

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

### **COUNCIL MEETING 11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2005**

#### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

I made reference to the year passing quickly in my last report and here we are the penultimate Full Council meeting of the year, where has it gone? Also, in the interests of facilitating a shorter meeting, (the 19 July meeting ended at 9.30 pm) I have exhorted my colleagues to keep their reports brief and to the point, therefore I must do the same!

In my last report I indicated tremendous budget pressures for the ensuing year of in excess of £1m budget gap. From a preliminary meeting this is certainly the case unless the dire predictions about central Government revenue support grant figures are wrong and they make a generous settlement. I would not recommend you hold your breath waiting for this to happen! As usual I anticipate it will be a difficult budget setting round trying to meet the aspirations of the community and Members to continue and enhance the excellent services we already provide. We must aim for any increase in Council Tax to be the minimum possible as we receive a clear message from the community that high increases are of major concern. We have therefore to seek to minimize outgoings and maximize income to help bridge any gap.

On the 26 September we received what I regard as a momentous decision from the First Secretary of State regarding the unauthorised Gypsy encampment in Oxen Lane North Curry. The appeals against the Enforcement Notice and the refusal of planning permission were dismissed in their entirety. An extension of the Enforcement notice was granted for a period of 12 months from the date of the decision but in my view this is more than compensated for by the fact that a Temporary Permission was completely ruled out. Of all the appeal decisions I have seen recently in similar circumstances, this is the clearest and most final in upholding the rules of planning. This truly was partnership working at its most effective with the community, Parish Council and Borough Council which has brought about as satisfactory a conclusion as we could have hoped for. I express the greatest appreciation to all involved and particularly our own officers who worked so tirelessly to meet the aspirations of the community.

Regrettably the good news of the appeal being dismissed was greatly marred by a cowardly and malicious attack on the property of two ladies living in Oxen Lane, the property most affected by the unauthorised development. Late at night on the day of the announcement, that the appeal had been dismissed, entrance gates were smashed open and cars and a garage wrecked. The perpetrators of this crime have set themselves apart from normal civilized society, I hope they are soon apprehended and dealt with robustly by the law. The circumstances could have been so different had anybody been in either vehicle. It was such a sudden and violent attack that serious injury or a fatality would almost surely have occurred. I extend my sincerest sympathies to the homeowners that suffered the attack and to the community as a whole as this has had a dreadful destabilizing effect across North Curry and not surprisingly they are concerned about the possibility of further incidents over the next 12 months.

To try and reassure the community I have held discussions with Inspector Mike Ashwin to increase patrols and security measures in and around North Curry. I am gratified by the rapid and positive response as various measures have been implemented and a much higher profile of

policing is evident. Hopefully this will allow confidence to grow and to reassure concerned people in the area.

During the same week we must not forget the dreadful incident that occurred in Gipsy Lane, Taunton, when a young man with everything to live for was so brutally and unnecessarily murdered. I can only offer my deepest sympathies to his family and friends for this sudden and tragic loss. I hope the people that committed this crime are swiftly brought to justice with appropriate sentences to match the crime.

Since the last meeting we have been moving forward on a lot of fronts and I set out the headlines of these for information.

- 1) Initial consultation about possible redevelopment of Taunton swimming pools, warrants further investigation.
- 2) The consultation prior to ballot for the housing stock transfer options is now progressing.
- 3) Additional covered tennis courts to create a centre of excellence is now confirmed and a request for an alternative method of funding is before you tonight.
- 4) Clearance from GOSW for siting the livestock market at J26 has been given and S106 agreements have or are about to be concluded.
- 5) The new North Street toilets have been completed and opened, a building to be proud of, it is regrettable that an article in the local press sought to denigrate the achievement by erroneously claiming it was over budget and suffered delayed completion. Neither were true and they also sought to build up fears that the design of the building would encourage anti social behaviour. It is sad that so much negativity exists, when Wellington has so much to be proud of.
- 6) Officers and Wellington Members have met to try and resolve the great differences in the Deane costings and design and those of Wellington TC for upgrading the Community building, in order to arrive at a satisfactory solution that meets our legal duties to ensure safe access for all.
- 7) A major new software programme for Revenues and Benefits is now in the process of procurement.
- 8) The ISIS project, a possible JV with Somerset County Council is progressing and funds have been allocated to carry out detailed analysis of its benefits, costs and risks as part of the next stage.
- 9) We were selected to participate in a study by the Leadership Centre benefiting from free consultancy to see what makes us an "Excellent Council". This will provide us with further training and grants are likely to assist particularly with succession training and strengthen our Review and Scrutiny process.
- 10) Proposals for enhancement and upgrading of French Weir Park were set out for public consultation. Despite a very wet and miserable day, considerable interest was shown.
- 11) TDBC staff travel plans have been agreed in principle and I commend all involved for arriving at a mutually acceptable solution to the majority. This will ultimately greatly assist in our efforts to encourage alternative forms of travel and help to reduce unacceptable levels of congestion. I fully realise the negotiations have been difficult and the end result is appreciated as we now set an example for other major employers.
- 12) We are at last nearing a successful conclusion of lease negotiations with SCC for the Old Municipal Buildings. They wish to operate it as a Register Office relocating from the present site at Flook House. What more fitting use could we find for such a beautiful old building and it will continue to allow public access to one of the finest town centre buildings.

In addition to all of these initiatives we recently attended joint presentations with Somerset County Council to try and gain funding from Cycle England to become one of five towns in England for the

development of cycling. This would involve measures to increase awareness and level of cycling and provide funding for upgrading existing and adding new cycle routes. We await the decision but it was felt that the judges believed there was considerable potential for Taunton to offer improved cycling facilities and take up.

Last but not least we joined with our Taunton Vision partners for a Royal Town Planning Institute presentation of the Terence O'Rourke designs for the regeneration of Taunton. These had been judged as excellent and suitable to go forward for consideration for a national award. We await the outcome of the Judges' deliberations. The majority of the community appreciate the hard work and excellent design that has produced our master plan for the huge programme of proposed regeneration. An RTPi national award would reaffirm what we already know, that we have a fantastic plan for redevelopment, it would be a tremendous accolade if the designs were to be recognised as worthy of an award by such an august body.

