

Council Meeting – 12 April 2011

Report of Councillor John Williams – Leader of the Council

1. Progress of the Third Way Road, Taunton

- 1.1 I was delighted to be present when the river bridge for the inner relief road was positioned and what an incredible feat of engineering this was. The bridge weighed circa 270 tonnes and the gross weight of the crane was around 1,100 tonnes having been assembled on site after arriving on 17 lorries!
- 1.2 Not sure what was happening “under the water” but on the surface it was a faultless operation, a credit to all involved in the very difficult and complex positioning of the massive structure. Apparently there was only 65mm of tolerance at each end and the structure was guided into its final position by four men on ropes at each corner. It fitted perfectly and was all over in under one hour.
- 1.3 Construction of a second bridge over the Mill Stream is presently under way and on present progress the road opening is likely to be late May or early June 2011. This will bring much needed relief from traffic congestion to Corporation Street and reduce traffic in North Street which has to be of great benefit to shoppers.
- 1.4 Works are under way on improving the Wood Street/Bridge Street junction and upgrading the traffic lights at the end of Staplegrove Road which is being done in readiness for the opening of the Third Way to facilitate the flow of traffic.
- 1.5 The opening of the Third Way will open up the whole of Tangier as a potential town centre site for employment and residential development.

2. Northern Inner Distributor Road (NIDR)

- 2.1 In my February report to Full Council I reported the excellent news of the award of Government funding for the NIDR and that it would be available as of April 2012 when Somerset County Council intended to commence work on the scheme.
- 2.2 Since then I have been discussing with the Leader of the County Council the possibility of an earlier start date bearing in mind the critical nature of this work in respect of freeing up a major strategic employment site. I am delighted to report that agreement has been reached in principle with a potential commencement on site of December 2010, possibly five months earlier than anticipated.
- 2.3 This is subject to receiving suitable tenders for the work and implementation not being subject to a public inquiry. If this occurred it could extend the lead in period. Also, of course, initial funding being made available for the works until Government grants are forthcoming. I am delighted to report that the Leader of

the County Council has assured me that short term funding of the works will not be a problem as he recognises the value and strategic importance of this site with its potential for creating around 4,000 jobs.

3. Firepool Site, Taunton

- 3.1 Great news that St Modwens have now received detailed planning consent for the Viridor development of the Priory Bridge Road Car Park Site. I understand they hope to commence construction work during May 2011 which has to be good for our local economy.
- 3.2 This will obviously mean the loss of around 200 car parking spaces but adequate capacity for normal use remains. We are working closely with Somerset County Cricket Club to open up additional parking space on the old livestock market site to help with peak demand during major cricket matches. It is also worth noting that the Cricket Club have reached agreement with the Park and Ride bus operators for a service direct to the cricket ground which has to be great news for easing traffic congestion in Taunton.
- 3.3 St Modwens and Project Taunton are in serious discussion with further potential occupiers of employment property on the site following the signing up of Viridor. I do believe that now we have our first occupier of the site, a major nationally recognised company, this will be the much needed catalyst for other occupiers to follow and with the NIDR now secure the whole site is available for development.
- 3.4 Dredging works of the river bed in the vicinity of the old canal lock has been carried out and it is now possible to gain direct access through the lock from the canal to the river which is navigable through the town to French Weir

4. Superfast Broadband

- 4.1 The planning process is under way for installation across Taunton and implementation should commence very shortly. I will update on progress at the meeting.
- 4.2 Since our last Full Council meeting I have received details of the County Council proposals to enable the whole of Somerset. These are commendable and excellent plans. It is of course subject to securing Government funding from an £800 million pot set aside for this purpose but I am sure we have a very good case and with the support of all Somerset MP's the signs are good for success.
- 4.3 The basic timetable is bid submission during this month, confirmation of success or otherwise May 2011, commence implementation early 2012 and completion across the whole of Somerset by 2015.
- 4.4 The County Council are keeping us fully updated and we are certainly offering our full support for this bold and imaginative scheme that will do so much for our rural areas. Particularly for existing businesses and for inward investment from

new business.

5. Car Parking Provision and Town Centre Business

- 5.1 The monthly car parking usage by numbers has shown a worrying decline over the past two months. This is something we must be aware of to ensure our actions do not worsen the situation and we must provide all support possible. The general consensus seems to be that national economic belt tightening and the very high cost of fuel is causing shoppers to think twice before jumping in their cars.
- 5.2 Locally it appears that our “empty shop” rate is well below the national average and that footfall, although reduced, has not been hit as badly as is occurring nationally. Long may this last and as noted above we must work to maintain a successful Town Centre Company and initiatives that enhance the visitor experience to Taunton.
- 5.3 I believe this is where our plans for the regeneration of our shopping centre, upgrading and enhancement of the High Street and redevelopment of the Castle Green, our historic town centre, are all important initiatives to enhance the retail offer and visitor experience necessary to combat the decline.
- 5.4 Part of this visitor attraction will undoubtedly be ease of access and adequate parking. We fully recognise this and despite the recent reductions in some car parks there has been an increase in parking provision for Taunton. A net increase 1227 spaces have been added through construction of the park and ride. This has the double benefit of providing for commuters out of town so freeing up valuable town centre spaces and reducing congestion during the peak hours AM and PM when most commuters will be travelling. We are all aware of how a relatively small reduction can reduce levels of congestion quite dramatically and here I quote the improvement caused by the school holidays.

6. Longrun Meadow, Taunton.....and other Green matters

- 6.1 The Green Cathedral made of living Willow is now under construction and is scheduled for completion during the first week of May this year (weather permitting). This is a truly remarkable structure and I am advised the first of its kind in the UK. I am however advised that other Green structures exist but to the best of our knowledge none comprise of Willow construction. This is a fitting material for a structure in Somerset where the Willow has been a valuable natural resource for centuries past. Once matured I believe this will be of great interest to many from far and wide.
- 6.2 The Mayor and I were kindly invited to the launch of a range of electric bicycles at Reaction Electrics’ premises in Priory Bridge Road, Taunton. The wide range of bicycles and electric scooters was very interesting but more to the point, is their potential for protecting and preserving our environment with zero carbon emissions when in use. We were allowed to try the electric bicycles and, I

believe I can speak for the Mayor to say, we were both equally impressed by the ease of use and the performance. Mayor and Leader racing around the large, fortunately empty, car park on bicycles, the mind boggles!

