

## **Part II Reports from the Executive**

### **COUNCIL MEETING 21 FEBRUARY 2006 REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Our first Full Council of the New Year and as always at this time of the year we have the huge task of budget setting for the next financial year to deliver the wishes of the community for effective and efficient front-line services at minimum cost possible. I believe we have delivered this with the difficult reconciliation of providing more for less. Other major initiatives we are taking forward include the Vision for Taunton, ISIS project, review of our housing stock, various economic development programmes, recycling of waste, continuing negotiations for Regional Spatial strategy, Housing Needs survey and we must not forget the many and varied services that we must continue to provide in an efficient manner to our customers. Local Government Review is also being floated if one believes the leaked letters and the appallingly undemocratic manner with which central government is handling it (or not as the case may be!)

#### **Budget Setting**

This is never easy but this year has been made easier because we were prepared to take the difficult decisions necessary during budget setting last year. We acknowledge a far better Revenue Support settlement than we could ever have expected. I must qualify this as not being generous in relation to the increased costs commitments to be met but more than we budgeted when first preparing our budget. When starting the process our budget gap was around £700,000, we found the necessary efficiency savings and extra income to deal with this shortfall and almost achieve a balanced budget. The greater than expected settlement created flexibility for this year so we used this to ensure it helped towards the known shortfall of future years as signalled by our medium term financial plan. Again we have also managed to reverse the trend of taking from reserves to support the budget because we have made a revenue contribution to capital of a further £150,000 (2005/06 £300,000). This is a huge turn around from the previous eight years when an average of just short of £500,000 every year was taken from reserves to support the budget. Equally I am proud to say that Council Tax increases have been steadily reducing year on year. From 1995 to 2003 the increase averaged 10% for every year, with our prudent 3% for 2006/07 we have achieved an average of just over 4% for every year of our administration. This is clear evidence, that we are, and will continue to deliver our manifesto promise to ensure value for money.

#### **Vision for Taunton**

A huge amount of work is being done on our behalf by various teams each taking forward a discrete part of the overall project. All essential to provide a

solid foundation from which to launch the huge development programme for Taunton, that is now being set in motion. It has now received national recognition as The Vision for Taunton has been recognised for exemplary planning at the recent RTPA awards for 2005. The breadth of planning, partnership working and the Vision's embrace of community aspirations have helped to clinch the award for 'Spatial Strategies'. The Award is not only a strong endorsement of our plans and community support, but will also raise awareness nationally among industry leaders and key players, which will help to drive the Vision forward.

Feasibility studies are being carried out to establish the way forward in respect of flooding issues, car parking requirements including provision of multi story parking, funding of infrastructure and public amenity from developers contributions and social housing. All of these separate studies feed into preparing an overall package that will be provided to would be developers who express an interest in taking the project forward. To date much interest has been shown. I am heartened that we will be able to provide the much needed development of Taunton to enhance its important role as County Town to becoming a regional centre with much improved economy, culture and leisure facilities.

In all of this I must not forget Somerset County Cricket Club. They have exciting and progressive development plans to ensure International matches can be regularly hosted in Taunton together with training and development plans for young people. They must succeed as it will place Taunton "on the map" as far as cricket is concerned and as an authority we must provide all backing possible in bringing their plans to fruition. Equally, adjacent to the cricket ground is the Brewhouse Theatre, the management of which appear to have taken a long hard look at the best way forward. They have decided to remain on its present site and to develop it further, looks the most sensible way forward. Again we must fully support them with their proposals as we must ensure our cultural provision expands every much as our economic development grows. I have said it often, we must not leave behind a cultural wasteland in pursuit of economic development. The two are essential to move forward together.

### **Regional Spatial Strategy**

The plans that will emerge from these negotiations are incredibly important to the potential future successful development of Taunton Deane. The very sad part is that plans are being prepared and promoted by the unelected and unaccountable body of the South West Regional Assembly. Although we can shout foul if something seriously adverse is promoted we do not have an official voice at the negotiating table. So much for this Governments hollow claim to promoting localism and for democracy to be brought nearer the people, what a sham claim this is when all actions, words and deeds point towards an ever more centralizing command and control mentality of central government. Central Government have decided that new housing completion numbers need to grow substantially, could be double the existing rate of present development in the worst case scenario! It

does not take a genius to realise that this rate of increase is just not sustainable in the short or medium term because of the huge increases in resources it would need. Add to this the ridiculous situation imposed on us as regards development of infrastructure necessary to support such growth, this needs substantial public purse investment in the whole infrastructure requirement otherwise we will compound and perpetuate the inadequate road and transport system that has been developed to date. An example of the ridiculously inadequate public investment proposed in infrastructure is the proposals for road improvements. Schemes totalling over £3 billion were identified as necessary in the SW Region. We have had about £90 million a year allocated for all the SW region for the next 10 years. Therefore £3 billion identified and circa £0.9 billion identified for the next 10 years - at today's rates a £2.1 billion shortfall across the region. All the more galling when it is realized the motorist contributes more than £40 billion to the exchequer but only receives about £7 billion investment in work to the roads. An appalling situation.

### **Local Government Review**

Yet again central government has shown its complete contempt for local democracy. It appears to have decided the existing three tier system, County, District and Parish Council, is wasteful, expensive and lacks representation for the people. The process by leaked correspondence between two Ministers and has grown since then. Firstly, consulting with County Chief Executives and then a programme of consultation with District Chief Executives. If you have not noticed, no mention of elected representatives being consulted as obviously we do not even figure in central government's thinking about their professed localism and democratic involvement. Much belatedly I received a letter only last week from the Minister playing catch up and inviting me to participate in a consultation process. I have to seriously question the sincerity and value of this offer having demonstrated a total contempt for democratically elected Members so far.

The even more incredible part of all this is the Government's case is not being supported by any solid evidential base that Unitary Authorities are better placed and sized to provide more efficient and effective services to our communities. We have enough historic knowledge of the establishment of Unitary Authorities, so the least the Government could do is provide a properly researched case to prove their stated claims that County and District authorities are wasteful and in need of change. I wish to deliver the most efficient and cost effective services for our customers whether this be Unitary or two tier but do not see the alternative the Government is promoting as being anything other than an attempt to tear down our traditional institutions because they perceive it as ineffective without any attempt to evidence their assertions. The sad loser in my view, will be the democratic loss of accountability to our communities.

