to full Council in December on this topic. It suffices to say at this stage that the council is feeling the pressure of competition on all fronts. Now there is no longer CCT and we are driven by Best Value, it is important that we look at all options for our achieving our corporate priorities in this area.

(b) **Housing Services (Councillor Stone)**

Housing Review.

As the Housing service has to undergo both a Best Value Review over the next 12-18 months and a review of the options for the future of the Council's housing stock it is now proposed to carry out these two exercises as a single review. It is hoped that this will save time and resources and reduce the duplication of effort which would be involved in separate reviews.

The Housing service can be broken down into 16 different aspects which would be the subject of a Best Value review. Several of these have already been completed but all will now become part of the forthcoming comprehensive review. This will of course be a daunting task for the officers involved as all the usual demands of running the service will of course need to be met at the same time. I hope Members will bear this in mind in the coming months.

Government propose further changes to Housing finance.

A further round of radical changes to the way that Housing finance is dealt with between Local Authorities and Government is now being considered. While changes aimed at simplifying the over-complex system which we presently have would be welcome, the initial proposals for some areas appear to risk further centralisation of decision making into Government hands.

One of the fundamental issues we shall be hoping to see from Government is a recognition that there is a serious housing crisis in the South West of England as well as in the London area. Significant changes are proposed in deciding how to allocate housing investment programmes and how to use the resources generated from Council house sales. Key issues will be the need to provide additional resources for areas like Taunton Deane where housing need is greatest and to ensure that Councils are given the ability to allocate resources in their area in a way which reflects their own local knowledge and priorities.

Housing/Planning review of gypsy site provision.

Following two decisions in the past year by Planning Inspectors to over-rule the refusal of planning consent by the Council at two sites to the East of Taunton, officers are now being asked to take a more corporate view of the gypsy site issue. Inspectors reports indicate that it is no longer sufficient to view these appeals as purely planning issues. While the two appeal decisions both suggest that they should not be viewed as setting a precedent, it is obvious that the issues such as availability of alternative accommodation and the personal circumstances of the individual gypsy families involved must be recognised as valid issues about which the Council must be better prepared to submit evidence at a public enquiry.

(c) **Planning And Transportation (Councillor Bulgin)**

I am pleased to report that since the last full Council meeting revised and updated Regulations for TDBC car parks have been adopted. The result of these amendments will make the car parks safer for people to use, remove any nuisance for adjacent properties and give the Council the necessary powers to pursue any contraventions. It was considered not appropriate to apply height restrictions in the car parks because several businesses in the Deane have to have access to goods loading bays via public car parks. The officers considered this along with other activities, being experienced in various car parks, and came up with a package to cover all issues. All Councillors have been notified of the changes and after due process the order has been adopted.

The latest phase of the Residents' Parking Scheme in French Weir was adopted on 9 September 2002. The streets concerned were Cleveland Street, Portland Street, Clarence Street, Upper Wood Street and Northfield Gardens. This completes the scheme for this zone. Following reviews, there are proposals to modify the St Augustine's area to include Duke Street and Priory Court and to extend the hours for the Albemarle area to 8.00pm. Alongside this the double yellow line restrictions in Station Road are also being reviewed to evaluate the need for them, and if possible to revert to single yellow lines in places which will help local businesses that trade in the evening.

The grant of planning permission for the flood alleviation scheme at Halse Water is imminent – another piece in the jig-saw for the development of Norton Fitzwarren, and for the protection of the existing properties there and further down stream in Taunton and beyond.

Proposals from developers for the design and use of land at Taunton Trading Estate have been made public and are stimulating debate – I hope that we are seeing the beginnings of some positive action in this area and that we will in the not too distant future see the site used to its full potential.

On a connected issue, it is pleasing to report that the County Council has very recently approved the plans for the construction of Silk Mills Bridge with work likely to start in 2004.

The County Council's adoption of a Speed Management Policy is now under way, and over the next few years over 100 new speed limits will be applied in Taunton Deane, with five times that number throughout the whole of Somerset. The County Council have indicated that they wish to handle the processing of all these new Traffic Regulation Orders, instead of the District Councils, in order to ensure a common approach to all issues. I believe this is good news because it will not only save TDBC officers time but will also save on costs.