- 7.1 However, I am delighted to see that Taunton has such a leading edge business that must form part of the vital Green Energy sector that is recognised as an important part of Taunton Deane's future economic development
- 7.2 The next major step in providing for electric vehicles generally is the provision of public charging points which I am committed to see provided. I am proud to announce that the first four posts have just gone live at the Blackbrook Park and Ride site and we are now seeking suitable locations for "in town" provision. We will not be able to support or encourage the budding electric vehicle provision unless we make it easy to recharge in public places. We propose being a trend setter in the South West.

8. Working with Partners

- 8.1 I was very sorry to hear the news that Richard Gould, Chief Executive of Somerset County Cricket Club has moved to pastures new to take up leadership of the all important Oval Cricket Ground in Surrey. He will be a sad loss for Taunton but I wish him well and I am delighted to have had the opportunity to work with Richard and to witness the great things he has done for Somerset Cricket.
- 8.2 I am sure all will agree with me our loss can only be Surrey's gain and I believe we should write as a Council with our best wishes for the future and our sincere thanks for all that he has done for Taunton in his six years here. I would welcome Council's full support for this. We have had an excellent working relationship over the years and I look forward to this continuing when a successor is appointed.

And finally.....this is the very last Full Council meeting before the end of the quadrennium when all the seats across Taunton Deane are subject to re-election. I am aware that some Members are standing down and no doubt some others will not make it through the election process but can I take this opportunity of sincerely thanking all Councillors for their hard work and commitment. I believe that as a Council we are a "can do" organisation and that is because of the great relationship between Councillors and officers for which I thank all concerned. I am proud to have been involved leading such a great team which I believe has achieved much and good luck to you all whatever your future post 5 May.

Councillor John Williams

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Report of Councillor Ken Hayward – Environmental Services

1. Environmental Health Teams

Food Safety

- 1.1 Taunton Deane food hygiene ratings are now live on the Food Standards Agency website. To have a look follow the link:-
<http://ratings.food.gov.uk/>
- 1.2 Well done to all involved and in particular Martin Stoyles, Claire Holman and Sarah Khan. The migration from Somerset Food Scores to the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme proved to involve a considerable amount of work, which is still in progress. Somerset is now one of the few counties that as early adopters is fully live with the scheme.

2. Crematorium

- 2.1 The Wesley System, including music, web casting, waiting room information screens, chapel screen presentations and DVD service was installed and up and running on 1 April 2011, as planned.
- 2.2 A service held on the first day included a hymn with the Wesley system organ and choir. The minister conducting the service was delighted at this facility as the small congregation were further encouraged to participate with the backing of the choir.
- 2.3 Over forty tracks not held on the system were requested in the first couple of days and successfully downloaded to the system.
- 2.4 On 4 April 2011 there was a request for a live web cast, a screen presentation and extensive use of the music system. Although it is “early days” the web casting facility has been requested a number of times and looks as though it will prove to be very popular.
- 2.5 Crematorium staff, funeral directors and members of the public are able to access the music held on the system via the following link:-
<http://www.wesleymusic.co.uk/>

3. Climate Change / Carbon Management

- 3.1 A quote has been obtained for putting solar PV panels on the roof of the Station Road Swimming Pool. The preferred option would require an investment of

£100,000 which in return would generate an annual income of about £10,600 over 25 years. This means total earnings of £265,000, an annual return rate on investment of 10.59%. Payback would be achieved after 9.5 years. On a yearly basis, the option would produce 4.7% of the total electricity used in The Deane House from a renewable source. Please note, any further decisions on this proposal are subject to the current review of Taunton Deane's assets that will run until June 2011. Also, the potential need for replacing the roof of the swimming pool will need to be factored in. The Council and Tone are looking for renewable options for the other sites used by Tone as well.

- 3.2 Our Green Champions prepared and ran a series of events for Council staff as its contribution to the national Climate Change Week (21–25 March 2011). The events were about promoting cycling, teleconferencing and smarter driving as ways to reduce emissions from business travel. There was a good response from staff particularly to the cycling competition, which was organised in conjunction with Tone who borrowed exercise bikes for free. The 'smarter driving' sessions took place in the new Club Car which had the dual purpose of getting more staff to know the car and showing them how to drive more fuel efficiently.
- 3.3 Work on producing the 2011/2012 Carbon Management Plan has started. An initial idea-gathering exercise took place with the officers and Members of the Carbon Management Steering Group. A draft plan has been assembled from this and currently further discussion about the details and priorities of the Plan takes place. It is anticipated for the Plan to be produced by the end of April.
- 3.4 Yearly consumption figures for 2010/2011 are due imminently. This will tell us what percentage carbon saving was achieved over the course of 2010/2011 compared to 2009/2010. These figures will be published as part of the Carbon Management Plan.

4. Waste Management

- 4.1 As you will all know, the Somerset Waste Board met on Friday, 25 March 2011 to consider the future of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) in Somerset and extending the existing contract for waste collection with May Gurney.
- 4.2 The future of the HWRCs has been given extensive and in-depth consideration by all Partners over the last few months. Faced with the need to balance the budget by making savings of £314,000 it seemed that the proposed closure of Middlezoy, Coleford, Crewkerne and Dulverton was the only option.
- 4.3 One alternative to closure was the possibility of charging householders to use the facilities. The idea came from the community consultation events that the Waste Partnership held in the affected areas. We were initially told that this was not legally possible, but Councillor Mary Whitmarsh and I were among those pushing for officers to think outside the box and find a way. That way was found. By designating them as "community recycling centres", they could be operated outside of the relevant requirements of the Environment Act, and the public could

be charged each time they visited. There were some risks involved in this solution, and each of the partners had to be prepared to “underwrite” the potential risk of there being a legal challenge to this solution, or that the charging regime did not cover costs. In either scenario, the Board would act quickly to shut down the sites pending a solution being found. In addition, the Board was presented with the final proposal on the revised opening hours for all sites.

