

COUNCIL MEETING - 17 DECEMBER 2002

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL
COUNCILLOR HORSLEY - LEADER OF THE EXECUTIVE

(a) Council Tax Base 2003/04

The Council Tax Base is the Band 'D' equivalent of the properties included in the Valuation Officer's Banding List as at 16 October 2002 as adjusted for voids, appeals, new properties, etc and the provision for non collection.

The Band 'D' equivalent is arrived at by taking the laid down proportion of each Band as compared to Band 'D' and aggregating the total. The approved base has to be notified to the County Council, the Police Authority and to each of the Parishes.

Adjustments have also been included for new dwellings and for initial void exemptions for empty properties. The Council Tax Base also has to reflect the provision for losses on collection. In the current year, a collection rate of 98.5% was agreed, however, improved recovery rates indicate that this could be increased to 99% for 2004/04. The Council Tax Base for 2002/03 was 37,317.82 and the recommended base for 2003/04 of 38,122.79 represents an increase of 804.97 or 2.15%.

The Council are, therefore, RECOMMENDED that:

- (a) the Report of the Corporate Finance Manager for the calculation of Council Tax Base for the whole and parts of the area for 2003/04 be approved;
- (b) that pursuant to the Corporate Finance Manager's Report and in accordance with the Local Authority (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992 the amount calculated by Taunton Deane Borough Council as its tax base for the whole area for the year 2003/04 shall be 38,122.79 and for the parts of the area listed below shall for 2003/04 be:

Ash Priors	64.49
Ashbrittle	80.93
Bathealton	80.14
Bishops Hull	1,060.29
Bishops Lydeard/Cothelstone	1,747.68
Bradford on Tone	270.96
Burrowbridge	196.94
Cheddon Fitzpaine	617.85
Chipstable	109.92
Churchstanton	296.10
Combe Florey	107.55
Comeytrowe	2,066.07
Corfe	130.85
Creech St Michael	939.06
Durston	56.75
Fitzhead	120.74
Halse	140.43
Hatch Beauchamp	241.44
Kingston St Mary	426.88
Langford Budville	211.37

Lydeard St Lawrence/Tolland	195.55
Milverton	565.70
Neroche	235.83
North Curry	694.52
Norton Fitzwarren	652.77
Nynehead	143.14
Oake	318.92
Otterford	160.35
Pitminster	435.55
Ruishton/Thornfalcon	602.68
Sampford Arundel	128.16
Staplegrove	707.17
Stawley	112.47
Stoke St Gregory	369.72
Stoke St Mary	193.02
Taunton	15,141.11
Trull	931.31
Wellington	4,501.70
Wellington (Without)	288.83
West Bagborough	155.29
West Buckland	391.84
West Hatch	135.36
West Monkton	1,058.45
Wiveliscombe	1,036.98
Total	38,122.79

(b) Implementing the Vision for Taunton

In order to progress the Vision for Taunton it is necessary to engage consultants to work on an Urban Design Framework for Taunton. The draft brief will need to be agreed with our partners and this Council will need to contribute £50k in the current financial year towards the cost of the consultants. This is an opportunity to continue our partnership with SWERDA and the County Council and to share the cost of this important, urgent work.

This is a matter that will have been considered by the Executive by the time that Council meet but a recommendation will not have been made until after the Council Summons has been published. For that reason, the recommendation is subject to it being first agreed by the Executive at its meeting on 11 December.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that, subject to agreement of the Executive, Council agree to a Supplementary Estimate of £50,000 being made in the current financial year towards the cost of engaging consultants for the Taunton town centre Urban Design Framework and masterplanning of the major sites.

Councillor Jefferson Horsley

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REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HORSLEY – LEADER OF THE EXECUTIVE

The season of goodwill is upon us. I would first like to welcome Kim Cooper to her first meeting as the new representative for Creech and Ruishton. She will bring a new vigour and fresh approach to the council. Her victory was an endorsement of the ideas and policies of the ruling group coupled with her own personal message for the people of the ward.