I recently attended a meeting at DEFRA offices with Right Hon Margaret Beckett MP, and I had the opportunity to raise various issues affecting Taunton Deane. Of prime importance to our agricultural community was the assurance the long-

awaited Single Farm payment (made to Farmers in Scotland and Wales pre Christmas) would be made by the end of February. I sincerely hope this will be honoured as I am well aware of the serious implications of the protracted delay to date. Farmers do not have enough funding therefore the whole rural associated business community is starved of vital funds to keep going.

In addition I raised the problem that recycling targets and credits for recycled materials had been frozen at present levels which could seriously affect our levels of funding for this service in future years. There also appeared to be a change of emphasis towards supporting incineration of waste as opposed to recycling. The Minister gave assurance that recycling was the top priority and the emphasis is still on removing as much waste as possible to minimise residual waste and that incineration would be very much the second option if recycling did not work satisfactorily.

I was pleased to receive this reassurance but unfortunately did not receive any reassurance about the loss of recycling credits which help so greatly with the ongoing funding of recycling. It is therefore, much a case of “watch this space” and await the issue of a supposedly imminent White Paper for consultation on the merits of recycling or incineration!

Cllr John Williams  
Leader Taunton Deane Borough Council

## **COUNCIL MEETING 21 FEBRUARY, 2006**

### **Report of Councillor Bishop**

#### **Planning Policy and Transportation**

##### **Consultations on the Local Development Framework (LDF) and the Review of the Community Strategy.**

The new spatial planning system places emphasis on the need to integrate the LDF with the Community Strategy. As such, the Borough Council (Forward Plan Unit and Policy and Performance Team) and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) have been working closely together over the past few months to consider the preparation of a single consultation strategy that will engage the public on the preparation of the following documents:

- Core Strategy (LDF document)
- Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (LDF document)
- Review of the Community Strategy
- Area based plans for North Taunton and Taunton East

This joint approach is a direct result of the strategy contained within the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). As well as strategy integration, the SCI emphasises the need to engage underrepresented groups.

To assist with these objectives, the Borough Council and the LSP have appointed Baker Associates to help prepare the detailed consultation strategy and facilitate the resulting actions. A range of consultation is proposed, including web based technology, exhibitions at various locations throughout the Deane, workshops, attending meetings of specific groups, and working with detached youth workers (amongst others). Intensive consultation activity will be focussed in North Taunton, Taunton East and Taunton Town Centre (the three areas where detailed plans are to be prepared).

Planning Aid South West is a key partner in helping to deliver the consultation activity. Planning Aid South West are very supportive of the steps that both the Borough Council and LSP have taken to fully integrate the LDF and the Community Strategy. As such, they are providing us with a significant resource and will work directly with underrepresented groups, helping with capacity building and facilitation.

The consultation period is due to commence on March 20<sup>th</sup> and close during the first week of June and will, without doubt, be the most intensive consultation exercise carried out in Taunton Deane.

#### **Planning Gain Supplement (PGS)**

The pre-budget statement in December confirmed the Chancellor, Gordon Brown's intention to introduce a PGS on windfall gains in land value arising from planning permission.

Members will have seen the comments on the consultation paper in a report to the SPTED Panel on 14 February 2006. Although PGS will not come into effect until 2008, it is likely to encourage developers to bring forward sites in their ownership before the tax bites.

The Government has indicated that their plans for a PGS are to be scrutinised by the Commons ODPM select committee. The inquiry will look at what factors should be considered when determining the rate of the supplement, the level at which it should be set and how the revenue should be distributed. It will examine how the PGS can be used to encourage brownfield development and the potential impact on section 106 agreements.

### **“Super-flexible” homes**

The Milton Keynes Partnership (MKP) has issued a discussion paper which proposes that Super-flexible homes would account for around 30% of the total homes on a 57 ha site. The document states that the homes should be flexible enough for residents to adapt to their changing needs throughout their occupation.

MKP chief operating officer, Jane Hamilton commented: “In a house designed on super-flexible principles, space can be arranged then potentially rearranged to meet future needs. This would allow homeowners to adapt their homes instead of moving as their circumstances changed”. She also stated the “Design flexibility could include open-plan layouts or rooms with partition walls that can be easily removed or repositioned. Another option would be the use of open truss roofs to ease future dormer conversion or upward extensions”.

### **Planning Applications**

The following two major applications have been received:-

Telephone House, The Crescent, Taunton  
Mixed use conversion to form 75 apartments and retention of 8,500 square feet of office space and associated facilities.

Construction of New Business Park, including formation of new roundabout, pumping station and lagoon on 17.29 ha of land adjoining Chelston House Farm, Chelston, Nr Wellington.

### **RTPI Award for Spatial Strategies Taunton Vision**

I would like to congratulate everyone, including our partners, who have been involved in the preparation of the Spatial Strategy for the Taunton Vision, which has been recognised for exemplary planning at the recent RTPI awards. The judges made many favourable comments, which have been reported in the local press.

The award was sponsored by The Planning Officer Society, which represents the most senior professionals and managers of planning functions in the English Local Authorities.

### **Planning Training**

Members have already been notified about a training session taking place in March for members of the Planning Committee and I would like to encourage other members to attend.

A training session has also been arranged for Members of Parish Councils covering Enforcement, and it is anticipated that this may be oversubscribed.

### **Councillor Cliff Bishop**

## REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL 21 FEBRUARY 2006

### COMMUNICATIONS

#### Information and Research

The Wellington and Area Profile mentioned in my last report is complete. It contains information on the economic, social and environmental well being of the wards of Wellington East, Wellington North, Rockwell Green, Oake, Monument and Bradford on Tone. The profile provides a baseline of information using the most up-to-date data and trends available and forms the basis of the draft Wellington and Area Community Strategy. Members will be aware that this is now available for public comment on the Council's website at:

[www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/tdbc sites/LOCAL\\_STRAT\\_PART/Wellington\\_and\\_Area.asp](http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/tdbc sites/LOCAL_STRAT_PART/Wellington_and_Area.asp).

#### Local Futures Audit and On-Line Database

The Policy and Performance and Economic Development and Regeneration teams have commissioned an audit of Taunton Deane from the firm Local Futures.

