

COUNCIL MEETING – 15 OCTOBER 2002

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

Economic Development

Now that the work of the Vision Commission is almost completed Taunton Deane Borough Council is about to embark on the most exciting year in its history. In particular this is true for the departments of Economic Development and Forward Planning.

In the next twelve months we should see both the Urban Extension Study and the Urban Design Framework. Both these exercises sound pretty dull and dry but in reality they will form the cornerstones of the Vision. They will determine the way Taunton will look in the first half of this century.

We have to ensure that we end, once and for all, the piecemeal development of our town, in order to implement the Vision. The recent recommendation of the Review Panel in relation to Firepool and Tangier was very important.

Sitting underneath the Urban Design Framework, which among other things will set the architectural standards, will be the master plans for Firepool, Tangier and the Crescent/High Street developments. I hope and trust you share my excitement at these challenges.

Tourism

Since the advent of foot and mouth disease we have been able to change the emphasis, albeit with relatively modest resources, to providing greater support for rural tourism.

There are three initiatives on the go at the moment

1. HATS - Horse Accommodation Tourism

Equine tourism is a fast growing sector and in Somerset we can provide an ideal venue. I have been immensely impressed by the group who are heading this initiative. TDBC and the Levels and Moors Partnership are key players but there are very significant inputs from private business. This partnership has the enthusiasm and motivation to make things happen and I advise you to watch this space. What has become clear to me is how this niche opportunity can bring new business to rural areas, here I am thinking of vets and farriers as well as restaurants and Bed and Breakfast establishments. To support this contention, our tourism officer, encouraged one of the group to invest in six trekking horses instead of converting his barn for further B & B accommodation. After a year this business is making more from the equine side than it is from its traditional B & B.

2. Cycling Tourism

In many ways cyclists use and enjoy similar terrain to horse riders and there is a very active group promoting cycling tourism in the county. Katie Burton realising that there are advantages for the two groups in sharing ideas and activities has brought about much closer cooperation between the two. TDBC is now working with the group on a cycling leaflet for Taunton Deane. We hope it will be possible to use some of the Leader Plus money to encourage tourists to “**Ride Somerset**”

3. LARA – Linking Rural Accommodation with Rural Attractions

This group are looking to coordinate accommodation with rural activities like horse riding, clay shooting and fishing. The aim is to develop rural tourism in the heart of Somerset, with particular emphasis on improving occupancy rates, exploiting rural attractions and assets, better communication and greater communication.

These three activities have been made a key priority for our tourism department (Katie Burton) and I confidently expect there will be real progress over the next twelve months.

While on the subject of the behind the scenes working of our officers, it was great to hear Mark Besley of Procters Farm, publicly thank John Rowe for his advice, encouragement and support when Mark opened his new farm shop at West Monkton.

Councillor Colin Croad