

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEETING – WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2002

Report of the Director of Development

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Horsley and the Executive Councillor with responsibility for improving people's livelihoods and job opportunities, Councillor Croad.

RELOCATION OF TAUNTON LIVESTOCK MARKET

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Council and Taunton Market Auctioneers (TMA) are still pursuing the agreed commitment to relocate the Livestock Market within the timescale of the lease (ending in March 2004).
- 1.2 Following an approach from TMA, the Executive agreed in November 2001 to pursue the suggestion of a joint market operation combining the former Bridgwater market site and Taunton markets as part of an agricultural business centre to serve the region. Such a concept warranted convenient access to the M5. A Feasibility Study was commissioned and the Final Report was the subject of a presentation seminar on 22nd January 2003 when the problems associated with funding a joint livestock market operation on site, close to Junction 24 were highlighted. It is now evident that the financial viability of such a proposed development at Junction 24 is questionable.
- 1.3 The issue now being raised is that there is a need to assess another option and identify the feasibility of relocating the livestock market close to Wellington at Junction 26 where TMA have identified a potential interest for some time. This report suggests that further work along these lines now needs to be pursued in partnership with TMA, the RDA and others.

2.0 THE OPTIONS

- 2.1 In accordance with its 1999 Commitment with TMA to relocate the market, the Council has been responsive to the TMA's suggestion to identify the feasibility of relocating the market within Taunton Deane or Sedgemoor. This option has been investigated by Austin Smith Lord, and the final report has been published and a copy should have been made available for all Members to read.
- 2.2 At the presentation made to Members on 22nd January, concerns were expressed about the Report under 4 headings:

- The viability of existing regional agricultural business centres.
- Stakeholder commitments to the Junction 24 sites.
- Financial/funding aspects relating to the Junction 24 sites.
- The need for investigating an alternative option at Junction 26.

2.3 The Council's possible options relating to Taunton Livestock Market were described in a memo to the Leader of Council dated 6th November 2002 (Appendix 1). However, since that time, with the publication of the feasibility report, the option for relocating the livestock market to a new Regional Agricultural Business Centre at Junction 24 (option 1 in Appendix 1) is now under question. One of the auctioneers will not inject capital into the project, land values and the extent of public funding and private funding required is higher than that envisaged by stakeholders.

2.4 In considering whether to pursue one of the alternative options, and the suggestion that we need to compare the Junction 24 options with an option for relocating the market to Junction 26, it is necessary to revisit the Council's intentions to be clear about our objectives.

3.0 **THE STATEMENT OF MUTUAL UNDERTAKING BETWEEN THE COUNCIL AND TMA**

3.1 In 1999, the Council agreed to enter into a lease arrangement with TMA for the future operation of the Market (ending in March 2004). The Council and TMA agreed a Statement of Mutual Undertaking which basically commits TMA and the council to relocating the Market within the timetable of the lease. These arrangements were entered into for 3 reasons:-

- The Council wanted to safeguard the medium to long-term future of the Market, which was not sustainable on the present site because of the existing constraints.
- The Council felt that that the majority of the risks associated with the operation of the Market rested with the operator.
- The Council wanted to make better use of its asset – the market site – for the benefit of the Borough as a whole.

These factors can now be reassessed:-

The Council wishes to safeguard the medium and long-term future of the Market which is not sustainable on the present site because of the constraints that exist there.

3.1.1 This objective would still appear to be relevant and the Council has an agreement with TMA still to run its course. The overnight accommodation of cattle (lairage) can result in noise disturbance at unsocial hours and queues of large cattle lorries along congested streets within built-up areas, and into the town centre shall be avoided. Mixed use developments (including

residential) that take place close to such sites can give rise to incompatibility problems. The present livestock market site in Taunton is constrained.