Councillor John Williams  
Leader of the Council

## **COUNCIL MEETING 11 OCTOBER 2005**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BISHOP** **PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION**

#### **Bus Users UK**

I attended the "Follow Up" meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September at the Brewhouse Theatre with Mark Leeman, staff from S.C.C. and First, chaired by Joe Lynch, Senior Officer of Bus Users UK. The two hour meeting, open only to those who attended the Surgery in March and their nominated guests, were given the opportunity to listen and respond to the attempts made by the service providers to overcome their concerns about the service provided, and the reasons for not being able to comply with all their requests. Bus Users UK will arrange a further meeting next year.

#### **Taunton Railway Station**

The work to transform Taunton Railway Station into an integrated transport interchange is well underway and will cater for all the modes of travel from buses, and bicycles to taxis and pedestrians and also provide 70 additional car parking spaces.

#### **The Slinky Bus**

This new service will provide a demand responsive transport (DRT) where public transport is not available or suitable for the journey. Bookings will be by phone and 24 hrs notice is usually required.

The local launch will take place outside the Council Offices at 5.30 pm, prior to the Council meeting, and the two buses that will be in use will be available for your inspection. Leaflets about the service will be available and staff will be there to answer any questions that you may have.

#### **Cycling England**

Cycling England, the group dealing with the cycling demonstration towns programme, is funded by the Department for Transport and replaced the National Cycling Strategy Board. It has been given a budget of £5 million over the next three years.

Somerset County Council has made an application for Taunton to be included in a pilot scheme to have Taunton become one of the Cycling Demonstration Towns 2005 –2008 and I am pleased that Taunton has been short listed with one London Borough and seven other towns. Once chosen, five towns will receive £500,000 each a year for the next three years for cycling projects, a figure that will be matched by the local authorities. All the short listed have or will be visited and it is expected that a decision will be made soon (probably before the Council meeting). I hope that Taunton will be chosen and given the opportunity to prove that concentrating investment to achieve results makes sense.

#### **Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) S.W.Planning Achievement Awards**

Seven South West entries for this years national Planning Awards have been passed to the judging panel for regional award consideration – Three of the entries, the Plymouth Local Development Framework, Poole Bridge Regeneration Initiative and Taunton Vision urban design statement have made it through to the final judging stage of the national competition – The

judges for the national competition visited Taunton recently to discuss the entry and I hope that we shall achieve success.

### **New Development Control provisions**

Commencement orders have instigated five important parts of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004:

Reducing the default period for the life of a planning permission from five to three years.

Giving planning authorities the power to decline to determine repeat and subsequent applications.

Establishing an obligation on statutory consultees to respond within 21 days when commenting on planning applications.

Setting new procedures with regard to the inquiry process for major infrastructure projects.

Statutory consultees to include regional planning bodies where a planning application may impact on the regional spatial strategy

### **Planning Delivery Grant**

A total of £135 million will be available next year for planning delivery grant, of which £6 million will be allocated according to local authorities progress on delivering e-planning services.

### **LDF Briefing Sessions**

Seven briefing sessions were held throughout our area in September and each session consisted of three short presentations followed by questions and answers on the following themes: the LDF (introduction); the Taunton Deane LDF (work programme); the linking of the LDF to the Community Strategy and consultation arrangements..

Although the attendance was not great the presentations were appreciated by those attending who considered that they were of benefit in assisting their understanding of the new system.

### **Planning training for members of Parish Councils**

Training Sessions for members of Parish Councils involved in the Delegation Agreement are being arranged and members of other councils are being invited to attend. A Meeting has already been held in Wellington and future sessions are likely to be arranged at Bishops Lydeard, North Curry and Pitminster. Ward members will be advised of the arrangements

**Cliff Bishop.**

## **COUNCIL MEETING 11th OCTOBER 2005**

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

#### SPORT

Swimming Pool Consultation: an extensive period of consultation regarding the future of swimming provision in Taunton was concluded in August 2005. The findings show generally high levels of satisfaction with what exists but a realisation of the need for modernisation/improvement. We will continue to explore the possibilities for modern swimming facilities in Taunton Deane.

#### PARKS

Taunton Deane's Three Green Flag Awards: these have been won by:  
Victoria Park for the first time; a high level of community interest was key to obtaining the award, but there is much work to be done to retain it.  
Vivary Park for a second year; the quality of provision and appearance of the park being hard to fault but there are still some areas for improvement.  
Wellington Park for a third time; being a very pleasant park of good heritage value. It also kept its Green Heritage status for a second year, being the only site to be awarded this in the South West. May I pay tribute on behalf of us all to the immense hard work of the Parks department, the Friends' Groups of the Parks and all those who have helped win these awards. CABE Space research shows how high standards contribute both economically and environmentally to our quality of life here.

Vivary Park Management Plan: we are slowly proceeding with the practical implementation of this plan, drawn up to reflect public priorities of personal safety, a more visible staffing and to mirror the Council's priorities. This is all against a background of reducing budgets. Work has just begun on the Chalet and ROK the main contractor has a year end completion date. It is designed to service the needs of both park and golf users and houses a café, selling hot and cold drinks and snacks, the golf shop and public toilets. The golf shop will then provide changing facilities. It will be owned by Taunton Deane and operated by Tone Leisure. Vivary Park also hosted a visit by the world-renowned Moscow State Circus which was a sell-out.

French Weir Park; a successful consultation day in the park in September attracted a large proportion of Fairwater residents to see initial ideas for improvements. Comments and priorities will be worked into design ideas to reflect its particular character and further discussion held to ensure agreement on the investment programme.