(d) **Economic Development, Property and Tourism (Councillor Croad)**

Economic Development

Now that the work of the Vision Commission is almost completed Taunton Deane Borough Council is about to embark on the most exciting year in its history. In particular this is true for the departments of Economic Development and Forward Planning.

In the next twelve months we should see both the Urban Extension Study and the Urban Design Framework. Both these exercises sound pretty dull and dry but in reality they will form the cornerstones of the Vision. They will determine the way Taunton will look in the first half of this century.

We have to ensure that we end, once and for all, the piecemeal development of our town, in order to implement the Vision. The recent recommendation of the Review Panel in relation to Firepool and Tangier was very important.

Sitting underneath the Urban Design Framework, which among other things will set the architectural standards, will be the master plans for Firepool, Tangier and the Crescent/High Street developments. I hope and trust you share my excitement at these challenges.

Tourism

Since the advent of foot and mouth disease we have been able to change the emphasis, albeit with relatively modest resources, to providing greater support for rural tourism.

There are three initiatives on the go at the moment

1. **HATS – Horse Accommodation Tourism**
Equine tourism is a fast growing sector and in Somerset we can provide an ideal venue. I have been immensely impressed by the group who are heading this initiative. TDBC and the Levels and Moors Partnership are key players but there are very significant inputs from private business. This partnership has the enthusiasm and motivation to make things happen and I advise you to watch this space. What has become clear to me is how this niche opportunity can bring new business to rural areas; here I am thinking of vets and farriers as well as restaurants and Bed and Breakfast establishments. To support this contention, our tourism officer encouraged one of the group to invest in six trekking horses instead of converting his barn for further B & B accommodation. After a year this business is making more from the equine side than it is from its traditional B & B.
2. **Cycling Tourism**
In many ways cyclists use and enjoy similar terrain to horse riders and there is a very active group promoting cycling tourism in the county. Katie Burton, realising that there are advantage for the two groups in sharing ideas and activities, has brought about much closer co-operation between the two. TDBC is now working with the group on a cycling leaflet for Taunton Deane. We hope it will be possible to use some of the Leader Plus money to encourage tourists to **“Ride Somerset”**
3. **LARA – Linking Rural Accommodation with Rural Attractions.**
This group are looking to co-ordinate accommodation with rural activities like horse riding, clay shooting and fishing. The aim is to develop rural tourism in the heart of Somerset, with particular emphasis on improving occupancy rates, exploiting rural attractions and assets, better and greater communication.

These three activities have been made a key priority for our tourism department, and I confidently expect there will be real progress over the next twelve months.

While on the subject of the behind the scenes working of our officers, it was great to hear Mark Besley of Procters Farm publicly thank John Rowe for his advice, encouragement and support, when Mark opened his new farm shop at West Monkton.

(e) **Leisure (Councillor Henley)**

I would like to start my report by talking about the wonderful success both Taunton and Wellington have had in Britain in Bloom.

Wellington not only retained the Portman Cup but also picked up the Abiss Trophy.

Taunton also once again won its category and at the National Britain in Bloom Awards won a Silver Medal. We had an excellent Awards night at W.P.A. to celebrate this award and to thank all the people who won and entered all the various local competitions. Many thanks to the teams led by Chris Mulchay, Shaun Creegan, Adrian Prior-Sankey, June Norman and Isobel Ward.

We have now, following last weeks' Review Panel, held a review of the Proms and Pop weekend in Vivary Park. They were great events and it was decided to progress the pop event with the help of an outside contractor with us taking on board the issues of Food and drink at the event. We must not forget though that 8,000 people attended and enjoyed these events.

Taunton Deane, in partnership with Take Art has just started a series of cinema film shows to rural village halls. This new initiative will allow people who live in rural areas to enjoy cinema films where they have previously not had the opportunity.

I had the pleasure of opening the new Bumbles Play Area in Wellington Sports Centre. This new facility is the first of its kind in Wellington and is a welcome addition to our new, re-equipped Sports Centre.

