

MEETING AW.03:0708  
DATE 18:07:07

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Area West Committee** held in Merriott Village Hall, Merriott on **Wednesday, 18th July 2007**.

(5.30 p.m. – 9.00 p.m.)

### Present:

**Members:** Kim Turner (In the Chair)

Simon Bending	Ros Roderigo
Michael Best	Dan Shortland (until 7.10 p.m.)
David Bulmer (from 7.00 p.m.)	Angie Singleton
Nigel Mermagen	Jean Smith
Robin Munday	Andrew Turpin
Ric Pallister	Martin Wale (from 6.45 p.m.)

### Officers:

Andrew Gillespie	Head of Area Development
Nicky Doble	Community Development Support Officer
Val Keitch	Community Justice Panel Co-ordinator
Simon Gale	Head of Development and Building Control
Gerard Tucker	Economic Development Team Leader
David Julian	Head of Countryside, Heritage and Tourism
Nigel Collins	Transport Strategy Officer
Jo Manley	Policy Planner
Lynda Pincombe	Senior Leisure Facilities Officer
Andy Shaw	Senior Technician
Andrew Blackburn	Committee Administrator

**(Note:** Where an executive or key decision is made, a reason will be noted immediately beneath the Committee's resolution.)

## 22. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20th June 2007, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

## 23. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence was received from Cllrs. Geoff Clarke, Nicci Court and Linda Vijeh.

## 24. Declarations of Interest

Cllr. Kim Turner declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the application for grant submitted by Ilminster Town Council (agenda item 9 – Area Development Grants) because she also served as a councillor on Ilminster Town Council.

Cllr. Mike Best declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest in planning application nos. 06/04544/FUL (conversion of redundant factory into 11 flats, 1 house and 1 office, Bonsoir of London, Abbey Street, Crewkerne) and 06/04548/LBC (demolition of modern extensions, internal and external alterations to form 11 flats, 1 house and 1 office, Bonsoir of London, Abbey Street, Crewkerne) as comments had been submitted by Crewkerne Town Council on which he also served as a councillor.

Cllr. Simon Bending declared a personal interest in the application for grant submitted by All Saints Church, Merriott (agenda item 9 – Area Development Grants) as he was the Church Organist. The decision on the application for grant from the organisation had been taken by the officers under the Council's Scheme of Delegation and was being reported to members for information only. The interest was, therefore, not considered to be prejudicial.

---

## **25. Public Question Time**

No questions or comments were raised by members of the public, representatives of parish/town councils or county councillors.

---

## **26. Chairman's Announcements**

No announcements were made by the Chairman.

---

## **27. Proposed Relocation of Crewkerne Market (Agenda item 6) (Executive Decision)**

Reference was made to the agenda report, which informed members of the need to find an alternative site for Crewkerne market as its current location in the South Street Car Park was to be the site of the new Waitrose Supermarket. Members were asked to approve the submission of a planning application for the relocation of the market.

In response to questions from Cllr. Mike Best, one of the ward members, the Senior Technician informed members that market traders would be able to park within the area of the proposed road closure on market days but otherwise in either the South Street or Abbey Street Car Parks. Cllr. Best also commented that he hoped that the proposed road closure would not, because of the number of potential closures, affect other events held in the town centre where road closures were required. The Senior Technician agreed to check that matter. The Senior Technician also noted the comments made in respect of ensuring that satisfactory arrangements were put in place to accommodate the bus stop and that people knew where it would be, if it were displaced by the road closure.

Cllr. Angie Singleton, also a ward member, commented that she was disappointed that the market could not be relocated to Falkland Square and also questioned the amount of District Council resources spent on progressing such a small service. She otherwise supported the relocation to Market Square.

During the ensuing discussion, comment was expressed by a member about the potential for the expansion of the market and about the possibility of Crewkerne Town Council being more involved. The Senior Technician indicated that the road closure was for public safety but could also leave room for any future expansion of the market.