Britain in Bloom National Award; Taunton was entered by the South West in Bloom Committee to represent the region in the large town/small city category (population 35-100,000). Newcastle-under-Lyme won the cup with a Silver Gilt award. Taunton, Norwich, Horsham also received Silver Gilt awards (70-80points). There were no Gold or Bronze awards made. Taunton was also "Highly Commended" in the "Best Floral Displays" of the finalist in all categories and "Commended" for Vivary Park in the Best Public Park in all categories. (Nottingham won the cups in both cases). Thank you to Parks, Friends, the Environmental Services and all who worked so hard for this prestigious award.

#### TONE LEISURE LIMITED ACTIVITIES

Vibe Youth Programme: this most successful youth activities programme at Wellsprings has got three years' funding. It is now being extended to Blackbrook for which we have one year's funding from Taunton Deane's Crime Reduction Partnership. £16,500 has been awarded by Children in Need for the inclusion programmes for children with individual needs across Tone Leisure activities.

Wellsprings Leisure Centre: investment has been made in a specialist indoor marquee lining for its sports hall to create a more formal atmosphere. This provides an ideal space for a wide range of events from craft exhibitions to charity balls.

“SportStreet” Programme Tone Leisure is launching an innovative programme to get more of the community active and involved in physical activity and sport. Starting in October one street will be selected for a month as Taunton’s “SportStreet. Each resident will receive a series of vouchers to use on a range of activities at the Tone Leisure centres. All they need do is to take a form of identification and an activity voucher with them for the month their street has been selected.

Over 50s walking Programme: Tone Leisure and Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership have set up new walking programmes in the Taunton area, with the aim of getting more people, more active, more often. Walks are free of charge and open to the over 50s

## COMMUNITY ARTS AND ARTS DEVELOPMENT

10 Parishes Festival. In only its second year the festival has brought more visitors to West Deane than Somerset Arts Week. 10 Radio was also born this September broadcasting local news, events, discussion shows, drama and music. It was put together by many different people in the community.

The Stoke St. Gregory Youth Theatre took centre stage at the Halifax Playhouse as youth winners of the National Association of Drama Societies. Thank you to Housing for supporting their winning performance with a guarantee against losses.

Influx Dance Company have been encouraged to stay in Taunton Deane by seed funds which have levered in a larger Arts Council grant.

TAPA have launched their new website and brochure with support from an arts grants they received 2 years ago.

A Visual Arts Group networking the Museum, the Brewhouse, Somerset Art Week, Somerset Art Gallery Trust, Quartz Festival and SCAT has been set up by our Arts Officer Caroline Corfe in order to programme and promote visual arts collaboratively. Visual arts are a particular strength of Taunton Deane especially with the new impetus of the 10 Parishes Festival and the high profile of the Quartz Arts Festival being launched by Queen College.

The Brewhouse Theatre & Arts Centre: Robert Miles the new director is now in post and already proving a positive dynamic team leader. A report will go the next H & L Panel.

Cllr Dilly Bradley

## **COUNCIL MEETING 11th OCTOBER 2005**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CAVILL** **ECONOMIC, ASSET MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM**

#### **Tourism**

Our 2005 Visitor Guide has been the most successful yet, with over 49,000 copies distributed nationwide, and we still have two months to go. The PR campaign has generated several articles and pieces in the national press and, from our point of view, has generated coverage that would have cost us over £50,000 in advertising. Our present advertising campaign is generating approx 400 requests per day, whilst the 2006 campaign has been booked and starts in late November. Whilst our old web-site performed well, our new web-site is a further improvement in terms of ease of use, features, searches, and appearance, and I'm sure will carry on generating an increase in hits. The 2006 Visitor Guide is well under way, with adverts for accommodation and attractions generating more income than previous years.

#### **TIC**

Whilst it was disappointing to lose the income from the cancellation of the 'Proms in the Park'; the Moscow State Circus sales tickets have helped us make up the shortfall. The booking line for accommodation has taken in excess of £12,000 to date, and the Wellington TIC has now become an agent for National Express.

On 19<sup>th</sup> October at Othery, the Mump Parishes Village Tourism Forum will be launched. This Forum aims to create a network of tourism services at a village scale, to stimulate rural enterprise based on recreational opportunities offered by the distinct landscape of the Levels and Moors. This is a partnership between Sedgemoor and TDBC.

#### **Rural Regeneration**

The Churchinford and Buckland St Mary/Otterford bus is now up and running and provides a demand-response service, to an area within the Blackdowns that is poorly served by public transport. A joint event involving several sections of Taunton Deane assisted in making the Ten Parishes Festival a great success. During the 9 days, 200 artists were involved exhibiting, entertaining and providing workshops. Well over 8000 visitors have been recorded in the visitor books. We are assisting the Chamber of Commerce in planning a business event for 2006. A Rural Business Opportunity event is also being planned in Wiveliscombe. We have helped organise a brokering table at Wiveliscombe to drive the Family Centre project forward. This involved getting GOSWRA, RDA, DEFRA, Business Link PCT and other together at the same time. Recently, SCC has announced that Wiveliscombe has been chosen as a site for the centre. Our third Celebrate Somerset event was held 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4th September, the event was well received by consumers and producers alike.

#### **ADO**

Over the last two months a considerable number of businesses have been assisted in their attempt to establish new income streams; not just the new



environmental schemes, but diverse projects involving the establishment of game farms, poultry auctions, market garden/nursery/garden design, and even an agricultural engineering business. Accountancy and computer courses have been well attended, enabling people to develop their own bespoke systems of particular relevance to their business. For those planning a new enterprise, a second marketing two day course has been held, and again, oversubscribed. Negotiations are underway to be able to promote local products at the Road Chef, M5 Taunton Services. This will give a local producer an opportunity to coordinate local supplies and oversee the project, promoting food, art and local craft.

