

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Executive – 11 November 2009

The Taunton Protocol—Adoption and Application by Taunton Deane Borough Council

Report of Project Taunton Manager – Mark Green

(This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ross Henley)

Executive Summary

The Taunton Protocol was developed in conjunction with leading national experts in the fields of carbon reduction, building design and valuation. It sets ambitious and auditable targets for sustainable development which are ahead of current national standards either in scope or timing, or both, and which, if implemented, would produce significant reductions of Co2 and help meet the Government's challenging targets for reducing the impact of climate change.

The Protocol has been acknowledged as one of the most comprehensive and well developed documents of its kind produced to date and has won significant acclaim both locally and more widely.

The standards contained within it cover:-

1. Low Environmental Impact Building Design;
2. Climate Change Adaptation;
3. Sustainable Lifestyles and Community Involvement;
4. Materials;
5. Construction Site Management;
6. Biodiversity and Ecology.

These standards can be applied either comprehensively or in part and are sufficiently flexible to ensure that their application need never jeopardise scheme viability and delivery.

They have been incorporated within the signed Development Agreement for the Firepool site and have been embraced by the Council's chosen development partner; St. Modwen Developments Limited. They have also been supported by other major local businesses such as the Cricket Club, Somerset College and Musgrove Park Hospital.

This report includes three recommendations. The adoption of the Protocol by Taunton Deane has already been supported by the Project Taunton Steering Group.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Taunton Protocol was developed in conjunction with leading regional and national specialists in response to increasing pressure from Government to adopt measures targeted at reducing the impact of climate change; principally through the reduction of Co2 emissions.
- 1.2 Work on the document commenced in 2007 after assessing other similar and existing standards and protocols and concluding that all were either limited in scope or so 'high level' as to be almost meaningless.

2. The Taunton Protocol

- 2.1 A full version of the Taunton Protocol can be viewed by clicking on the following link:-
<http://www.projecttaunton.co.uk/downloads/finalissueprotocolseptember08.pdf>
(3 hard copies of the document [40pp A3 full colour] are available for inspection in the Members' Room)
- 2.2 Rather than focussing solely on carbon reduction measures, the Protocol addresses six key elements of genuinely sustainable development:-

1. Low Environmental Impact Building Design;
2. Climate Change Adaptation;
3. Sustainable Lifestyles and Community Involvement;
4. Materials;
5. Construction Site Management;
6. Biodiversity and Ecology.

Each element was developed by an acknowledged expert in that field and the overall process was co-ordinated by Fulcrum Consulting; one of a small number of expert advisors to the Government. Effects on cost and value were considered throughout the development of the Protocol and this element of the work was carried out by Alder King, Bristol.

- 2.3 Each key element of the Protocol contains a number of individual standards, all of which have been designed, wherever possible, to be complimentary and consistent with other existing and emerging strategies and legislation, e.g. Building Regulations, Buildings For Life and the Council's emerging public art and allotments strategies.
- 2.4 The Protocol has been designed in such a way as to be capable of internal or external audit and includes a 'check list' which developers can use to assess their performance against the various elements.

- 2.5 The Protocol has also been designed in such a way that elements can be applied individually or in combination; either in response to the type of development envisaged or as a result of viability testing.
- 2.6 The Protocol has been independently acknowledged as one of the best and most comprehensive documents of its kind and has won a prestigious award from RegenSW.
- 2.7 RegenSW have calculated that adoption of the Protocol standards for the new development planned for the centre of Taunton would reduce Co2 emissions by 35% compared to existing or proposed legislation; primarily by bringing forward the timing of the introduction of new standards.
- 2.8 The effects of the Protocol on building costs and values and land values are currently difficult to predict, Alder King consider that the increasing importance put on whole life costs by occupiers, together with the increasing effect of public and legislative pressure on corporate priorities is likely to swing the balance in favour of increasingly sustainable development. This effect is already evident in a number of other countries. In any event, the Protocol is sufficiently flexible to respond to market conditions.

3. The Legislative Framework

- 3.1 The Government has set challenging targets for Co2 reductions and has introduced a number of measures to improve energy efficiency, including, for instance, changes to Part L of the Building Regulations. BREEAM and Eco-Homes standards are also well established and understood by the development industry. Other standards, such as 'codes for sustainable homes' have emerged more recently.
- 3.2 The Protocol has incorporated existing standards wherever possible to give an established and easily understood baseline for assessment.
- 3.3 Although it is understood that the Government's existing definition of 'zero carbon' is likely to be changed in the near future and that the timing of some of the proposed legislative changes may be similarly changed (as may the actual standards themselves), the Protocol has been designed in such a way that it can be readily updated in response to such changes.
- 3.4 The Protocol has no statutory status and will not be incorporated into the formal planning framework as SPD. The position with the RSS, either generally or in relation to carbon reduction and sustainability, is currently uncertain. The Taunton Protocol is capable of being enforced only on TDBC owned land where the Council chooses to do so using its powers as landowner. Elsewhere, it can only be applied on a voluntary basis and with the support of either the landowner or developer.
- 3.5 To date, Protocol standards have been incorporated within the Development Agreement for Firepool and have been supported by Somerset County Cricket Club, Somerset College and Musgrove Park Hospital.

4. Recommendations

1. That wherever appropriate and economically viable, the standards contained within the Protocol be applied to all future development on land owned by Taunton Deane Borough Council;
2. That Taunton Deane Borough Council actively encourages developers of other non-Council owned sites to consider applying some or all of the standards contained within the Protocol; and
3. That the Protocol be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect emerging best practice and future changes to legislation.

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