

Executive – 20 August 2008

Present: Councillor Henley (Chairman)
Councillors Brooks, Coles, Horsley, Mullins, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Smith and A Wedderkopp.

Officers: Penny James (Chief Executive), Tonya Meers (Legal and Democratic Services Manager), Heather Tiso (Revenues and Benefits Service Manager), Paul Harding (Principal Revenues Officer), Karen Hughes (Leisure Development Manager), John Williams (Chief Housing Manager), Lesley Webb (Housing Enabling Manager), Alastair Highton (Scrutiny Officer), Marc Hole (Community Planning Officer) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager).

Also present: Councillors Cavill, Farbahi, Govier, Ms Herbert, Morrell, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stuart-Thorn, Mrs Whitmarsh and Williams.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

189. Apology

Councillor R Lees.

190. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 16 July and 24 July 2008, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed subject to the declaration of interest made by Councillor Brooks in Minute No 173/2008 being amended to read "Taunton East Development Trust".

191. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman (Councillor Henley) and Councillors Brooks, Govier and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Mrs Smith declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillor Coles declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One.

192. Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the latest review of the Council's policy for granting discretionary rate relief to ensure alignment with the Council's priorities.

Taunton Deane was the billing authority for national non-domestic rates. The level of rates was set nationally and the Council paid the income it collected

into the National Rates Pool governed by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Local Government Finance Act 1988 primarily governed rating and contained provision for mandatory rate relief in certain circumstances and powers for billing authorities to grant discretionary rate relief in defined circumstances.

The Council was able to award mandatory and discretionary relief concurrently, or just mandatory relief, or just discretionary relief.

The National Rates Pool met the costs of mandatory relief in full whereas local Council Tax payers bore the costs of discretionary relief.

Existing awards of discretionary relief would expire on 31 March 2009, or sooner if there was a change of ratepayer.

The cost of awarding discretionary rate relief in 2007/2008 was £45,600, whereas the total value of discretionary rate relief was £120,583.

Reported that Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 contained the provisions of Discretionary Rate Relief which fell into three specific categories, details of which were submitted. Section 49 of the Act gave a billing authority power to reduce or remit business rates payable on a property if it was satisfied that the ratepayer would suffer hardship and it was reasonable for the authority to do so.

In developing a policy for granting discretionary rate relief the following factors had been taken into account:-

- The Council should help non-profit bodies who provided facilities and benefit to the local community and had limited resources to raise extra finance;
- The highest level of mandatory relief was 80% and applying a similar maximum for discretionary rate relief ensured some parity;
- There should be provision for special consideration to allow discretionary rate relief up to 100% in exceptional circumstances or where it clearly linked to delivering or supporting the Council's objectives and priorities;
- Exceptional circumstances would be where the business was at risk where the loss of the facility would be against the interests of the community;
- Rural communities relied on Post Offices and this could merit an award of discretionary relief of up to 50% in Rural Settlements. With the 50% mandatory rural rate relief, the rate bill would be cancelled in full;
- 'Top-Up Relief' to charities should be limited to charities with strong connections with Taunton Deane; and
- Aiding the viability of businesses, particularly in rural areas, to help develop sustainable communities.

In formulating a Discretionary Rate Relief Policy, it was Taunton Deane's aim to have a policy that:-

- Was equitable and balanced the wider interests of the community with the resources made available by the Council Tax payer;
- Was clear and transparent;
- Set out, as far as possible, objective criteria rather than subjective judgements for the award of discretionary rate relief;
- Was straightforward to administer;
- Supported the delivery of the Council's objectives and priorities; and
- Offered stability to those organisations receiving relief.

Although it was difficult to predict the exact future level of applications, the likely implications of the new policy were submitted.

During the discussion of this item Councillor Horsley commented that the continued charitable status of private schools was currently being investigated by the Government. As registered charities, private schools received 80% mandatory rate relief.

It very much looked that in the future, unless each school could demonstrate that it provided public benefit, the rate relief was likely to be cut.

Councillor Horsley wondered whether it might be the ideal time for the Council to make an approach to the local private schools proposing the increased availability of their sport/leisure facilities to the people of Taunton Deane. This could be a way in which the schools could demonstrate "public benefit" towards retaining their charitable status.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the proposed Discretionary Rate Relief Policy be approved; and
- (2) the idea of contacting the private schools in Taunton Deane, as outlined above, be supported.

