

## COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

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

**Wellsprings:** we are in business: the New Year Launch was a great success and I would like to pay tribute to Juliette Dickinson, Steven Hughes, James Curry and all the leisure staff who slaved to get everything ready and gave up their weekend to hold open house and show people round and also to Cllr David Gill who spent the whole weekend on duty. We got good press coverage and the membership sales for the first month have topped 400. We are now planning the formal opening at the end of April by way of a “Welcome to Wellsprings Musical Event”. We have booked the Beatles Tribute Band with disco for the main hall (Tickets £10 or £7.50 for those on low income or 11-16). For the formal plaque unveiling ceremony we are looking to invite not only those people involved in the project but also the many stakeholders in North Taunton.

**Leisure Services Strategic Review:** with the deferral of the transfer of the service to a Leisure Trust, the opportunity is being taken to work up a Leisure Strategy for Taunton Deane. It is manifestly impossible to continue to spend the current sums on the current service given our budgetary constraints. From our consultations it is clear that people prefer the option of increases in charges to increases in Council Tax but we are competing in a very competitive market. I would therefore urge all councillors to consider the base paper (App.3 Executive Agenda 11.3.04) produced by our consultants New Horizons as a starting point. We have to consider both short term operations and also our longer term direction which may include rationalisation of the facilities themselves: i.e. consideration of swimming provision in Taunton, the future role and management of Vivary Golf Course and the range of opportunities provided at Blackbrook. In the meantime I am pleased to report that the latter is starting a visually impaired exercise session in partnership with Somerset Association for the Blind. Wellsprings has received accreditation by the Somerset Physical Activity Group to run Physical Activity Schemes for GP referrals. We now run the most successful schemes in the county. A bid has been submitted for tennis. The bid to the Crime & Disorder Partnership for a diversionary project for youth has been successful thanks to James Quirk’s prompt action.

**Greens Spaces Strategy:** we are nearing the end of the work on this document which has been based on extensive consultation with the community. We will shortly be consulting on it with elected members. In particular Ian Baggott of the Communities First Partnership will present the draft findings to Wellington Town Council together with other organisations on 3<sup>rd</sup> March and then to the Health and Leisure Panel before it goes to the Executive in April.

**Vivary Park:** one of the conditions of the Lottery Grant was that we should prepare a 10 year management plan and this has now been produced by the Communities First Partnership and is available in the Members’ room. It includes a most interesting Ecological Survey and Nature Conservation Plan. We are being urged to treat the Park as an outdoor leisure centre in which we deliver our corporate priorities of social inclusion and community building. Alongside this we have been working with the New Horizons Consultancy using Vivary as an example of how we could manage the parks service differently; in a more holistic way and create a staff presence as this is what people tell us they want. I would also like to thank all those people who have been preparing the ground for the launch in the Spring of the Friends of Vivary Park. This leads me on to Vivary Golf

course for which I am making a budget bid for money to deal with flooding and tree thinning. We are also being challenged over the issue of alternative changing facilities since the Tennis Pavilion burnt down and are discussing all options for addressing this issue.

**Leisure Grants:** as you will see from the proposed Capital and Revenue Budget 2004-2005 there is a figure of £21K per annum for the next three years (T04) for parish play equipment and to this is being added another £10K per annum thus increasing the sum to £31K per annum. This is an increase not a decrease or cut. Likewise the budget for Village halls which had been cut to £44,100 per annum has been reinstated by the addition of a further annual sum of £15,400. As you are aware traditionally this council has made a percentage contribution to any scheme that meets certain criteria. However given the changing political and financial climate, the bulk of money for such projects is now channelled through external funds such as Living Spaces ([www.living-spaces.org.uk](http://www.living-spaces.org.uk)), Community Fund of the RDA. Awards for All, Wyvern Trust etc. We are therefore recognising the changed regime and our role in pump-priming by reducing our percentage contribution to 33% which brings it in line with our other grants. It enables us to spread our limited funds almost two and a half times as far as previously by our 85% contribution and increases the amount of money drawn down. In addition we are deciding to make a priority of youth provision as the young people tell us they lack facilities.

**Culture:** I have recently attended with officers a work shop run by Sport England with the Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership. The government has now realised that one and a half billion pounds have been spent on sports projects and the percentage of active sporting people remains firmly at 30%. While we can argue about what this means, the government is now facing escalating health problems arising from obesity. To respond to this the SASP's strategy for 2004-2007 is entitled "Creating a Healthier and More Active Community in Somerset". This brings me on to community and culture. I have also just attended with officers a session on Integrating Cultural and Community Strategies. Again more words but for the purposes of what we do in Taunton Deane I would define culture as the way in which a community or a number of people express themselves as community. The very latest in buzz words is "hub". This appears to mean a building or club which acts as a focal point of identity and activity for an area or a number of interest groups. The driver here is cost of capital and income resources in the shape of buildings and people.

TDBC are a key partner in the Cultural Consortium set up to look at how the Castle Green area develops as a cultural quarter. We are currently consulting the major players and stakeholders on the exact need and proposed nature of the new performing arts venue proposed in the Vision for Taunton, when the Brewhouse may give place to the expanding Somerset Cricket Ground. We are also working with potential tenants; the Somerset Art Gallery Trust, The Brewhouse, Somerset Art Week, SCAT, and other organisations on a proposal to retain Hunts Court through a Creative Enterprise Development Agency.

The first phase of the Economic Impact Study of Creative Industries in Somerset has been commissioned by the district council, SCC, Culture SW and Arts Council of England South West, providing evidence at district level by the Somerset Arts Officers Group. This partnership with the Arts Council England, South West also ensures the implementation of the Disability Arts Action plan, the Voluntary Arts Audit, and the development of a training package for key strategic organisations and arts managers called "Achieving Brilliance".

**1100 project:** this celebration of 1100 years of Taunton since the charter of 904 is scheduled for May and will be a physical expression of the ideas expressed in the previous paragraph. Look out especially for the Water Festival in French Weir on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.

In all of this there is a lot of consultation, reflection and creative thinking to be done. The contribution of back benchers of all parties is very much needed in order to focus ourselves to succeed as an effective Council for Taunton Deane in the very different world in which we find ourselves.

**Councillor Mrs D. Bradley**