**RESOLVED:** that, in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992, application be made for the carrying out of development comprising the relocation of Crewkerne market to the area of paving outside the Victoria Hall in Market Square as indicated on the plan attached at page 2 of the agenda.

**Reason:** To authorise the submission of a planning application for the proposed relocation of Crewkerne market.

(Resolution passed without dissent).

*(Andy Shaw, Senior Technician – (01935) 462048)*  
*(andy.shaw@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

## **28. The Chard and Ilminster Community Justice Panel (Agenda item 7) (Executive Decision)**

The Community Justice Panel Co-ordinator summarised her report on the agenda updating members on the progress of the Chard and Ilminster Community Justice Panel.

Members were pleased to note the good progress being made with this successful initiative and that the work of the Panel was to be expanded to the Crewkerne area.

The Community Justice Panel Co-ordinator then answered members questions on points of detail during which she explained the meaning of “sanctioned detections”, which had been referred to in the agenda report, and how they related to the work of the Panel.

The Committee were pleased to note that confirmation had been received from the Home Office that further funding would be made available for at least another year. It was also understood, however, that there was no guarantee that funding would be available beyond that time. The possibility of some funding being received from South Somerset Homes was also welcomed.

Particular reference was made by members to the Home Office funding. Comment was expressed that, bearing in mind the acknowledged success of the project, it was felt that it should receive more mainstream funding from the Home Office in the future rather than being considered on an annual basis as at present. It was suggested that representations be made to the Home Office regarding that matter and that the local Member of Parliament’s support be sought in respect of making those representations. It was also suggested that the Local Strategic Partnership be requested to assist with regard to seeking support for the expansion and funding of the project.

The Committee supported the comments of a member who suggested that information on the Community Justice Panel be sent to Crewkerne Town Council and other parish councils in the surrounding area about the expansion of the Panel into that locality. That matter was noted by the Community Justice Panel Co-ordinator.

The Chairman thanked the Community Justice Panel Co-ordinator for her report and for her continuing work in making this project a success.

- RESOLVED:** (1) that the report of the Community Justice Panel Co-ordinator and the good progress being made with this project be noted;
- (2) that, bearing in mind the acknowledged success of the project, representations be made to the Home Office requesting that the project receive mainstream funding in the future rather than being considered on an annual basis as at present;

- (3) that the support of the local Member of Parliament be sought in respect of making representations to the Home Office on the funding of the project;
- (4) that the Local Strategic Partnership be requested to assist with regard to seeking support for the expansion and funding of the project.

**Reason:** To note the report on the progress being made with this project, to make representations with regard to the Home Office funding and to seek the support of the Local Strategic Partnership with regard to the expansion and funding of the project.

(Resolution passed without dissent).

*(Val Keitch, Community Justice Panel Co-ordinator – (01460) 260341)  
(val.keitch@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

## **29. Progress Report on the Community Projects of ‘A Better Crewkerne and District’ (ABCD) Community Plan (Agenda 8)**

Reference was made to the agenda report, which informed members of the ongoing progress of the priority projects in the ABCD Community Plan.

Diane Butler, Chair of the Steering Group and Marcus Barrett from the CALIBRE (Crewkerne and Locality: Industry, Business and Rural Enterprise) Working Group were welcomed to the meeting.

Diane Butler made a presentation during which she informed members of the progress to date of the priority schemes in the Community Plan including a joint community facility for youth, arts and sport, Crewkerne Urban Development Framework, notice and interpretation boards and Crewkerne Youth and Volunteer Fairs. Marcus Barrett informed members of the progress with the project to market Crewkerne and the locality as a business location. Reference was then made by Diane Butler to the success of ABCD’s first annual general meeting, which was held in April this year.

The Chairman thanked Diane Butler and Marcus Barrett for their presentations. The Committee praised their enthusiasm and was pleased to note the progress being made with the development of ABCD’s Community Plan projects.