193. Community Buildings Strategy

Reported that the Council's Forward Plan Team was consulting on a Planning Obligations Strategy which would include a requirement for developers to contribute to the provision of community halls. The Council currently had no policy which set out the reasons for its support for community halls nor which provided the evidence for negotiations with developers to set out the standard for their provision in new developments.

With over 20,000 new homes and the resulting 50,000 new people moving into Taunton Deane in the coming years, it was important to plan for their needs.

Research had concluded that every new dwelling built should provide a contribution to local community hall provision and that the use of the contribution should depend on the location of the development. Developments in Taunton Town Centre contributed towards existing public buildings for public use. It was felt that developments in rural villages should be used to improve existing halls and the new urban extensions should provide new community halls and/or improve existing halls.

The research undertaken was submitted and this covered the Council's historic role, definition of a community hall, value of community halls, audit of quantity and calculation of catchments including lists of halls, audit of quality, consultation with the Strategy and Performance Panel and other partners and equipment and management costings.

Based on the findings and conclusions reached during research into the provision and need for community halls in Taunton Deane, the proposed vision for the Council for community halls was:-

“Every community should have a community facility which was open to everyone and was a focal point for community activities for all age groups in the community.

The building should be kept clean, warm and safe and be well maintained to ensure it was fit for its purpose, met equality of access needs and health and safety standards. It should aim to provide a scale of accommodation as described in the Council's Standard for Community Buildings and should be flexibly designed and well managed to meet the future needs of the community.

Wherever possible and certainly when new buildings or extensions were planned, sustainable construction techniques should be used. The buildings should also be designed to take into account the possibility of antisocial behaviour and the need to reduce its impact on the environment”.

Further reported on a proposed policy to put the above vision into action. The Council would continue to support efforts by local communities to provide and improve community buildings, community centres and community halls, particularly where there was identified unmet need for such facilities or potential to extend the range of uses or services an existing building could accommodate.

The Council would ensure that demand for community halls generated was within easy reach of new homes and house builders would be required to contribute towards the improvement of existing buildings or the provision of a new one.

Where there was no obvious course of action for providing the needs of the new residents, contributions would be held by the Council for ten years to

enable time for a site and match funding to be found. If unspent after this time, the money would be returned to the developer.

The managing organisations of community halls would be required to provide the following:

- evidence that it was capable of managing the building to a high standard;
- a business plan for its maintenance, funding, promotion, equal access, environmental issues and targets for a good cross section of community use.

The basic standards for the provision of community halls in Taunton Deane was as proposed in the following table:-

Population threshold	Scale of provision
Less than 1495 residents within one mile.	A main hall with toilets and kitchen.
1495-2149 residents within one mile.	A main hall, toilets, kitchen and a meeting/activity room.
2150 or more residents within one mile.	A main hall, toilets, kitchen and two meeting/activity rooms and a further meeting room or usable space for every additional 650 residents.

The report went on to highlight other elements in the policy including:-

- Developing the building brief;
- Enhancing existing buildings;
- Accessibility;
- Protecting community use – it was likely new community buildings would be protected in the future by a planning condition which would prevent conversion to non-community uses without a thorough assessment of local need and alternative options;
- Calculation of the community hall contributions from developers; and
- The recommended standard specification for a community hall.

Resolved that the Vision, Policy and Standards set out in the report be adopted and that their implementation through the grant and planning systems be supported.

194. **Redevelopment of a small area of Housing land at Holyoake Street, Wellington**

Reported that there were currently fifteen dwellings on the land at Holyoake Street, Wellington comprising one bedroom bungalows and flats that had been built fifty years ago. They provided sheltered accommodation but were suffering from subsidence. Costly work had been carried out on some of the properties, but extensive work was required on the remainder.

Working with Magna West Somerset (MWS) Housing Association it would be possible to regenerate the area with the existing stock being replaced with thirty six two-bedroom apartments and a meeting hall.

Fifteen of the apartments would be sheltered homes and would be contained in a block with an exclusive entrance and secured lift. The remainder of the apartments would be for general need.

