

## **FULL COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004**

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

As we approach the festive season it will be a good opportunity for us all to relax and reflect. Since our last meeting in October it has certainly been a very busy period, much has been happening, the major points of which I will try and reflect in my report.

#### **Good News A358 and Silk Mills**

After much deliberation the Secretary of State announced that the chosen scheme on sound economic and environmental grounds for the upgraded road route to Devon and Cornwall would be the A358. This is not just good news for Taunton but the whole of the peninsula and not least the South coast area down to Poole and the Northern coastal area of Devon and Somerset. In addition, it will include the desperately needed bypass for Henlade which presently suffers from unacceptable congestion and pollution. It also has to be good news for the taxpayers across the country with this scheme coming in at around £90 million less than the A303 improvements. We now need to obtain a clear timetable of when this is likely to move through the planning and consultation stage to the reality of a much needed improved road link.

Regarding the Silk Mills bridge project, only recently the County Council shared with us that their application for final approval together with extra funding for the project had been called in by central government for review. This was potentially a serious blow, particularly as they were unable to gain any responses to their requests for reassurance from the powers that be. After a week of nail biting the government announced the bridge would be funded to £11.6 million, a serious shortfall but not enough to cause a failure of the whole scheme and it is now going ahead full steam. This Council, as a demonstration of its commitment to working in partnership with the County Council, agreed to release the £399k funds agreed to assist the County in maintaining progress whilst central government deliberated.

The failure of either of the above road schemes would have called into question our ability to carry forward our plans for the regeneration of Taunton. Easing of congestion is a fundamental part of our ability to succeed in achieving our ambitious plans.

#### **Budget Setting**

Good progress has been made towards balancing our budget for 2005/06. I warned in the last report to Full Council, hard choices would have to be made if we are to seriously address our underlying structural budget problems. As already announced, our budget gap based on provisional figures, is down from £1.2M to £1.09M which has to be good news, but it still leaves us with a substantial gap to bridge. We have already shared with Members our prioritisation of services (Profile of Services) to meet our corporate objectives and provided a detailed schedule of proposed savings (Savings Delivery Plans) for consideration and comment. This is the result of a huge amount of work by officers, identifying where efficiency savings/increased income can be found and prioritising this in terms of delivery and acceptability. My thanks to all for the efforts so far made which has assisted Members greatly in their consideration of the wealth of information produced. (Notwithstanding the print size!!)

We are on target for the production of the usual Xmas folder for Members to consider the budget proposals prior to these being incorporated in the final budget statement. The Head of Resources will be visiting the various Group meetings to discuss and explain these proposals to ensure they are fully understood, this assistance is always welcomed by Members.

In terms of the central government settlement by way of the Revenue Support Grant, I am pleased to acknowledge it ranks as a better settlement than last year resulting in an increase of circa £281K above the grant for last year. This sounds good news and I do not wish to appear ungrateful but it pales into insignificance when compared to the additional costs imposed upon us, some by government diktat. To mention just a few budget figures at present:

Recycling revenue costs	£301K
Increase in wages and salaries	£411K
Inflationary price increases	£86K
Leisure support and debt repayment	£94K
Civil contingencies bill	£25K
Extra costs of pensions	£164k

This is by no means a comprehensive list but it clearly indicates my reticence about the size of increase for next year and demonstrates why I offer my note of caution. Make no mistake, we have no option but to continue with the hard choices that will have to be made in order to balance the budget, and create a sustainable and affordable budget position for the future. This administration is prepared to make those hard choices to ensure any increases in Council Tax are minimised for the taxpayer but equally maintaining our front line services to ensure efficient delivery.

### **Incursion of Gypsies**

Regrettably, a group of Gypsies set out to commit a flagrant breach of planning regulations. This was carried out in a completely premeditated manner even down to the delivery of their planning application, as the invasion commenced and offices were closing at 4.30PM on a Friday afternoon. The land in question is well outside the village envelope and under normal circumstances would never be eligible for development, yet the Gypsies have decided they can develop it with impunity from the normally strict planning regulations. This begs the question, why do itinerants such as this, consider themselves above the law, this is an appalling state of affairs and we urgently need government help and direction to strengthen our eviction powers in the face of these flagrant and premeditated breaches of planning regulations. We can apply the strict regulations that apply to development in the open countryside but it is depressing and frustrating to realize that you are merely in a lottery of chance as to the support that will be given when our decisions are inevitably appealed to higher authorities.

I feel our very democracy is under threat because the government does not take the urgent, positive action required to prevent what is now turning into an epidemic of invasions in the open countryside across the land. The Gypsies claim they have rights, I most certainly agree, but what they do not understand, or refuse to accept, is that with rights come responsibilities. Those responsibilities for the settled population require they do not commence development without adequate and appropriate permissions in place. The Gypsies refuse to acknowledge this and they are setting themselves up as more privileged than the settled population. I find this wholly unacceptable, therefore, immediate measures should be implemented to allow us to deal with this situation. This should happen before it creates intolerance from the settled

community of the itinerant groups, because of the favoured position they create for themselves by their total disregard of laws and the community around them. This they appear to be able to do with impunity.

Having said this, we are committed to acting in as robust and rapid a manner as possible to prevent the continued flagrant breach of development in open countryside and I would add this is not a case of nimbysism, as Taunton Deane already has more than adequate provision for Gypsies and travellers within its boundaries, particularly in the Parish of North Curry. My sincere sympathies to those afflicted. I can only offer reassurance that we are determined to fully implement all measures open to us to assess and correct this flagrant breach.

### **Vision for Taunton**

We have made great strides with these proposals, so much so that I now refer to it as the “regeneration” of Taunton as I feel at last we are moving from the aspirational visioning stage to the actual implementation. The senior Advisory Board is now established with representatives from SWRDA, SCC, EA, TDBC, GOSWA, SCAT and other stakeholders, an independent Chairman is being considered and I may be able to report further on this at the meeting. Below this is the Executive Board of Senior Executive officers from the main organisations of which Penny James is our representative. It has been agreed that Penny will take the lead in the direction of the project team that will carry out the implementation. The project team will be a dedicated group of officers and commercial professionals to oversee the assembly and implementation of projects, whether this is by commercial development or public investment in the public realm spaces.

In addition to this the East Goods Yard at Firepool now has planning consent for development and final details are awaited with an anticipation that actual development will commence early to mid next year. The County Cricket Club is now actively pursuing funding sources to assist with their regeneration and plans to become a venue for one day international matches. We have also received a planning application for development of the private car parks in the Tangier area which is being considered at present and if acceptable, this would be another tangible move forward in the much needed regeneration of Taunton.

The inner relief road is resurrected in the form of the “third way” and has been accepted in principle by this Council subject to further details about satisfactory means of servicing shops in Bridge Street to avoid the inevitable congestion that will occur. The important point about the realignment of the road is that it respects development of the Tangier area, minimises impact on existing houses, allows development of the cultural facilities on the West bank of the Tone and provides the new link across the river to relieve the unacceptable levels of congestion in Park Street, Corporation Street and North Street.

The other area of major importance is the relocation of the agricultural livestock market presently situated at Firepool, I am pleased to report that all the required information for consideration of the planning application is now available and it should be considered by the Planning Committee early next year. The relocation of this market is a vital link in the regeneration process as it releases one of the single largest sections of land for redevelopment.

