

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 11 September 2012 at 6.30 pm.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Hall)
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Ms Lisgo)
Councillors Mrs Adkins, Mrs Allgrove, Mrs Baker, Beaven, Bishop, Bowrah, Brooks, Cavill, Coles, Denington, D Durdan, Miss Durdan, Edwards, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gaines, A Govier, Hayward, C Hill, Horsley, Hunt, Miss James, R Lees, Mrs Lees, Meikle, Morrell, Mullins, Ms Palmer, D Reed, Mrs Reed, Ross, Gill Slattery, T Slattery, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stone, Swaine, Mrs Warmington, Mrs Waymouth, Ms Webber, A Wedderkopp, D Wedderkopp, Williams and Wren

1. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Govier, Mrs Herbert, Mrs Hill, Nottrodt, Prior-Sankey, Tooze and Watson.

2. Communications

Councillor Edwards made reference to the recent success of both Debbie Criddle and Lucy Shuker who had won medals at the Paralympic Games in London. He felt that it would be appropriate for the Council to mark in an appropriate way these achievements and sought the endorsement of the other Councillors present to do this. This was agreed.

3. Declaration of Interests

Councillors Brooks, A Govier, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Waymouth and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Mrs Smith and Stone declared personal interests as employees of Somerset County Council. Councillor Wren declared personal interests as an employee of Natural England and as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council. Councillor Hayward declared a personal interest as one of the Council's representatives on the Somerset Waste Board. Councillor Stone declared a prejudicial interest as a Tone Leisure Board representative. Councillor Swaine, declared a personal interest as a part-time swimming instructor. Councillor Mullins declared a personal interest as EDF Energy at Hinkley Point was his employer. Gill Slattery declared personal interests as a member of the Board of Governors at Somerset College.

4. Public Question Time

(i) Heather Davis said she had attended the Planning Committee last week to object to the planned – now approved – 41 acre site of solar panels situated adjacent to the nature reserve of Ash Priors wood and conservation village of Halse.

She had been shocked at the lack of discussion, nor any attempt by Councillors to establish the facts behind the many submissions made. Councillors also demonstrated the lack of thought that had been applied to such a large and policy challenging application.

The debate had not covered the definition of “sustainable development” which was at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework.

In reviewing the Core Strategy it was clear that there was no statement about the importance of agricultural land, how much there was, or how much would be given over to non agricultural developments. Given the role of agricultural land in absorbing carbon this highlighted a fundamental issue.

It was stated that Taunton Deane would be a leader in addressing the causes and impacts of climate change but later it was stated that the Council would follow building control national standards which currently developed houses at only level 2/3 of the Sustainable Development Code. Why not level 4 or 5 as used by other Councils?

Surely a leader would work with developers and energy suppliers to ensure all new builds had solar heating and / or photovoltaic panels on all roofs.

Mrs Davis asked Taunton Deane to change the Strategy statement to reflect the reality of the Council's actions or implement substantial changes in attitude and approach to justify stated intentions.

(ii) Sylvaine Shapland referred to the Core Strategy which correctly highlighted the shifting of weather patterns. In recent months these patterns had resulted in falling yields leading to dramatic rises in food prices.

Last Tuesday the United Nations had issued a press release urging countries in the developed world to produce more food from the agricultural land that they had, rather than growing crops for alternative energy such as bio diesel, in an effort to reduce imports of food and fend off looming worldwide food shortages and price rises.

She had objected to the solar development in Halse on the basis that such developments undermined the wealth of ordinary people through higher food and energy prices, whilst making the land owners and financiers rich.

On a piecemeal basis the Council was allowing the removal of prime high grade arable land, so depleting the nation's ability to feed itself. In the National Planning Policy Framework it stated that developments on three measures should be sustainable – social, environmental and economic.

The Core Strategy was at odds with the National Planning Policy Framework because it had created a presumption in planning that renewables trumped all else. Indeed it inferred/advocated the use of high grade arable land in section CP1.

The Core Strategy recognised the need for more than 17,000 new homes. More people meant more food required, but there was no more farmland

available, other than that which was being used for other things than producing food.

If a farmer presented a solar panel scheme that was for a grain store roof and/or to use land at the side of fields which were already set aside to encourage nature, then that would be reasonable. Rejecting large schemes and supporting this suggested type of approach would be leadership in carbon reduction, renewable energy and securing the nation's food supply.

Ms Shapland suggested that the Core Strategy policy should be changed to reflect a balanced approach to schemes in order that our ability to produce food was not reduced.

Most farmers did not embark on large schemes, because they cared about their role in society and their impact on the environment. They realised that these schemes were morally repugnant and an abuse of the land they farmed.

(iii) Mike Davis stated that following last week's decision an environmental charity had been engaged to take the decision to a Judicial Review.

As part of the case, the lack of balance in the proposed Core Strategy and positive endorsement of large scale solar developments, regardless of land types, would be highlighted.