An extensive consultation exercise with the residents had been undertaken details of which were submitted. Taking into account the sensitive nature of the proposed scheme, officers of the Council and representatives of the MWS Housing Association had met with the tenants on an individual basis. The initial proposals of the scheme had been discussed, together with the forms of compensation available in the case of home loss.

With regard to the latter, it appeared that tenants would be eligible for the Statutory Homes Loss Payment as well as compensation for “disturbance” such as removals, connections of utilities and carpets and curtains. During the discussion of this item it was confirmed that if a tenant moved from Holyoake Street to another dwelling and then back once the redevelopment had taken place it was feasible, subject to the agreement of the Asset Holdings Manager, for two allowances for disturbance to be paid.

During the consultation with the wider group of residents who also lived in Holyoake Street, a number of objections had been expressed.

As a result, the architect’s plans had been amended to take account of residents’ concerns, which would now include sufficient on-site parking for the redevelopment. Further consultations with the tenants and the wider residents’ group would be undertaken to discuss the updated plan in advance of a planning application being submitted.

Noted that the properties would be owned by MWS Housing Association, including the meeting hall, but Taunton Deane would benefit from nominations to lettings of the new two-bedroom stock.

Existing tenants would have the option of moving into temporary accommodation in Wellington and then moving back to a new apartment or move to permanent elderly accommodation elsewhere in Wellington.

Reported that the Council’s Allocations Policy allowed for sensitive lettings without reference to the points scheme as in cases like this. With the introduction of the Choice Based Letting Scheme, tenants affected by home loss could be allocated a suitable property via a direct match.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the principle of progressing the redevelopment and regeneration of the site at Holyoake Street, Wellington be approved;

- (2) the disposal of the land to Magna West Somerset Housing Association for £1 be approved;
- (3) the Council's contribution to the funding to assist the development be also approved;
- (4) the Council uses every means at its disposal to ensure that agreement is reached with the tenants in their relocation to a suitable property; and
- (5) the Council works closely with residents in Holyoake Street, Wellington and the surrounding area to keep them informed as to the progress with the redevelopment.

195. Task and Finish Review into Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

Submitted for information, comment and approval the recommendations of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Task and Finish Group.

The "Green" agenda was becoming more prominent in the policies of all major political parties. National and international responses to climate change and other environmental issues would have a major impact on Councils, communities and businesses. Renewable power generation had a role to play in the green agenda as did energy efficiency and reducing energy use.

Taunton Deane was a signatory to the "Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change". By doing so, the Council had made a number of commitments which included:-

- Working at a local level to deliver carbon dioxide reductions in line with the Kyoto Protocol;
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the Local Authority's own operations; and
- Encouraging all sectors of the community to reduce their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Also reported that the 2007-2008 Climate Change Bill was about to receive its first reading in the House of Commons. The Bill's key provisions included commitments to significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

In addition, Taunton Deane had a Corporate Objective to safeguard and enhance the environment which stated that the Council would "actively promote sustainability in Taunton Deane with a focus on climate change, energy efficiency and renewable energy, to reduce the Council's carbon footprint on the environment".

Against this background, the Overview and Scrutiny Board had agreed in October 2007 to begin a Task and Finish Review on this subject, in accordance with the following terms of reference:-

- (1) To understand the advantages and disadvantages of different types of renewable energy and how they might be applied to Taunton Deane;
- (2) To “case study” biomass as a renewable fuel. Biomass could offer a locally sourced renewable energy supply, with a specific positive effect on the local and rural economy;
- (3) To propose a policy framework that would allow Taunton Deane to enable and facilitate sustained development of low and zero carbon energy production;
- (4) To identify good and best practice that could be implemented in Taunton Deane;
- (5) To find out what concerns existed about different renewable energy technologies, whether they were well founded and what could be done to address those concerns; and
- (6) To make recommendations on how Taunton Deane could anticipate, meet and possibly exceed renewable energy and low carbon obligations laid down by Central Government and other agencies.

At its first meeting, the Task and Finish group had distilled the broad terms of reference above into the following statement:-

“To understand the advantages and disadvantages of different types of renewable energy, their viability and funding and how that might be applied to Taunton Deane and promoted, especially with regard to:-

- Helping residents to embrace renewable energy;
- Helping developers to embrace renewable energy; and
- What Local Authorities were able to go ahead and do.”

