

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)