It was felt that in the context of sustainability laid down in the National Planning Policy Framework, the Core Strategy was leading Planning Officers to disregard arguments put forward.

It was sad that the democratic processes decided to rush this application without fully understanding the technical issues raised in the submissions and omitting to inform local residents of the application.

At the meeting, it was clear that most Councillors had not read beyond the Planning Officer's summary. He understood that not one Councillor had visited the site. Detailed points had not been investigated by the Planning Officer and it appeared that the decision had already been made.

The impending Core Strategy was biased towards renewable energy at the expense of food production. The logical consequences had not been thought through. Policy was being used as a defence by Planning with the "sustainable" element of the National Planning Policy Framework being interpreted as renewable energy and reducing carbon generation.

The Core Strategy should ensure that one problem did not accentuate another. It was felt that, as worded, Policy CP1 opened the door for large scale solar farms.

So the question that the Core Strategy needed to address, but did not, was how do you maintain as much high yielding agricultural land as possible whilst reducing your carbon footprint and increasing renewables?

Before the Core Strategy was signed off as worded, Mr Davis hoped that Councillors would reflect on what he and his colleagues had said and consider Taunton Deane's essential role as a farming area in sustaining life.

In response, Councillor Edwards asked if copies of the three submissions could be forwarded so that a full written response to the points raised could be made.

5. **Recommendation to Council from the Executive**

Adoption of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy

The Executive had recently considered the proposed adoption of Taunton Deane's Core Strategy as part of the statutory development plan for the district.

The Core Strategy had been prepared over a number of years and set out a long-term strategic vision and spatial policies to guide planning decisions in Taunton Deane up to 2028.

Earlier in the year, the Government's Planning Inspector had considered issues that had been raised in representations and made verbally at the hearing sessions. This had included the need for any 'Main Modifications', which were considered necessary in order for the plan to be considered 'sound' and recommended for adoption. In addition, a number of further consultations had been held to address the publication of new national planning policies such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Taunton Deane Core Strategy Inspector's Report had been received on 3 July 2012 which had identified a number of Main Modifications which were outlined below:-

- Clarifications to Policy CP3 to define the geographical extent of town centres and the operation of the 500 m² threshold for impact assessment;
- Additional text following Policy CP4 to set out the process for advancing sites into the five-year housing land supply;
- Removal of a reference in Policy CP7 to an interim policy pending the introduction of a Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule;
- Amendment to Policy SP1 relating to housing allocations in minor rural centres to allow greater flexibility;
- Numerical corrections to the housing provision figures in Policies SP4 and SS1;
- Removal of the requirement for the allocation of strategic housing sites within the identified 'broad locations' (Policies SS6 and 7) to await a Core Strategy Review in 2016 and substitution of reference to allocation in the

Site Allocation and Development Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) by 2015; and

- Re-wording of Policy SS8 (Broad location for Taunton Strategic Employment) to provide a clear criterion-based context for site identification in a future DPD.

In addition, a new Policy (CP1) had been introduced as a main modification to ensure that the plan properly reflected the presumption in favour of sustainable development introduced in the NPPF.

The incorporation of these changes meant that the Core Strategy could be considered sound and capable of adoption.

Moved by Councillor Horsley, seconded by Councillor Coles that the proposed recommendation be amended by the addition of the following wording:-

“The continued need for the items below be recognised for the forthcoming Site Allocations Document to address the following:-

- (a) Putting in place Flood Alleviation schemes that will fulfil the requirements of the Environment Agency and identify the infrastructure risks and funding costs for Taunton Deane Borough Council;
- (b) Bringing forward further identifiable and deliverable housing sites to strengthen the five year supply of housing land and deliverable employment land in Taunton Deane as soon as possible; and

Strive to make the economic case for achieving housing and employment targets that are predicated on a much more realistic rate of growth at the next Core Strategy Review than the 2.8% of the current Core Strategy”.

The amendment was put and was carried.

The substantive Motion which is detailed below, was put and was carried:-

Resolved that:-

- (1) The Taunton Deane Core Strategy 2011-2028, incorporating the Inspector’s recommended modifications, be formally adopted;
- (2) The continued need for the items below be recognised for the forthcoming Site Allocations Document to address the following:-
 - (a) Putting in place Flood Alleviation schemes that would fulfil the requirements of the Environment Agency and identify the infrastructure risks and funding costs for Taunton Deane Borough Council;
 - (b) Bringing forward further identifiable and deliverable housing sites to strengthen the five year supply of housing land and deliverable employment land in Taunton Deane as soon as possible; and
- (3) Strive to make the economic case for achieving housing and employment

targets that were predicated on a much more realistic rate of growth at the next Core Strategy Review than the 2.8% of the current Core Strategy.

(Councillors Mrs Baker and Swaine left the meeting at 7.55 pm and 7.58 pm respectively.)

(The meeting ended at 8.03 pm.)