Last week took place the annual Taunton 10k event which was a great success as usual.

The Council is also positively looking at ways of replacing the burnt down golf pavilion at Vivary Park.

(f) **Communications (Councillor Lees)**

For my first report as the member with responsibility for Communications, I am looking forward and bringing you notice of the items that I have under consideration at the moment. It may be worth reminding members here of the Communications Portfolio remit. We

know that good communication is essential to good government and I aim to co-ordinate and review:-

public relations;
media relations; and
communications.

I am keen that the Council is accessible in its buildings literature and website and I have added three communications actions supporting the corporate priorities:-

to improve accessibility;
information exchange; and
media training.

The Public Relations Officer is working on a Communications Strategy to support these aims among others and I have seen the first draft of this document which will be completed before the end of the year.

I have looked at some of our publications too. The Council newspaper the Deane Dispatch will be published at the end of November and I am reviewing the suggested articles and its distribution. I also receive a digest of Weekly Bulletin articles before they are published. The Council do many good things for the people of Taunton Deane and I wish to promote the good work of the Council when and wherever possible.

Future publicity is being planned to increase the quantity of news coming out of the Council. I want to ensure that we communicate early and well so that our publicity properly reflects both the good work that is done, and also that it reports at the earliest stage any future plans or concerns we may have.

Finally I hope councillors will welcome the clear map of their Ward, that is on their desks tonight, I know I find it useful to have the exact detail of my Ward available to me and I am sure that goes for all Councillors. I am always interested in ways to promote good clear communications and I will welcome Members views at any time.

(g) **Community Leadership (Councillor Lisgo)**

Building Communities

The Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership decided (on 17 September) to submit an Expression of Interest to the Regional Development Agency, under its new “Building Communities” regeneration initiative. The Expression of Interest (EoI) will focus on Lyngford ward (one of two Taunton wards eligible under this funding stream), and will include innovative proposals for tackling the particular needs of this North Taunton neighbourhood. The Council

will play a key role in developing the EoI by the end of November with local partners and agencies.

Community Strategy

A community strategy for Taunton Deane will be completed before Christmas. This Strategy, to be published on behalf of the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership, provides a broad framework for measuring and improving quality of life across Taunton Deane. The Community Leadership Panel will consider the strategy on 24 October.

Grant Giving

Practical proposals for reforming the Council's grant giving practices and procedures will be considered by the Community Leadership panel on 24 October.

Equalities Review

Several key meetings take place in October as part of the Council's review of its performance in promoting equality across all service areas and in the wider community. A 'Challenge' event with local groups and agencies takes place at the Albemarle Centre on 21 October, and the Community Leadership Panel is holding a special meeting to consider the issue on 29 October.

(h) **Environmental Services (Councillor Mullins)**

(i) No report

(ii) Councillor Miss Phippen asked the following questions:-

- (1) Recent television coverage gave details of how Manchester City Council overcame its litter problem. What steps are being taken to improve the situation in Taunton Deane?
- (2) In view of the recent Press coverage concerning a lost dog who was re-homed before the owner could trace him, does this Authority have plans to ensure there is adequate communication with neighbouring authorities, dog wardens, Police and reception kennels to reduce the risk of this happening again?
- (3) The new Fact Sheet about the Dog Warden Service states "that Dog Wardens have a legal duty to pick up strays and to take them to the kennels. However this duty is limited to normal working hours. Outside these times, responsibility passes to the Police who have a duty to accept strays brought to them.

As dogs do not know our "normal working hours," do we have any plans to improve our very limited week-

end cover of the dog warden service? Do we work with neighbouring authorities to provide a better service?

Councillor Mullins replied:-

- (1) Further investigations would be undertaken into how Manchester City Council had overcome its litter problem;
- (2) A further look would be taken at how information was provided to dog owners;
- (3) There were no plans to improve the existing level of weekend cover. The Council would continue its close working relations with neighbouring authorities.

(i) **Resources (Councillor Partington)**

Investors in People

This authority is working towards obtaining the award of Investors in People (IIP) for the whole council. The Corporate Management Team made the commitment in May 2001 but it requires a two-year lead-time. It is intended that the assessment to obtain the award will be June 2003 and the council is on course to make this time scale.

