

Agenda Item No. 7 - Receipt of a Petition

Stop wasting taxpayers' money on a bad idea in Firepool, Taunton and drive inward investment first

We call on Taunton Deane Borough Council to reconsider its speculative hotel investment in Firepool and engage in consulting local businesses and the community to transform this prize site into a unique destination for high-value inward investment.

Taunton Deane Borough Council is borrowing £16,000,000 of taxpayers' money to build a 120-bed hotel on Firepool.

We believe this decision by the Council to be a high-risk, speculative and irresponsible taxpayer-backed scheme.

There has been NO transparency to justify the Council's decision-making process.

We can see NO obvious commercial demand for this investment as there is nothing in the Firepool Redevelopment Plan that will attract new business-led investment into the centre of Taunton and nothing that will attract visiting tourists.

If the Council intends to borrow £16,000,000 of taxpayers' money, we would expect to see the funds FIRST deployed in a manner that will drive new business into the centre of Taunton, a plan geared to attract visiting tourists to Somerset's County Town, and a scheme that will enhance the lives, health and well-being of its inhabitants.

With the high street retail sector in crisis, it is now vital that Taunton develops forward-looking, imaginative and innovative plans which capitalise on emerging business opportunities. Firepool must now be transformed into a social, cultural, sporting and leisure destination. Ideas already put into the public domain by Tauntonians include:-

- A large, highly flexible space capable of hosting popular concerts, conferences, awards dinners and much more
- A visitor centre (think Eden Project) celebrating the biodiversity and natural habitats of Taunton's unique hinterland (The Levels, Quantocks, Blackdowns, Exmoor)
- High-tech business start-up units – a centre of innovation for R&D
- A sports franchise/sporting facilities, eg. Snow dome/skating rink
- Low-rent artist studios to create a vibrant arts community
- Trampoline park/soft play area

It is our firm opinion that Taunton Deane Borough Council is not only risking ratepayers' and council taxpayers' money in a highly speculative investment, but also risking its ability to fund the services the public have come to rely on.

We the undersigned call on the Council to stop wasting taxpayers' money. Engage with us and reconsider Council plans and investments to transform Somerset's

County Town into a unique destination for high-value new business.

We urge the Council not to put “the cart before the horse”. Work with us to establish a secure base that serves the best interests of Taunton. Create the demand by attracting inward investment and visiting tourists to Firepool FIRST.