### **Economic Development**

The new Business Development Grant has got off to a good start, with the first of the three seminars being over-booked. This grant is a competitive scheme that awards £2000 to 5 businesses, that can show through their business plan how they can develop their business. We are fortunate to have the assistance of Business Link's services. Awards will be made in the second and third week in November. We are continuing to update the Commercial Property register, and there seems to be an increase in the number of businesses looking to relocate or establish themselves here, particularly in Taunton and especially office based companies. With funding secured through the Market Towns Initiative, a partnership of TDBC, Wellington Chamber, SCC and the Town Council have decided, as the best way forward, that an inward investment web-site for Wellington will be designed, aimed specifically at encouraging businesses to relocate to Wellington.

### **Asset Management**

We will shortly be having a meeting with English Heritage who wish to consider the schedule of works to the OMB. This should not affect the completion date of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006. There will be an in-depth assessment of Fore Street and the surrounding area of Wellington to determine the details of the work necessary for DDA compliance. The necessary detailed work for the new toilet block at the Community Centre in Priorswood will soon be complete.

### **Community Arts**

The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre, now working within a new partnership on the basis of a three year plan and financial forecast, will be reporting on 15<sup>th</sup> November to H & L Review Panel.

The Stoke St Gregory Youth Theatre took the prominent position at the Halifax Playhouse, as Youth Winners of the National Association of Drama Societies.

Taunton Deane has assisted with a starter grant, enabling a larger ACE grant which facilitated the Influx Dance Company to take up residence at the Tacchi-Morris centre. This is a young and talented Dance Company.

### **Taunton Town Centre Company**

Our Tourism Unit will be producing a flyer to promote Taunton Carnival (15<sup>th</sup> October) and the Ice Rink. In respect of the Ice Rink, we have been offered

significant sponsorship but have not yet achieved the major sponsor we had hoped for. However local businesses will now be offered the opportunity to take up the eighteen banners that will be around the Ice Rink from November to December. Christmas Lights switch on date is Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November. The Safer Business Award presentations will be at Somerset County Cricket Club on 27<sup>th</sup> October, when awards will be made by Richard Barron of Action Against Business Crime. Congratulations to TRAC on winning this award.

Councillor Norman Cavill

## **COUNCIL MEETING – 11<sup>th</sup> October 2005.**

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

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

##### **1.1 Licensing Unit**

At the end of the transitional period TDBC had received 95% of all premises licence applications. According to the Department of Culture Media and Sport, Taunton Deane was the best performing authority in the Country.

Overall the number of premises and personal license applications were not as high as first envisaged. The numbers of applications are as follows:-

- 463 applications for a personal licence, all of which have been granted.
- 378 applications for a premises licence, 316 of which have been granted.

Of the 16 hearings that have so far been determined by the Licensing Sub Committee, 5 appeals have been lodged with the Magistrates Court.

The Licensing Unit recently suspended a Taxi Driver's licence after he was convicted of driving his private vehicle without insurance.

##### **1.2 Health and Safety Team**

###### **Local Authorities and Health and Safety Executive working Together**

Taunton Deane Borough Council has been requested by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to sign and commit to a local "Statement of Intent" with regard to local authorities and the HSE working together. The Health and Safety team have already been involved in a number of joint initiatives over the past 12 months and plan to continue this involvement in the future.

###### **FRESH (the Forum for Regional Excellence in Safety and Health)**

FRESH represents liaison arrangements between the Health and Safety Executive, (HSE) and the 45 Local Authorities, (LA's) within the South West of England from Cornwall to Dorset, Wiltshire and the former county of Avon. FRESH aims to "ensure a more effective use of combined resources between LA's and HSE, to reduce work related accidents and ill health". TDBC Chief EHO James Barraah is currently chair of FRESH.

###### **Watch Your Step!**

In October 2005 HSE, Local Authorities and other partners will launch a nationwide campaign to tackle the causes of Slips and Trips accidents in the workplace. The health and safety team will be focusing on slips and trips

issues when they carry out their routine visits during October. In addition, over 200 non- food premises have been invited to attend an awareness event highlighting both the “Watch your Step” and “Backs 2005” national campaign issues. This event is being jointly held with the HSE on 25 October at SCAT college.

#### Safety and Health Awareness Day

In February a further joint event is due to go ahead at Bridgwater College involving HSE, Taunton Deane and Sedgemoor District Council. Over 300 food premises will be invited to attend presentations on manual handling, slips and trips and asthmagens (flour dust).

### **1.3 Food Safety Team**

#### Safer Food Better Business (SFBB).

This is a Food Standards Agency initiative aimed at helping small food businesses to prepare for changes in food hygiene legislation that will come into force in January 2006. We have secured a grant of £20,000 from the Food Standards Agency for a training programme to introduce SFBB to local food businesses. The training will be free and will be delivered in partnership with Somerset Skills Alliance.

### **1.4 Environmental Protection Team**

#### Media Shadow Visits.

As part of on-going measures to raise the profile of Environmental Health among our customers, a series of shadow visits is planned. Reporters will accompany Officers in their daily duties, looking at various aspects of the services provided in terms of nuisance investigation, the Dog Warden and Pest Control Services, water quality issues, air quality and contaminated land.

#### Asbestos Fire.

A fire in a domestic garage in the early hours of a Saturday morning resulted in asbestos contamination of neighbouring properties when the garage roof exploded in the heat. An Officer from Environmental Health attended the scene at the request of the Fire and Rescue Service and samples were taken that confirmed the presence of asbestos. As a follow up measure, a Notice was served requiring the house owner to appoint a registered asbestos contractor to clean up and properly dispose of the potentially hazardous debris. The work was completed within two days.

#### South West Environmental Surveillance System (SWESS).

We are participating in this internet based scheme, which allows participating agencies to share information and best practice on environmental events of

public health significance. The scheme is being co-coordinated by the Health Protection Agency.

### Dog Microchipping.

A successful dog microchipping day was held recently, in partnership with the Dogs Trust. Twenty-four dogs were microchipped and there was good media coverage that will help to encourage responsible ownership.

## **2.0 WASTE SERVICES**

### **2.1 Toilet Cleansing**

The efforts of our in-house cleansing team still seem to be paying dividends, with very few complaints.