**NOTED.**

*(Nicola Doble, Community Planning Support Officer – (01460) 260410)  
(nicola.doble@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

## **30. Area Development Grants (Agenda item 9) (Executive Decision)**

Reference was made to the agenda report and the Committee considered applications received by the Council for financial assistance from Chiselborough Village Hall, Ilminster Town Council, Ilton and Broadway Scout Group and Crewkerne Methodist Church. The Committee was also asked to note the details of grants that had been awarded to local organisations by officers under the Council’s Scheme of Delegation.

Arising from the consideration of this item, a member questioned the level of resources in the Area West Reserve and he expressed his view that there needed to be a clear vision with regard to the use of those resources. The comments made were noted by the Committee and the Head of Area Development.

**(1) Chiselborough Village Hall**

The application from Chiselborough Village Hall was supported by members.

**RESOLVED:** that a grant of £12,500 be awarded from the Area West Capital Programme to Chiselborough Village Hall towards the cost of the provision of an entranceway and toilet for the disabled subject to the standard grant conditions.

**Reason:** To determine an application received by the Council for financial assistance submitted by Chiselborough Village Hall.

(Resolution passed without dissent).

**(2) Ilminster Town Council**

Cllr. Kim Turner (Chairman), having declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this application, vacated the Chair and left the meeting during its consideration. The Vice-Chairman, Cllr. Robin Munday, took the Chair for this item.

During the ensuing discussion, the view was expressed that allowance should be made within the Town Council's precept for the purchase of equipment such as gang mowers. Reference was made to another town council having purchased equipment from within their precept as had some other smaller rural parish councils. The view was also expressed that town councils, with their larger population base, were better placed than smaller parish councils to purchase such equipment from within their precepts.

The majority of members concurred with the comments made and indicated that they could not support this application.

**RESOLVED:** that the application for financial assistance received from Ilminster Town Council towards the cost of the purchase of gang mowers be not approved.

**Reason:** To determine an application received by the Council for financial assistance submitted by Ilminster Town Council.

(1 in support of the award of a grant, 8 against).

**(3) Ilton and Broadway Scout Group**

Members indicated their support for this application. Comment was expressed, however, that although Broadway was in Area West, Ilton was within Area North and perhaps a contribution towards any grant should come from that Area. Although it was agreed that the grant be awarded in full by Area West in this instance, members asked that should any similar applications be made in the future that affect more than one Area, consideration should be given to splitting the award of any grant between the two Areas.

**RESOLVED:** that £2,211 be awarded from the Area West Capital Programme to Ilton and Broadway Scout Group towards the cost of the purchase of camping equipment including replacement tents, cooking equipment and a storage container subject to the standard grant conditions.

**Reason:** To determine an application received by the Council for financial assistance submitted by Ilton and Broadway Scout Group.

(Resolution passed without dissent).

**(4) Crewkerne Methodist Church**

The Committee noted the comments of Judith Littleboy who spoke in support of the application and confirmed that the project would be available for community use and benefit the people of Crewkerne.

During the ensuing discussion, members indicated their support for the award of a grant in respect of this application. Concern, however, was expressed by a member about the low amount of financial assistance being awarded by Crewkerne Town Council in this case and that he would have expected a more significant contribution from them. The ward members explained the reasons why the Town Council were unfortunately not in a position to offer more at the time the application was made.

**RESOLVED:** that a grant of £12,500 be awarded from the Area West Capital Programme to Crewkerne Methodist Church towards the cost of a building programme to extend the building, create two separate venues and improve access to the premises subject to the standard grant conditions.

**Reason:** To determine an application received by the Council for financial assistance submitted by Crewkerne Methodist Church.

(Resolution passed without dissent, 1 abstention).