The Terence O’Rourke proposals for the Urban Design Framework and Urban Design proposals were unanimously accepted when considered by Members so we are able to

proceed with implementation where in accord with our Local Plan or development of the new “Local Development Framework” as appropriate.

### **Adoption of Local Plan**

This has now been formally adopted by this Council and is only subject to challenge on legal matters to February 2005. Following this, subject to any matters that may be raised, it will be produced for issue to all interested parties as being the vital document to guide future development decisions for the next few years.

In addition to this, an Urban Extension Study was considered as to where a further 3,000 to 4,000 houses and more employment land was best sited. The recommendation was for an extension to the Monkton Heathfield site towards Walford Cross but the report acknowledged that the study was finely balanced between the recommended site and an alternative beyond the Comeytrove area. Due to the vast increase in housing numbers proposed it was felt that the most sensible way forward would be to fully consult on both proposals to gain some understanding of the thoughts of local residents before a final decision was taken. This is likely to be incorporated in a much wider consultation exercise which will be conducted by County in order to inform longer term planning required by the Regional Spatial Strategy.

### **Cornhill, Wellington**

I am pleased to report that the working group of local shopkeepers and Wellington Town Councillors with input from TDBC officers has now been established and is working. With total local involvement, hopefully this will deflect the previously negative criticism and assist with achieving success through constructive cooperation. Be assured, there is no lack of will on the part of this administration to see a successful regeneration of this area within the bounds of our influence.

### **And Finally**

I was delighted to be invited to participate in the recent launching of the new Atrium at the Somerset College of Arts and Technology (better known as SCAT). What a wonderful facility we have available to a huge number of students which brings vibrancy, business and hope to our town. This should start addressing the striking demographic gap we have in the 20 to 45 year age group for which Somerset as a whole suffers a loss against the average of the West Country and fares even worse when compared against national averages. My small part was to draw the link between the wonderful training facilities now available at SCAT and the regeneration of Taunton. This was an easy task, comparatively, as with such a huge demand for a highly trained workforce from our economic development proposals, together with the necessary re-skilling as demands change, SCAT is pre-eminently situated to fulfil and assist with the growth predicted. Also with its links to the University of Plymouth with an established faculty, degree courses are now an established fact of life here in Taunton. I am sure this will greatly facilitate the reversal of the brain drain we have experienced from Somerset to date.

Good luck to Alyson Scott and her staff and with the wonderful facilities now available, I am sure the College will be a resounding success and go from strength to strength. I was honoured to be invited to the launch of the impressive facilities now available.

**Councillor John Williams**  
**Leader of the Council**

## **COUNCIL MEETING – 14 December 2004-**

### **Report of Councillor Bishop – Planning Policy and Transportation**

#### **Building Control Conference**

The Castle School and Sports complex was again the venue for this, the Sixteenth annual Building Control Conference and Exhibition organised by Taunton Deane's Building Control Service.

The Sports Hall was transformed into a bustling exhibition hall, where 42 trade exhibition stands competed for the attention of the Conference delegates and a flourishing coffee bar provided all-day refreshments for exhibitors and delegates alike.

A total of 210 delegates registered for the event – close to capacity for the venue. Soft lighting, plush seating, specially erected staging and professional sound systems turned the school hall into an inviting lecture theatre, where the delegates listened to papers from invited speakers on a range of topics, from ground contamination to fire regulations, describing the growing importance of risk assessment in formulating acceptable solutions to health and safety issues.

An excellent buffet lunch, superb value for money and a smoothly professional presentation are the hallmarks of the Taunton Deane Conference, and the reasons for its continuing success. I would like to pay a special tribute to Mary Sims for the detailed planning and dedication which underlies the successful running of this event, and to Brian Yates and the Building Control team for their enthusiasm and unstinting hard work in the run up and “on the day”. No time to sit back, though. Planning for next year's event begins in earnest as soon as Christmas is over.

#### **Planning Delivery Grant**

The ODPM has ordered all local authorities to review their performance submissions following allegations of widespread abuse to gain extra funding under the planning delivery grant. I am confident that our submissions are accurate and in accordance with the recognised procedural instructions.

The grant, worth £130 million this year and £170 million in 2005-06, rewards councils that have improved their performance on handling planning applications. Under government targets, planning departments should determine 80 per cent of minor and major applications within eight and thirteen weeks respectively. We need to ensure that performance targets represent quality and efficiency in the operation of the planning system – not just a numbers game.

#### **Temporary Stop Notice**

The ODPM published on 29<sup>th</sup> November draft Temporary Stop Notice Regulations, an associated draft circular and draft Regulatory Impact Assessment.

The decision to use the “temporary stop notice” will be at the discretion of local authorities, if they think that there has been a breach of planning control and they consider that it is expedient that the activity is stopped immediately. The draft regulations (the subject of the consultation) restrict the use of temporary stop notices in certain circumstances and specify activity not prohibited by a temporary stop notice provision in the Act.

Details of the consultation are available on the ODPM web site at

<http://www.planning.odpm.gov.uk/>

You should then select Consultation Papers. The document will be near the top of the page.

### Changes to Planning Fees

The Minister, Keith Hill issued a statement with the consultation document stating that Council's must be allowed to recover more than just their costs to deliver a first class planning service. It is intended to increase the fees in April 2005 by 17% on a differential basis with minor applications increasing by a minimum amount. The suggested threshold will be £28,500 compared with the current fee of £13,800 and it is intended that a further increase will take place in 2006. An added incentive would allow lpa's to raise their fees by a further 10% if they meet their time taken targets. There are significant references in the consultation paper to lpa's charging for pre application advice provided that the charge does not exceed the cost of supplying the service.

### Transportation items of interest

The long awaited decision on the dualling of the A358 has been made and the extensive lobbying has resulted in a favourable decision.

The North West Taunton Package ( Silk Mills Bridge and Park and Ride) is proceeding at full speed following the announcement of the Government's financial backing of the scheme.

The Taunton strategy will be presented to the SCC Scrutiny Panel investigating Somerset Passenger Transport at a Panel meeting in Jan 2005.

The final draft of the Countywide Parking Strategy will soon be considered.

The draft Local Transport Plan 2 is expected in the Spring of 2005 and will be submitted to Government Office for the South West in July 2005.

Bus users surgery – this **will** happen in the new year and members will be advised of the details

Congestion Protocol will be presented to SPTED in Feb,2005 and this will provide an update on the various action points.

Councillor Cliff Bishop

## **COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004**

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

#### CULTURAL FORUM

The newly established Cultural Forum for Somerset met for the first time in November. Its purpose is to :

- Establish a strong county-wide voice for culture
- To put the community into cultural and community planning
- To build strong partnerships for culture
- To build effective leadership for culture

The Forum debated the proposed terms of reference and these will come back to the Executive Group of the Forum in January

#### CULTURAL QUARTER CONSORTIUM

The Cultural Quarter Consortium for Taunton met on 8 November and discussed their PR campaign. They have also set up meetings with Somerset Cricket Ground and SWRDA to discuss their aspirations for the cultural quarter.