As the review progressed, it became apparent that energy efficiency was as important as renewable energy and the group consciously looked less closely at renewables and more closely at energy efficiency.

Reported that a series of meetings of the Task and Finish Group had been held and evidence had been collected from a number of sources including the Bristol and Somerset Energy Efficiency Advice Centre, Bical Biomass Industrial Crops Limited and various officers within the Council.

In the past couple of months, the Task and Finish Group had discussed the recommendations it wished to make to the Executive. These were as follows:-

Recommendation 1

The review group believed that the Council should encourage and be supportive of any efforts made to identify sites for viable commercial wind turbines.

Recommendation 2

The Council should promote a trial of anaerobic digestion as a means of producing energy. A feasibility study should be carried out to determine the usefulness of commercial food waste for this purpose, which was currently land-filled.

Recommendation 3

The Council should look for and pursue opportunities to deliver viable biomass power generation on future developments where the Council had the power to influence; this should include its own buildings and housing stock. The review group was particularly impressed by the potential of miscanthus as an energy crop. West Somerset District Council's recent work using waste wood-chip could also be a worthwhile bio-mass fuel.

Recommendation 4

Taunton Deane Borough Council should implement this scheme (where all householders were encouraged to complete a Home Energy Efficiency Questionnaire in return for two free energy efficiency light bulbs and a customised energy efficiency report for their home) in association with the relevant local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre to encourage and enable households to save energy and reduce their carbon footprint.

Recommendation 5

The Planning Department should prepare and publish a supplementary planning document, or similar policy or best practice guide, requesting or requiring those who submit planning applications to extend dwellings, to complete energy efficiency improvements as a requirement of receiving planning permission: where possible and practical. This requirement/guidance should include, but not be limited to, the following:-

- Cavity, wall, loft and floor insulation;
- Replacement of boiler if over a certain age;
- Upgrade of heating controls;
- Hot water insulation package;
- Draught stripping; and
- Energy efficient lighting.

Recommendation 6

The Council should work with the local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre to set up an Energy Efficiency Open Day, perhaps in the style of the successful Affordable Housing Open Day, to promote energy efficiency, renewable energy and energy saving as it affected residents and businesses in Taunton Deane. This open day should be specifically set up to provide practical assistance for residents and businesses as well as information on the climate change agenda. This event would need to be properly advertised and promoted.

Recommendation 7

Taunton Deane should explore the possibility of appointing a Climate Change Officer. This post should include the following responsibilities and be appropriately placed in the structure of the organization to have the greatest impact and influence:-

- To promote the Council's Corporate Objective on climate change, renewable energy and energy efficiency (Objective 17, 2008-11 Corporate Strategy).
- To lead Taunton Deane's input into meeting the Local Area Agreement targets relating to climate change.
- To lead on producing, implementing and monitoring documents relating to climate change, renewable energy and energy efficiency; such as the Carbon Management Plan and Climate Changes Strategy.
- Service the "Green Groups" and keep them informed – see Recommendations 10 and 11.

Recommendation 8

Taunton Deane should create a webpage to promote energy efficiency, renewable energy and the wider climate change agenda, with a direct link placed on the www.tauntondeane.gov.uk front page. This webpage should contain information on energy efficiency, renewable energy, the Council's approach to climate change, and a list of contact details for relevant organizations and funding authorities.

Recommendation 9

A leaflet containing details on how householders could access grants and other assistance to make their homes more energy efficient should be compiled. It should be distributed with the annual Council Tax demand. The leaflet should direct householders to the Energy Savings Trust website, and provide contact information to help householders not only make their homes more environmentally friendly, but possibly save money by doing so.

This recommendation was made during the review as an interim recommendation. It was adopted by the portfolio holder for Planning and Transportation and the leaflet was distributed with the 2008-2009 Council Tax demand.

The Panel believed that the leaflet should now be distributed to all Council offices and, where possible, to officers who have direct contact with the public. In particular, the leaflet could have a role in tackling fuel poverty, and in correspondence between the Planning Department and applicants.

Recommendation 10

The Council should set up a small informal "green group" of interested Councillors who can promote the green agenda within the Council, amongst other Members, and in the community at large. It should also act as a mechanism for feeding back the views and attitudes of the public, and be given the opportunity – without prejudice to other methods of consultation – to give feedback on "green" strategies that the Council developed, such as the

Climate Change Strategy. This green group should be linked to the role of the Energy Efficiency Officer (if recommendation 7 was adopted).