- 4.4 There was a lot of debate at the meeting on the proposed levels of charging, and also much concern expressed around the proposed opening hours – in particular the closure of all sites from 1pm on a Sunday, and more generally on the impact this might have on fly tipping. However it became evident that there could be no amendment to the proposed opening hours. Viridor staff were having to effectively take a pay cut (loss of overtime) and to expect them to work a full day every Saturday and Sunday, was deemed unreasonable.
- 4.5 After much debate, an amended proposal to keep the sites open, with a charge of £2 per visit, together with a clause allowing more flexibility should local Parishes or community groups wish to offer full or partial funding support in the future, was unanimously agreed. The Board also agreed to accept the proposed opening hours without amendment.
- 4.6 Whilst there may be an issue with increased fly tipping, I share the belief that this will only be short-term as the public get used to the new hours.
- 4.7 I also believe that the current practice of taking waste to the HWRC in the private car, joining the queue at the facility and then driving home again is not carbon efficient. There is a positive side to the measures that we have had to take, and that is that it should force the Partnership to look for further innovative ways to improve upon the services it provides. As one of the Taunton Deane Representatives on the SWP Board, I shall be continually pushing for this to happen.

The Contract Extension

- 4.8 The Board discussed this in depth at previous meetings – in connection with the Business Plan for 2011/2012. The current contract arrangements require us to apply an inflationary increase to the contract price each year – based on the Retail Price Index (RPI). This, based on current levels of inflation, would cost all the District Councils in Somerset a fortune. We had to find a way of amending this.
- 4.9 Steve Read has done some hard negotiating with May Gurney (our contractor for collecting waste) so that the inflationary index to be used would be changed to a more affordable measure. It would be based on a basket of indicators instead of RPI. This would save the Districts collectively approximately £500,000 per annum – and so made real financial sense. In return for this change, May Gurney has said they want an early agreement to extend the contract. The original contract is for seven years, with the option to extend for another seven, then another seven. This potential long term deal is fairly typical in the waste collection sector. We are currently in year four of the first seven year chunk of

the contract and this proposal would mean we would commit now to extend the contract to the end of the second seven year chunk.

4.10 The Board asked for an independent review of this “deal” – to gain assurance that this was a sensible solution before finally agreeing the contract extension. The report duly presented to the Board clearly showed that “the proposed extension makes commercial sense” and that “extending the contract on broadly the terms proposed does represent the best opportunity to obtain best value for the partner authorities”. The Board unanimously agreed to support the contract extension and asked the Managing Director to finalise the negotiations to make this happen.

4.11 And finally..... the Board thanked those Councillors who would not be standing at the forthcoming elections (including our own Councillor Mary Whitmarsh) for their hard work in supporting the Waste Board. Mary was ‘in it from the start’, and I would like to add my own personal thanks to Mary for her support over the last twelve months, and wish her all the very best for the future.

Councillor Ken Hayward

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Report of Councillor Mrs Catherine Herbert – Sport, Parks and Leisure

1. Parks

- 1.1 The Parks Teams have been working to make sure all our parks are in tip-top condition ready for the spring and the increase in visitors.
- 1.2 Bedding plants are being tended in the Nursery in preparation for the summer season, and the Nursery Team are investigating the potential of growing on new plants to create new income streams in the future.
- 1.3 Holly Close Allotments was lucky enough to get some money from the Unparished Area Fund to put up fencing and this has now been installed and the new and enthusiastic Allotment Committee are starting their hard work to get the site up and running.
- 1.4 In the same vicinity, working with Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey, we have also arranged for the relocation of a bench and some refurbishment works to be carried out on the benches on the popular embankment walk.

2. Community Leisure and Play

- 2.1 Cotford St Luke and Taunton Green Play Areas have been officially opened by the Mayor. Greenway Recreation Ground is on site and we have also received the news that Creechbarrow Road's landlord issues are now resolved and this project is now out to tender. We are still optimistic for a summer completion for this greatly wanted playground.
- 2.2 The water play area in Vivary Park has proven very popular and it was unfortunate that the water pump broke after only a short time. The team immediately contacted the supplier and a replacement pump was installed within 10 days and the children are again enjoying the water play.
- 2.3 We are also working up proposals to update the play area at Wellington Recreation Ground, and in early discussions with a skate group in Wellington hoping to refurbish the skate park.
- 2.4 I was lucky enough to attend a meeting hosted at Somerset College by the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG). The day was a chance to meet with other Authorities in the South West and hear LOCOG's hopes for how the whole country can be part of the Olympic experience.
- 2.5 The event gave a taste of what might be available for towns to 'Olympic' their streets and the enthusiasm was palpable in all attendees, although of course there was concern about how much things would cost! There will be lots for us to consider as 2012 draws near.

3. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

Community, Sports and Health Development

- 3.1 Tone continues to work hard to develop a number of community outreach programmes:

Sport Development

- 3.2 Taunton Deane Foot Anstey Aquathlon

3.2.1 Over 170 athletes turned up to show their grit and determination as they battled it out in the 7th Taunton Deane Foot Anstey Aquathlon on Sunday, 27 February 2011 at Wellington Sports Centre.

3.2.2 Sponsored by south west law firm Foot Anstey and organised by Somerset RC Tri Club and Tone Leisure, the competition caters for all levels of fitness and stamina with competitors able to enter either the short or longer distance race.

Health Development

- 3.3 Older People

3.3.1 Three Flexercise training days have been run since June 2010 resulting in approximately 150 Flexercise participations each month.