#### CURRENT RESEARCH INTO THE ARTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Taunton Deane Borough Council is one of the partners in the Somerset Local Authorities (LA) annual agreement with the Arts Council of England, South West (ACE). This partnership has commissioned or part funded three reports to inform Creative Industries development across the county:

The Economic Impact Study of Creative Industries identified that at least 1814 people worked in Taunton Deane in the creative industries in 2002/3 generating approximately £ 300 million.

The Voluntary Arts Audit established that there are at least 550 arts organisations in Somerset, attracting 600,000 attendances to voluntary arts groups sessions and well over 1 million attenders as audiences at voluntary arts events per annum. Voluntary arts groups also have a significant economic impact with an annual turnover of over £4 million. They support the local economy by around £1.1 million a year.

Harnessing Opportunities: (A Creative Strategy for Taunton and Somerset) commissioned by TDBC alongside the L.A/ A.C.E. partnership and the Somerset Art Gallery Trust from the consultancy Integria, suggests that if the local growth of Creative Industries reaches parity with the regional performance, then 1800 new jobs could be created and could contribute £100 million to the local economy.

Integria proposes a creative industry resource centre in Taunton with satellites in the other districts funded by the Rural Renaissance, local authority and private finance alongside a raft of other creative industry initiatives in the Cultural Quarter and Tangiers.

These reports, alongside the Somerset County Council review of local authority investment in the arts by Diana Johnson, were discussed by the Somerset Arts Alliance (SAA) meeting on 8 December.



A joint Somerset and Dorset research event will be held on 31 January 2005 to launch these four reports. A summary of, and response to them is available from Caroline Corfe, as are the full documents.

In brief all this work substantiate the argument for the contribution that the arts and culture in its most inclusive sense, make to social and economic regeneration and in particular The Vision for Taunton.

#### GREEN FLAG AWARDS DAY

Taunton Deane was invited to host the prestigious Green Flag Award Ceremony at Wellsprings Leisure Centre in November. We achieved the award for Vivary Park for the first time and were re-awarded it for Wellington Park which also achieved Green Heritage status – the only such award made in the southwest. Attended by 400 delegates from across the country, the ceremony was hosted by the Mayor and addressed by the Head of Public Space Policy at the ODPM, the Chairman of Cabespace and the Head of Corporate Affairs at the Civic Trust. Over 100 of the delegates toured Vivary Park after the ceremony and attended the raising of the green flag in the park.

#### VICTORIA PARK

Building on the success in winning Green Flag Awards the Parks Service is continuing in its plan to seek accreditation for one new park each year. Next year we will be entering Victoria Park in the Eastgate ward of Taunton. Already we have a development plan for the park agreed with the local community and will be seeking to implement the early phases next year. Quick wins so far include addressing issues of personal safety by pruning some of the vegetation along the boundaries to allow better visibility into the Park and to make the area around the subway, between the Park and Lambrook Road, more open. These areas will be replanted this Autumn/Winter along with bulbs in three areas under trees, to provide colour during the Spring

Further improvements planned include replanting the formal areas of the Park adjacent to Eastbourne Gate, repainting the park furniture, working with the community on ideas for a new play area funded from Section 106 agreements, and a formal gated entrance to the Park at the Victoria Gate next to the pavilion.

#### VIVARY PARK

In response to last year's consultations, work continues on the development of a public facing service in Vivary Park. Plans have been submitted for a pavilion next to the Vivary Park Golf Course to replace the one burnt down in 2002. It will be a 'log cabin' structure providing changing for 'pay and play golfers', a café for the park, WC's to replace the existing outdated block in the Fons George Car Park and a golf sales area.

The idea is for this building is to form a new focus for the Wilton Lands family area enabling some to enjoy a snack while others enjoy the park in other ways. Tenders have been invited for the building and it is hoped to have it in place and open by April 2005

## EVENTS

The Vivary Park project also includes expanding the events programme to generate income for further improvements in the park. A report will be taken to Health and Leisure Panel in February setting out a proposal for a charging framework and licence system for events held in Vivary but also on other open spaces.

This month sees our annual Christmas music event at the bandstand on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> December at 7.30 around the bandstand.

The Taunton Flower Show is planning to extend onto the Wilton Lands in addition to Vivary Park to create a family entertainment area.

## PARKS NEWSLETTER

The first Parks newsletter is about to be published to acknowledge the value of the work of our Friends Groups in helping us to manage and develop the parks for the local community. We have Wellington and Vivary and Victoria Park Friends groups already as well as the Community Orchard Group – all doing excellent work.

## PARKS WEBSITE

The parks website is being developed to further improve communications and promote the parks and open spaces. It will enable the public to contact the parks service electronically to report problems or issues.

## WELLINGTON

a review of the open spaces in Wellington will begin next April and we are seeking users with an interest in their local park or greenspace to come forward to work on development plans for new play areas, site improvements and other issues.



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS IN TAUNTON DEANE.

Tone Leisure and Taunton Deane Borough Council have recently received the results of national and local research into activity levels across the country.

Taunton Deane residents achieved the highest levels of physical activity in the research. Activity levels to improve health are recognised to be 30 minutes of activity (making you moderately out of breath and sweating) at least five times a week.

33% of people asked in Taunton Deane said they were active 5 times per week or more. This was higher than the Newcastle (17%) and Kirklees (18%) areas that were also surveyed.

Other key messages from the research included;

- 95% of people know that physical activity/exercise is important to their health but only 28% know they should be doing at least 5 times 30 minutes a week.

- 51% of people don't exercise as much as they would like and 48% of people don't take as much exercise as they think they should
- More than 3/4s of the population can gain a positive health benefit from increasing their activity levels
- 59% of people would like to do more physical activity/exercise

The key question remains around why people do not exercise as much as they should when they know how important it is to better health. The research identified lack of time, work and family commitments as barriers to activity in many age groups.

Participants in the research identified time during the day and facilities in their workplace could be important in removing these barriers.

## WELLSPRINGS – A REGIONAL CENTRE

Since opening in January the Wellsprings Leisure Centre has developed in to the community facility that had been hoped for. Most importantly the centre has found a niche in the market as a regional venue for events, sporting and non-sporting. This is hard evidence of our function on the ground and not just in documents, as a regional centre with PUA status.

As expected the local Taunton Tigers national league basketball team are making good use of the facilities, and the South West Gymnastics Association book the centre for regional competitions, as do the British Gymnastics Association for Trampolining. However, Wellsprings is also attracting a new customer base with some other high profile spectator events. Such events include; the Dymond Snooker Classic with Jimmy White and John Virgo in attendance, the Round Table who recently hosted their annual speaker evening in the centre raising £11,000 for local charity. Several concerts have also been hosted, including the 'Wurzels'.

Future events include a Kickboxing demonstration evening with movie star Jean Claude Van Damme - the muscles from Brussels The centre is hosting two Christmas party nights with live music in December and in the New Year there are already bookings for a Chinese New Year celebration, World Darts and Lord Archer will be speaking at the Taunton Vale Rotary Club annual speaker evening. In addition to this Wellsprings has been used by over 50 local businesses and organisations for meetings and conferences and is currently used by the Living Light Church every Sunday for its services. All this shows the centre's profile continues to grow and this can only be positive for Taunton Deane and its residents.