Recommendation 11

In light of the financial **and** environmental cost of the CO₂ footprint of Taunton Deane Borough Council, the Council should set up an informal volunteer “green group” amongst officers to promote and champion energy saving, green awareness at the Council to create an environmentally sustainable working environment.

In response, the Executive commented on the recommendations as follows:-

Recommendation 1 - Wind turbines were not really feasible in Taunton Deane due to the lack of available and reliable windspeed and there were also planning constraints. It was not therefore really worth spending a lot of officer time on. The Executive did not wish to rule out the principle but no promises could be made.

Recommendation 2 - This was not the Council's responsibility except in planning terms. There was no resource at this time to promote or pursue this recommendation. However, the Somerset Waste Partnership might have an interest and this recommendation should be flagged to the next meeting of the Somerset Waste Board (SWB). Any parties interested in this issue should also be directed to the SWB.

Recommendation 4 – A good idea, subject to resource availability.

Recommendation 5 – There was no capacity to publish a supplementary planning document – and it was questioned whether it was actually required. The Code for Sustainable Homes is being implemented by Government and this was mandatory. The South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was applying these mandatory targets in advance of Central Government – so Taunton Deane would be ahead of the game in any event (unless the Secretary of State disallowed this aspect of the RSS). The Council would not be able to require it through planning without the policy framework. However, the Council did already have the Taunton Protocol which could be used as a persuasive tool with developers. The Council could also look at what advice we provided for domestic applications on energy efficiency measures beyond what was required, but at the moment planning resources are tied up delivering the Local Development Framework. In time, the intention of the recommendation would come about but it was not deliverable at the moment.

Recommendation 7 – This recommendation would be considered as part of budget setting and in the light of the current recruitment freeze and Core Council Review. The Executive was open to the usefulness of the post but this was dependent on resources and re-organization.

Recommendation 9 – The leaflet had already been distributed with

notable results.

Recommendations 10 and 11 – Both these groups were already being set up. Care needed to be taken to ensure that they worked in tandem and did not duplicate efforts.

No comments were offered in respect of **Recommendations 3, 6 and 8**.

Resolved that:-

- (1) subject to any comments as set out above, **Recommendations 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11** of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Task and Finish Group be accepted; and
- (2) **Recommendations 2 and 5** of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Task and Finish Group be not accepted for the reasons stated.

196. **Task and Finish Review into Affordable Housing in Taunton Deane**

Submitted for information, comment and approval the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Review.

As both a Housing Authority and a Local Planning Authority, Taunton Deane had a duty to facilitate affordable housing delivery and to provide social housing for those on the Housing Register. Recent Housing Needs Assessments, had demonstrated that the supply of new affordable housing in the district had not kept pace with demand.

Accordingly, the former Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel had agreed in May 2006 to begin a Task and Finish Review on this subject.

The remit of the review was to look at ways that the Council and its partners could increase the overall supply of affordable housing in Taunton Deane under six broad headings:-

- (1) Mortgage provision;
- (2) Land values;
- (3) Taunton Deane's affordable housing threshold policy;
- (4) The possibility of building on flood plains;
- (5) Rural housing and self-build housing;
- (6) Practice in other Local Authorities.

At its first meeting, the Task and Finish Group had agreed that its terms of reference should be:-

- (a) To identify the issues and problems relating to the provision of affordable housing that required investigation focused on the following nine themes:-

- Rural affordable housing including rural housing models that had been shown to work and Community Land Trusts;
- The role of Housing Associations and the challenges they faced;
- The role of, and challenges experienced by, private sector house builders;
- Mortgages and mortgage provision;
- The role of the Planning Department;
- The role of the Housing Enabling Team;
- The role of the Community Council;
- Examples of good practice in other Local Authorities; and
- Land;

(b) To make recommendations and policy suggestions to the Executive.

Since that time, a series of meetings of the Task and Finish Group had been held and evidence had been collected from a number of sources including Arcadia Housing Group, Falcon Rural Housing, Summerfield Developments and the Mortgage Detectives. Members had also visited a Community Property Trust at High Bickington, Devon, and an affordable housing scheme in Nether Stowey.

