

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 13 July 2010 at 6.30 pm.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Horsley)
 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Brooks)
 Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Bishop, Bowrah, Cavill, Coles, Mrs Copley,
 Mrs Court-Stenning, Critchard, Denington, D Durdan, Ms Durdan,
 Farbahi, Gaines, Govier, Guerrier, Hall, Hayward, Henley, Mrs Herbert,
 C Hill, House, Miss James, R Lees, Mrs Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris,
 McMahon, Meikle, Morrell, Mullins, Murphy, O'Brien, Paul,
 Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stone,
 Swaine, Thorne, Watson, Mrs Waymouth, Ms Webber, A Wedderkopp,
 D Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams and Mrs Wilson

Also present : Mrs Anne Elder, Chairman of the Standards Committee

1. 40 Commando Royal Marines

Before formally commencing the meeting, the Mayor made reference to the recent casualties suffered by 40 Commando Royal Marines in their current deployment to Afghanistan.

Members stood in silence in memory of those Marines who had been killed.

2. Reflection

The meeting was opened with a reflection offered by Mrs Sheila Harvey.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 13 May 2010 and 24 June 2010, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

4. Apologies

Councillors Beaven, Ms Court, Edwards, Mrs Floyd, Mrs Hill and Stuart-Thorn.

5. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Brooks, Govier, Paul, Mrs Waymouth and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Henley declared personal interests both as a Member of the Somerset County Council and as an employee of Job Centre Plus. Councillor McMahon declared personal interests both as a Member of the Somerset County Council and as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Prior-Sankey declared personal interests both as a Member of the Somerset County

Council and as a Member of Taunton Flower Show. She also declared a prejudicial interest as her husband was currently the Vice-Chairman of the Flower Show Committee and stated that she would leave the meeting before any discussion on this topic took place. Councillor Slattery declared a personal interest as an employee of Sedgemoor District Council. Councillor Miss James declared a personal interest as an employee of Viridor. Councillors Mrs Court-Stenning, Mrs Smith and Stone declared personal interests as employees of Somerset County Council. Councillor Mrs Wilson declared a personal interest as an employee of Job Centre Plus. Councillor Mullins declared a personal interest as an employee of EDF Energy. Councillor Thorne declared a personal interest as a close relative was an employee of Tesco. Councillor Hayward declared a personal interest as his wife worked for Somerset Staffing, particularly with regard to opportunities at Hinkley Point. Councillor Brooks declared a personal interest as a tenant of a property in Halcon, Taunton. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as the owner of land at Cotford St Luke.

6. Petition Guidance and amendments to Standing Orders

Submitted report previously circulated concerning the proposed introduction of a scheme to deal with the receipt of future petitions in order to comply with new legislation and Government guidance. A number of proposed amendments to the Council's Standing Orders were also submitted.

The provisions relating to petitions had been created by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 which came into effect on the 15 June 2010. The Act placed a duty on local authorities to implement a petition scheme in line with the Government's recommended guidance.

Earlier in the year, the Council had provided a response to the consultation process and a number of amendments had been made to the guidance as a result of the overall process.

At this stage Taunton Deane did not have an e-petition scheme in place although this would be required by December of this year. A further report would be made to Full Council in due course regarding this matter.

The Corporate Governance Committee had approved both the guidance and the revisions to the Standing Orders.

Resolved that:-

- (1) The guidance set out in the Petitions Scheme attached to these Minutes as Appendix 1 be approved; and
- (2) The revisions to the Council's Standing Orders attached to these Minutes as Appendix 2 be also approved.

7. Written Questions to Member of the Executive

Councillor Critchard asked the following questions:-

“Following the adverse publicity during the General Election over the proposed re-development of the Halcon Estate and the suggestion by the Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate that this proposal included the building of several tower blocks of flats, would the Leader of the Council care to comment on this?”

Both in the press and via his website Mark Formosa claimed that he had learnt this information from the minutes of the Taunton Deane Conservative Group’s meeting at which the group had been given a presentation on this project by the Housing Enabling Lead, Lesley Webb. In light of the implications of compromising the neutral role of the relevant officer, would the Leader of the Council condemn completely what happened?