## TAUNTON AQUATHLON

The first Taunton Aquathlon, organised by Tone Leisure and Somerset RC Tri club, is planned for Sunday 20th February 2005 and involves a swim and a run. The event takes place at Wellington Sports Centre and is based on the Taunton Deane Triathlon course. There are two distances and various age categories - Short Distance is 500m swim and 5k run and Long Distance is 1000m swim and 10k run. The cost to enter is £10 and entry forms can be found on [www.tauntondeanetri.co.uk](http://www.tauntondeanetri.co.uk)

## EXERCISE REFERRAL SCHEME FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH MILD CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD).

A need has been identified for a Community-based scheme to support and encourage individuals with *mild* COPD to adopt and commit to a programme of regular physical activity. COPD is a progressive disease of the lungs that causes disability and impaired quality of life. The benefits of regular physical activity include an improved exercise capacity, reduced dyspnoea, increased peripheral and respiratory muscle strength and endurance and an improved health-related quality of life.

The Pilot scheme is planned to start in January 2005 at Wellsprings Leisure Centre. Referrals are being requested from Warwick House Medical Centre. It will be an 8-week programme of twice-weekly gym-based exercise with assessments at the beginning and end of the programme. Individuals will be encouraged to maintain physical activity levels at the end of the course. It will be evaluated with a view to seeking referrals from other surgeries in Taunton Deane in the future.

To sum up, the work of Tone Leisure in the health field brings in funding to the Trust and contributes to their business plan.

NET WORKING:

**The LGA Rural Commission:** I would refer my colleagues to the report in the Weekly Bulletin.

**Taunton Town Centre Partnership;** I attended the launch of their new interactive website; [www.tautontowncentre.co.uk](http://www.tautontowncentre.co.uk)

**Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership;** Taunton Deane's contribution of £6,500 has levered in £250,000 into the area. The Sports Council are now leaning to supporting people rather than buildings. They see the solution to the latter to be "Hub Clubs".

**Councillor Mrs Dilly Bradley**

## **COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004**

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

#### **Lyons Review**

Work has continued on making our case as a suitable area for relocation. There has been more conferencing with the assistance of the RDA, where we are able to meet and supply literature on Taunton. Currently a conference is being planned to take place in Taunton early in the new year.

#### **Sale of Land at Wiveliscombe**

Re-negotiation for an area of land to be sold to a successful local company, Brendan Powerwashers, has been completed, adding uplift and potential uplift clauses to an agreement. This is a good result for the council and secures long term benefit for Brendan Powerwashers, and employment in the area.

#### **Business Property Survey**

We recently set a cut off date for this survey, which has received a good response. The questionnaires are now being analysed, so that a report may be presented to SPTED. There are many useful and interesting comments made on the questionnaires, and from an initial review it would seem to confirm our concern on lack of availability of industrial land.

#### **Tourism**

The new 'Heart of Somerset' tourism brochure has been printed, and approximately one third of the copies have been delivered to TICs nation-wide. There is a new and improved layout, to compliment the new marketing themes of SW Tourism. The Guide now works on two levels, not only to attract visitors to the area, but also as a user guide for when they are here.

A new Wellington 'Specialist Shops' leaflet with full colour images of shop frontage and information details has been printed. Such information is also available on line at [www.heartofsomerset](http://www.heartofsomerset). This site is presently being re-designed and will be launched early in 2005.

The 2005 marketing campaign goes nation-wide in mid December with adverts on radio and tv. Further national advertising will start in January 2005. This advertising is expected to generate requests of the order of 16,000 guides.

The Taunton TIC has had a most successful year so far, and the hand over process between SCC and TDBC is progressing well and is expected to be completed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005.

#### **Rural Renaissance Steering Group**

This group met for the second time, and five projects have been asked to come forward with full applications for funding consideration. A bid is being made to Rural Renaissance to secure funding of the ADO posts to deliver a service that compliments the Rural Enterprise Gateway (recently launched at the Bath and West Show-ground).

**Innovative Market Towns**

This European Social Funded project, under the direction of Stephanie Berry, is organising a business breakfast to promote the project and its findings on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2005.

**Agricultural development officer (ADO)**

With the help of funding from the Wool Marketing Board and DEFRA, our officer has been developing and delivering a series of workshops designed specifically for the agricultural section in the Deane area. The aim of these workshops is to help farmers improve existing skills and develop new ones. So far the ADO has concentrated in three main areas – 1) the use of computers and IT, 2) designing and carrying out a workable market strategy, and 3) developing a programmed approach to livestock health. The first IT programme was a resounding success and over subscribed. By offering this particular choice, there is something for everyone, and will hopefully equip the users better to manage their businesses and improve their profitability.

**Asset Management**

Work is continuing on resolving the DDA and fire regulation requirements, for the OMB. Talks are continuing with the SCC re more beneficial usage of this building.

The draft report on the balustrading of the multi-storey car park is now being considered to see if any additional improvements are required.

**Councillor Norman P Cavill**

## **COUNCIL MEETING – 12 OCTOBER 2004**

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

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING**

##### **Environmental Protection Team.**

1. Weather Station. A new computerised weather station has been installed on the roof of the swimming pool and staff have received training in its use. This equipment replaces an unserviceable unit and the data gathered will be integrated with air quality software to provide an accurate picture of the link between local weather and air quality episodes. The new equipment was funded as the result of a successful bid for supplementary credit approval from the Government.
2. Air Quality Action Plan. The Action Plan for Taunton's two Air Quality Management Areas (in East Reach and Henlade) has now been completed, together with our Stage Four Review and Assessment. These two technical documents have been circulated to the Air Quality Officer Work Group for final comments before being presented for formal adoption and submission to DEFRA.
3. Water Quality. Application is being prepared to obtain a Warrant from the Magistrates' Court to enter a property in order to take samples of drinking water from a private water supply. The supply is used by two other properties and this action has become necessary to protect public health because of the refusal of the supply owner to allow samples to be taken.

It is extremely rare for legal action of this sort to be taken and we are not aware of any other Authority that has attempted it.

4. Ombudsman Enquiry. The Ombudsman has concluded that there was neither injustice nor maladministration by Environmental Health in a case of noise disturbance in a residential area arising from a Planning decision to allow a childrens' nursery. The Environmental Protection Team recommended refusal of the application on noise grounds but this was not accepted.

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

1. Enforcement. Officers successfully prosecuted two cases during November. One related to a traveller caravan site near West Hatch, where the electrical system was unsafe and the site owner failed to comply with an Improvement Notice. He was fined £2500 plus £500 costs.

The other case was a prosecution of a major carpet retailer that was using unsafe methods for the storage and retrieval of stock at high levels, despite having been warned about similar practices before. The company was fined £3000 plus costs.

2. Retail Supply Chain Project. The Health and Safety Executive have recently adopted a project focussing on health and safety during deliveries of goods to retail premises, developed by Taunton Deane, and representatives of all local authorities in the South West for roll out across the region. The Principal Environmental Health Officer (Food/Health and Safety) is a member of the steering group for this project, which is likely to be highly influential with major retail and distribution firms.
3. Fireworks. For the first time this year we ran a Voluntary Registration scheme for Bonfire and Firework Displays targeting local schools, sports clubs, community and other groups who ran organised event to celebrate Bonfire Night 2004.

