

## **COUNCIL MEETING – 24 FEBRUARY 2004**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL FROM THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP REVIEW PANEL**

#### **Freedom of the Borough**

The Review Panel has given consideration to recommending Council to admit Councillor J R G Meikle MBE, as an Honorary Freeman of the Borough.

The Local Government Act 1972 (amended by the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980) allows a Borough or City Council to admit “persons of distinction and persons who have in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the city, borough or royal borough” as Honorary Freeman.

A resolution passed by not less than two thirds of the members voting at a specially convened meeting is required to admit the Honorary Freeman but this does not confer any rights upon them.

However, the conferring of the title of Honorary Freeman is the highest honour that a Council of a City or Borough can bestow and, in the view of many, should not be given too often.

Taunton Deane Borough Council have granted this honour on only three previous occasions. To the Light Infantry to mark its long association with the area, to Sir Edward du Cann to mark his many years as Member of Parliament for Taunton and most recently to 40 Commando Royal Marines.

Under the terms of our Constitution any grant of freedom must be made by Council on the recommendation of this Panel.

#### **Councillor J R G Meikle MBE**

Councillor Meikle has been an elected Councillor for 46 years and during that time has made a significant contribution to the local community. Set out below is a brief synopsis of many of the milestones in his career as a local politician.

- 1947 Joined Young Conservatives, founder Chairman of Western Area Young Conservatives.
- 1955-58 Chairman, Taunton Conservative Association.
- 1958 Elected to Taunton Borough Council.  
During his early days as a Councillor, Councillor Meikle was instrumental in persuading the Housing Committee to adopt a new post war ‘Raglan’ Estate layout for the future (footpaths to front doors, grass areas, cars out of way at rear compound – Pyrland Estate, Churchill Estate).

As Chairman of the Planning Committee he inaugurated a biennial 'Design Award' for the encouragement of good design, good layout of buildings both residential and commercial. The Design Awards continue to this day.

The Government of the day tried to persuade councils to build high-rise housing. Councillor Meikle was completely opposed to this type of housing.

Highways Committee were persuaded to introduce an early form of pay and display at Whirligig Car Park.

- 1967-68 Elected Mayor of Taunton Borough Council and launched four Mayoral projects.
  1. Perceived need for a 'Council of Voluntary Service', which has expanded considerably and still serves the social needs of the town significantly.
  2. Launched the Abbeyfield Society, which now has two homes and Taunton Vale Rotary has added an 'extra care' Abbeyfield home.
  3. Set up a 'Voluntary Services Overseas Committee'.
  4. With aid of many voluntary organisations, sought to establish the incidence of severe loneliness in Taunton. A 'Gold Rimmed Invitation' was issued from the Mayor and Mayoress for people on their own to take tea with them. The objective was to link them with weekly social groups.
- High Street Pedestrianisation.

The shopping gravity of the whole town moved southwards, the Pig Market development completed the new triangle High Street, Fore Street and East Street.
- The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre.

Chaired the Taunton Theatre Trust whose purpose was to initiate interest and funds to build a theatre and arts centre. It took ten years to raise both the money and site. The Brewhouse in its years has been responsible for a renaissance of drama, music and the arts in Taunton Deane and the community at large.
- 1974 – Taunton Deane District Council created and Councillor Meikle was its leader from 1974 to 1991.
- 1975 Achieved Borough status and with it the Mayoralty.
- Taunton Deane Business Forum.

Councillor Meikle inaugurated this forum with County, Deane, SCAT membership working with the Chamber of Commerce and the local Job Centre. The forum did its best for many years to identify priorities, ultimately persuading councils to set up their own organisations.
- Taunton Deane Citizenship Award

In the late eighties Councillor Meikle received an MBE. He was aware of many people in Taunton Deane who also deserved an award for their contribution to the community. The solution he found was to create a 'Taunton Deane Citizenship Award'. It continues to run successfully every year.

- 1991 Taunton Deane changed political control and Councillor Meikle became leader of the opposition from 1991-2002.
- In 1999 following an initiative from Councillor Meikle, Taunton Deane started the successful national movement 'Vote for Life' to enrol hundreds of thousands of citizens to join the National Register of Organ Donors.

This has now been taken up by many other local authorities and as a result has attracted over 650,000 registrations.

This is just a few of the many initiatives that Councillor Meikle has been involved in during his 46 years as a Councillor. It does, however, give examples of the eminent service he has given.

Should the Council agree to grant this honour to Councillor Meikle there is a procedure, laid down in statute, which has to be followed.

The Freedom resolution is passed at a special meeting of the Council when a formal presentation is made. It is necessary, however, for Council to agree that they will pass that formal resolution well in advance of that ceremony.

After passing the resolution the newly admitted Freeman may take the appropriate Freeman's Oath and sign the Freeman's Roll with the signature being witnessed by the Mayor and Chief Executive.

A sealed and illuminated certificate of the grant of the Honorary Freedom, incorporating a copy of the formal resolution, contained in a suitable Scroll Holder is then usually presented to the newly appointed Freeman by the Mayor with the recipient being given an opportunity to reply. The Council would arrange a reception for guests following the special Council meeting.

The cost of these proposals can be met from within existing budgets.

It is therefore **RECOMMENDED** by the Panel that Councillor J R G Meikle be made an Honorary Freeman of the Borough in recognition of the eminent service rendered by him to the Taunton Deane community.

Councillor Bryan Dennington  
Chair, Resources Review Panel