3.3.2 Ten Active Living Centres (ALCs) in Taunton Deane are participating in the 6 week physical activity programme. There are approximately 15 participations per centre, per session. ALCs include: Parmin Close, Temple Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Wiveliscombe, Staplegrove, Rockwell Green, Oake, WHERE Northfield Centre, Frank Bond Centre and St. Michael's Centre.

- 3.4 Active Somerset

3.4.1 Tone Leisure received funding for 12 more Active Somerset classes which started before 31 March 2011 for 12 weeks. Funding helps with the venue hire for 12 weeks and instructor fees for 12 weeks.

3.4.2 Classes include: tots/parents sports skills, beginners tennis, improvers tennis and match play, line dancing, Activate, boot camp, Tone Leisure running club (based at Wellsprings Leisure Centre), ladies running club (based at Wellington Sports Centre), multi-exercise sessions, step to health and beginners triathlon training.

- 3.5 Weight Management Programme

3.5.1 Currently Tone is halfway through the 12 week weight management programme at the Feel Good Factory, Blackbrook Pavilion. Working in

partnership with Slimming World, at the midway point of the trial 6 out of the 11 participants had cumulatively lost a total of 111½ inches.

3.6 Activity to Promote Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing in Adults

3.6.1 Tone has been working in partnership with Somerset Partnership NHS Foundation Trust to establish bespoke activity sessions for clients to be more active and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

3.6.2 The sessions that are being held in Wellington are for middle and older-aged adults, whilst those in Taunton are for young adults. The activities, which have been funded by the Active Somerset initiative, include circuit training, walking, trampolining, archery, boxercise and hot cycling.

3.7 Walking for Health

3.7.1 Nine individuals undertook the one day Volunteer Walk Leader Training held in Wellington in March. Some of the volunteers have joined the team in Taunton and others are making plans to volunteer on a forthcoming scheme for Wellington. Tone's Health Development Officer provides a support function to a team of 20 volunteer Walk Leaders.

Facility News

3.8 Taunton Pool

3.8.1 Taunton Pool has seen a busy New Year period, with the weekends and school holidays being particularly busy.

3.8.2 Every couple of months Tone has swim challenges and the one for February was a group challenge to swim the length of the River Thames (215 miles) in the 28 days of the month. This proved popular with over 20 customers taking part and one completing 50 miles in the month. Their next challenge will be to swim the length of the Grand Canyon.

3.8.3 Tone Leisure and Taunton Deane Borough Council are currently seeking quotations for a new lift and lockers at the Station Road Pool.

3.9 Wellington Sports Centre

3.9.1 During February the Centre held a successful Roller Disco event with over 100 skaters for the family session and 60 skaters for the adults only session. This again was a very successful event bringing lots of new faces to the site.

3.9.2 The young persons' Z3 project witnessed 730 visits in February after a great birthday promotion in January, targeting those users who had not been to the site over the past 8 weeks. The team are currently working closely with local schools to secure regular daytime bookings for the facility.

3.9.3 The roof is currently being repaired and maintenance planned for a new Calcium Hypochloride pool system will be installed in the next few weeks.

3.10 Free Swimming Underspend

3.10.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council orders have now been placed for the new Sea Scooters and Aqua Bubbles for both Taunton Pool and Wellington Sports Centre. All of the proposed swim initiative projects will commence after the Easter holidays.

3.11 Wellsprings Leisure Centre

3.11.1 Junior Activities - Wellsprings has secured £7,000 of external funding to enhance the children's holiday activity programme. The funding will be predominantly used to support 'inclusive' play opportunities, as well as staff training and equipment.

3.11.2 Events - In February there was some cockney rhyme at Wellsprings when Chas & Dave brought their tour to Taunton. It was surprising how far people were travelling to see the performance - tickets being sold to people in Liverpool and Leicester.

3.11.3 The regular bookings for the National Association of Majorettes England and SW Schools Gymnastics have held competitions at Wellsprings as well as an IDTA Dance Competition.

3.11.4 Forthcoming events include the British Sugar Craft Guild Annual Exhibition, two dog shows and an Antiques Fair. The stars of Strictly Come Dancing will be returning in May.

Councillor Catherine Herbert

Council Meeting – 12 April 2011

Report of Councillor Mrs Jean Adkins – Housing Services

1. Somerset Strategic Housing Project

- 1.1 This externally funded project is designed to improve the quality of strategic (non-landlord) housing services in Somerset (housing advice, homelessness, strategy, private housing work) and to achieve efficiencies in these services.
- 1.2 This approach will allow the Districts to decide the extent to which they are able to commit to shared services in any of these areas, based on their local requirements and circumstances. The project is also exploring the most sustainable and cost-effective ways of delivering housing services across Somerset, which maximise the benefits of scale whilst delivering good quality local services.
- 1.3 The four priority “themes” underlying this project are:-
 - Strategy Development;
 - Performance Management and Value for Money;
 - Access and Customer Care; and
 - Diversity and Social Inclusion.
- 1.4 Good progress is being made in the “start up” phase – which includes Youth Housing, Financial Inclusion, Vision and Skills. For example, On Vision, the project will develop a clear shared vision for strategic housing that contributes to wider community objectives; On Skills, the aim is to make the most effective use of staff resources to enhance existing capacity by mapping existing staff skills; On Financial Inclusion, the work will ensure that everyone in Somerset has access to, and information on, a wide range of appropriate financial products and services, and it will provide practical solutions to enable people to manage their money better.

2. Youth Housing Strategy

- 2.1 The aim of this project is to provide a co-ordinated, consistent, cross-County approach to ensure homelessness and youth housing provision for young people is prioritised and implemented. This will be achieved through a new Youth Housing Strategy, to drive forward this agenda in Somerset – and an action plan to target greatest needs.

- 2.2 To date, youth housing services have been mapped, assessment of needs has almost been completed and benchmarking is under way. This project forms part of the Somerset Strategic Housing Project.

