

COUNCIL MEETING – 20 APRIL 2004

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL
COUNCILLOR BISHOP - PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION

Taunton Deane Local Plan - Proposed Modifications

At its meeting on 23 March 2004, the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel considered the proposed modifications to the Taunton Deane Local Plan, following the receipt of the Local Plan Inspector's Report.

After careful consideration, the Review Panel recommended the Executive to accept the proposed modifications prior to requesting Council approval to place the modifications on deposit for public consultation.

The Executive felt it was important that proposals for the development of land at Longforth Farm, Wellington should be considered as part of the Local Development Framework that would have to be produced by the Council shortly.

The Council are RECOMMENDED that the proposed modifications to the Taunton Deane Local Plan be agreed and that they be placed on deposit for public consultation.

Councillor C W Bishop

NOTE: A full copy of this report was circulated to all members of Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel and the Executive. Copies have also been placed in the Member's Room and are available on the Council's web site: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk. If any member requires a hard copy please contact Ralph Willoughby-Foster, Forward Plan and Regeneration Manager.

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Report of Councillor Bishop – Planning Policy and Transportation

The Planning Delivery Grant

I was delighted when notification was received from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that a grant for 2004/05 of £533,068.00 had been awarded to the Council and I congratulate all staff on their performance, which helped to secure the award.

Although the grant is not ring-fenced it has been allocated on the basis that it will drive up performance in the delivery of planning functions, both in respect of development control and plan making.

The ODPM will continue to link grants awarded for 2005/06 to improved planning performance so as to act as an incentive for authorities to reach and secure the development control handling targets and produce local development documents in a timely manner. The Minister has stated, "authorities should be aware that they will need to secure improvements in these areas in order to receive money next year".

Planning Applications

The Section 106 agreement for the Abbey Manor Development at Firepool should be signed before the end of the month and the application which has been outstanding over a long period will then be cleared.

Local Development Framework

As there appears to be confusion amongst some members regarding the timescale for the LDF, the following statement from the Minister should clarify the matter:-

"All authorities are required to have the LDF in place and meet the development control target by the end of 2006/07."

Consultation concerning proposed changes to Taunton Town Services with effect from 7 June 2004 by First Somerset & Avon.

Last month I attended a meeting in Bath with the Directors of First, regarding the improvements to services and the criteria for future investment.

I was also requested to arrange a meeting with Councillors Weston and Croad, who had expressed their concern about the bus services operating in the Priorswood area. At the meeting we were informed of the details that were being given to the Traffic Commissioners regarding the proposed change to the Taunton Town Service with effect from Monday 7 June 2004.

The following report, issued at the meeting, is reproduced as it contains information, which is of considerable interest to the Council, but I must point out that publicity will be provided by First nearer the date of the proposed changes.

“From 7 June it is proposed to replace the current network of 8 town services in Taunton with 4 new routes, of which 3 will be cross-town.

The present network has been in place since April 2002 and was based on recommendations from outside consultants engaged by First to review Taunton’s bus services. Whilst these changes brought some simplifications to the network, and a stable pattern has been maintained since, efforts to promote travel on Taunton’s town buses during the intervening period have not met with much success. Notable events have included the introduction of low floor buses on services 1 and 2.

However, periods of staff shortage have made it difficult to maintain a full service and coupled with increasing traffic congestion along key corridors such as Station Road and East Reach, there has been a lack of confidence by passengers in the reliability of the network.

Our own research in September 2003 confirmed this view, particularly amongst passengers in the Priorswood area and to address this we have focussed management attention on issues such as staff recruitment and the transfer of work to depots where we can attract drivers.

We have now completed our detailed review of the performance of Taunton’s town service network, the first stage of which resulted in the deregistration of service 7 to Staplehay which had not been carrying enough passengers to be viable for us (Cooks Coaches are now providing a partial replacement, service 97, with financial support from Somerset County Council). The second stage is the revamp of the remaining town services.

- Service 1 (Parade – Ladymead Road) will be merged with service 5 (Parade – Blackbrook) and 6 (Parade – Juniper Road) to form a new cross-town service 1/1A (Ladymead Road to Blackbrook [1] or Juniper Road [1A]). The new service will be operated throughout by low floor buses.
- Service 2 (Parade – Priorswood) will be retimed so as to better fit in with services 1/1A between the Parade and the railway station. The service will be operated by conventional minibuses.
- Service 3 (Parade – Nerrols Farm) will be merged with service 9 (Parade – Bishop’s Hull) to form a new cross-town service 3, Nerrols Farm to Bishops Hull.
- Services 4 (Parade – Laxton Road) and 8 (Parade – Galmington) will be merged to form a new cross-town service 4, Laxton Road to Galmington.

Sunday services will be unchanged.

These measures are designed to: -

1. Simplify the town network to make it easier to market, via a new town map and timetable, with coloured route carried forward on to the buses themselves.

2. Address reliability issues by providing additional running time in areas where congestion is an increasing problem – e.g. Station Road. On new services 1/1A this has been found by redeploying the generous recovery time on existing services 5 and 6. Service 2 has also been given additional running time but will remain self-contained. On the cross-town services there will still be between 3 and 8 minutes' recovery time at the Parade and buses will avoid the need to pass along the same congested section in successive journeys.
3. Introduce new cross-town journey opportunities such as Ladymead Road to East Street shops and Blackbrook Sports Centre, Nerrols Farm to SCAT, Holway to the railway station and Laxton Road to Musgrove Park Hospital.
4. Even out the spread of the eight town buses each hour between the Parade and the railway station so as to provide a more convenient service.

By addressing basic issues such as reliable and robust timetabling we intend to provide a sound base upon which to move forward with our town service network in Taunton.

With housing estates generally within walking or cycling distance of the town centre, and easy access to relatively cheap car parks close to the shops, the environment for operating a successful commercial town bus service network is challenging.

We need the proactive support of the local authorities to help create the circumstances where public transport can be given its fullest opportunity to offer an alternative to the private car. We were disappointed that the congestion protocol between the two local authorities did not specifically address the issue of keeping buses moving.

We welcome the proposals featured in the current consultation on the Taunton Transport Strategy review and we shall be responding in writing to list out those roads where we feel additional bus priority measures are essential.

Our new town network in Taunton is a platform for future development. With effective promotion and good reliability, we believe we can win back lost passengers and raise the profile of public transport in Taunton. But we need the local authorities as partners in this endeavour. We welcome regular forums with user groups and tripartite meetings with the councils. If together we can grow the business, it will assist in attracting further investment from our parent group. We look forward to your support”.

Regeneration Through Heritage –Tone Mill Partnership

Tone Mill is a unique heritage site of national importance in an area of economic need. The project is particularly well placed to bring together a heritage asset with a regeneration programme to add value to the community of Wellington and can be an excellent example of heritage led regeneration.

At the meeting of the Partnership on 6 April, the members, who will act as initial Trustees, were appointed in order that an application can be made to the Charity Commission for establishment of the Trust.

A Feasability Study Brief has been prepared and most of the money is in place to appoint consultants.

Councillor Cliff Bishop