Set up by the Council and supported by Avon and Somerset Police, the Fire Service, Trading Standards and St John Ambulance Service, the scheme aimed to promote best practice at these events and to encourage local residents and visitors to go to firework displays that are properly organised and well run.

Event organisers received a detailed information pack from the Council, and the Council and Fire Service carried out a site visit, where necessary. The Council issued a Certificate of Registration to all displays successfully meeting the safety criteria.

There was limited take up this year with some display organisers approaching the Council too late to participate. It is hoped to increase the numbers participating next year, subject to resources.

### **Food Safety Team**

1. Inspection Programme. The food premises inspection programme is currently running slightly ahead of schedule following a concerted effort by the team to bring forward inspections. The new Food Standards Agency Code of Practice (mandatory) has been received and the implications are being considered in conjunction with other Somerset local authorities.
2. Educational Game. The “Foodo” game, an educational tool based around a food poisoning outbreak and funded by a £10,000 grant from the FSA, is currently in production by our commercial partner and should be distributed to schools around Xmas time. Several sponsors have come forward to fund their local school’s participation in our hand washing education programme, and officers are currently liaising with the schools to carry out the classroom sessions. This has been a very popular scheme with the schools that have participated so far.
3. Enforcement. A well-known national soup company has been issued with a formal caution after supplying a carton of soup containing the remains of a blue rubber glove used by workers on the production line. The company has since considerably tightened its procedures on glove use and control.



## **Licensing Unit**

1. **Licensing Policy**. Following the publication of the guidance issued in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 the licensing Unit has been busy writing the Council's Draft Statement of Licensing Policy. The consultation on the Licensing Policy has just finished and is hopefully ready for adoption tonight.
2. **Licensing Act 2003**. The Licensing Unit is liaising with other departments both within and external to the Council to ensure the smooth transition of the Licensing Act.
3. **Drink Safe Be Safe Award**. The Licensing Unit has also been working on the preparation of the Drink Safe Be Safe award scheme, and it is hoped that licensed premises will start applying for the award in the very near future. I wish to congratulate Jim Hunter on his efforts with regard this award scheme.

## **TAUNTON DEANE CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM**

1. **Crematorium Organ**. Quotations have been received for repairing and renovating the crematorium organ. The crematorium is very fortunate to have such a quality instrument in its chapel. Having been installed when the building was built in 1963 this is its first major renovation.
2. **Cremator Brickwork**. This year £31,000 had been budgeted for cremator brickwork replacement. Fortunately this brickwork has lasted longer than anticipated so light repairs are currently underway with a complete re-bricking being postponed until necessary.
3. **Taunton Deane Cemetery & Crematorium Car Park Lighting**. Following a "risk assessment" the necessity for car park lighting was identified. This lighting will be installed during 2005/06 and paid for by income generated by the crematorium.
4. **Crematoria Abatement of Mercury Emissions**. Legislation requiring crematoria to carry out mercury abatement is expected at the end of the year. It will probably require crematoria to make their intentions known within one year as to whether the crematorium proposes the abatement of mercury within seven or ten years (this time span is not yet known) or if it intends to enter an emissions trading scheme. Members will be provided with a report once the legislation has been published.
5. **Crematorium Waiting Room Extension & Office Refurbishment**. Tenders have been received and opened and details of the cheapest tender are being checked to ensure that all the required specifications are met, this is essential with such a high quality listed building. It is expected that work will commence following the busy winter period.
6. **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. The proposal put forward to use part of the existing car park for burial is advantageous because it continues to provide burial space where the deceased can be laid to rest alongside relatives previously buried. It is anticipated that work to prepare this land will be undertaken during 2006.

7. 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 during 2006.
8. The Reclamation of Metals Following Cremation. The Federation of British Cremation Authorities and the Environment Agency are currently sharing legal opinion and discussing proposals before plans proceed for any collection or recycling operations.

## **WASTE SERVICES**

1. Refuse collection. The introduction of the new collection arrangements continues to go as well as can be expected considering that over 45000 changes were made during week commencing 22.11.04 involving 11 heavy goods vehicles and about 35 of Cleanaway's staff . 85% of properties in the Deane now have same day collections for all waste services including refuse, dry recycling and garden waste. This will improve access to the services for the customer by making them more convenient as well as improve the efficiency of the refuse service to limit cost pressures in the future.
2. Recycling. The expansion of the dry recycling service to most properties in the borough and including a full range of materials has significantly increased the amount of recycled material collected. The combined recycling and composting rate in Taunton Deane is now 21.6%.

The performance of the Somerset waste Partnership is also improving to the extent that collectively the Somerset Councils now have the third highest recycling and composting rate in the country after Dorset and Cambridgeshire and equal to Hampshire.

The garden waste collection service was suspended for the winter season at the end of November. This year almost 1500 tonnes of garden waste was collected for composting at Priorswood.

3. Street Cleansing. A small precinct sweeper has been introduced into the street cleansing service as part of a trial to target detritus (silt etc). It is this material that accumulates at the back of the footpath and in highway channels that has suppressed the "cleanliness index " since performance monitoring commenced in April 2003. The machine has proved useful in clearing leaves quickly from problem areas and is also ideal to clean the very tight estate roads and cul de

sacs that are a feature of some estates in Taunton.

4. **Public conveniences.** The planning application for the replacement public toilets in the North Street Car Park in Wellington has been approved and work commenced on producing the detailed drawings and specifications that will form the basis of the tender documents.

**Councillor Mark Edwards**

**COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES**

This report will focus on three areas within the Housing Portfolio. The first is to provide an update on Housing Stock Options and the second will be to make members aware of the current situation in respect to Anti Social behaviour. I will also comment on proposed changes to the sheltered housing scheme.

**Housing Stock Options**

Further to the update and format in October, advice to members on the past three months and future quarters activity is noted below.

Last three months:

- A formal application was made to the Government Office South West (GOSW) on the 9<sup>th</sup> November to get the process “Signed Off”. Initial feedback is that the work we have undertaken is viewed as “Good Practice”.
- On the 17<sup>th</sup> November the Head of Housing met with the GOSW, Community Housing Task Force and Housing Corporation to discuss the work being undertaken. All Government agencies indicated they were happy with Taunton Deane’s current and future work plans.
- Also on the 17<sup>th</sup> the GOSW and Community Housing Task Force (CHTF) spoke at a Special Executive Meeting about the national scene. Part of their presentation included making it very clear that there is no Fourth Option and there is no intention for there to be a Fourth Option.
- DOME, the Independent Tenant Advisors have almost completed their work in helping tenants choose their preferred type of landlord should a stock transfer take place. Their final meeting with the Insight Group is scheduled for the 11<sup>th</sup> December. The outcome of this meeting will be feed into the Tenants Forum and Housing Review Panel on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December respectively.
- Prior to the Tenants Forum and Housing Review Panel taking place this month, DOME will also be attending a Special Executive and Housing Review Panel on the 8<sup>th</sup> December to discuss the work they have undertaken to date. This will include feedback on the views of tenants from undertaking “Drop In Sessions” and a Postal Questionnaire on which type of landlord they would prefer.