3. Private Sector Housing Partnership

- 3.1 A major challenge has been posed to the work of the Private Sector Housing Partnership given the Government's abolition of private sector renewal funding. In the current financial year we received £462,000 to support work in private sector housing on energy efficiency, empty homes, bringing homes up to a minimum standard, dealing with disrepair, and improving health and safety standards. Next year there is nothing in the capital budget for this work.
- 3.2 This is very challenging. According to the October 2009 Building Research Establishment (BRE) Housing Stock projections, an estimated 15,413 private sector homes (41% of total) fail the basic decent homes standard in Taunton Deane.
- 3.3 To respond to this challenge the Private Sector Housing Partnership will be concentrating predominantly on existing high priority need groups and statutory interventions.
- 3.4 Nevertheless, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has given local authorities a clear message that private sector renewal has to be funded differently in future. As a consequence of this, the Partnership will continue to encourage home owners and landlords to take up improvement loans through the Wessex Reinvestment Trust, and it will bring forward its tentative plans for the Partnership to become self-financing.

4. Anti-Social Behaviour Update

- 4.1 I am pleased to report that the tenant of the "crack house" in Leycroft Grove, Taunton has voluntarily surrendered the tenancy of the property thereby avoiding the need for the Council to take legal action.
- 4.2 There were 23 reported incidents of anti-social behaviour during March 2011, four of which have been finalised.
- 4.3 This number is up on the previous month but, hopefully, this is due to the very visible presence of our two new members of the Estates Team.

5. Tenants' Forum

- 5.1 Following the recent resignation of the previous Chairman, Ken Marshall, I am pleased to report that the Vice-Chairman, Malcolm Andrews, has stepped up to become Acting Chairman of the Tenants' Forum.

Councillor Jean Adkins

Council Meeting – 12 April 2011

Report of Councillor Terry Hall - Corporate Resources

1. Revenues and Benefits

- 1.1 At the time of writing this report the outturn results for 2010/2011 have not yet been received. I hope to be able to be able to give the results at the meeting.

2. Southwest One (SW One)

Procurement Savings Progress

- 2.1 SW One procurement savings of Council's spending signed off by Taunton Deane is still behind target at £809,000 although has improved since my last report when it stood at £556,000.
- 2.2 Members may recall SW One are required to save £10,000,000 over the 10 years of the contract. Early savings were required to repay the cost of the Transformation Projects (see below).
- 2.3 It is beginning to look that the target of £10,000,000 is unlikely to be achieved in the original timescale.
- 2.4 Spend analysis software is being tested to produce detailed spend analysis reports which are expected imminently.
- 2.5 Savings resulting from combining purchasing of printers for Somerset County Council (SCC), Avon and Somerset Police (ASP) and Taunton Deane are expected to produce extra valuable savings as is a review of vehicle supply.
- 2.6 Significant savings amounting to £2,500,000 over next five years are anticipated to flow from the current examination of Deane DLO and Housing Property Services expenditure.
- 2.7 Workshops will be held for local Small and Medium Enterprises to assist them in how to supply SW One.

Transformation Projects

- 2.8 The SW One partnership was created to deliver five key Transformation Projects in addition to the operational back-office services element to the contract. These projects are SAP, Back Office and Customer Relationship Management systems, People Excellence Model, Locality based service delivery and procurement transformation.

- 2.9 The funding for these projects is generated from the savings being delivered through the procurement transformation project.
- 2.10 Because the savings have not materialised at the speed expected, it will be necessary to reschedule some repayments of internal borrowing. The Executive's agenda for the meeting scheduled on 13 April 2011 provides details of the proposals.

3. Legal and Democratic Services

Legal and Democratic Services Partnership

- 3.1 I reported to last Council that discussions were in progress with the other Somerset Councils to establish a Legal and Democratic Services Partnership on similar lines to the SW Audit Partnership.
- 3.2 The decision whether to proceed has now been deferred until after the elections as some discussion needs to be had about the County Council's involvement.

Localism Bill

- 3.3 A response to the Localism Bill was given before the 10 March 2011 deadline following agreement by the Corporate Governance Committee. The response was in line with the comments previously made by the Council's Standards Committee.

Creedwell Orchard, Milverton

- 3.4 Councillor Thorne requested that this matter be placed on the Corporate Scrutiny Committee's agenda. However, due to the number of items already scheduled for the March agenda, the Chairman felt that a briefing note to Members would be more appropriate at this stage.
- 3.5 In addition it was also thought that this matter could be politically sensitive and that it was inappropriate to deal with it before the forthcoming Local Elections. Once the briefing note has gone out, if Members still wish the matter to come before Scrutiny it can be put on the forward plan.

Bishops Hull

- 3.6 Kevin Toller is leading a steering group and is the main point of contact between the residents and developer in trying to resolve the issues coming out of this development.
- 3.7 Many of those issues have also involved Legal and Democratic Services and a great deal of time is currently being spent on this. Kevin has I believe now resolved many of the issues with this development and things have now settled down....I hope.

Budget Review Project

- 3.8 Members will be aware we endorsed a four year strategy in order to deal with the budget gaps that will be coming on the horizon over the next few years.
- 3.9 Work is currently underway by officers to look at a project in order to consider ways of dealing with these gaps. Tonya Meers will be leading on the “Internal Communication with Stakeholders Work Stream” and this will be a very critical part of the project.
- 3.10 In addition to that, Tonya is feeding into various other work streams in her role as Solicitor to the Council. This project is taking up a lot of time as envisaged but is making progress. Members will also be involved in this project as it progresses.

4. Performance and Client Team

Government Connect

- 4.1 We have recently passed the CoCo (Code of Connection) Audit but have a number of enhancements we need to implement by next year. Laptops are being rolled out with encryption. Members will receive new replacement laptops after the election.
- 4.2 SCC is in discussion with SW One regarding the effect on SW One of the reductions in County spending. SCC has provided details of their proposed renegotiation and we have agreed a structure for Taunton Deane and ASP to monitor progress. This is an area of significant concern as the impact and outcome are unknown.
- 4.3 The re-launch of SAP is nearly complete and is anticipated to finish in April 2011. The team is working to implement the remaining elements of SAP and get the entire system and supporting processes to acceptable Business as Usual standards.
- 4.4 The team is heavily involved in the Budget Review Project and is working closely with the Strategic Procurement Service and services to promote procurement related change across the organization.