This will provide an overall assessment of quality of life in Taunton Deane, including a wide range of economic, social, cultural and environmental factors.. It will include maps, charts and tables with a commentary that analyses and compares performance. The Audit will analyse and benchmark performance at a Borough level, set within a sub-regional, regional and national context. It will also allow national benchmarking, help with policy development. Not least it will encourage a shared and 'joined-up' understanding of the issues and challenges faced in Taunton Deane. It will help us develop and monitor the following key areas of work:

- The Corporate Strategy
- The review of the Community Strategy
- Local Area Agreements
- The Economic and Regeneration Strategy
- The Local Development Framework

The Audit will comprise five sections:

*Section 1: Introduction* – background, objectives and report structure

*Section 2: Economic profile* – economic performance (scale, productivity, growth); industry; business and enterprise; education and skills; labour market

*Section 3: Social profile* – demographics (age; ethnicity; occupations; household formation; migration and change); prosperity and wealth; deprivation and inequality; health; crime

*Section 4: Environmental profile* – land and property; housing; transport and connectivity; services and amenities; natural environment

*Section 5: Summary and conclusions* – summary of research findings and identification of key issues and implications for strategy.

The final section of the Audit will reference some of the Council's policy documents and draw out some of the key issues and challenges for policy development. It will be complete by the end of March 2006. We intend for the Local Futures Group to present their findings to officers, members and the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership. These sessions will we hope identify key issues, help create consensus and highlight key strategic challenges.

As well as the Audit, we are also buying a license to their on-line Local Knowledge database. This is a powerful research tool and will help us to make major savings on research time and costs. The database is always up-to-date and ensures users have access to the latest indicators and information down to ward level. Accessed by the Internet, the results and queries can be saved, printed or downloaded for immediate use in reports or presentations with high-quality graphics.

Local Futures will provide training sessions and advice on getting the most from the database.

### **Public Relations and Media Relations**

The press briefing on the Budget proposals held on January 31<sup>st</sup> was again successful and well attended. Press briefings such as this provide a positive platform to build relations with the media, educate on complex issues and are also a good opportunity for the press to ask questions. The briefing timing ensured Members were aware of the report at the same time as our delivery to the media.

We continue to work closely with the local media to promote a better public understanding of the Vision for Taunton as shown by the successful column in the Taunton Times. The column aims to raise local awareness of work that is happening from within the Delivery Team and the Vision in general. The Vision Guide has been flying off the shelves and we are getting many positive comments.

Media interest is still strong and we plan to be more active in looking at trade publications and working with regional media and where opportunity presents the national media too. We have forged links with the National Local Government Association Media Officers and we now send them specific press releases.

### **Local Government Reputation Project**

Taunton Deane recently hosted a presentation from the LGA on the 'Local Government Reputation Programme'. Officers from Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council and the Regional Secretariat all attended. A quarter of councils in England and Wales have now signed up to

this. I am pleased that this Council is carrying out the core actions outlined in my last report and more importantly is doing them well. Our media relations are improving all the time. We publish a regular newspaper. We are more aware of the need to brand our services. We continue to improve our internal communications and we are producing an A-Z of services.

### **Finally ...**

While member training is not within my area of responsibility I would like to congratulate Member Services. The **Public Speaking** training session was excellent. It was thoroughly enjoyable with lots of practical hints and tips. I am sure as a result we will be better communicators. We look forward to more of the same, as it was a useful and stimulating evening.

Gwyneth Leighton  
Executive Councillor for Communications

## **COUNCIL MEETING 21 FEBRUARY 2006**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS. D. BRADLEY – LEISURE, ARTS AND CULTURE**

#### **COMMUNITY ARTS AND ARTS DEVELOPMENT**

##### **Orchestra West**

The launch of Orchestra West at the Gaumont Theatre, courtesy of Mecca Bingo, on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> February was a tremendous success. It worked well as a performance venue with over 600 people attending a superb concert by this new Taunton based professional orchestra. This and the take-up on the Somerset County Cricket Club's Elton John concert in June indicate the demand for quality entertainment.

##### **Arts Website – [www.tauntondeane.gov.uk](http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk)**

This is now live – click on A-Z services, then arts and creative enterprise, then arts service and take it from there. It gives contact details for the numerous arts organisations in Taunton Deane, provides the arts grants guidelines and application form on line and signposts to other funding sources. The partnership and policy page will come soon.

##### **Regional Cultural Spatial Strategy**

Officers attended a stakeholders meeting. A supply/demand model for culture was flagged up as useful, as was the need for investment in both the medium and small scale facilities as well as the flag ship venues. The need for a major iconic exhibition and conference space in the SW like the NEC was also discussed.

##### **Anne Frank Exhibition opening 4<sup>th</sup> March**

She Koyokh, an internationally acclaimed klezmer group will be touring schools, special schools and community groups in Taunton Deane from 28<sup>th</sup> February to promote this exhibition. They will give a live performance alongside the Stoke St. Gregory Young Players' award winning play "Strength of Spirit" at the Brewhouse on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. Taunton Deane has contributed £2K to this residence, Live Music Now! the organisers have brought £3K and the Anne Frank Steering group have contributed £340 to the launch.

#### **PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES**

##### **Victoria Park**

Work is progressing on the new facilities here, funded mainly by s.106 money. The official opening is planned for 25<sup>th</sup> March with tree planting to mark the Anne Frank Exhibition.

### **Wellington Open Space**

Work continues on this project involving the community working out what facilities are needed where in Wellington.

### **French Weir Development Plan**

The consultants' report from The Community First Partnership and the Swan Paul Partnership is now available on the website:

[www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/parks](http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/parks) under the Neighbourhood Parks heading. Community consultation continues with positive and encouraging responses.

**Carols Around The Bandstand** were this year organised very successfully by the Friends of Vivary Park, with some financial assistance from the Council. The event was a very happy and well supported occasion.

### **CABE Spaces Parkforce Pledge Campaign**

All our consultation tells us that site based staff is what the public want in the parks and open spaces across the Borough. CABE Space, the government funded agency for open spaces, has a current campaign to which local authorities are being encouraged to sign-up (without requiring expenditure). This is just one way of promoting our green spaces and their effective management in quite a variety of ways.

### **Chalet in the Park – The Sand Wedge Café**

The Vivary Chalet, environmentally friendly, has been completed on time and within budget to provide a community focal point in Vivary Park. Overlooking the golf course and the mini golf, the building is now open and being run by Tone Leisure. It is Taunton Deane's response to requests for somewhere for coffee or tea, a place to meet and a presence in the park. It will also provide new public toilets, The refreshment facility will be open from Easter. The old pro-shop will become a changing facility for the pay and play golfers.

### **Waterlinks**

An ambitious application has been submitted to the Big Lottery Living Landmarks Scheme by a partnership of 4 District Councils and the County Council towards an imaginative project to enhance the waterways of Somerset. Labelled '**Waterlinks**', the project aims to provide such facilities as a sluice on the Parrett, a Climate Change Centre on the Levels and major enhancements to the rivers and canals in the area including a 'Park and Glide' facility on the Tone in Taunton to link the new Silk Mills Park & Ride scheme and the town centre.