1. Asylum Seekers

I am pleased that the response we are getting from the NASS (National Asylum Support Service – an arm of the Home Office) and Clearsprings is one of co-operation. I hope to be able to report to you verbally on a meeting likely to take place on 16 December.

I have written to the Home Secretary David Blunkett enquiring how the figure of 302 refugees was arrived at for Taunton. I have also asked him what research has been done into establishing the availability of housing within the private rented sector before they came here with their announcement of their intentions.

I repeat that we want to play our part in assisting these people. We want the best for all homeless people of whatever origin. Our problem lies in the fact that the private rented sector seems unable to cope with the waiting list that already exists here and the sheer scale of the allocation given to Clearsprings by the NASS will only exacerbate the situation. The funding comes from the Home Office but the knock on effect could be serious and costly especially if there is a danger of replacement of those already waiting with the incoming refugees.

2. The Budget

It is difficult to understand at this stage the announcement of the figures for central government support for 2003/4. The headline figure is that there has been a 4.7% increase for us compared with 12% for Mendip, 9.4% for Sedgemoor and as little as 3.3% for South Somerset.

In cash terms this however comes down to only 2.1% for TDBC and could be yet another example of government “spin” to appear much more generous than they actually are. I have to give them the benefit of the doubt at this stage as the full figures have not been yet revealed to us. There is a hope that the change in Housing Benefit Administration grant which has been transferred to the Department of Work and Pensions might in fact be more generous and help us to overcome part of our Budget Gap of £411,000. I will endeavour to update the Council verbally on
17 December.

I do deprecate the fact the government released the early figures to the press some six hours before they came to Taunton Deane. It shows that they are much more interested in getting their own message across than helping local authorities to overcome the difficulties they face.

3. Wellsprings Centre

We are making significant progress on this project. It does not appear from any visit to the site but behind the scenes things are much more optimistic.

Firstly the process for selecting a partner to submit the bid into Sport England is making good progress. Sport England have understandably informed us that they will only consider the cost of work to completion and expect us to pick up any remedial and rectification work that has to be done. This is approximately half the remaining work. We are still on target for the timetable we have jointly agreed between ourselves and the other partners Ladymead School and the County Council.

Secondly the funding package is slowly taking shape between the partners. Clearly this has to have the approval of full Council in due course but I am more sanguine than of late about this. Again I will endeavour to update colleagues on 17 December.

Thirdly it is pleasing to report that the attempts by Warners to seek adjudication in their favour in respect of costs have failed now on three separate occasions. Each time TDBC has come out well and Warners has in effect had to pick up the bill. This doesn't guarantee we will win always but it does augur well when we come to seek recompense for the rectification work that has to be done before completion.

We have not had to date the District Auditors "due diligence" report.

We owe it to the community to get the centre up and running and put behind us the disappointments of the past 15 months.

4. Vision for Taunton

We are already seeing the fruits of our work on this. We have to go forward with the approach "This is what we are doing – isn't it great!" rather than "Do you think this is a good idea?"

It is pleasing that the Reference Group has now been established by the Local Strategic Partnership. This will monitor progress as well as providing advice on all matters. What it does establish is a commitment to making Taunton a regional centre of excellence and capitalising on what we do best – namely serving the public in all aspects.

We will have to overcome the difficulties we are experiencing with infrastructure projects. We must seek to drive forward the ambitions to obtain a Strategic Employment site. The longer term work of the Urban Extension Study is critical to this ambition of ours.

I want to clear any ambiguity about this being "Taunton only". We can only deliver the Vision of Taunton as this regional centre of excellence if we enjoy the support of our colleagues in Wellington and the wider community – the diaspora of Taunton. Similarly we must acknowledge the significance of other towns who impact on our lives such as Bridgwater. The regional approach towards planning that is coming in will mean that we have to plan with the strategic objectives in mind for the wider community.

The Blue Paper on Urban Design Framework shows that we are not letting grass grow under our feet. In fact, in terms of long term visioning I believe we are positively sprinting!

Councillor Jefferson Horsley