Councillor Terry Hall

Council Meeting – 12 April 2011

Report of Councillor Mark Edwards - Planning and Transportation

The last month has seen the Third Way Bridge finally lifted into place and Councillor John Williams has covered this momentous occasion in his report but I wanted to add that I do not think any of us will quite realise the true impact of this road until it opens.

Then in addition there is also the Northern Inner Distributor Road which is due to start soon and again Councillor Williams has included this in his report.

These two investments in our infrastructure are key to Taunton's future and will open up enormous potential for the whole area. Carefully considered investment in time and infrastructure to help today, but with one eye clearly on the future.

1. Core Strategy

- 1.1 The Core Strategy has been written in draft and continues to be refined ready for 'Regulation 27' publication in June 2011. The Strategy Unit gave a Members Briefing in late February to explain the content, evidence and rationale behind the Core Strategy. The briefing was very well attended by Councillors and also prospective candidates for the elections in May.
- 1.2 The Strategy Unit has also presented at the Taunton Business Forum to give an overview of the Core Strategy and more specifically on the planned provision of employment land and business growth in Taunton Deane. Again this was well attended and generated useful debate.
- 1.3 The team continues to work closely with Development Management and Project Taunton to produce a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Taunton High Street.

2. Maidenbrook Appeal

- 1.1 Officers from the Strategy Unit and Development Management recently represented the Council at a public inquiry into an appeal by a developer against the Council's refusal to grant planning permission for a public house and residential development for 233 properties at Maidenbrook, Taunton.
- 1.2 The grounds for refusal were that the site is unsustainable, undermines

future planned growth and removes a valuable green wedge between Taunton and Monkton Heathfield.

- 1.3 We await the Inspectors decision, which had not been received at the time of writing this report, and I will update verbally at Full Council by which time we expect to have had a decision.

3. Enforcement

- 3.1 As part of the first phase of the Planning Service review, the need for more consistency in enforcement investigations has been identified as an issue for improvement.
- 3.2 Changes to the Enforcement Policy are being proposed aimed at an early planning assessment to ensure that our limited resources are focused on those cases, which are ultimately likely to result in enforcement action.
- 3.3 Deadlines for submission of retrospective planning applications are also being introduced to make sure that decisions as to whether to take enforcement action are not unduly delayed.
- 3.4 I would add that this is one important part of the wider review which is taking place and is not absolute and as part of this I am taking into account concerns from major developments which are being built in Taunton presently.
- 3.5 I want to make sure the system is fit for purpose and where we have issues which have occurred that these are learnt from. I will make sure that Members are informed as this progresses.
- 3.6 There is a great deal that needs to be done to make sure the Planning Service is ready to deliver if we want to see the growth required for Taunton to have the future we are all planning.

4. Firepool, Taunton

- 4.1 Reserved matters consent has just been granted for the first phase of the Firepool development at Priory Bridge Road Car Park. 2711 square metres of office space will be provided in a six storey building at the front corner of the site. Construction will begin shortly with the completed offices being occupied by Viridor in 2012.
- 4.2 It is expected that the public realm works, which gained planning consent last year, will be put in at the same time. Development Management Officers have a good working relationship with St Modwen with monthly meetings taking place to discuss current applications and potential future developments.

- 4.3 This is a good example of how large schemes can be delivered without unnecessary planning delays and should be considered as another lesson for the wider review.

5. Landscape Team

- 5.1 The Landscape Team has continued to provide expert advice on landscape and wildlife issues in respect of planning applications and has attended planning inquiries where required. They continue to process Tree Preservation Order (TPO) applications and serve new Orders when necessary. The team has also provided advice to West Somerset District Council on processing TPO applications on a commission basis.
- 5.2 The team has been successful in attracting £10,000 grant funding to improve access and signage at Otterhead Lake Local Nature Reserve and has prepared a bid for Higher Level Stewardship at Ash Common. If successful, the grant bid will be worth £30,000 over the next 10 years. £8,500 has been grant aided by the Environment Agency to the establishment of a Community Woodland at Westford, Wellington.
- 5.3 The first year's New Burdens (Protected Habitats and Species Grant) payment of £16,800, provided by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, has now been used in connection with protecting European protected species within Taunton Deane and this has provided valuable information particularly with regard to bats.
- 5.4 The Grant is distributed to all Local Planning Authorities with a European protected species or habitats and to date, with the second year's grant taken into account, the Council has received £33,670 towards this work.

6. Slinky Bus

- 6.1 The Council has invested in about 900 more hours for the Slinky Bus covering the peak morning period to boost the availability of community transport.
- 6.2 The Slinky Bus is available for anyone who cannot access public transport, where public transport is not available and for people without access to suitable transport for their journey. This means that a wide range of the community can use the service such as employees, parents and toddlers, students and retired members of the public.
- 6.3 The bus also has wheelchair access and the free concessionary bus passes can be used to cover fares.

- 6.4 The extra hours are being bought as Taunton Deane Borough Council is ending its discretionary taxi voucher scheme from April when changes in the law mean the scheme cannot continue to be run by this authority.

Councillor Mark Edwards

Council Meeting – 12 April 2011

Report of Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris – Community Leadership and Communications

1. Taunton Deane Partnership

1.1 The focus at the March meeting of the Partnership was an update on progress on the three priorities for 2011/2012:-

- Priority Areas: working collectively to improve urban and rural areas of high need;
- Promoting Taunton Deane: celebrating achievements and raising the sense of pride through public events and good communications; and
- Planning cycles: improving value for money and effectiveness by aligning planning and budget cycles.

1.2 Priority Areas: A comprehensive consultation exercise is being carried out in North and East Taunton, with the aim of completing 200 one-to-one interviews with residents and community groups. Taunton Deane's Community Development Team along with Estates Officers, Children's Centre staff, Police Community Support Officers and schools are working to complete the questionnaires. The information gathered will be used to develop an Action Plan for the areas, due to be published towards the end of this year.