The application is for £45 million (towards a total project cost of approximately £70 million) and we will know by April 2006 whether the project has been shortlisted by the Panel.

## **SPORTS**

### **Taunton Tennis Centre**

The tenders have just been opened for this scheme to resurface two existing outdoor courts and cover them with a framed fabric structure. Work will begin in the spring of this year. The project will increase the number of covered

courts to 6 and set Blackbrook up as the major tennis facility for the South West Region. Over half the money has come from the Lawn Tennis Association and the balance by way of grant and a loan from Taunton Deane to Tone Leisure. This is progressive partnership working into which Richard Huish College South West Tennis Academy and the Taunton Tennis Club have had input.

### **Taunton Green**

Tenders have been received relating to the conversion of a tennis court to a Multi Use Games Area at **Taunton Green**. A funding application has been submitted to Barclays Space For Sport to finance the project and we are currently awaiting their decision. It is anticipated that the cost will be in the order of £50,000 and that Barclays will provide all of the required funding.

### **Tone Leisure Events**

Wellsprings has hosted five very successful Christmas parties and a number of large social events are also booked. As well as these there have been Tribute Bands and a Pantomime, not to mention private childrens' parties. These all ensure that we have a leisure centre enjoyed by a wide range of people.

## VILLAGE HALLS

Bathealton Village Hall Committee has completed the works to the kitchen, electrics, toilets and other refurbishment items. The grant of £13,750 from this Council has been paid.

Combe Florey Village Hall is making good progress with its grant aided refurbishment works and is planning an official opening in April.

Ash Priors Village Hall and Wiveliscombe Community Centre have both been accepted for funding in principle by the Joint County and District Panel for Voluntary Village Halls and Community subject to there being sufficient funds available. The final decision will be made on 24 March.

## NETWORKING

The **LGA Rural Policy Review Group** covered Affordable Rural Housing and the England Rural Development Programme. As to the former, sustainability appraisals need to be encouraged and there is a need for a small number of new dwellings in our rural areas. As to the second topic, we need to decide what we mean by rural development; land needs to be manageable through the money it produces. The question is what is the role of agriculture in a prosperous rural economy. We need to find a profitable use for the land as it does not manage itself.

The message from **The SWMLAC Annual Forum** is that Museums, Libraries and Archives are at the centre of a community enabling it to understand itself and its past. Such facilities provide a sense of identity, a sense of place and a shared experience – community! Culture strengthens community and must have a voice in the LSPs, the local Community Strategies and the LAAs.

The **Rural Enterprise Gateway Conference** was all about climate change, fuel security and sustainability. Quite clearly there are opportunities for us as a council to promote alternative fuels such as wood chip heating systems. For the farmer directly and us indirectly there appears, following the huge hike in oil and gas prices to be a viable future for bio-fuels.

**Frieze Hill Orchard Community Wassail** was a very happy family event which involved a walk in the dark down a muddy lane armed with sticks to a bonfire, mulled cider and apple cake, the Mummers and a Morris Dance or two; a most successful community get-together.

Cllr. D. Bradley

## **COUNCIL MEETING 21 FEBRUARY 2006**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CAVILL ECONOMIC ASSET MANGEMENT AND TOURISM**

#### **Tourism and TIC**

Taunton TIC in conjunction with Wellington was nominated, and subsequently won the National Express Regional Agent of the Year award for the South West area. This award recognises the commitment and enthusiasm of the TIC and its staff. The award ceremonies take place at Cheltenham races in March and the National Agent of the Year will be announced. Our TICs will be attending.

The 2006 'Heart of Somerset' visitor guide as a brand seems to be capturing the public's imagination. So far 32933 have been distributed compared to 15000 at the same time last year. The campaign is performing extremely well with very positive feedback from the advertising agencies that we use. Taunton Deane and Somerset will be present at the British Travel Trade Fair 2006 in March, in order to promote our area. This fair takes place each year at Birmingham NEC and is the established exhibition dedicated to showcasing travel and tourism products. Somerset will also be represented at this show by 'Visit Exmoor' and the West Somerset railway.

The Somerset Tourism partnership has recently had feedback from the consultants who are undertaking a review of all aspects of tourism delivery, management, and promotion in Somerset. A further series of workshops will take place in March and the work is due to end in April. It will contain recommendations on how best to move forward tourism delivery in Somerset.

Following a meeting with our Tourism Officer and Sky Channel 160, the company wishes to film one of their 30 minute programmes called Britain's Best Breaks here in Somerset. This will be excellent promotion as this programme will be repeated in the order of 24 times. If you want an idea of what they produce, visit their web site [www.britainsbestbreaks.tv](http://www.britainsbestbreaks.tv)

#### **Rural regeneration**

Successful negotiations have been made with Road Chef, such that there is an area available for us within Road Chef's retail area in the south bound site of the deane Services. Visible promotional material has been designed and put in place and Graeme Wallace of Wallace's farm shop is leading the project on our behalf. Whist promoting his own products, of course, he will also be including as many other Taunton Vale producers as possible, so a wide range of local food, drinks, arts and crafts will be on offer. Although this is very much early stages of the plan, we hope that we will be able to obtain a north bound site as well and when the operation is up and running properly then to have an official opening later in the year.

A new member of the Ec Dev team, Alex Stephens is carrying out a study of all community spaces in the Ten Parishes area around Wiveliscombe, to assist in the site design and to see who else might use the facilities of the new

children's centre which the county council have decided to locate on a single site at Croft Way, Wiveliscombe.

### **Community Arts**

Taunton Deane Borough Council has been instrumental in gaining £41,000 from Arts Council England to match £75,000 County Council's Social Services funds for a disability arts project. Six Acres Resource centre and other residential and day centres in Taunton Deane and across the County will be hosting national and local artists, storytellers and dancers over the next 18 months. The aim is to encourage people with learning difficulties to take up creative learning opportunities, artistic careers and in the long term to set up an arts social enterprise. This is a major step forward for the shared Somerset Local Authority Arts and Disability Action Plan.

### **Asset management**

The DDA ramps that were designed for Halcon Road Post office and that were awaiting Highways approval are now being installed. Work should be completed on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2006.

Blackdown Business Park. The final process of selecting a developer and agreeing the tender is now almost complete.

OMB. Various designs have been drawn up to resolve the DDA problems and the requirements for the County Council. With agreement from the County we should be able to progress this work in the near future.