During the next cycle of meetings, IIP will be coming to members for support via the Executive and the Resources Review Panel. There are important benefits to this council and its employees, and this can be demonstrated by the results elsewhere of IIP being obtained in leading business and organisations producing tangible improvements in the performance of their employees and the way business is conducted.

5. The Vision for Taunton

Received presentation and considered report of the Taunton Vision Commission.

On the motions of Councillor Horsley it was RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Report of the Taunton Vision Commission be received;
- (ii) the report be referred to both the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership (TDLSP) and the Somerset Strategic Partnership (SSP) and they be asked to take joint responsibility for:-
 - instituting any further consultation on the Report;
 - assessing action needed to implement the Commission's findings and conclusions, and the bodies and agencies which would need to be involved;
 - preparing a programme for the implementation of action;

- seeking further input from the two Councils, as necessary.
- (iii) The two Partnerships jointly appoint a “Reference Group” to take the lead on their behalf in championing the Vision – by advising on progression and monitoring the work referred to in para (ii), such Group to comprise:-
- 3 members of Taunton Deane Borough Council, to be appointed by the Council and to include their representative on the LSP;
 - 3 members of Somerset County Council, to be appointed by the Council and to include their representative on the LSP;
 - 3 other members of the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership, to be appointed by the Partnership.
- This Group to be a flexible body, meeting on an ad hoc basis and able to respond to local needs and priorities.
- (iv) The proposed Reference Group be asked by either or both councils from time to time to advise them on appropriate matters, as outlined in the report.

6. Housing Capital Finance – Motion

Moved by Councillor Murphy, seconded by Councillor Paul:-

“Taunton Deane Borough Council has always been committed to ensuring that there is a good stock of affordable and social housing available. It is proud of its record as a local authority in the way it has both managed its own housing and enabled Registered Social Landlords to procure further housing for rent.

It sees no reduction in the waiting lists for meeting housing needs over the years and there is evidence of continuing pressure on these lists.

This council notes that under the “pooling” arrangements proposed in the Consultation Paper “The Way Forward for Housing Capital Finance” the proceeds would be directed towards those authorities with greatest need and demand and where the Councils have difficulties in meeting the Decent Homes Standard.

This council has reservations about the pooling of such resources from the sale of Council Houses to address the housing shortages in other parts of the country whilst there is a problem in the funding of social house building for the homeless in Taunton Deane. The Council needs assurance that the process will not be used to deplete resources in the county and districts at the expense of the metropolitan and large urban areas. It would prefer the comprehensive spending review to provide new funds for housing rather than confuse the programme with the redistribution programme suggested.

The council welcomes the proposals to replace the convoluted Local Authority Social Housing Grant system with a simple system to make direct grants to the Registered Social Landlords.

This council asks the Government to note its comments on the Consultation Paper.”

The motion was put and was carried.

7. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 9 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

8. Crescent Car Park Development

On the motion of Councillor Horsley it was RESOLVED that subject to:-

- (a) the Heads of Terms being agreed and the outstanding payment of costs to the Councils' external consultants being made and
- (b) the Leader of the Council together with the Chief Executive being satisfied that a partnership between Heritage Shopping Centres, Sovereign Land Ltd and Fortis Bank was available and feasible;

the following be agreed:-

- (1) that partnership be appointed as the developer of Crescent Car Park site on the terms and conditions originally approved by the Council in December 2001;
- (2) the Council take a positive proactive role in the promotion of the scheme and in the use of a Compulsory Purchase Order to assist with the land assembly necessary for the development to take place; and
- (3) work now commence to determine the cost of urgent repairs to the High Street

(Councillor Mrs Hill arrived at the meeting at 7.15pm)

(The following Councillors left the meeting at the times indicated:- Councillor Meikle at 8pm., Councillor Mrs Miller at 8.40pm., Councillor Hunt at 8.55pm; Councillor Tolchard at 9.25pm; Councillor R. Parrish at 9.30 pm; and Councillor Eckhart at 9.45 pm).

(The meeting ended at 9.55pm).