The new public toilets in North Street Car Park in Wellington were opened on the 14th September. The toilets were designed to compliment the built environment and be in-keeping with the Victorian architecture of Wellington. The facilities incorporate features to ensure they are easily maintained, vandal resistant and are safe and hygienic for residents and visitors to Wellington.

### **2.2 Street Cleansing**

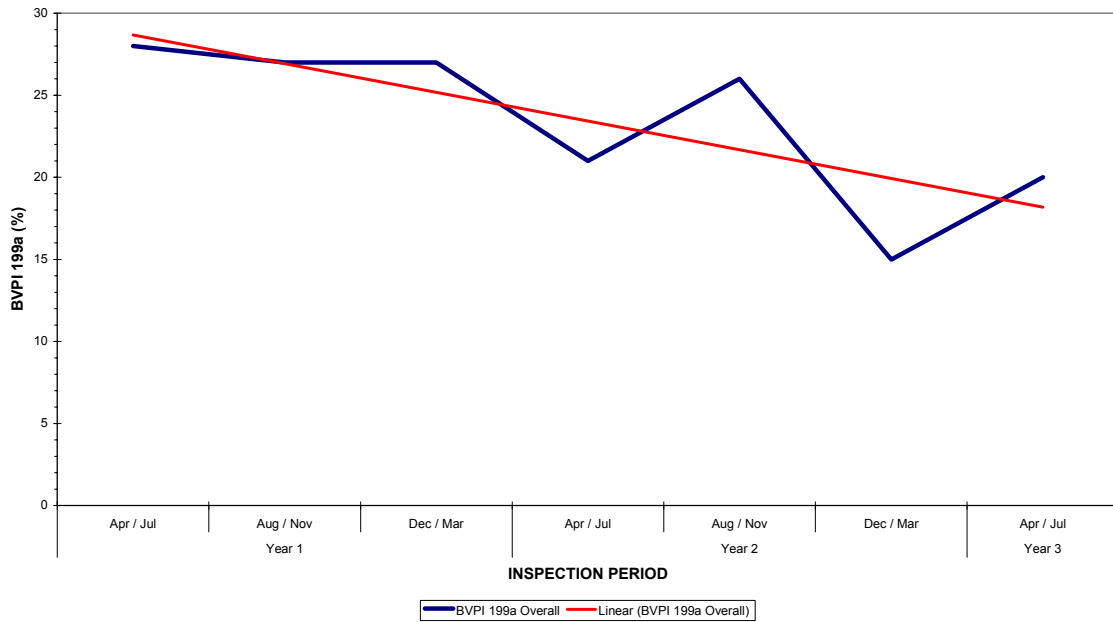
As part of this years Street Scene initiative 5000 sq m of footway in Taunton was treated for the removal of chewing gum, the areas covered were The Parade a section of the High Street, Fore Street, part of Paul Street, Cheapside and part of East Street.

Also, as part of the ongoing River Tone Partnership a clean of the main channel has taken place using specialist contractors.

In an effort to remove more silt type detritus from cul-de-sac's and footways Deane DLO are purchasing a 'Schmidt Swingo' precinct sweeper. This decision has been reached after successful trials using a hired machine.

The programme of monitoring of street cleanliness that the council is required to carry out to produce BVPI 199 was undertaken in July. 300 sites were inspected that were representative of the borough in terms of land use and by reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The monitoring methodology is prescribed by ENCAMS to conform to the national Local Environmental Quality Survey. The graph below shows a trend of continuing improvement (less is best!) in the overall cleanliness of the borough since monitoring was introduced. The monitoring of graffiti and flyposting are now included in the surveys and the inspections carried out in April indicate that these are not significant issues in Taunton Deane.

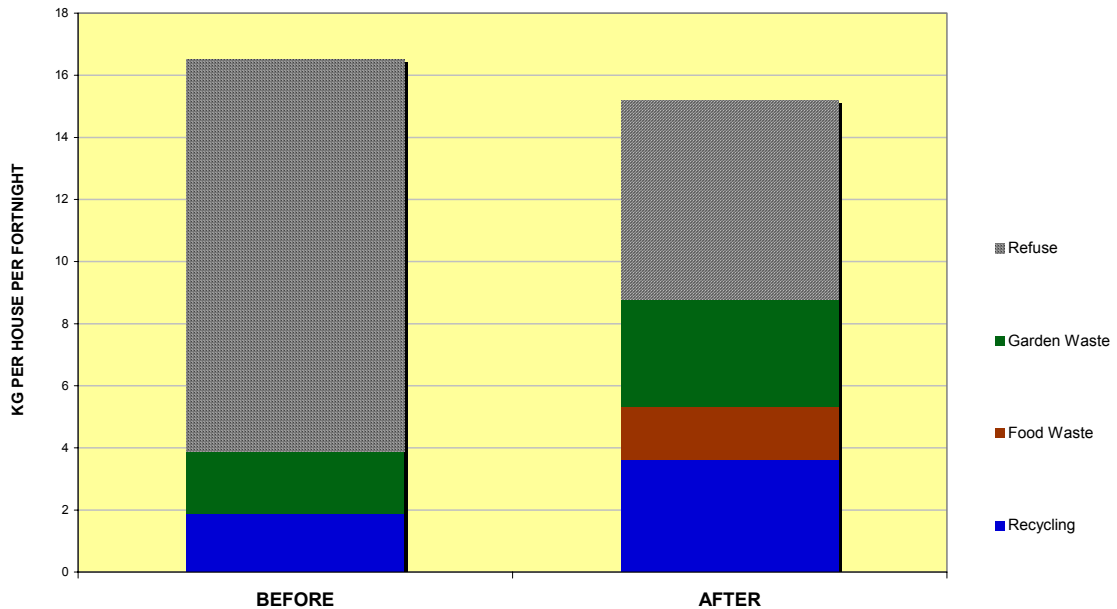
**BVPI 199a FOR TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL - APRIL 2003 TO JULY 2005**



**2.3 SORT IT!**

The new collections in Phase 1 continue to deliver high levels of performance as can be seen in the chart below. Overall waste arisings are down, and 57% of the collected waste is being recycled or composted.