As these claims have now been disproved, can the Leader of the Council also assure Councillors that the Conservative Group received the same briefing on this item as that was made to both the Independent and Liberal Democrat Groups?”

On the same topic, Councillor Paul asked the following questions:-

“At Full Council on 13 April 2010, following a question from a member of the public concerned about the possibility of an eight storey block of flats in Halcon, Councillor Williams accepted an invitation from Councillor Henley to state publicly that there were no plans to build a tower block as part of the proposed Regeneration scheme. Councillor Williams welcomed the opportunity to state categorically that there were no such plans.

On 29 April 2010, the Somerset County Gazette quoted Councillor Williams as saying “I said nothing of the sort at the meeting. I could not have denied the possibility of an eight storey block because it was recorded as such in the minutes of a Conservative Group meeting.”

It is very important that the residents of Halcon are able to trust the assurances and intentions of the Council in a very sensitive issue concerning their very homes. Will Councillor Williams assure the Council that the County Gazette misrepresented him, and that he did not deny what he plainly said at Council on 13 April 2010?

If it transpires that the County Gazette accurately reported what Councillor Williams told them, will Councillor Williams explain why he was willing to use the newspaper to tell the people of Halcon that the Housing Officers of this Council had prepared a plan which included an eight storey tower block and had briefed the Conservative Group to this effect?

If Councillor Williams had wished to retract or in any way ‘clarify’ what he had said at Full Council, he could have done this without giving the impression that a plan for an eight storey tower block clearly existed.

We all know that such a plan never existed, and that the officers would not have briefed the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Groups with different versions of the same proposals in this very important respect. Since it is important to restore the trust of local residents in the integrity of the Housing Officers who are conducting the consultations, will Councillor Williams apologise to the officers for his comments to the Somerset County Gazette?"

Councillor Williams replied as follows:-

"I thank Councillors Critchard and Paul for advance notice of their questions and as both are on the same subject I will deal with as one.

- 1) The minutes of the Conservative Group meeting held on 11 January 2010, in reference to the officer briefing on the proposed Halcon Redevelopment, state: "The eight storey block of flats would be located where the ground slopes away to mask its outline by the contour of the ground".
- 2) I cannot comment on the briefing given to the Liberal Democrat and Independent Groups as that is a question for the officers who gave the briefings.
- 3) At Full Council on 13 April 2010, I did not state that there were no plans for an eight storey block of flats at Halcon. I did say that I sincerely regretted that confidential information was leaked, that I did not condone it from whatever source, and that I awaited the conclusion of the formal review by the Standards Committee.
- 4) The Taunton Deane Conservative Group's commitment to this potential scheme is beyond question. This is an imaginative and exciting scheme. We fully supported it as the main opposition party, and we hope that you as a Group will now do likewise and give your wholehearted support. After all, it is a scheme certainly worthy of further investigation."

8. Recommendations to Council from the Executive

(a) Wellington Sports Centre Bid

Councillor Mrs Herbert reported that in the last couple of days Sport England had informed the Council that its bid for a capital grant of £350,000 towards a refurbishment proposal at Wellington Sports Centre, estimated at £600,000, had been unsuccessful. This was due mainly to the new Coalition Government's squeeze on spending.

In the circumstances, the recommendation from the Executive for the virement of £250,000 from the Asset Management Earmarked Reserve to the Capital Programme had been withdrawn.

Responding to questions from other Members, Councillor Mrs Herbert undertook to investigate whether it would be feasible to carry out a reduced

refurbishment scheme instead at Wellington Sports Centre with funding from the Asset Management Earmarked Reserve.

(b) Climate Change – Revenue contribution to Capital

The Executive had previously approved the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan which was aimed at delivering on the 10:10 challenge.

The Plan included the replacement of the old gas fired boilers at The Deane House with more modern, high efficiency gas boilers at a cost of approximately £55,000.

The funding for the replacement boilers was available within the existing Climate Change revenue budget. However, the boiler replacement was a capital project.