### **Economic Development**

The latest business development grant, after strong competition, has been awarded to the following:

'Clever Clogs' Games, which are early years literacy games for use in the classroom: [www.cleverclogsgames.co.uk](http://www.cleverclogsgames.co.uk)

Mark Butterfield Furniture Ltd, high quality furniture design, manufacture and fitting: [www.markbutterfield.co.uk](http://www.markbutterfield.co.uk)

G's Fashion, a new men's and women's fashion retailer combining great quality products with a relaxing and friendly atmosphere.

Good to Go providing top quality foods for delivery to offices and work places in Taunton, offering a wide range of soups, desserts, smoothies, snacks and drinks: [www.goodtogofood.co.uk](http://www.goodtogofood.co.uk)

Stawley Village Shop, the new village shop in Stawley will replace the old shop and post office in Greenham. Located next to Stawley School, the shop will offer improved access, larger premises and a wider range of stock for residents living in Stawley and the surrounding villages. This initiative will be of great benefit to this rural community and its suppliers.

Those who were unfortunate not to finish in the final five have still gained greatly in the business planning and advice that our partner 'Business Link' has been able to provide.

Councillor Norman P Cavill

## **COUNCIL MEETING – 21 February 2006.**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MARK EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES.**

#### **1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.**

##### **1.1 Licensing.**

January saw the introduction of the Drink Safe Be Safe Awards with the top prize being given to the Moat House at a gala dinner. Many other premises in Taunton Town Centre also received awards and it is hoped the scheme will now roll out across the Borough.

The Licensing Unit/Council is also taking part in the Scrutiny Council initiative organised by the Department of Culture Media and Sport, (DCMS) so far DCMS have visited Taunton twice as part of a six month long review of the Licensing Act. They have met with bodies and individuals who have been involved locally in the new licensing process, including the Police, the Chair of the Licensing Committee, the Council's Chief Solicitor and representation from Village Halls and Community premises in Taunton, along with visits to venues in the Borough on an evening. The purpose of the Scrutiny panel is to assess the impact of the Licensing Act and to make changes where appropriate to the Guidance that accompanies the Act, the Regulations and if necessary the Act itself.

The Unit is now getting ready for the implementation of the Gambling Act that will transfer additional responsibilities to the Local Authority from 2007.

##### **1.2 Health and Safety.**

In December 2005 the Health and Safety Team took a prosecution against National firm Carpetright for failing to comply with an Improvement Notice. The Notice required them to carry out risk assessments for display screen equipment used at their Taunton premises. As a result of their failure to act Carpetright were fined £7500 and costs of £1000 were awarded to the Council. These costs have now been successfully recovered.

A successful Safety and Health Awareness seminar was arranged at SCAT on 8 November 2005. The event (attended by 50 people) was aimed at Taunton Deane's business community and was run in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The afternoon provided valuable advice on how to avoid slips and trips in the workplace. Slips and trips account for a third of all major injuries reported each year and are the single most common cause of injuries at work. TDBC is committed to working more closely with the HSE, in order to pool resources and deliver effective training. TDBC and the HSE are holding another safety and health awareness day at Bridgwater College on 14 February. The seminar will focus on health and safety hazards in food businesses.

##### **1.3 Food Safety.**

Members of the Food Safety Team detained a large quantity of stored rice after a serious infestation of rats had been discovered in a temporary food storage warehouse. Several tons of rice were subsequently surrendered voluntarily to the Council by the owners, and were destroyed. The detention action became necessary to ensure food that had been potentially contaminated by rats did not leave the warehouse for distribution to retail outlets. Food Safety Team officers, working with

the cooperation of the owners, sorted through the consignment of over 40 tons, and were able to certify a quantity of it as being safe for use. The salvaged proportion was moved into rodent proofed storage areas, while the remainder was sprayed with dye and removed to landfill under the supervision of our Officers. This was a good example of timely and effective intervention by the Team, and of using a pragmatic combination of statutory powers and cooperation with business.

#### **1.4 Environmental Protection.**

Further to the report given to the last Full Council, there has been an excellent response from owners of private water supplies to our new sampling service that is tailored more precisely to our customers' requirements. A questionnaire was sent out to all 374 households with a private supply, explaining that the new service allows the customer to choose the frequency and variety of testing for their water supply, in addition to statutory sampling requirements. 373 responses were received (99.5% return rate), enabling us to update our records and identify previously unknown supplies. Twelve properties initially requested extra routine sampling, with many more asking for a 'one off' test, and requests for extra testing are still being received.

## **2.0 WASTE and RECYCLING SERVICES**

### **2.1 Toilet Cleansing**

The staffing of the Castle Green Ladies toilets will cease on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March they will then remain open on a similar basis to the Castle Green Gentlemen's facilities. The two members of staff involved have been given notice of their redundancy and every effort is being made to find alternative employment for them. As part of the change improvement works will be necessary to give greater durability against vandalism.

The toilet block situated in the car park at Wilton Lands has now been closed with the public being directed to the new facilities within the new Vivary chalet.

### **2.2 Sort It!**

In addition to winning the National Recycling Award for the best local authority initiative the Somerset Waste Partnership has now also won the Composting Association's national award for the *SORT IT!* services

Feed back has been received from 3000 properties included in Phase 1 of SORT IT! The opinions of the respondents are very similar to the feedback from Mendip and South Somerset .

The key statistics that emerged are:

- 73.2% of respondents thought the new arrangements were better of which 33.7% thought they were much better.
- 85% of respondents though it was easy to sort out their waste
- 80.1% of respondents are now recycling more (and 38.1% are recycling a lot more

- 79.4% of respondents use the food waste collection service. Of those that don't it is because 77.3% make their own compost at home.
- 84.2% of respondents rarely have waste that will not fit in the standard sized wheeled bin.
- 93.1% of respondents thought the information provided for the new services was clear and helpful.
- Although only 18.1% of respondents contacted the SORT IT! helpline of those that did 80.5% thought the response was helpful.

5,000 properties included in Phase 3 of *SORT IT!* have received their notification packs about the changes to waste services. Phase 3 collections will commence in May. Promotional events and roadshows are being managed to accompany the programme together with media support.

### **3.0 TAUNTON DEANE CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM**

#### **3.1 Annual Emissions Testing**

The results of independent sampling and analysis from the discharge of three stacks at the crematorium have shown the concentration of total particulate emitted was well below the prescribed limits. These limits are as dictated by Guidance Note PG 5/2 (95) "Crematoria." The test work carried out investigated the components and concentrations of the releases to atmosphere from the crematorium. The crematoriums own analytical equipments data confirms compliance with the legislation.