**TAUNTON DEANE : BEFORE & AFTER SORT IT!**



October is a very busy month for the waste services team and the Council’s contractors. The delivery of containers to the 13600 properties in Phase 2 of *SORT IT!* commences on 3 October and the first collections from these properties start on 17 October.

Residents in the Phase 1 areas will also receive their first newsletter on the *SORT IT!* services. This includes feedback on the performance of the services and a short questionnaire to help us make the services as effective as possible.

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

#### **3.1 Crematorium Organ**

Work is nearly completed on repairing and renovating the crematorium organ. The renovation will provide a far better depth of sound and better usage of the existing pipes; work will be completed before the busy winter period begins.

#### **3.2 Taunton Deane Cemetery & Crematorium Car Park Lighting**

Following a "risk assessment" the necessity for car park lighting was identified. The lighting will be installed during this financial year and paid for by income generated by the crematorium.

#### **3.3 Crematoria Abatement of Mercury Emissions**

Legislation requiring 50% of cremations in this country to be abated for mercury by 2012 has been issued. The legislation requires crematoria to let their intentions be known by the end of the year as to whether the crematorium proposes the abatement of mercury by this date or if it intends to enter an emissions trading scheme. Members will be provided with a report before the end of 2005.

#### **3.4 Crematorium Waiting Room Extension & Office Refurbishment**

Work has been completed on this long awaited extension and office refurbishment. The need for these improvements was originally identified following consultation with the funeral directors, clergy and the public. The cost is being met through the income generated by the service.

#### **3.5 Wellington Cemetery Extension**

For several years now both the estates and planning sections of Taunton Deane have been looking for suitable land at Wellington to use as future burial ground. As yet no land has been identified, although enquiries continued to be made.

#### **3.6 Taunton Deane Cemetery Extension**

The Council owns land at the crematorium, which will be used for future burial. This land requires developing for the service. An entrance road, paths, drainage, planting etc have to be in place before its use can commence. It is anticipated that work to prepare this land will be undertaken over the next few years.

Councillor Mark Edwards

## **COUNCIL MEETING 11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2005**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GREG GARNER**

This report will focus on two 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 Home Aid Partnership.

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

##### **Last three months**

There has been considerable work undertaken since July, with the Project Team communicating to Tenants, Staff, Councillors and our Partners.

Recent communications have included:

- i) Briefings to all Housing and Building DLO Staff
- ii) Briefings to Non Housing Staff
- iii) Information in the August Pay Slips
- iv) A Staff Newsletter copied to all Councillors
- v) Briefings to Councillors at both major Political Group Meetings and also through a Members Briefing at which PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) and Aldbourne (the Independent Tenant Advisors - ITA) were present.
- vi) Briefings to the Local Press
- vii) Two Newsletters to our Tenants
- viii) Posters displayed by the ITA across the Borough in venues such as Libraries, Doctor Surgeries. The poster encourages tenants to get involved
- ix) Briefing to the Tenants Forum and Tenants Panel by the Community Housing Task Force and Housing Corporation
- x) A letter to our Leaseholders
- xi) A letter to our Partners

Our four Advisors have now started working closely with the Council and our tenants.

- i) Aldbourne Associates appointed as the Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA) and who are providing support to tenants
- ii) PWC re-appointed to be the Council's Lead Advisor and will for example provide financial guidance
- iii) Pinsent Masons appointed as the Council's Legal Advisor and will for example provide advice on governance matters
- iv) Seymour-Cotton Partnership appointed as the Council's Communication Advisor and will for example assist in producing excellent communication materials, e.g. newsletters, video etc.

As with the Housing Stock Option Appraisal, a number of groups have now been formed, all of which have been discussed at the Tenants Forum, Housing Review Panel and Executive. One of these is the Officer Steering Group, which oversees,



provides steer and supports the work of the Project Team. In addition a Communication Group and a Tenant Panel have also been formed.

By the date of this Full Council the first Shadow Board Meeting will have taken place. The Shadow Board will consist of 12 Members, split equally of Tenants, Councillors and Independents from the Community. Initially meetings will take place monthly but from 2006 more frequently through various Working Groups. Further detail of the Shadow Board's activities and progress will be reported at future Full Council meetings.

A Tenants Priority Survey has been sent to all tenants, seeking for their views on the type of Housing Service they would like to receive in the future. The results of this survey will be factored into the ongoing consultation exercise and relayed back to Councillors and staff.

### Next three months

During the next three months further consultation and briefings will take place, supplemented by information releases, including a further Tenant and a separate Staff Newsletter to be produced by the end of October.

In November, the first "door knocking exercise" combined with holding "drop in centres" will be undertaken by the Project Team and the ITA. The purpose of this is to engage with tenants face-to-face and explain the work currently taking place and to answer questions.

Members will continue to be advised.

### **The Community Handyman**

The Community handyman service was launched at the "Wellington Spectacular" event on August Bank Holiday. The service has been well received by the public with the first booking made within 10 minutes of the service being launched. To date the handyman has undertaken a further 28 assignments.

The handyman service is a mobile repairs service making home visits to carry out small repair and other jobs for vulnerable home owners (elderly, disabled or low income residents) living within Taunton Deane. Charges for this service range from a minimum of £5.00 (e.g. if on income support) to a standard charge of £10.00. All customers pay for materials.

The handyman service is part of the Home Aid partnership chaired by me and funded jointly by this Council, South Somerset District Council, Somerset County Council Social Services, Somerset Primary Care Trust, The Safer and Stronger Communities Initiative and Taunton Deane Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Home Aid is planning to launch additional services to support vulnerable homeowners within Taunton Deane and South Somerset District Council. Members will naturally be advised as plans progress.

Councillor Greg Garner



## **COUNCIL MEETING 11 OCTOBER 2005**

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

#### **1 ISiS (Improving Services In Somerset)**

In May this year, the Executive agreed to consider the potential for TDBC to enter into a partnership arrangement with Somerset County Council and a third party private sector partner, to explore alternative ways of providing customer access, corporate support and transactional services.

The reasons for doing this come from our need to radically change the way customers can access our services. To achieve this change, and make the improvements we want to see, money needs to be released from “back office” and other services to allow investment into customer access. By making changes in this way, we will at the same time be meeting our requirements to make efficiency savings in line with “Gershon”.

An Outline Business Case has been developed over the summer, resulting in a final draft being presented to the Executive on 24 August. Having approved the Outline Business Case, authorisation was given to go ahead with the procurement process to seek a private sector partner willing to invest in this partnership arrangement.

The services likely to be involved are:  
Human Resources (Personnel & Payroll)  
Finance  
Information services  
Property Services  
Customer Services  
Revenues  
Benefits  
Procurement  
Some elements of Office Services  
Deane Design and Print

Avon and Somerset Police Authority (ASPA) have recently approached both Councils and are keen to consider joining the project. In principle, this could be beneficial for all Partners, and more importantly the public as all three organisations have similar ambitions around public and customer access. It has already been agreed that, if this were to go ahead, there would be no change to the location of the Partnership.

The Police Authority met on 28<sup>th</sup> September and gave approval and funding for them to join the project.

This is clearly a major development for the programme so there will be a need to ensure that the involvement of ASPA does not prejudice the interests of either SCC or TDBC and that the affordability model remains robust. Further, ASPA will need some time to ensure their own business case is developed

and that proper governance arrangements are put in place. As a result, the project timetable will be reviewed at the ISiS Joint Programme Board meeting next Tuesday (4<sup>th</sup> October).

Regular updates on this project will be provided to Members, through monthly briefing sheets, and updates at Group meetings when appropriate.

## **2 Revenues**

The software programming issues, which delayed opening the Payment Kiosks, have now been resolved and extensive testing has been undertaken. The machine will go-live at Taunton on Monday 10 October 2005 and a week or so after this date at Wellington. Initially this will be a 'soft launch' and the machines will run along side the existing face-to-face cashiering service. Face-to-face cashiering will be phased out early in the New Year.

Collection of the current financial year's Council Tax & Business Rates charges is progressing well and we were on target at the end of August 2005. We accumulated a backlog of Council Tax work over the summer months due to our being short of fully trained staff. Training of the new staff has, however, progressed well and, with some assistance from the Benefits Unit, we have largely cleared the backlog.

## **3 Financial Services**

In recent weeks the Financial services Unit has been involved in the new CPA arrangements through the production of the Use of Resources and Value for Money self assessments. In addition work has now started on the budget process for 2006/07 and in providing reports to the Review Board on budget monitoring for the current year. Officers are also involved in many other corporate projects, for example Waste Contract Integration, the Vision, ISIS and the Housing Stock Transfer project.

We are still awaiting the formal outcome of our recent external audit of the 2004/05 Annual Accounts but we expect an unqualified opinion

## **4 Member Services**

Details of the latest Member Training programme will be with members shortly. Training sessions are planned in Public Speaking, Ethics and Probity, Health and Safety of Councillors, Advanced Overview and Scrutiny, and Managing and monitoring the budget.

A start will also be made on a review of councillor membership on Outside Bodies. The Review is intended to ascertain how councillor membership is of benefit to each outside body and how their objectives fit in with the Council's own objectives. It will also suggest and encourage ways in which regular reporting back takes place and cover indemnities for councillors

## **5 Revenues and Benefits Project**

The project team has finished evaluating the tenders to install and maintain a new suite of Revenues and Benefits software (and document management

software to support these applications). On 21.09.05 the Executive agreed to accept the tender from International Business System (Public Services) Ltd; subject to contract. Contract negotiations began during the week of 26<sup>th</sup> September. The new software is planned to 'go live' on 31.03.06. This project is part-funded by a £400k grant from the Department of Works and Pensions

## **6 Internal Audit Services**

The section has successfully completed its first joint audits using the same audit staff working at Taunton Deane Borough Council and South Somerset District Council as part of the South West Audit Partnership. The process will over time allow us examine how the internal control framework operates within other Councils and will result in Taunton Deane challenging existing working practices and internal control arrangements. Internal Audit staffs continue to be involved in a wide range of initiatives across the Council including the provision of advice on Risk Management, Data Protection and Freedom of Information. We also play a vital assurance role in some of the major projects that the Council is working on including ISIS, replacement Revenues / Benefits and Housing Systems. From the 1<sup>st</sup> October West Somerset and Mendip District Councils formally join the partnership providing further opportunities for us to develop our skills and learn from others.

## **7 Information Systems**

The brand new tourist information web site (Heart of Somerset) was launched this week (at <http://www.heartofsomerset.com/>) giving lots of useful information about things to do and see within Taunton Deane.

A new E-Mail alerts system has been launched, giving visitors to the Taunton Deane web site the opportunity to sign up to automatically receive emails informing them of new planning applications and decisions, council job vacancies and forthcoming consultations, as well as information from the new Heart of Somerset site.

Major updates to the planning system are due to be completed next month, including full implementation of the Imaging/Workflow system within the unit. This should dramatically reduce the amount of time wasted searching for paper files, and will enable full remote working for planning officers in the future. The Building Control unit has bought the Submit-A-Plan system, which enables applications to be accepted via the Web. It also facilitates remote working using tablet pc technology, and links closely with the existing administration system.

Work is on going on the new intranet system, and a number of sites are now live using the new Microsoft Sharepoint system.

## **8 Customer Service**

Because of a combination of a large number of staff vacancies, prolonged sick leave and staff annual leave during the summer, the speed of answer fell well below an acceptable level. I am pleased to say that replacement staff have been recruited and trained and quality of service has been restored.

