

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BISHOP – PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION

Taunton Deane Local Plan Inspector's Report

The Inspector's report was received by the Council on Friday 19th September. It is approximately 920 pages in length, and came in both paper and electronic formats.

All TDBC Members were advised of our receipt of the report and a news release was sent out to the media on 24th September. On Thursday 25th, the report was also made available on the Council's website. In addition, letters have been sent to those who have made comments on the Plan during its two Deposit stages.

Because of the size of the Report, and to save resources, copies have not been sent automatically to Members or parish and town councils. We are hoping that by making the report available on the website, people can use the technology to access and read the report. They can then copy those parts that are of most interest to them. Copies are being made available to Members or local councils on demand, although where possible we are doing this in the form of CD Roms rather than on paper. A briefing for Members and local councils has also been arranged.

The public can access the report on the website, and can view paper copies at the Deane House reception, public libraries and the two community offices in the Borough. Copies are also available for purchase, at £30 for paper copies and £5 for CD's.

We are publishing the report before having the chance to check it, which we will now do. Where we find it to be "a crucial lack of clarity in the meaning of any statement, or an omission" which we consider needs to be resolved, the Council has two months from the date of receipt of the report to raise such issues through the Planning Inspectorate.

Local Development Frameworks (LDF)

A bill is being published later this month setting out further details of LDF's, and all LA's will have to put in place a Local Development Scheme (LDS) by the end of 2004.

The new concept for LDF's require Community involvement, speeding up and monitoring the process with an Annual Report. It is designed to minimise the Examination period and produce good quality, **binding** reports..

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 Housing – Influencing the size, type and affordability of Housing

The Strategic Planning and Transportation and Economic Development Panel discussed the consultation papers at their last meeting, and we shall be forwarding their views to the ODPM.

The aim of the proposed change is a policy framework that will secure more affordable housing as part of the timely delivery of agreed housing numbers. The proposed change emphasises that the affordable housing sought should not make development unviable. Whilst any changes that increase the number of affordable housing units are welcome, I do not believe that planning, alone, can secure the number of affordable houses needed to meet the demand.

Transportation Issues

The receipt of the SWARMMS report has been delayed and is expected to be received later this month. The Highways Agency will publish its findings on the A358 and the A303 and the Regional Assembly will be given six weeks to respond to the Minister on the proposals.

First Great Western in conjunction with the Strategic Rail Authority, Somerset County Council and First Somerset & Avon, is improving bus / rail links at Taunton. They have invested in new interchange facilities at Taunton railway station to provide a covered, comfortable and fully accessible route from rail to road to transform public transport between the rail network and communities on the bus route to Minehead. I attended the official opening and was very impressed with the facilities provided – Members, when in the area, should see for themselves the facility, on the South side of the station which will be welcomed by users visiting the area. I was informed that a planning application will soon be submitted to make the North side of the station more user friendly.

We have agreed a Congestion Protocol (The ‘Seven Point Action Plan’) and as a result of the good working relationship between the Deane and the County we are beginning to solve some of the problems. Members will be pleased to learn that consultants have come up with two options to solve the problems associated with the traffic movements at the Station Road / Priory Road junction. A decision will be made on one of the options in the near future and it is anticipated that work will start sometime next year...

A planning application has been submitted for the Inner Relief Road and the Council will be making comments on the application to the County Council, who will be responsible for making the decision on their application.

Councillor Cliff Bishop