#### **3.2 Cremators**

The maintenance of the crematorium cremators is always considered of the utmost importance and with this in mind the latest version of operating software has been installed. The equipment has also undergone a comprehensive maintenance check and a full re-bricking of a cremator is currently underway.

#### **3.3 Cremation Regulations**

The Department for Constitutional Affairs has issued various amendments to the Cremation Regulations. These amendments concern; incineration of body parts, cremation of bodies where the death occurred outside the British islands, still-born children, The Civil Partnership Act, Medical Referees and updates references to the Births and Deaths Registration Act.

#### **3.4 St Mary's Cemetery, Wellington Road**

During the winter some of our grounds staff have been concentrating on St Mary's cemetery. Unfortunately many of the old memorials have become rather dilapidated and pose difficulty when maintaining the cemetery. The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order enables the lowering of some of these badly worn stones and we are currently investigating this option.

Councillor Mark Edwards



## **COUNCIL MEETING 21 FEBRUARY 2006**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GREG GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES**

This report will focus on three areas within the Housing Portfolio. The first is to provide the usual update on Housing Stock Options and the second will be to update members on the handyman service and the third to advise on the current status of the Cash Incentive Scheme..

#### **Housing Stock Transfer Update**

##### Last three months

Further to December's Full Council, the following provides Members with an overview on what has taken place and what will take place for the next couple of months.

Since the last Full Council update:

- i) Two Tenants and Staff Newsletters have been sent
- ii) A members briefing has been held where there was an introduction to the Offer Document and more information on the findings on the Tenants' Priority Survey
- iii) Meetings of the Officer Steering Group, Communication Group, Staff Forum, Tenants' Panel, Tenants' Forum and Sheltered Housing Forum
- iv) Two further Shadow Board Meetings, covering an Overview of the Housing Service, a tour of some estates, Culture of the Registered Social Landlord (RSL), Offer Document and training on Equality and Diversity
- v) Undertaking Tenants' Days to talk to tenants to understand more about the areas they have asked for improvements in, from the returned Tenants' Priority Survey
- vi) Door Knocking by the Independent Tenants Advisor
- vii) Undertaking a Partners Day
- viii) Selected the name of the potential new RSL – "Deane Housing"

By the time of the next Full Council the following will have taken place:

- i) Further Tenants and Staff Newsletters will be sent
- ii) Further Council meetings where the Offer Document for example will start to formalised
- iii) Meetings of the Officer Steering Group, Communication Group, Staff Forum and Tenants' Panel and Tenants' Forum, covering such important matters as the Offer Document
- iv) Two further Shadow Board Meetings, covering Business Planning / Valuation, Key Policies, Assets and Services to be transferred and TUPE / Staff Protocol
- v) Undertaking Staff Workshops
- vi) Agreeing what areas of Housing would transfer if there was a "Yes" vote, including Staff and Assets / Services
- vii) Further Door Knocking
- viii) Visits to other organisations that have gone through a similar experience
- ix) Undertaking a Media Briefing

Naturally all Members will be kept updated and informed.

### Handyman update

As at the first week of February, we have received 292 Handyman requests of which 199 have had work completed. Pete, the Handyman, currently has another person working with him to help deal with the outstanding workload.

I am delighted at the continued success of the handyman service, a function that provides a much needed and trusted service to vulnerable members of our community.

### Cash Incentive scheme update

£

The budget was:-

Carried over from 2004/05 =	68,500
Budget =	200,000
Plus Extra =	50,000
	<u>£318,500</u>
Spent =	310,000
Balance remaining in Budget =	8,500

Breakdown of Properties	Number
4 Bed House	1
3 Bed House	5
2 Bed House	5
2 Bed Bungalow	1
2 Bed Flat	4
1 Bed Flat	1
<u>TOTAL</u>	17

Completed	13
With Solicitor	4*
Awaiting Property	0
Cancelled	6
<u>TOTAL</u>	23

\*One is due to complete on 20 February.

The Cash Incentive Scheme remains a very cost efficient method of housing families and will be supported as demand dictates.

Councillor Greg Garner



## **COUNCIL MEETING 21 FEBRUARY 2006**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR TERRY HALL - RESOURCES**

#### **1 Electoral Services**

##### **Boundary Review**

The Working Group of members met on the 6<sup>th</sup> February to discuss Taunton Deane's formal response to the Draft Recommendations of the Boundary Committee for England, during Stage 3 of the ongoing Review of the Borough wards.

The Working Group accepted the Boundary Committee's recommendations for no change in the wards of

Blackdown  
Monument  
Norton Fitzwarren  
Staplegrove  
Fairwater  
Trull  
West Monkton

The Boundary Committee have accepted Taunton Deane's original proposal that a new ward comprising the parishes of Ash Priors, Bishop's Lydeard, Combe Florey, Cothelstone, Halse and West Bagborough be created, and it is suggested this be known as Bishop's Lydeard ward.

Minor amendments to the three Wellington wards, confirmed as acceptable to Wellington Town Council, were also accepted.

The Working Group were opposed to the recommendations for Wiveliscombe and West Deane ward and noted the strong opposition received from the parishes potentially affected. Well-established community links in the area of the 10 Parishes and Market Towns Initiatives would be disrupted and Community Planning Areas breached. It was agreed that Taunton Deane would press for their original proposals for no change in this ward be adopted.

The Working Group considered that the recommendation from the Boundary Committee for two new wards in the east of the Deane namely Creech, North Curry and Stoke St Gregory and a separate Ruishton and Neroche ward was unacceptable. In the absence of a suitable alternative the original proposal for a combined North Curry and Stoke St Gregory ward with the inclusion of the parish of West Hatch remains Taunton Deane's preferred option and it is suggested that the ward be known as The Levels ward. The Working Group was, however, aware that there had been opposition to this proposal.

With the exception of a transfer of 500 electors from Taunton Eastgate ward to Taunton Killams and Mountfield ward and minor boundary adjustments between Lyngford and Pyrland & Rowbarton wards and between Blackbrook & Holway and Halcon wards, all the other recommendations of the Boundary Committee were rejected.

Taunton Deane's formal response will be sent to the Boundary Committee before the consultation period ends on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

### **Electoral Administration Bill**

This piece of legislation is winding its way through the legislative system. Changes to the hours of Poll, to 7.00am to 10.00pm for ALL elections will be in force for the local elections in May.

