

Council Meeting- 4 October 2016

The Proposed Development at Firepool (the Old Cattle Market), Taunton

Motion proposed by Councillor Simon Coles and seconded by Councillor Jefferson Horsley

The Council notes that:-

- a) The Planning Committee rejected the Firepool Application submitted by the developers St Modwen on 31 August 2016 on the recommendation of the officers.
- b) It was defeated on the grounds that it did not meet the requirements of the Council's Core Strategy adopted in 2012 and on the grounds of poor design, failure to connect the station appropriately through the new Boulevard to Somerset Square and lack of activity for the waterfront onto the River Tone.
- c) It was also condemned for appearing like a "retail park" and the adverse effect it would have on the existing current town centre with Taunton Deane's consultants Savills estimating that it could take up to 20% of turnover away from the area.
- d) There was little evidence of any businesses truly interested in coming to Firepool from the hotel, entertainment, leisure and retail sectors at the meeting on 31 August 2016.
- e) The announcement on 19 September 2016 of the forthcoming closure of The County Stores in North Street, Taunton from January 2017.
- f) The announcement on 15 September 2016 made by the John Lewis Partnership that it was unlikely to open any further Waitrose Stores in the foreseeable future including Firepool.
- g) The Government's confirmation on 18 September 2016 of its decision to proceed with the contract arrangements to build Hinkley C.

Council further believes that Firepool is still the most important brownfield site available for the future development of Taunton and is anxious for new proposals to be brought forward at the earliest opportunity taking into account the latest circumstances set out above.

Council further believes that to attain our vision of becoming a forward thinking, progressive County Town and to meet its sustainable growth requirements to create prosperity and exploit our natural advantage of becoming the sub-regional capital of the South West we should:-

- A) Seek a new development partner; or
- B) Should consider undertaking the project north of the River Tone ourselves;
- C) Should rapidly reconsider the mix of buildings and businesses to reflect the changing circumstances set out in the Notes above; and
- D) Any development should enhance the current offering of the town centre;
- E) The development should be environmentally sustainable.
- F) The new proposals should reflect the strategic importance of the site as the new "Gateway to Taunton" from the Railway Station and be designed accordingly; and
- G) A fresh survey should immediately be undertaken of the businesses in the town centre and with the people of Taunton to ascertain their views on the above ideas.

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Motions to Council – Assessment Form

On receipt of a Motion from a Councillor, the Democratic Services Manager will carry out an assessment as to its contents to establish whether there are likely to be significant consequences to the Council should the Motion be carried at the subsequent Full Council meeting.

The first question to be addressed will be:-

“Can the Motion, if approved, be implemented without the need for any resource (financial and otherwise) to be identified outside existing budgets or staffing capacity?”

If the answer is ‘yes’, then the motion can proceed towards discussion and resolution.

An example of a Motion which would fall into the above category would be where the Council is being asked to lobby the Government, Somerset County Council or other body on a particular issue. If the motion is carried, the action required will usually involve no more than a letter being prepared and sent to the intended recipient.

However, as in the case of the recent Motion on ‘Legal Hights’, the answer to the above question would clearly be ‘no’.

In such circumstances, detailed analysis of the wording of the Motion will be required to identify what will be needed if the Motion – when it comes before Full Council – is carried.

Such analysis will include:-

- What additional resource would be required to ensure the Motion (if approved) could be implemented?
- What needs to be done to identify the level of resource necessary both in financial and staff terms?
- Are any approvals needed to provide these resources?
- Will this require reports to be submitted through Scrutiny and the Executive? If a Supplementary Estimate is required, Full Council approval will be required too.

If such analysis is required, the Democratic Services Manager will arrange for the attached pro-forma to be completed and this will accompany the relevant Motion onto the agenda of the Full Council meeting so all Members are aware that further investigation will be required before the Motion – even if it is carried – can be implemented.

Motions to Council – Assessment Pro-forma

(To be used in circumstances where it appears the wording of a proposed Motion will commit the Council to providing further financial or staffing resources which cannot be met from existing budgets)

Brief Details of the Motion –

That the Council should:-

- A) Seek a new development partner; or
- B) Should consider undertaking the project north of the River Tone ourselves;
- C) Should rapidly reconsider the mix of buildings and businesses to reflect the changing circumstances set out in the Notes above; and
- D) Any development should enhance the current offering of the town centre;
- E) The development should be environmentally sustainable.
- F) The new proposals should reflect the strategic importance of the site as the new “Gateway to Taunton” from the Railway Station and be designed accordingly; and
- G) A fresh survey should immediately be undertaken of the businesses in the town centre and with the people of Taunton to ascertain their views on the above ideas.

Questions to be addressed

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What additional resource would be required to ensure the Motion (if approved) could be implemented?</i> |
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Answer – Parts A and B of the motion would involve the termination of the Council’s contractual relationship with its development partner. This would involve resource requirements, although the main resource requirements would arise in relation to the assessment and implementation of alternative delivery arrangements. Points C-F if carried out by the Council (rather than by St Modwen under the existing development agreement) are likely to require significant resources. They will involve significant officer time and technical and professional advice. .

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What needs to be done to identify the level of resource necessary both in financial and staff terms?</i> |
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Answer – An assessment of the cost, feasibility, and effectiveness of alternative delivery models would be necessary if the Council wished to support parts A and/or B. The level of resources required to undertake such an assessment would depend on the range of alternatives investigated but would include external advice (including legal and development advice), as there is not sufficient capacity internally. Technical advice is likely to be required in terms of infrastructure delivery. Alternative models may involve Council investment in infrastructure, and this would have to be costed and planned.

- ***Are any approvals needed to provide these resources?***

Answer – Yes. A decision to pursue an alternative approach to Firepool delivery (points A and B) would require Council approval, including an assessment of the resources required. There would also need to be consultation with/approval from the Council's funding partner, the HCA, in relation to any alternative disposal strategy. Failure to do so could lead to a requirement to repay the funding.

- ***Will this require reports to be submitted through Scrutiny and the Executive? If a Supplementary Estimate is required, Full Council approval will be required too.***

Answer – Yes. A decision to pursue an alternative approach to Firepool delivery (points A and B) would require Council approval, including a request for resources.

Likely timescale involved –

The table below shows estimated timescales for implementing a new delivery strategy. These timescales are a very rough guide. They will be affected by market conditions, developer interest, and the Council/HCA decision making process.

Appraisal of alternative delivery options	4 - 6 months
Termination of the Development Agreement	2 - 4 months
Preparation of new planning application and consultation	4 - 8 months
Grant of Permission	4 - 6 months
Marketing/Procurement of new delivery partner(s)	12 - 18 months

Although a number of the timescales above could run concurrently it is estimated, again as a rough guide, that substantive development on site could start somewhere in the range of 2 – 4 years from a decision to pursue an alternative delivery strategy.