

## **COUNCIL MEETING 22 APRIL 2003**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CROAD – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM, AND COUNCIL BUILDINGS**

#### The Vision for Taunton

You may recall that in my report to the Council in October last year, I offered the view that the Urban Design Framework and the Detailed Study for Firepool and Tangier, were the cornerstones for implementing the Vision. Now that the consultants have been appointed and are about to start work, I am even more certain of this contention.

The consultation process and the involvement of key partners like the Taunton Economic Partnership and the Town Centre Partnership, will generate an exciting debate. Believe me, the Vision document will not gather dust on the windowsills of various offices round the town, but will be the vital road map, setting out the future in the next 20 years. We are already receiving clear signals from influential players in the private sector that they are impatient to move forward.

It is recognised that the Crescent Car Park development is absolutely critical to the implementation of the Vision. Retailers in Taunton are relying on us to deliver this essential enhancement in the face of the growing competition from Exeter and Bristol. I share everyone's disappointment at the lack of progress but I am convinced that the momentum we will gather over the next nine months as a result of the work being undertaken by the consultants, will attract the interest of both major retailers and developers, even if we fail to move forward with Heritage/Sovereign.

#### Economic Development

I reported the appointment of the Economic Development supremo in January. Unfortunately Steve Vinson will not be joining us. I am personally delighted to be able to tell you that Mark Green will be heading this important department from 1st June. Mark has an outstanding track record at South Somerset, a local authority with an excellent reputation for putting economic development high on its list of priorities.

#### Asset Management Plan

As advised in the Bulletin, the sale of Creech Paper Mills has realised a price in excess of our expectations. What delights me is that it has been purchased by a local company with a reputation for investing in the creation and improvement of employment sites. This demonstrates that the introduction of Asset Management Planning has forced local authorities to examine more closely how best to utilise their assets and to recognise the implications of not investing sufficiently in essential maintenance programmes.

This is my last report for this quadrennium. I have found the most rewarding part of being an Executive Councillor is the close working relationship that develops with officers at all levels. I would like to express publicly my appreciation for their support and loyalty.

**COLIN CROAD**