**(5) Details of Delegated Grant Decisions**

**RESOLVED:** that the Committee note the revenue grants awarded to local organisations, as set out in the agenda report, by officers under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

**Reason:** To note the grants awarded by officers under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

**(6) Financial Implications**

**RESOLVED:** that the Committee note that its unallocated capital budget for 2007-08 has now been reduced to £8,555, and that £2,495 remains unallocated for discretionary revenue grants.

**Reason:** To note the position of the Area West capital grants programme after the award of grants at this meeting as shown above.

(Resolution passed without dissent).

*(Bob Chedzoy, Community Development Officer – (01460) 260359)  
(bob.chedzoy@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

### 31. Consultation Report for Off-Street Parking Provision for Recent Town Centre Developments (Agenda item 10) (Executive Decision)

The Transport Strategy Officer summarised the agenda report and members considered the monitoring exercise that had been conducted relating to off-street parking provision in recent new residential developments in town centre locations in all the District market towns, and the impact of this provision on both nearby car parks and on-street parking. Suggestions for the future interpretation of Local Plan Policy TP7: Parking Provision in Residential Areas, were also considered.

In response to questions from a member, the Transport Strategy Officer reported that the Government guidance did not differentiate between residents and visitors in setting parking standards. The Policy Planner clarified that the parking standard within the Local Plan town centre boundaries was one parking space per dwelling whilst the standard outside town centres was 1.5 spaces per dwelling.

A member questioned how robust the recommended approach may be. The Head of Development and Building Control indicated that the problems that may be caused in respect of car parking elsewhere than on a particular development was a material consideration in the determination of a planning application. However, how robust the recommended approach would be would not be clear until the result of any relevant planning appeals were known, if such an appeal were to be lodged.

A member commented that he welcomed the report as it indicated that a problem existed whereas only anecdotal evidence had been available previously. The recommendation of the officers was supported.

- RESOLVED:** (1) that the Committee note the report and endorse its suggestion that car parking and transport issues be considered as part of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) in February/March 2008;
- (2) that, until addressed through the Core Strategy, officers use this survey work and the inbuilt flexibility in the adopted Local Plan Policy TP7 to negotiate with developers to seek to achieve the maximum parking standards (1 parking space per dwelling) for town centres.

**Reason:** To address the impact of additional parking from recent town centre residential development on nearby car parks and adjacent streets.

(Resolution passed without dissent, 1 abstention).

*(Jo Manley, Policy Planner – (01935) 462588)  
(jo.manley@southsomerset.gov.uk)  
(Nigel Collins, Transport Strategy Officer – (01935) 462591)  
(nigel.collins@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

### 32. Annual Review of the Economic Development Service (Agenda item 11)

The Economic Development Team Leader referred to his agenda report, which informed members of recently introduced changes to the Economic Development Service together with an explanation of the additional support that was now being provided. Members were also updated on the progress of financially supported external programmes.



During the ensuing discussion, a member commented that the three market towns in Area West had not had the resources in the past to promote new initiatives and was pleased to note that a new officer had been appointed to help deliver projects identified in the Chard Vision.

A member also referred to the need to keep ward members and town councils fully involved with any initiatives. The Economic Development Team Leader commented that he wanted to strengthen communication at all levels.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and members were asked to encourage businesses to engage with the enhanced service now being provided.

**NOTED.**

*(Gerard Tucker, Economic Development Team Leader – (01935) 462527)  
(gerard.tucker@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

### **33. Ilminster Multi Use Games Area - Update (Agenda item 12) (Executive Decision)**

The Senior Leisure Facilities Officer summarised the agenda report, which updated members on the situation regarding the implementation of the management agreement for the Ilminster Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Swanmead School.

Cllr. Kim Turner, one of the ward members, expressed her support for the officer's recommendation and commented that free use of the facility by the public was not yet available as the agreement had not been signed.

Other members expressed their disappointment that the agreement had not been completed satisfactorily.