1.3 Promoting Taunton Deane: Sue Parker from Somerset College is taking the lead on this priority and is arranging a workshop to scope the project to be held during the Partnership Board meeting on 10 May 2011.

1.4 Planning cycles: Work is ongoing, led by Andrew Hinchcliffe of Somerset County Council.

1.5 Out of Hours Telephony: There is interest from a number of public sector partners in working together to deliver a more efficient and cost effective out-of-hours telephony service. Discussions are at a very early stage.

2. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP)

2.1 The merger of the East and West Somerset CDRP's went ahead as from 1 April 2011. This group will become the CDRP for Somerset and will be known as the Community Safety Partnership. This merger was agreed by Full Council in October 2010. The County Council plus the five districts will be members along with the Police, Police Authority, Fire Service, NHS Somerset, Probation, Exmoor National Park, the Drugs and Alcohol team and the Youth Offending Team. The elected member representative for Taunton Deane will be the relevant portfolio holder. There will also be a senior officer representative.

3. Health White Paper

- 3.1 The Government's recently published Health White Paper "Healthy Lives, Healthy People" proposes transferring local health improvement functions to local authorities. A new body - Public Health England – will be responsible for setting the overall outcomes framework for public health and national resilience against health threats such as flu pandemics. Directors of Public Health will be employed by upper tier/unitary local authorities and jointly appointed by Public Health England. There will be Statutory Health and Wellbeing Boards for upper tier/unitary Councils. There is no statutory requirement for District Councils to be represented on these Boards.
- 3.2 Taunton Deane's response to the Health White Paper was submitted last week, having previously been circulated to the Executive, Shadow Executive and Group Leaders.
- 3.3 Our response flags up all the areas where the work of Taunton Deane impacts on public health: housing, planning, leisure, street scene, environmental health, community safety, licensing, emergency planning, benefits, grants, work on priority areas. In fact, almost all of the Council's activities have an affect on public health.
- 3.3 The White Paper focuses on County and Unitary Authorities with very little mention of District Councils or recognition of the impact of the work of District Councils on public health. Our response draws attention to the need for all Districts to have a place on the Health and Wellbeing Boards and for those Boards to take the wider determinants of public health into account.
- 3.4 Our response also points out the importance of pooled resources or place based budgets and targeting areas of greatest need.
- 3.5 The full response is available from Mark Leeman in the Strategy Unit and on the website.

4. Communications

- 4.1 Press releases: press releases this cycle have covered the £1.65 million Homes and Communities Agency funding for new homes at Ruskin Close, the Mayor's Gala Concert, extra funding for the Slinky Bus service, street party applications, information on applying to become and District or Parish Councillor, encouraging people to get on the Electoral Roll and applying for postal or proxy votes,

5. And finally

- 5.1 As I am sure you are all now aware, after 14 years on this Council, I have decided not to stand for re-election again. I am conscious this shows a lack of staying power compared to the eleven or so Members who have already served for 20 years or more! However, there are other things I want to do and I felt the time was right for me. I particularly want to publicly thank officers for their support, help and

advice. Working with them has been very rewarding and I have learnt a lot from them.

- 5.2 I am struck by the pace of change we have seen over the past 14 years and it is clear that further big changes and challenges lie ahead. I wish every success to those elected on 5 May 2011.

Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris

Council Meeting – 12 April 2011

Report of Councillor Cavill - Economic Development, Asset Management, Arts and Tourism

1. Keeping Members informed

1.1 Economic Development Delivery Plan

The team has now finalised and printed its Delivery Plan for 2011 and 2012.

In addition to those previously circulated, a presentation has now been given to the Town Centre Company.

The Delivery Plan sets out how the Council will support the economy, with activities falling into three themes:

- Stimulating Business Growth and Investment;
- Ensuring a Skilled and Entrepreneurial workforce; and
- Creating an attractive business environment.

2. Theme 1 - Stimulating Business Growth and Investment

2.1 Business Liaison

The team has started a proactive programme of visits to local businesses, investors and their agents, with the aim of assisting businesses to realise their growth and investment plans. The team intends to visit 100 businesses per year.

Organisations recently visited and currently being supported include:-

- Summerfield Developments
- Mr Miles Tea Shop, Taunton
- Mercedes Dealership, Taunton
- Asda Stores, Taunton
- Somerset College
- Swallowfield, Wellington
- Deane DLO and Taunton Deane Nursery
- GSI Exotech, Taunton

2.2 Regional Growth Fund Bid

During January the team worked closely with Forward Space Limited, the owner of the Collar Factory (aka Barnicotts) on the submission of a bid to the new Regional Growth Fund (RGF). The bid, which proposes the refurbishment of the

property to create an incubation and business centre, was the only bid forthcoming to the RGF from Somerset. Forward Space anticipates hearing the decision on its bid in mid-April.

A second round of bids will be opened by Government in mid-April, and officers will liaise with businesses to encourage appropriate bids to the programme from Taunton Deane.

2.3 Rural Post Offices

Hattie Winter is continuing to work with Councillor Bishop to lend support to Oake Post Office.

The team is also working with Councillor Morrell on a community project to reinstate the Post Office at Bishops Hull by contributing reply paid envelopes to a mail out to the village.

The team is also looking at the wider issue of rural Post Office closures, and coordinating the support available to those businesses.

2.4 DLO Nursery

The team is lending its support to the DLO Nursery in its aim to generate more commercial income streams. A Personal Business Advisor from Business Link has been introduced to work with the Nursery team to produce a Business and Marketing plan over the next couple of months.

2.5 Shop Front Grants for Wellington and Wiveliscombe

Retailers in both Wellington and Wiveliscombe took advantage of the above scheme, which expired at the end of 2010/2011, and which was designed to make both towns even more attractive places to shop.