Next Three Months:

- It is hoped to advise Members that the Stock Options Process has been “Signed Off”. This decision will automatically be relayed to the Office Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) will be presenting to the Tenants Forum and Housing Review Panel on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December respectively the financial position on a Stand Alone and Group Structure Stock Transfer. **They will also provide an update on the Prudential Code.** A similar presentation on all these areas will be made to the Executive on the 12<sup>th</sup> January.
- A formal application to gain a place on the Stock Transfer Programme is being drawn up. This application has to be submitted no later than the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2005. PWC are assisting staff with this work.
- In January, the Corporate Management Team will discuss the composition of the required Project Team and provide a recommendation to Members. It is anticipated this team will be formed from April 2005 and manage the process up to and including the ballot of tenants in 2006. As mentioned at October’s Full Council, the team will consist primarily of housing staff but will also compromise non-housing staff to ensure corporate involvement and that the Council rather than Housing owns this process.

### **Anti Social Behaviour**

Local Housing Authorities are required by the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 to prepare and publish a policy for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour, and the procedures for dealing with occurrences of Anti-Social Behaviour, no later than December 2004.

Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Service has had a published policy and set of procedures in place since November 1998 but never updated, these have now been updated to take into account the following developments:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 – particularly the introduction of “demoted” tenancies. A demoted tenancy is where the Council apply to the court for a demotion order. A demotion order lasts for 12 months during which time the tenant cannot engage in any anti social behaviour for fear of losing their secured tenancy.
- Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) protocol
- Acceptable Behaviour Protocol (ABC) protocol

The following actions will also take place

- The Housing Service will work closely with corporate and partnership colleagues to achieve targets relating to Anti-Social Behaviour in the Crime and Disorder Strategy 2005 – 2008
- The Housing Service Anti-Social Behaviour Policy will now be reviewed annually to ensure that tenants and residents receive the best possible service

The updated Anti Social Behaviour policy was approved by the Housing Review Panel in November.

## Sheltered Housing Scheme

There have been a number of letters in the press in relation to the Council's removal of resident wardens.

During recent months residents were asked to complete a support plan, in some cases these were completed with warden assistance. This is the first time that such plans have been completed in Taunton Deane, the purpose of which is to identify the kind of support that they consider is appropriate to them. 885 of just over 1000 residents submitted their support plan.

Given that many elderly people are living longer healthier lives, the support plan survey revealed that a number of respondents wanted to remain independent and in their own homes in the knowledge that support was available (Deane Helpline) and that this facility would be supported by mobile wardens if they wanted it. Other respondents however required greater levels of support.

This has led to support categorisation as follows:

### Non-Sheltered Housing

- Accommodation specifically for older people, (pension age) or younger with disability.
- Specialist equipment including emergency call system, movement sensors and door entry systems.

### Sheltered Housing

- Accommodation specifically for older people, (pension age) or younger with disability.
- Provision of meeting hall, laundry, office (with staff available at core hours)
- Specialist equipment as above.
- Regular contact calls as specified by residents in their support plan.
- Response from the Emergency Response Team (also able to provide a lifting service).
- Cleaning of communal areas.

### Extra Care Housing

- Accommodation specifically for older people, (pension age) or younger with disability.
- Responsive staff presence 24hrs a day, 365 days a year.
- Provision of meeting hall, laundry, office.
- Specialist equipment as above.
- Regular contact calls as specified by residents in their support plan.
- Cleaning of communal areas.

One of the key improvements is that residents in Extra Care Housing will have 24/7 cover, it is impossible for sole resident wardens to provide this level of support.

Members should note that these initiatives are not about saving money. Looking to the future we seek to provide the most appropriate service levels for our residents across as wide a geographical spread as possible. Mobile wardens have a role to play and where already introduced these are proving successful.

Nevertheless we are still talking to our residents through letters and a number of meetings (last scheduled meeting 21<sup>st</sup> December) to explain exactly what we are trying to achieve now and in future.

Similarly a process of questionnaires and consultation was also carried with our wardens the results of which support this Councils course of action.

**Councillor Greg Garner**

**COUNCIL MEETING – 14 DECEMBER 2004**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL – RESOURCES**

**PERSONNEL**

Continuous improvements in technology, and changing expectations of the public around communication methods mean that the way local authority services can be delivered is changing. Some jobs may just as effectively be performed at home, with no detriment to service delivery. As part of implementing the Council's People Management Strategy, and in recognition that some public services can now be delivered in many different ways, we have recently developed a policy framework to enable staff to work from home where it is agreed that jobs are suitable for this. Many employers are adopting similar policies and these can be key factors in helping the recruitment and retention of staff. There is also the potential to help support the Council's Green Travel Policy by reducing the number of car journeys made into Taunton.

We are coming to the end of the Equalities and Diversity training for staff and elected members. The outcome of the CPA Inspection highlighted a need to address this area, so we are pleased to report that the final sessions have now been organised for this training to be completed.

The Corporate Management Team (CMT) has now been through our pilot management development programme, which was recently developed in-house. Initial feedback from the programme shows that it was found to be extremely effective, and very well received. Plans are now being drawn up to roll it out across the Council so that other managers may also benefit from it.

**OFFICE SERVICES**

Efforts within the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team are directed at three major areas of work. Two cover e-government initiatives; digitising of Land Charges' documents is ongoing, and preparation work for the Local Land & Property Gazetteer has begun in earnest following movement on computer software issues. The third area is the Freedom of Information Act that comes into force on 1 January and will impact on all areas of the Council. The team has also been supporting Waste Services by preparing information for the changes to refuse and recycling collection arrangements.

Investigations continue into the possible future for the Old Municipal Buildings. Work has recently been completed there on several of the matters brought to light through the Fire Risk Assessment, although full compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act remains a contentious issue.

**CUSTOMER SERVICES**

The main task confronting the Customer Services Section in the past month has been the recruitment of additional staff. We have been seeking 3.64 staff, one to cover the loss of a previous CSA and two to bring us up to strength. This exercise attracted 90 applications, from which we have recruited to 2.64. We have still to interview for the



remaining post. The recruitment of the extra people should contribute to better performance. The remaining issue is that of office accommodation, which is still under consideration.

Operationally, the reorganisation of the waste collection days added significantly to calls from the public. We were able to identify however that most calls were generated as a result of either the Royal Mail not delivering the leaflet, or simply that the public did not read the leaflet, and not as a result of poor administration.

## **FINANCIAL SERVICES**

The Financial Services Unit has in recent weeks been working mainly on the budget for 2005/06, including meeting with Managers over delivery plans and finalising the Detailed figures prior to approval of the budget in February 2005. In addition work has started on the procurement phase of the new financial management system, and it is hoped to have the new system in operation by October 2005. Finally we have just concluded working with our external auditors on the 2003/04 Accounts and we have just received their unqualified opinion on the Annual Accounts.

## **ELECTORAL SERVICES**

The annual audit or canvass has just been completed. The new Register of Electors came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004. Just under 47,000 properties were canvassed. The response rate was just over 95%. Of these responses 21.75% used the Free phone telephone service, introduced last year.