Terry Hall

## **COUNCIL MEETING 11 OCTOBER 2005**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GWYNETH LEIGHTON COMMUNICATIONS**

We are now achieving a higher level of awareness and much improved integration of the communications functions across the board with good results – but we recognise that we still have a long way to go to ensure that good communications becomes a strategic element of the Council's work and is embedded into our culture. The Communications Strategy has been updated and will be kept under review.

The Communications Team has been working closely with departments across the organisation on many of the Council's major projects including the Vision Delivery, Stock Transfer, ISiS, the continued roll out of the Sort It doorstep recycling campaign and the effective promotion of the new Licensing arrangements to mention but a few projects.

A great deal of work is being done to improve the content and the navigation of the Council website to make it easier for the public to get information and to access our services. I would like to thank the officers and members who helped the Communications Team manage our Corporate stand at the Wellington Spectacular at the end of August – we had very positive feedback from the public who were impressed with the fact the Council was taking part in the event and supporting Wellington. The launch of the Handyman Scheme at this event was very successful and most people we spoke to thought it was an excellent service and that it would help many residents. The doorstep recycling bins that were on display created major interest and the public were very supportive of work the Council is doing to protect our environment and wanted to learn more.

We have now developed a joint Communications Strategy and action plan with Somerset County Council for the ISiS (Improving Services in Somerset) project. This covers communications with all stakeholders and enables constant monitoring of progress. The communications with staff so far has included staff briefings, two staff newsletters, e-mail messages and team meetings. We will continue to make sure that good communications are built into this project.

A media monitoring and evaluation system has been put in place and reports will be made on a regular basis of the outcomes of our media coverage. Coverage in the local press remains strong and, it is pleasing to note the feeling is that the positive reporting outweighs the negative. We will be looking at ways to further expand our work to gain better coverage in the 'trade', regional and national press as well as in local government media.

The Weekly Bulletin has been restyled to take into account comments and suggestions from members and staff, and will contain weekly features from Heads of Services. My thanks go to Malcolm Western, Acting Head of Housing for leading the way with this and for his refreshing approach.

The next issue of the Council's newspaper - Deane Dispatch – will go out to households towards the end of November.

A new post of Communications and Information Manager has been created. I am delighted to tell you that Ruth James has been appointed. This post has a wide remit, reports to the Head of Policy and Performance and is responsible for the following:

- Public Relations
- Corporate Reputational Risk and Management
- Press and Media Relations
- Communications and Marketing (internal and external)
- Corporate Communications Strategy
- Consultation, Complaints and Customer Feedback
- Web Content for Customer Access
- Freedom of Information
- Research and Information Management

Gwyneth Leighton  
Executive Councillor for Communications

October 2005

## **COUNCIL MEETING 11 OCTOBER 2005**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS JOANNA LEWIN-HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

#### **Taunton Deane Crime and Disorder Partnership**

The Taunton Deane Crime and Disorder Partnership meeting in September discussed Local Area Agreements, the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003, and opportunities arising from the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act. Crime figures from the police showed a very encouraging 8% drop in reported crime over the past 6 months and a drop of 11% in violent crime. A discussion on anti-social behaviour centred round the need to provide more diversionary activities and to find ways of helping local residents to understand the benefits of installing youth facilities in their areas.

#### **Operation Relentless**

On Friday September 9<sup>th</sup>, staff from Taunton Deane joined with those from the Police in helping to deliver Operation Relentless 2. This was based around cracking down on alcohol related disorder.

The operation was based around cracking down on alcohol-related disorder and anti-social behaviour with over 50 staff from various agencies involved. As well as high-profile policing in Taunton and Wellington town centres, licensees displayed banners promoting the event and educational literature surrounding the '3 strikes' initiative was distributed. This initiative targets alcohol-related offending, working on a yellow and red card scheme and associated help and advice, with persistent offenders targeted for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

Over a thousand 'anti-spiking' straws were distributed free of charge to members of the public. These straws are specially made to completely cover the top of a bottle to prevent the contents from being tampered with easily.

#### **Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)**

The Taunton Deane LSP meeting in September discussed the allocation of funds to a number of projects. These included a scheme to promote apprenticeships within partner agencies; a campaign to increase the take up of broadband among businesses in North and East Taunton; and support for Local Action Teams (LATs). These are community based groups established to promote community safety in local areas and neighbourhoods.

Penny James updated the LSP on recent developments with delivering the Vision for Taunton. A dedicated delivery team had been set up and the Taunton Vision leaflet was distributed, and very well received.



Brendan Cleere briefed the LSP on recent progress with the development of the Somerset Local Area Agreement.

### **Local Area Agreement (LAA)**

A LAA is a three-year agreement that sets out, with partners, what the priorities should be for the local area and how these might most effectively be addressed.

These should reflect both local and national priorities, including those emerging from community strategies and other key strategies. The local area decides how to achieve the outcomes, for example by more flexible use of existing funding streams and pooling resources.

Somerset Strategic Partnership is developing the LAA, with input from many other agencies and partnerships across the County, including district councils and LSPs. The LAA will be negotiated with Government Office South West and signed off by ministers by March 2006.

### **Community Strategies for North and East Taunton**

Consultant Steve Gerry has now completed the baseline assessments on North and East Taunton. These assessments, funded by the LSP, effectively pull together the results of all the consultation and research work that has recently been done in these areas and the information will be used to produce a draft community strategy. Further funding from the LSP, and from the Planning Delivery Grant, will allow the appointment of a consultant to get the views of the local community on the draft community strategy, and also on the new Local Development Framework.

### **Thanks to Volunteers**

I have recently attended the Annual General Meetings of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Age Concern and Home Start. I also visited the YMCA in Lisieux Way and attended an Army Cadet Force presentation of awards ceremony. These organisations, and many others like them, illustrate very vividly the huge contribution the voluntary sector makes to our community. Across Taunton Deane, dedicated and committed volunteers offer their time and skills to a wide range of very worthwhile organisations and I extend my thanks to all of them.

Joanna Lewin-Harris