The Committee concurred with the comments of a member who was of the view that elected members of the County Council should be working together jointly with District Councillors to address this issue. He suggested that, should this matter not be resolved, and the decision of the Government be not in favour of Somerset County Council becoming a unitary authority, the County Councillors within Area West be invited to attend the meeting of the Committee to be held in September to discuss how the completion of the management agreement can be progressed to a satisfactory conclusion.

- RESOLVED:** (1) that the Committee endorse the action in setting a deadline of 21st August 2007 for the Somerset County Council to produce a satisfactory management agreement for the Swanmead School Multi Use Games Area in Ilminster;
- (2) that, should this matter not be resolved, and the decision of the Government be not in favour of Somerset County Council becoming a unitary authority, the County Councillors within Area West be invited to attend the meeting of the Committee to be held on 19th September 2007 to discuss how the completion of the management agreement can be progressed to a satisfactory conclusion.



**Reason:** To secure the completion of a satisfactory management agreement for the Swanmead School Multi Use Games Area in Ilminster.

(Resolution passed without dissent).

*(Lynda Pincombe, Senior Leisure Facilities Officer – (01935) 462614)*  
*(lynda.pincombe@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

#### **34. Reports from Members on Outside Organisations (Agenda item 13)**

No reports were made by members who represented the Council on outside organisations.

---

#### **35. Feedback on Planning Applications Referred to the Regulation Committee (Agenda item 14)**

There was no feedback to report as there were no planning applications that had been referred recently to the Regulation Committee.

**NOTED.**

*(Andrew Gunn, Deputy Planning Team Leader – (01935) 462192)*  
*(andrew.gunn@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

#### **36. Planning Appeals (Agenda item 15)**

The Committee noted the details contained in the agenda report, which informed members of planning appeals lodged, dismissed and allowed.

**NOTED.**

*(Andrew Gunn, Deputy Planning Team Leader – (01935) 462192)*  
*(andrew.gunn@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

#### **37. Venue for Next Meeting (Agenda item 17)**

The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee would be held at the Shrubbery Hotel, Station Road, Ilminster on Wednesday, 15th August 2007 at 5.30 p.m.

**NOTED.**

*(Andrew Blackburn, Committee Administrator – (01460) 260441)*  
*(andrew.blackburn@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

---

#### **38. Planning Applications (Agenda item 16)**

Prior to consideration of the planning applications, the Head of Development and Building Control reported that Dave Norris, previously the Council's Major Applications Co-ordinator, had been appointed to the post of Planning Team Leader (Areas West and North).

The Chairman referred to the Planning Tour for members in Area West, which it was hoped to hold in September, and informed members that they would be receiving an e-mail with

suggested dates for the tour. As soon as a date that was suitable for most members had been identified, the necessary arrangements would be made.

The Committee then considered the applications set out in the schedule attached to the agenda and the planning officers gave further information at the meeting and, where appropriate, advised members of letters received as a result of consultations since the agenda had been prepared.

(Copies of all letters reported may be inspected in the planning applications files, which constitute the background papers for this item).

**06/04544/FUL (Pages 1 - 42) – Conversion of redundant factory into 11 flats and 1 house (GR 344038/109833), Bonsoir of London, Abbey Street, Crewkerne – Bonsoir of London Ltd.**

**06/04548/LBC (Pages 43 - 49) – Demolition of modern extensions, internal and external alterations to form 11 flats and 1 house (GR 344038/109833), Bonsoir of London, Abbey Street, Crewkerne – Bonsoir of London Ltd.**

The Head of Development and Building Control referred to the report on the agenda, which set out fully the details of these planning applications. He further reported that the description of the applications had been shown incorrectly in the agenda and should have referred to the conversion of the buildings to 11 flats, 1 house and 1 office and not just to 11 flats and 1 house.

The Head of Development and Building Control commented that since this application was last considered by the Committee in April 2007, the original economic viability report in respect of the use of the premises for commercial purposes submitted by Messrs. Bruton Knowles had now been updated by them, details of which were contained in the agenda report. He further reported that an updated list of employment land and premises in the Crewkerne and Chard areas had been compiled by the Council's Economic Development Team, details of which were also attached to the agenda report.

It was further reported by the Head of Development and Building Control that the Council's former Principal Economic Development Officer (who had recently changed posts within the Council but due to his knowledge and previous involvement with this site had continued to advise) had looked at the updated economic viability report and also concluded that conversion of the premises to commercial use would not be viable. The current Economic Development Team Leader had also looked at this case and supported those comments.

The Head of Development and Building Control indicated that based on the economic evidence, marketing of the premises would not alter the fundamental issue of the high development costs for this listed building. He indicated that this matter had been looked at in depth and referred to the applications for planning permission and listed building consent being acceptable. Consequently the recommendations were one of approval as set out in the agenda report.

The Council's former Principal Economic Development Officer then explained to members in detail the reasoning for his advice that the conversion of the premises for commercial use would not be viable, whereas the proposals as submitted would be a viable development for this building.

The officers then answered members' questions on points of detail regarding the proposals. Points raised included the internal size of the building that could be developed and particularly the measurements of the internal floor areas on which the various calculations had been based.

The Committee then noted the comments of a number of people and organisations who wished to make representations about the application.

The Chairman of Crewkerne Town Council's Planning and Highways Committee, Mrs. V. Chard, commented that the Town Council had deep concerns about the loss of such a large employment building within the town centre. Concern was also expressed that there was no evidence that the property had been marketed for employment use. It was also understood that the applicants had been approached by several companies enquiring about a commercial development for the building but had been rebuffed. She commented that the Town Council was disappointed that there was a report that suggested that there was no call for office/commerce space within the town centre, which they felt was flawed. It was hoped that this had been rectified with an independent report, which gave a more accurate picture of the actual situation regarding the lack of potential commercial space. Reference was made to the large number of dwellings either nearing completion or with planning permission and to the consequent need for more employment space being critical. It was felt that the employment space this building would give would be ideal given its proximity to town centre facilities and bus stops. The Town Council was also concerned that Crewkerne should not be seen as becoming a dormitory town. The Committee was urged to refuse the application.

The Committee then noted the comments of Mr. M. Barrett, Chairman of Crewkerne and District Chamber of Commerce, in objection to the application. He mentioned that the Chamber recognised the contribution that Bonsoir had made to the town but would be sorry to see the energy and dynamism removed. Reference was made to there being a dynamic need for commercial use and to an existing developer that had shown an interest. It was commented that the town could only grow if there was space to grow into and concerns were expressed at the substitution of residential use for commercial. He felt that the premises were in a prime location for commercial use.

Another objector, Mr. J. Stokes, referred to two buildings that he had refurbished and successfully turned into commercial use. He also referred to the building not having been looked at from the point of view of an "owner/driver" rather than as an investment opportunity. He also felt that mixed use had not been tested. He questioned the view that the assumptions in the economic viability report were correct whilst those of a developer were wrong. He further referred to a company that he knew were interested in the premises. He also gave figures to support his view that commercial use could be successful.

Mrs. M. Smith, Mrs. L. Danes and Ms. V. Robertson spoke in support of the application. Views expressed included the following:-

- general view of the townspeople is that the building should be used for residential purposes;
- Crewkerne was a country town and the Abbey Street locality was in a Conservation Area. Office use would not be in keeping;
- the demand for small offices was questioned;
- Bonsoir had managed to keep the atmosphere and integrity of the building, which it was felt should remain as such in the future;
- the building had been empty for some time and was currently falling into decay;
- concern was expressed about commercial traffic should there be a commercial use of the building;

- residential use would bring in people to spend money in the area and the proposals would raise the profile of Crewkerne;
- quite a few buildings had been converted to commercial use already therefore the need to convert this building was questioned. It was not felt that it would be viable to convert the premises for employment use whilst it would be for residential. Concern was also expressed about the building's future if it was used for commercial purposes and did not succeed.