In the past couple of months, the Task and Finish Group had discussed the recommendations it wished to make to the Executive. These were as follows:-

Recommendation 1

The Planning Department should look at the usefulness and feasibility of implementing a tariff approach to secure financial contributions from all housing developments.

Recommendation 2

The Housing Department should look at the usefulness and feasibility of pursuing a Community Land Trust (CLT) model in an appropriate area of Taunton Deane, bearing in mind that a CLT must exhibit the following key characteristics:-

- There needed to be a desire to pursue this from the community in question. This could not be run “top-down” by Local Authorities;
- Any CLT must be owned, actually and figuratively, by the community;
- Public involvement and support from the beginning was essential;
- The District (and County) Councils must genuinely support the aspirations and timetable of the community;
- Community Land Trusts were not just about housing; they were about developing communities;
- Needed dedicated, full time support;

- That it needed significant commitment from the community to be successful.

Recommendation 3

In acknowledging the work already done in developing the 'green' aspects of the new Regional Spatial Strategy, and following on from documents like the Taunton Protocol, the Council should redouble its efforts to promote energy efficiency and environmental sustainability in affordable housing developments, including working with developers.

Recommendation 4

The Housing Department should look again at the possibility of producing affordable housing on infill sites on its housing estates and other landholdings, which could include a pilot project to test the concept.

Recommendation 5

Homes delivered through the Affordable Housing programme had to be managed effectively if they were to be a positive benefit for residents and the community. Therefore, the Housing Enabling Team should ensure it had an appropriate and effective working relationship with the Housing Management Teams of the local authority and its Housing Association Partners, to ensure that new affordable housing developments could be properly managed as well as meeting our affordable housing need.

Recommendation 6

The Council, as lead partner in the development of affordable housing in Taunton Deane, kept in mind the fact that mortgage companies were often put off mortgaging on complex financial models that might not be proven in the market place. Some models, however appropriate or useful to a developer or potential buyer, might make some tenures less accessible.

Recommendation 7

That Taunton Deane should continue to be flexible when negotiating affordable housing allocations on housing schemes. For example, it was better to achieve one or two units rather than have a rigid protocol that was so strict it might stop a site being developed at all. This was particularly important where schemes were close to the Council's affordable housing threshold.

Recommendation 8

Delivering Taunton Deane's affordable housing objectives could only be assured with continued and appropriate resourcing of the relevant parts of the Housing and Planning services, and that there must be a full Corporate commitment to affordable housing delivery.

Recommendation 9

There was concern and the perception that the Community Council for Somerset was failing to provide a value for money service in relation to

its affordable housing work. The Council had recently suggested improvements and efficiencies to the Community Council, which had been adopted.

The Council should continue its recent work to support the Community Council to help make it the valuable resource it should be.

In response, the Executive commented on the recommendations as follows:-

Recommendation 1 – This was not feasible at the moment. It would require the development of a Special Planning Document which within the current timetable of delivery of the Local Development Framework (LDF) was not accounted for. It was also felt that it was not required. The Council had levels of development when provision of affordable housing “kicked in” and the flexibility to take either a cash contribution or the actual housing. The Section 106 Agreement policy for the town centre was part of the LDF and this was well under way.

Recommendation 2 – There was no resource to support delivery of this at this time. However the concept was agreed and it could be a valuable tool for delivering affordable housing in rural areas in the future.

The Executive would bear this recommendation in mind until resources became available or an opportunity arose.

Recommendation 4 – This would be acceptable if there was the political will to do so. If not, it was still possible to look at brown-field sites on our housing estates on a case by case basis, and reject the use of green land.

Recommendation 7 – This was not required. The Council needed a level when it could require the provision of affordable housing to “kick in” – it was helpful that this was based in policy (and in Government Planning Policy). Taunton Deane already had the flexibility to take less if a scheme was not financially viable to produce the target amount and cash could already be taken rather than bricks and mortar.

Recommendation 9 – This recommendation was also not required. Issues with the Community Council had now been resolved.

No comments were offered in respect of **Recommendations 3, 5, 6 and 8**.

Resolved that:-

- (1) subject to any comments as set out above, **Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8** of the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group be accepted; and

(2) **Recommendations 1, 7 and 9** of the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group be not accepted for the reasons stated.

197. **Community Engagement – Taunton Deane Borough Council Position Statement**

Reported that the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership (TDLSP) had held a meeting on 28 May 2008 to review community engagement in Taunton Deane and to make recommendations to improve its effectiveness.

The scope of the review was:-

- To review the existing three Community Partnerships established by the TDLSP in October 2007; and
- To contribute to a wider debate, under Pioneer Somerset, of community engagement models across the County.

The model for community engagement in Taunton Deane was Community Partnerships. There were a number of principles on which the Community Partnerships had been founded. These were:-

- (a) That they should be multi agency – the intention was that all the LSP Member organisations would use the Community Partnerships as their means of engaging with the public in Taunton Deane;
- (b) That no budget would be allocated to them. It was intended that Community Partnerships would influence the way LSP Member organisations spent their budgets;
- (c) That the meetings would be open to all members of the public;
- (d) That the Community Partnerships would not have a set membership in order to keep meetings as informal as possible; and
- (e) That the Community Partnership meetings would enable the TDLSP to keep its Sustainable Community Strategy “alive” by testing out whether the priorities in the Community Strategy were still those that mattered to communities.

Submitted for information a copy of a paper outlining Somerset County Council’s review of its area working and community engagement structures across the County.

The conclusion reached that “one size did not fit all” and that “engagement needed to be kept flexible and local” had been welcomed by the TDLSP.

The need to create a joint approach with the County Council to reduce duplication and confusion was however considered to be important.

The LSP had also considered South Somerset District Council’s Model of Community Engagement which had seen the district divided into four sub-district areas. Each sub-district area was served by an Area Forum and an Area Committee. The Forums were open to Community Groups and therefore provided the community with an opportunity to engage with the

Council. South Somerset had also used Area Forums as the mechanism for operating community kitties.

The Area Committees were decision making bodies with delegated budgets and Members and powers to take local decisions in the interests of the community. The Committees were focused on local issues and actions and used the Area Forums to enhance that focus.

The TDLSP had made the following comments when considering the South Somerset Model:-

- The South Somerset Model saw actual engagement with communities take place at the Area Forums. The existing Taunton Deane Community Partnerships served a similar purpose; and
- Area Committees did not currently exist within Taunton Deane. The general view was that a more informal approach to joint County and District Member working was favoured. This was currently being piloted through the creation of the Taunton Unparished Fund. A review of this pilot would be held in January 2009 at which point further consideration might be given to rolling out this approach to other areas of the District.

Reported that each of the Community Partnerships in Taunton Deane had now held three meetings. The TDLSP Review Meeting had looked at observations made about the Community Partnerships since their inception, together with the views of the County Council and the South Somerset District Council Model and had considered how Community Engagement could most effectively be developed in Taunton Deane.

These considerations had resulted in the following recommendations, which constituted Taunton Deane Borough Council's draft position on community engagement:-

- (1) That the basic premise of the Community Partnerships (as set out above) remained the same;
- (2) That the various community engagement models in place needed to be streamlined to avoid duplication and confusion;
- (3) That greater attendance by the public and Councillors of all three tiers be encouraged;
- (4) That a broader representation from the key organisations in Taunton Deane be achieved at the Community Partnership meetings;
- (5) That the geographic boundaries of the Community Partnerships be reviewed and consideration be given to splitting the central area into two areas to gain better separation of the rural and urban areas;
- (6) That the format of the meetings be changed where appropriate. For example follow the usual open forum with a themed session in order to widen the range of issues discussed;
- (7) The importance of keeping an informal approach to the running of the meetings in order to be more accessible to the public was shared by all members of the TDLSP;

- (8) That an informal approach to joint County and District Member working be taken, through the piloting of the Taunton Unparished Fund;
- (9) That a greater level of support be sought from Partner Agencies including Somerset County Council in the planning of Community Partnership meetings and the delivery of outcomes; and
- (10) That Community Partnership meetings should not be seen as the only way to engage with the public. Efforts should be made to attend other public events to meet and engage with the public.

Resolved that the recommendations outlined above as Taunton Deane Borough Council's position on Community Engagement be approved.

(The meeting ended at 7.56 p.m.)