- 3.1.2 Austin Smith Lord point out that diseases such as BSE and Foot and Mouth have had a huge impact on livestock trading. Further new technology such as electronic trading has emerged. Therefore, there is no certainty in the future of the need for, or financial viability of large cattle markets in their traditional form. Recent studies such as the Red Meat Strategy Report consider the need to rationalise the market sector and redevelop markets to rural business centres that do not threaten the viability of town centres.
- 3.1.3 Although Austin Smith Lord have demonstrated that sites at Junction 24 would be more attractive to some large ancillary agricultural businesses in the Bridgwater area than at Junction 26 they indicate that information about successful purpose-built regional agricultural business centres is rare as this is a new concept. However, on a different scale, they indicated there is evidence that the relocation of a livestock market at Bakewell in Derbyshire National Park afforded an opportunity to integrate a new agricultural business centre concept into a sensitive landscape.
- 3.1.4 Both Wellington Town Council and TMA consider that the option of relocating the livestock market to Junction 26 requires further investigation and concerns were raised by several Councillors on 22nd January 2003 that further consideration should be given as to whether Taunton's relocated livestock market to Junction 26 would be a better commercial proposition.
- 3.1.5 The Council has worked in partnership with the TMA to date to explore options. In the circumstances, it is considered that it would accord with the Council's objective if the council now commissioned further work with the TMA to better identify the option of relocating Taunton Livestock Market to sustainable agricultural centre site at Junction 26 to provide a viable outlet for the farming community and an alternative to that suggested at Junction 24. (A copy of the suggested brief will be available for your meeting).

3.2 The majority of the commercial risk associated with the operation of the Market should rest with the operators.

- 3.2.1 Austin Smith Lord have recognised that the Taunton Livestock Market is extremely successful with the catchment area accessing the centres of Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall. However, they point out that the catchment area for

livestock markets rely heavily on the management of market and the success of auctioneers. Effective competition needs to be from modern welfare-friendly premises.

3.2.2 If this Council, Sedgemoor District Council, the Regional Development Agency (RDA) and TMA determined that modern welfare-friendly premises at Junction 24 was a commercially viable proposition then this Council, capital contribution would be likely to be bolstered by contributions from another local authority. However, land values (and availability of land) between Junction 24 and Junction 26 are a major consideration.

3.3 The Council wishes to make better use of its landholding asset – the market site – for the benefit of the Borough as a whole.

3.3.1 The Taunton Vision Commission reported in September 2002 upon the Vision for Taunton as a regional centre of excellence. The relocation of the livestock market was recognised as being a vital decision for the Council to realise the potential for vibrant and exciting regeneration framework for transforming Firepool, Tangier and Crescent Car Park areas. The Crescent Car Park site could meet the rental capacity needs of the town centre. The Firepool area could provide quality facilities which have a regional draw with carefully designed buildings and an attractive public realm to raise local aspirations and encourage a shared sense of community pride in Taunton.

3.3.2 From a purely financial aspect, the cattle market site would realise more income if sold for retail or residential purposes. The Vision Commission recognised that Taunton should avoid the problems of ill-considered growth associated purely with the economic potential of a particular landholding. In this respect, the Council needs to form appropriate partnerships to lobby, direct, fund and deliver projects consistent with the Vision. The Council, together with the County Council and Local Strategic Partnership have identified an appropriate lead partner in SWRDA for the masterplanning of the Firepool site and any joint development venture.

3.3.3 In this way, the Council may be able to raise finance from its landholding asset – the market site – to assist in the relocation of the market and for the regeneration of Firepool for the benefit of the Borough as a whole. The benefit is wider than an economic benefit. The Council's objective is therefore still relevant.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

4.1 To assist the local agricultural community in Somerset at a time of restructuring in the local economy the Council should continue to assist TMA in efforts to relocate the market and such to include the commissioning of further information upon the viability of an area close to Junction 26. This further work might be obtained within a two month period. The terms of reference for such a commission are currently being discussed with our partners. Draft terms of reference will shortly be available for the Leader and Executive Portfolio holder (and a copy should be available at your Executive Meeting should you wish to see one). This Council's financial contribution to this latest work is likely to be matched by TMA and the RDA and should be found within budget.

5. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 5.1 That discussions continue with TMA, SWRDA and the interested parties to commission further information about possible alternatives for relocating the Taunton Livestock Market on a suitable site close to Wellington, Junction 26 on the M5.
- 5.2 That the detailed terms of reference for the additional study be approved by the Leader and Executive Portfolio holder.

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