As at 1<sup>st</sup> December the total electorate is 81767. However, rolling registration has already kicked in and there are already another 191 (at the time of writing) electors to be added from 4<sup>th</sup> Jan 2005. There are currently just over 9000 electors who vote by post (10% of the electorate). From the canvass there are around another 1500 applications to be added to this total.

Next *scheduled* elections will be the County Council on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2005. Will there be a Parliamentary on the same day? If there is this will increase the turnout at the County Council election.

## **BENEFITS**

As reported in July, the new review regime means we must visit over 1,500 benefit recipients this year. To ensure we meet our targets, Benefit Officers have supplemented the work carried out by our 2 Visiting Officers. We have been piloting new technology by using tablet PCs allowing us to electronically complete claim forms in the customer's home. This, combined with the use of digital cameras has assisted us in improving our speed in processing. So far, our Investigation Team has taken action against 11 fraudulent benefit recipients. This has earned "SAFE Rewards" of £20k from the Department for Work and Pensions as part of the additional funding available for authorities taking action to reduce fraud.

## **REVENUES**

The major areas of the Revenues Team Plan for 2004/05 currently being worked on are as follows:

- *Cash deposit machines implementation* – a company named SCANCOIN have been selected through the tender process to provide the machines. We are aiming to install machines at Taunton and Wellington during February 2005. Currently we are in the process of agreeing contracts with SCANCOIN and obtaining estimates from the DLO for the necessary building work.
- *Document imaging & workflow* – imaging and workflow has now been fully introduced for all Council Tax and Business Rates post. We are now imaging all post upon receipt and working from images. This will speed up processing time, allow us to keep more accurate and detailed processing statistics and make it easier for us to quickly locate outstanding items of work.
- *Business Rates 2005 revaluation* – the new transitional relief and bill content regulations are due to be released within the coming week. Once received we can then start to identify the amendments required to our IT programme.
- *Small business relief* – the regulations will be released on 3 December 2004. These will differ somewhat from the proposed regulations and increase the number of businesses eligible to receive relief. Once received we will undertake publicity and start inviting applications from January 2006.
- *Team planning for 2005/06* – 2 team planning sessions have been held in order to identify what tasks we need to complete within Revenues during 2005/06.
- *Council Tax new-year billing planning for 2005/06* – preparation has started for next year's annual billing. We are intending to produce the Council Tax leaflet in conjunction with 3 other Somerset Districts, thereby making a substantial saving on production costs.

## **INTERNAL AUDIT**

The Audit Team have continued to progress with the system-based audits during the last quarter, which include Housing Benefits, Taunton Deane Debts and Creditors. Staffing changes within the team have had a limited effect on output and the section has continued to progress informal joint working arrangements with South Somerset District Council. The joint audit approach focussed on the Housing Benefits and Creditors reviews; it has resulted in service improvements to the audit process and has enabled the Audit Team to increase the scope and coverage within these core system reviews. The Team continues to get involved with non-audit duties, highlights this quarter include: -

- Data Protection – Continued provision of general advice and guidance on data protection issues.
- Wessex Reinvestment Trust – Advice and guidance on audit and risk management issues.

- E-Government and Information Management – Preparing for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act and help in the completion of the Council's IEG4 submission.

## **INFORMATION SYSTEMS**

With the retirement of Mike McLaughlin responsibility for e-Government has been taken over by Simon Kirkham. One of his first tasks is to complete and return our IEG4 return to the ODPM by 20<sup>th</sup> December. This important document must be approved by ODPM to secure next year's IEG funding of £150,000, and now includes reference to how e-government is helping deliver efficiency savings.

The SomersetOnline partnership has agreed that the existing Somerset Online Portal is not delivering what it should, and some work that Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane have done in providing a more suitable alternative has been adopted as the way forward. This style of working utilises the significant skills and knowledge already present in our organisations to deliver value-for-money projects for the partnership, and it is hoped that further work will be delivered on this basis.

Tina Saunders has joined us as E-government project coordinator, helping to mitigate to a certain extent Mike's absence. We have also secured the services of Chris Danby to do some work on reviewing the content of the web site, out of which will come some proposals on how the content is managed in the future. His report will be available in January.

The storage-area-network project is very near completion now. We are now using the new backup devices, and will be migrating to the new disk storage in the next 2 weeks.

The new IS Strategy is nearing completion and will be with CMT in January.

**Councillor Terry Hall**

**COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GWYNETH LEIGHTON - COMMUNICATIONS**

**Crisis Communications**

The villagers in North Curry have lived harmoniously with Gypsy neighbours for many years. However, on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> October the village tranquillity was overturned by what has been aptly described as a military-style incursion of land at Oxen Lane by Gypsies that provoked an understandably vocal response from local people. Within 48 hours Taunton Deane Borough Council was under the scrutiny of the national and local press and broadcast media and still is. For 2 weeks the phones were ringing non-stop and the PRO working long hours. The public relations office is still on alert and handling regular calls from the media. Our aims are to ensure that the media is kept well informed and we provided a spokesperson at all times throughout the crisis period.

It was essential that the people of North Curry felt that they were being heard by the Council and that we were pulling out the stops for them. The Leader, Councillor Williams was our key spokesperson and his ability and willingness to talk to reporters was fundamental in winning the media and resident support. Judith Jackson and Councillor Norman Cavill did their share of interviews. The Council was never unavailable for comment either in or out of office hours.

We will this week be putting our skills to the test again and are expecting a high turnout from the Press at the Planning Meeting scheduled for Thursday evening. Press releases will be issued the next day to inform residents and the media of the outcome and the reasoning behind the decisions made.

I am proud of the professionalism displayed by our Public Relations Office through the work of Emma Brewster with assistance from Becky Brown – they did a great job under what can only be described as extreme pressure. They both went that '**extra mile**' for TDBC and residents of North Curry.

In summary the coverage in the press has been positive, the majority of articles generated by the media being based on fact and containing direct quotes from the Council. We are pulling out the stops to ensure that residents feel they are aware of the events and understand the action we are taking. However, there is a feeling amongst some residents that we are not keeping them informed, somehow we must aspire to overcome this.

**Media & Monitoring**

In the past there has been no analysis of coverage in the press and we are now putting together a monitoring programme to identify what is being said about us. Knowing what is good or what is bad will help us formulate media plans to revert negative press.

On the positive side – the Green Flag Awards for Vivary and Wellington parks were given excellent local coverage. We arranged press interviews on the Vision for Taunton and are working in partnership on this with Somerset County Council on media handling for The Vision, Silk Mills Bridge and the Dualling of the A358. The 'Drink Safe, Be Safe' campaign got off to a successful start with the help of the Somerset County Gazette. ITV are producing a programme in which the Council will be shown as an authority that is taking positive action against the anti-social effects of binge drinking. The Daily Telegraph reported on our request to the Office of Fair Trading that we be allowed to include minimum price drinks in the campaign, resulting in national media interest from 5-Live and the Daily Express. Jim Hunter, Licensing Officer was interviewed on Radio 4 from which we received very positive feed back from local residents.

As you might expect, we have also received some negative press, mainly relating to budget issues, the arts, possible redundancies and changes to the wardens scheme where misinformation has abounded causing public concern and confusion about the consultations and proposals being made by the Council.