The applicants' representative, Mr. P. Smith, Group Finance Director for Bonsoir, commented that the company had provided significant employment in the town and maintained employment elsewhere in the district. He referred to detailed discussions having taken place with Planning and Conservation Officers and to a heritage statement having been submitted in respect of this application. He indicated that employment use had been considered originally but had been found not to be viable and therefore this scheme with residential use had been put forward. He referred to the issues that had been discussed at the April meeting of the Committee. He made reference to the update by the Economic Development Officer of the premises available for commercial use and the conclusion that, although there was a reasonable demand for commercial premises in the town, that demand was met by supply and therefore further commercial units were not needed. With regard to the economic viability report he mentioned that Bruton Knowles were a nationally respected firm and their conclusion was that commercial use would not be viable. He also clarified that the economic viability report was prepared for the District Council and not for the applicants. In referring to other interested parties that had been mentioned, he referred to one having an indicative interest and to the other not being sure whether the building would be suitable. He urged the Committee to accept the views of the Council's officers and agree the recommendations of approval.

The Head of Development and Building Control clarified that the economic viability report had been prepared for the District Council but it was common practice for the applicants to pay for such reports.

Cllr. Angie Singleton, one of the ward members, challenged the economic arguments, which she felt were flawed. She also referred to the advice of the officers being based on the use of the building for residential purposes with only a small commercial use. She expressed her view that the building should be marketed in respect of employment use. She referred to there being anecdotal evidence of interest in the building but that people had been informed that it was not available. She referred to the present owners not requiring the building and felt that they were trying to maximise the return from it. She reiterated her view, however, that the property should be market tested as she felt that this was the last opportunity for commercial space of this type in the town centre. Although evidence had been given of other commercial property that was available, she referred to the need to look at the size as she understood that one of the parties who had indicated an interest was looking for a size that could only otherwise be found on the Cropmead Industrial Estate but the possible use was not suitable for such a site. She also mentioned that the property was not in a totally residential area, being near to a pub, Chinese takeaway and a building that employed around 80 people. She accepted that the building would not be viable for total employment use, and that there would need to be some residential element to this scheme, but she was keen that the right balance should be achieved and that a percentage of the building be used for commercial purposes. She was not able to support the application until the property had been market tested.

Cllr. Mike Best, also a ward member, commented that this was a unique building in the centre of the town with bus links, whilst other buildings were on industrial estates or out of town. He indicated that as this was the only building left of this size for commercial use in the town centre he could not support its use for mainly residential purposes. He was of the view that a mixed development should, however, be sought.

A full discussion ensued when the majority of members indicated that they found the proposals as submitted to be acceptable. Reference was made by a member to Policy ME6 of the Local Plan, which indicated that a market test was not required and he felt, therefore, that the Council could be challenged if such a test was asked for. It was also commented that currently efforts were being made to have residential development in the town centres with employment use outside. A member expressed his view that employment use of the building would at best be uneconomic and at worst unviable. It was also felt that people would not wish to take on a listed building. The view was also expressed that what might happen in the future was not a reason to refuse the application. It was felt that there was a need to accept the independent professional opinion on the economic viability of the property that was before the Committee. Reference was made to this being a large building in the centre of the town and to not having heard anything to suggest that there were concrete proposals for mixed or total employment use. It was considered that this proposal would maintain the building's character for the foreseeable future and would be an asset to Crewkerne.

- RESOLVED:** (1) that planning permission be granted in respect of application no. 06/04544/FUL subject to the receipt of satisfactory amended plans with regard to the highway improvements and to conditions 1-10 as set out in the agenda report;
- (2) that listed building consent be granted in respect of application no. 06/04548/LBC subject to conditions 1-18 as set out in the agenda report.

(8 in favour, 3 against)

*(Andrew Gunn, Deputy Planning Team Leader – (01935) 462192)*  
*(andrew.gunn@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

.....  
 Chairman