Other provisions in the legislation relate to postal voting, anonymous registration, pre poll information, security issues and issues relating to the annual audit of electors.

As and when more information and detail is released I will keep you informed.

### **2 "ISIS" – (Improving Services in Somerset)**

Work on the ISiS Programme continues to progress according to plan.

#### **Selecting the partner**

- The advert to attract a private sector partner was published in the European Journal on 21 December and the LGC on 5 January. To help prospective Bidders better understand the principles and aspirations of ISiS, an Open Day was held on 16 January, which was attended by representatives of nearly 40 companies.

Short listing will take place on 17 March with further negotiations taking place with short listed companies between May and July, leading to a preferred bidder being identified around August.

#### **Service specifications**

- SMT members contributed to some extremely useful and constructive workshops in November to help determine what our baseline services currently look like for those services in scope of ISiS. The workshops also spent some time thinking through what we might want those services to look like in the future. This work was carried out so that our prospective partner has a clear picture not only of what needs to be delivered now, but also what these services aspire to in the future. These specifications are now being combined with those of SCC, through joint workshops to produce a single, joint specification for each service.

## **Other progress**

One of the key drivers behind the ISiS programme is our ambitious plan to improve customer access. This is a key ambition for TDBC, so it is essential we plan and prepare for this properly. Consequently a full time secondment has now been made from the beginning of January to the role of Customer Access Project Manager - this will help us develop and implement these plans, and to ensure they are well developed enough to link with the ISiS timetable. This work will be very closely linked to the ISiS project team.

Now that the procurement process is under way, there is an enormous amount of work to do to ensure that we select the most appropriate bidder. Likewise, bidders will want to ensure that both TDBC's and SCC's "credentials" are in order. Work is therefore taking place to ensure the "Due Diligence" part of the procurement process is completed.

Both TDBC and SCC have expressed a preference for secondment to be the employment model. Staff workshops have been held in both SCC and TDBC for all those "in scope" to explain the differences between secondment and TUPE, and to consult staff about this preference.

## **3 Revenues**

*Payment kiosks* – with effect from 23 Jan 2006 we have closed the cash desks and moved over entirely to using the payment kiosks. This has largely been successful, although there have been a few technical hiccups and complaints from the public. The cashiers have done a sterling job in explaining to the public how to use the machines. However, the real test will come in late March/early April when the first Council Tax instalment becomes due.

*Council Tax & Business Rates collection* – the statistics at the end of the third quarter (31 Dec 2005) indicate that we are very slightly below target for both debts. (A detailed report was made to the Resources Panel on 9 Feb 2006).

*Year-End for Council Tax & Business Rates* – the new-year debit raise processes are scheduled to take place during the last week of February with bills being issued at various times over the subsequent 2 weeks. Currently we are undertaking detailed testing in order to check that the debit raise, calculation and bill production processes are working as they should.

*Small Business Rate Relief* – application forms were issued in Dec 2005 to all businesses possibly entitled to relief. So far we have had a good response

## **4 Member Services**

Discussions have now taken place with all political groups on the Overview and Scrutiny Review. A further report will now go to the Review Board. With

the recent appointment of an Overview and Scrutiny Officer it is hoped that any new proposals will be introduced as soon as practically possible.

## **5 Personnel**

### Staff Absence

The latest figures for the year up to December 2005 (Q3) projected for 12 months show that the average no of days absence due to sickness per employee is 11.1 days. This is a welcome improvement over last year and below the current year's BVPI target of 11.5 days.

A working group has been set up to look more closely at absence and they have looked at the figures and trends over the past 2 years and recommended some strategies to reduce absence due to sickness within the authority.

These include measures to try and prevent illness and to treat the more common conditions experienced by our staff. A more proactive strategy to manage absence through management training and greater support and encouragement to staff are being pursued.

## **6 New Revenue and Benefits System**

The key areas of progress are summarised below;

December 2005 - progress reports were submitted to DWP who were satisfied with the reports and have released a further instalment of the DWP award (£160k released, representing further 40% of the full award). We have now received a total of £240K. Final payment of £160k will be made on satisfactory completion of the project.

Hardware (servers) ordered, delivered and installed. OPENRevenues software installed on the new server on 24<sup>th</sup> January

IT staff have received 2 days Technical database administration training on 31.01.06 and 01.02.06 (loading new releases, batch processes and basic database housekeeping functions). IT staff presently working hard on creating very large number of conversion files which will extract the necessary information from the in-house system in a way that will enable it to be loaded onto OPENRevenues.

Comprehensive training plan agreed for ALL Revs & Bens staff and auditors.

Data cleansing exercises for Benefits and Council Tax underway, primarily focused on assisting with the creation of a single person database across OPENRevenues.

Once the conversion files have been created they will need to be checked and balanced by users involved in the implementation (no small task) before testing can begin (again a major task).

## **7 Financial Services**

The Financial Services Unit have now completed the work on the 2006/07 budget and work will now begin on finalising the closedown timetable for the 2005/06 financial year. In addition the Unit is supporting and working on various corporate projects such as ISIS, Housing Transfer and the Vision for Taunton. Work is also progressing on the production of the leaflet which will accompany the Council Tax bills for 2006/07 and we are currently liaising with the Supporting People Unit at SCC to determine the level of grant funding which the Council will receive next year"

## **8 Benefits**

The Benefits Service has successfully recruited staff for its new Benefits Advice team. The new team members are joining TDBC over the coming weeks in preparation for their 'go live' date of Monday 27<sup>th</sup> February.

Although the Customer Service Team have done an excellent job in answering calls from benefit customers, the complexity of benefits queries has led to many of these calls being lengthy, tying up the phone lines and preventing other customers getting through.

The new team will take calls from existing benefits customers and will free up the Customer Service Team to answer calls from new customers. The Benefits Advice Team will have the time and the necessary experience to deal with these calls thoroughly without the need to transfer them to the assessment team.

It is also the team's aim, by using lean fundamentals, to improve the current service provided, process claims more efficiently and get the information we need first time.

Last year, the team piloted their 'Help Us to Help You' scheme, which rewarded customers whenever they responded immediately to a request for further information needed to support their claim. Customers who took part in the scheme gave very good feedback and it is being rolled out to all customers.

The service wants it's customers who have had a change in their circumstances to call the new team, get told the information needed to reassess their claim and offered an appointment with a Benefit Officer the next day. If they keep the appointment and provide all the information needed, their claim will be assessed immediately and they can leave the Deane House with a new decision.

The Overpayments Team was particularly successful in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2005/06. For the first time since the team was created, the overall debt relating to benefit overpayments fell by almost £1,000.

The Investigations Team continues to do well. So far in 2005/6, they have prosecuted 4 people and issued a formal caution to 24 others. One case is awaiting a prosecution and another is with the police pending an arrest. Again, the changes to the subsidy arrangements mean they will no longer get rewarded for issuing penalties and cautions.

In September 2005, 4 Benefit Officers started home working. Early signs show the scheme has been very successful. Home workers are at least 60% more productive than office based Benefit Officers and none of the home workers have been absent through sickness. The home workers themselves are complimentary of the scheme and comment on the positive affect it has made to their work-life balance. The service is currently looking at offering other Benefit Officers the opportunity to work from home.

## **9 Internal Audit Services**

The Audit Team have now finished the system-based audits during the last quarter and are now moving on to some of the Council's non-financial audit areas including dog wardens, community safety and housing repairs. The Internal Audit Team has successfully filled a full-time vacancy and continues to deliver in the following areas:-

- Undertaking a wide range of financial and non-financial audits
- Rolling out Risk Management at service level with a number of workshops being facilitated by members of the Internal Audit Section.
- Ongoing provision of Data Protection and Freedom of Information advice.
- Playing a vital assurance role in some of the major projects that the Council is working on including ISIS, replacement Revenues / Benefits and Housing Systems.

Councillor Terry Hall

## **COUNCIL MEETING 21 FEBRUARY 2006**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS JOANNA LEWIN-HARRIS**

#### **POLICY AND PERFORMANCE UNIT**

I would like to congratulate Simon Lewis on taking up his new post as Scrutiny and Performance Manager and also welcome three new members of staff to the Policy and Performance Unit.

Jane Chipp has joined us as the Strategy and Partnerships Manager. She will take responsibility for the Local Strategic Partnership, Community Planning, Community Safety and Equalities.

Alistair Higton has joined us as Scrutiny Officer. This is a new post and shows this administration's commitment to improving Taunton Deane's scrutiny function. Alistair recently gave a presentation to the Community Leadership Panel and will be repeating this for the Review Board later this month. I very much hope that this new resource for scrutiny will create the environment for members to get more involved in, and satisfied with, scrutiny and that the outcomes of scrutiny reviews will bring about changes in council policies or activities.

Clare Stuart has joined as Anti-Social Behaviour co-ordinator. The Crime and Disorder Partnership fund this post. Clare's role involves support for the Local Action Teams, developing an anti-social behaviour database and co-ordinating youth provision across the Deane.

#### **LOCAL ACTION TEAMS**

Five Local Action Teams (Galmington, Holway, Lambrook, Monkton Heathfield and Norton Fitzwarren) recently put in bids for funding to the Local Strategic Partnership. The bids were for items such as litter bins, dog bins, youth facilities, speedwatch, computer facilities, and grants amounting to a total of £6,335 were awarded.

#### **CCTV**

It has been apparent for some time that arrangements for monitoring our CCTV system are in need of updating. Currently the system is monitored live on average 18 hours a day by a combination of parking attendants and dedicated operators and they have done an excellent job. The police now tell us that we really need to monitor 24 hours a day, and to employ specialists who have the necessary training and security clearance to be linked in with the police airwave radios. WE are currently looking at upgrading our own system, or possibly linking with a neighbouring authority to deliver a better service.

#### **VISIT FROM HOME OFFICE ALCOHOL POLICY TEAM**

3 members of the Home Office Alcohol Policy Team are due to visit Taunton Deane on Tuesday 14 Feb. The visit is in recognition of the good work and achievements of the Taunton Deane Crime Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) in tackling alcohol related anti-social behaviour. The main purpose of the visit is to get a broad overview how Taunton Deane is addressing alcohol misuse problems. I will be meeting the team, as will the Chief Executive and officers from the Community Safety Unit and Licensing. The team will also meet with the police, the County Gazette and members of PubWatch.

## **COMMUNITY PLANNING**

In order to consult as many people and organisations as possible across the Borough in the preparation of the Local Development Framework and review of the Community Strategy, Bakers Associates were appointed by TDBC (Forward Plan and Policy & Performance) and the LSP to develop a consultation strategy and facilitate consultation workshops.

The LSPs Spatial Planning Working Group, with representatives from each local community planning area, have been instrumental in shaping the strategy with Bakers. There is considerable emphasis on engaging those who traditionally may not get involved in planning and community issues. Planning Aid South West are helping with free advice and community capacity building, particularly in North and East Taunton.

There will be a variety of consultation methods including workshops, exhibitions, drop-in sessions and stakeholder meetings. Feedback will be encouraged through completing comment forms, writing in, e-mailing to a dedicated e-mail address, and discussions.

The consultation period will commence towards the end of March and conclude at the beginning of June. The feedback from this will help shape the LDF Core Strategy and Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan, a review of the Community Strategy, and local area strategies for North and East Taunton.

### Wellington and Area Community Strategy:

The draft Wellington and Area Community Strategy is now live and ready for comment on Taunton Deane Borough Council's website. Community involvement has been integral to the process and we hope that the Strategy has the local community's final endorsement. Comments are welcomed and should be received by Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> February. The steering group will then consider all feedback before the plan becomes a working document.

## **LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT**

The Executive endorsed the Second Draft Local Area Agreement earlier this month, with support for the proposal of the Review Board to improve reference to culture within the LAA. There is still work to be done in respect of governance and performance management arrangements, how any reward grants will be distributed and possible alignment of budgets. The Chief Executive will represent TDBC in future discussions on these issues.

## **CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP (CDRP)**

The Police and Justice Bill just published incorporates legislative changes to the working of Crime and Disorder Partnerships.

This will mean that the strategic direction of the CDRP will be set at the county level with a co-ordinating body overarching the 5 district CDRP's and including the county wide Drugs and Alcohol Action Team. Taunton Deane's portfolio holder will be required to sit on this strategic group that will also drive the Safer Communities block of the Local Area Agreement.

Instead of carrying out an audit every three years, and setting a 3 year strategy, we will be obliged to carry out a 6 monthly strategic assessment, and this will inform a rolling three yearly strategy to be updated each April.

Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder act relating to data sharing will be strengthened to oblige responsible authorities to share depersonalised data. CDRP's will be obliged to consult and engage communities on a regular and ongoing basis and produce regular reports. Overview and Scrutiny committees will have their powers extended to encompass the work of CDRP's. Elected members will be able to issue a Call for Action if they feel that

a member of their community has not had a community safety issue sufficiently well addressed.

Joanna Lewin-Harris