The shop front enhancement scheme has enabled new and existing retail businesses to refurbish or re-instate traditional shop fronts or replace unsympathetic shop fronts improving the look of the town for both residents and visitors while encouraging economic development. The scheme has now closed, but the successful businesses have been awarded grants of up to £500, or 50% - whichever is the lower figure - for the cost of eligible works to enhance their shop fronts.

2.6 Support for Rural Business Projects

A small grant fund is available from the Council for rural projects and innovative Renewable Energy projects.

The Wellington Chamber of Commerce has been awarded £500 to create a map of traders in the town, and the 10 Parishes Festival has received £1000 towards web site and literature production.

The Economic Development Team is currently assisting a new wood recycling business that is looking for premises to establish a community interest company and aims to offer skills and training opportunities to local unemployed people as well as establishing a trading arm.

The team is also supporting a community-owned renewable energy company that is aiming to deploy a number of low carbon technologies across Wiveliscombe – this project is progressing well with significant interest from Somerset County Council and the Children’s Society to install solar panels on the roof of the Wiveliscombe Children’s Centre.

3. Theme 2 - Ensuring a Skilled and Entrepreneurial workforce

3.1 Halcon Regeneration Project

The team plays an active role in the Halcon Regeneration Project, particularly the generation of employment and training opportunities for residents. Officers are currently organising a Business Forum for local businesses to consider the opportunities for Apprenticeships and local work placements and co-ordinating this Somerset College.

3.2 Redundancy Support

Recently Somerset Caravans at Walford Cross has announced that they will be making significant redundancies. The Economic Development Team has responded proactively, offering support alongside Job Centre Plus where requested.

3.3 Job Clubs for long term unemployed people

The team continues to work with Job Centre Plus to encourage Job Centre Advisors to start referring their job seekers to the Job Clubs. Both Job Clubs (Halcon and Wellington) continue to make good progress, and the team will re-negotiate the Service Level Agreements for 2011/2012 with a view to setting up further provision in Priorswood.

The Council has recently funded new computer equipment for the Priorswood Link Centre to further support job seekers.

3.4 Fredericks Somerset

The team is currently liaising with the Fredericks Foundation to support the extension of Fredericks Somerset, offering loans to people to start up or enhance their business.

The opportunity to start a business has particular relevance during the current climate of redundancies and business closures and provides a route out of deprivation and benefit dependency for many people. A report proposing support was considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee in February, and will be followed by a report to the Executive at its meeting on 13 April 2011.

4. Theme 3 - Creating an Attractive Business Environment

Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

Since November work has been underway to design a LEP covering Somerset, Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

A proposal was submitted to the Government in mid-March, which has since received Ministerial endorsement. Work will commence immediately by the Steering Group to progress the LEP.

Through the Economic Development Team the Council has actively sought to input to the design of the LEP and will continue to try to ensure that this Council's voice is heard.

I would like to particularly thank David Evans for the great work he has done with other Districts, which has meant that the Districts of both Somerset and Devon now have a voice in this proposal.

4.2 Taunton Cultural Partnership

Members will be aware that the Brewhouse Theatre has had its public sector funding reduced by Somerset County Council in the forthcoming year, and that the Theatre has been unsuccessful in securing funding from the Arts Council England (ACE) under its National Portfolio funding stream. Members and officers are liaising closely with the Brewhouse's Chief Executive to consider how those decisions will impact upon the Theatre's Business Plan.

However, three other organisations have been successful and received a small amount of ACE funding: Take Art!, Somerset Film, and SPaeda.

Hinkley Point Nuclear Proposal

EDF Energy intends submitting its proposal for the development of the Hinkley B Nuclear New Build in June 2011, so the opportunity for local communities to

understand the likely implications of the development, and to secure measures to mitigate the negative effects of the development from EDF is closing.

EDF issued a revised consultation document in February for local areas to comment on its assessment of the likely impact of the development and the mitigating measures proposed. The Economic Development Team responded on behalf of the Council expressing concern that whilst EDF's studies indicate that Taunton Deane will be significantly affected by the development (e.g. Taunton will be one of the most highly densely populated areas by Hinkley related employees), the studies to date do not adequately assess the detailed impact of the development or propose sufficient mitigating compensation. Copies of the Council's submission have been circulated to Members.

The Economic Development Team is engaging with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce (on behalf of EDF Energy) to encourage local businesses to sign up to the Hinkley Supply Portal. Officers are discussing events in Taunton Deane to raise awareness of the Portal.

Taunton Academy Community Hub

Matt Parr has continued to work with the Taunton Academy, to offer a redundant Art Building to voluntary and community organisations in Taunton. Working with the Strategy Team, four groups have been identified, space has been allocated and a hire agreement completed. A deadline of Easter has been proposed for the completion of the hire agreement.

Into Somerset

Having obtained commitments from all of the constituent local authorities in Somerset to continue involvement in Into Somerset for a further year (2011/2012), the Board is currently producing a Business Plan to cover that period and the ensuing 3 years. By focusing on external marketing and working closer with the District Councils on fulfillment of investment enquiries the partnership is well positioned to attract investment to the County. It is also important that the partnership becomes less dependent upon local authority funding by better engaging the business community and attracting private sector funding.

5. Tourist Information Centre (TIC)

Taunton Deane will continue to fund the TIC which is very positive news in the current climate. As one of the few remaining TICs in Somerset there is great potential for partnership working. Currently, an on-line ticketing service is being considered which will enable the TIC to provide e-tickets; and discussions are taking place as to how the TIC might assist in promoting the new Museum.

6. Asset Management

Mount Street Nursery

The sale is progressing well, although the types of affordable housing and numbers, as well as their location, need to be further defined. The developer is keen to progress and has everything needed in relation to surveys and investigations on the site. It is hoped to exchange contracts by the end of April 2011. Legal Services has received a draft contract from McCarthy which is receiving attention.

Frobisher Way

Completion of this sale is being delayed. Further meetings are taking place with a likely purchaser.

TYCC site

This is presently subject to a call-in and will be dealt with at the next appropriate Scrutiny meeting.

Councillor Norman Cavill