On the motion of Councillor Hayward, it was

Resolved that a Revenue Contribution to Capital of £55,000 to enable the funding of replacement gas boilers at The Deane House be agreed.

(c) 2009/2010 Budget Outturn Report

The Executive had received details of the outturn position of the Council on revenue and capital expenditure for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and trading services for 2009/2010 at its meeting in June 2010.

A number of issues including the general economic climate and major changes within the Council's organisation had impacted on Taunton Deane's services and financial performance. However, the Council had continued to operate within the framework of its Budget Strategy and its overall financial standing at the end of the financial year was considered to be sound.

The matters in connection with the net transfer of earmarked reserves and the Carry Forward of Capital Programme Budgets required the approval of Full Council due to slippage in the original spending plans.

During the discussion of the Outturn Report, the Executive had decided that, subject to a Supplementary Estimate being agreed by Full Council, funding should once again be made available to enable the Council to enter a display in this year's Taunton Flower Show.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that:-

- (i) the net transfer of £856,000 to earmarked reserves for use on General Fund Services and £513,000 to earmarked reserves for use on Housing Revenue Account Services, in 2010/2011 or later years, as set out in the report to the Executive, be approved;

(ii) the Carry Forward of General Fund Capital Programme Budget totalling £1,026,580 for slippage into 2010/2011 and the carry forward of Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme Budget of £1,497,820 for slippage into 2010/2011 as set out in the report to the Executive, be approved; and

(iii) a Supplementary Estimate of £8,500 within the Leisure Portfolio for entry in the Taunton Flower Show in 2010, to be funded by a one-off transfer from the Deane DLO Trading Account Earmarked Reserve in 2010/2011 be approved; and that funding for entry in the Show in future years be considered as part of budget setting for 2011/2012.

9. **Reports of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors**

The following reports were made to the Council on the main items of current and future business.

(i) **Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)**

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- A new Coalition Government and a new administration locally;
- Project Taunton Progress;
- Hinkley Point Opportunities;
- Taunton Cultural Consortium;
- Affordable Housing Day;
- Funding News.

(ii) **Planning and Transportation (Councillor Edwards)**

The report from Councillor Edwards provided information on the following areas within his portfolio:-

- Regional Spatial Strategy and the Core Strategy;
- Five Year Supply;
- The Planning Process;
- Planning Applications.

(iii) **Community Leadership and Communications (Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris)**

Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris presented the Community Leadership and Communications report which focused on the following areas within that portfolio:-

- Local Strategic Partnership;

- Youth Initiatives Fund;
- Communications.

(iv) **Economic Development and the Arts (Councillor Cavill)**

The report from Councillor Cavill covered:-

- Economic Development;
- Local Economic Partnerships;
- Proposed Hinkley Point C;
- Low Carbon Economy;
- Local Action for Rural Communities;
- Taunton Tourist Information Centre;
- Asset Management.

(v) **Environmental Services (Councillor Hayward)**

The report from Councillor Hayward drew attention to developments in the following areas:-

- Environmental Health Team;
- Waste Management;
- Climate Change / Carbon Management.

(vi) **Sports, Parks and Leisure (Councillor Mrs Herbert)**

The report from Councillor Mrs Herbert dealt with activities taking place in the following areas:-

- Parks;
- Community Leisure;
- Play;
- Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities.

(Councillor Paul declared a personal interest during the discussion of this report as his wife was still a Member of the Vivary Park Golf Club.)

(vii) **Housing Services (Councillor Mrs Court-Stenning)**

Councillor Mrs Court-Stenning submitted her report which drew attention to the following:-

- Tenant Service Management Board;
- Affordable Housing;
- Regeneration of Halcon, Taunton;
- Somerset Strategic Housing Project.

(viii) **Corporate Resources (Councillor Hall)**

The report from Councillor Hall provided information on the following areas within his portfolio:-

- Customer Contact;
- Revenue and Benefits;
- Performance and Client Team;
- Civic Activities.

(Councillors Swaine and Govier left the meeting at 8.04 pm and 8.33 pm respectively.)

(The meeting ended at 8.54 pm.)