### **Communications Strategy**

Work continues to meet the strategy aims. A consultation toolkit is currently being developed and managers are being encouraged to consider how they will manage communications and consultation through their 'Heads Plans'. A process is now in place to control the quality of consultation along with a hard to reach database to help those undertaking any consultation ensure that they are being inclusive.

#### *Corporate Management of Media & Communications*

It is important the organisation is aware of the importance of good communications and public relations. Over the next three months the Communications Team will be focussing on putting in systems and Media Training in place for the Executive and the Senior Management Team.

The Communications Team is producing a PR Tool Kit that will include:

- What is Public Relations and how it can benefit the Council
- Media tools – press releases, statements, press briefings
- An updated Media Protocol
- Do's and don'ts in dealing with the media including broadcasting

### **Publications Audit**

The publications audit is currently in progress and covers all leaflets, brochures, newsletters, posters, forms and information packs issued by the authority. The aim of the audit is to gather information on the volume and costs to help improve cost effectiveness. We are reviewing all publications to ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and E-Government Strategy and to check for uniformity of corporate style and accessibility to information by minority and hard to reach groups.

### **Deane Dispatch**

Members were each sent an advance copy of the latest edition of Deane Dispatch prior to distribution to households in Taunton Deane.

### **Weekly Bulletin**

The Weekly Bulletin plays a vital role in keeping members informed of Decisions – this was endorsed at the Review Board on 25 November and members will continue to be notified of Decisions this way. The Bulletin was originally devised as a method of keeping members informed about news that is not reported through normal Council business then its circulation widened to include the press and public. It has had a mixed level of contributions over the past few months and there have been some weeks when news was rather thin on the ground. It is the perfect way for representatives on Outside Bodies to report back to Council colleagues, simply email [weeklybulletin@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:weeklybulletin@tauntondeane.gov.uk)

*A Merry Christmas & Happy New Year to you all!*

**Councillor Gwyneth Leighton**

**COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS LEWIN HARRIS**

**CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP (CDRP)**

The most recent Audit of Crime Statistics, carried out by Taunton Deane's community safety team on behalf of the Crime and Disorder Partnership, is now complete.

Overall it shows a 3% increase in recorded crime. Within this figure there are some significant successes: notably a 29% reduction in dwelling burglaries, a 7% reduction in non-dwelling burglary and a 29% reduction in total vehicle crime.

There has been, however, a 52% increase recorded in violent crime. This is in line with national trends and it is important to note that the heading of violent crime covers more than physical attacks. Other categories under this heading include offences such as harassment, dangerous dogs in public places and possession of an offensive weapon. The ABH (actual bodily harm) figure has increased from 355 to 751 incidents. These can be linked predominately to the night time economy.

I am therefore very pleased that, through the CDRP, various initiatives have been introduced to tackle the problems created by binge drinking, particularly but not exclusively in the town centre. These include the Drink Safe, Be Safe campaign which includes the Gold Silver and Bronze awards for licensed premises that achieve certain standards and the Louise McClintock Appeal which has led to a big increase in the number of plastic or shatterproof glasses and bottles being used in town centre pubs and clubs.

I attended the launch of the most recent initiative "Three Strikes" at the beginning of this month. The 3 Strikes policy aims to quell alcohol related anti-social behaviour in Taunton Deane.

Based on the yellow and red cards shown to footballers, Taunton's three-step system has been put in place to deal predominately with drink-fuelled late night disorder in and around the town's clubs and pubs.

For a first offence, the offender will be sent a Yellow Card warning of the likely consequences of further offending and also containing a health education message and details of support organisations.

For a second offence within twelve months, the offender will be sent a Red Card, with a stronger warning about the consequences of a further offence. The card will outline the effects of alcohol abuse and explain where help is available. A second offence will also mean that the convicted person is banned from all Taunton Pubwatch premises for 3 months.

After a third prosecution for anti-social behaviour, offenders will become targets for an ASBO.

## **EQUALITIES**

Harry Connery, our Equalities Officer, has been in post since October and he is leading the drive for the council to achieve Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. To this end we need to establish where we currently stand, and thus identify the gaps. A system of Equality Impact Assessments is therefore being tried out in selected services and, when the “bugs” have been ironed out, will be gradually rolled out across all services.

Work is also ongoing in obtaining more information regarding the different Ethnic Minority groups in Taunton Deane. Census information can quickly become outdated and we need to know about the different communities so we can provide support in terms of translation and appropriate communication. If Members have knowledge of any such minority groups, perhaps they would pass the information on to Harry Connery.

The Website is a specific area where improvements are needed and again work is ongoing with regard to our obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act.

Equalities and Diversity training has been offered to all members. To date, around a third of members have not yet attended this training. A further course will be laid on in the New Year, and I would urge all members who have not yet received this training to attend. This is important both from the point of view of the Local Government Equalities Standard and our Members Code of Conduct.

## **WARD PROFILES**

Another area of work currently being undertaken by the Corporate Policy and Performance team is the development of Ward Profiles. These will contain key information about the borough, its people and their needs as well as statistical information on the social, economic and environmental trends in Taunton Deane and its wards. This information will finally be in one place in a standard and easy-to-use format. The profiles are intended for use by the Council, the Local Strategic Partnership and all the related bodies in the public, voluntary, community and private sectors in our various efforts to target resources to those areas of greatest need, provide evidence for funding bids, develop policy options, and readily access local information.

## **REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

As Taunton Deane’s representative on the South West Regional Assembly, I attended a meeting of the Assembly in Exeter in November.

The main issues at the meeting covered the launch of the Integrated Regional Strategy, the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and the merger of Regional Housing and Planning Bodies.

The Integrated Regional Strategy, Just Connect 2004 - 2026, has been developed through widespread consultation as an overarching strategy for the long term to enable the region to focus its thinking and action on achieving long term as well as short term goals. It gives a clear set of aims and objectives for integrating all the region's strategies. The key aims are:

- To harness the benefits of population growth and manage the implications of population change
- To enhance our economic prosperity and quality of employment opportunity
- To enhance our distinctive environment and the quality and diversity of our cultural life
- To address deprivation and reduce significant intra-regional inequalities
- To make sure that people are treated fairly and can participate fully in society

Further information is available on the SWRA Website: [www.southwest-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk)

The Regional Spatial Strategy contains three options for future growth in the South West up to 2026 and these options are currently out for consultation. Broadly, they are:

- Focus most new development in eleven designated Principal Urban Areas in the South West. Taunton is one of these.
- Focus a greater share of regional development on seven Principal Urban Areas in the South West. Under this option, Taunton would not be included.
- Recognise that different parts of the Region have different needs and potential and that a more flexible approach is needed that includes development eleven Principal Urban Areas but also recognises the contribution that can be made by market towns and smaller centres, particularly in the more rural parts of the region that are remote from the Principal Urban Areas.
- 

In its response to the consultation, Taunton Deane Borough Council has expressed a preference for the third option, which keeps Taunton's PUA status while representing a more sensitive response to the needs of the rural areas.

Government policy now means that the Regional Assembly will become responsible for producing a Regional Housing Strategy and advising Ministers on housing investment allocations. The proposals at the meeting concerned the new structures that need to be set up within the Assembly to take on this responsibility that will come into effect in September 2005.

**Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris**