

COUNCIL MEETING – 25 FEBRUARY 2003.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR COLIN CROAD -ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND COUNCIL BUILDINGS.

At long last we seem to have addressed the staffing problems that have beset Economic Development for the last 12 months. We have appointed Stephen Vinson from Caradon to head this critical area. Steve will report directly to the Director of Development, and will join us on 19th May. He will operate at an S.U.M. level. We have also appointed a new Tourism Officer, David McCribbin and we are about to shortlist applicants for the post of Business Development Officer, to replace Jasmine Nelson. Although remaining staff have struggled hard to fill the gaps, there is no doubt that our effectiveness has been reduced by our lack of resources.

Economic Development.

We have recently been advised of Sovereign/Heritage/Fortis reluctance to sign the Heads of Terms for the development of The Crescent Car Park site. The developers wish to undertake a thorough review of the scheme and this will take two to three months. This also means that the developers are not prepared to make any further contributions to the Council's Consultants costs until the Heads of Terms are signed.

Our consultants C Hillier Parker have been asked to provide potential options for consideration by the Council. These will be reviewed by the all-party Members Panel before the next full Meeting of the Council, but after this report is submitted.

The fourth and last Rural Workshop is about to take place as I write this report. They have been well attended and many stimulating ideas have emerged. I would like to record my thanks to Cllr David House for the way he has lead these workshops. They are very much in line with the thrust of the Government's Rural White Paper. The outcome will be a Rural Charter which sets out this Council's statement of intent. They will also inform the Best Value cross cutting review, now taking place, on Economic Development and Community Regeneration.

The Way Forward Tourism Group have continued work on developing a strategy for Somerset. The vision we have defined is "Working together to promote Somerset as a premier tourist destination". The strategy will be based on the following themes:

Marketing Somerset

A Quality Destination

A Dynamic Cohesive Public/Private Partnership

Making the Best Uses of our Combined Resources

Seeking funding from outside agencies

Spreading the benefits of Tourism among the local economy

There is no doubt that both the RDA and SW Tourism recognise that the formation of sub regional groups based on county boundaries, is an essential requisite for delivery of a high quality tourism product. It is clear that only those groups who can demonstrate that an effective private/public partnership exists will receive funding for their initiatives.

Councillor Colin Croad

