

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

That discussions are now at an advanced stage for the merger of our West Somerset Council (WSC) with Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC). The reason for this situation is quite simply that WSC is deemed to be financially unsustainable and therefore unable to continue as a single entity. The financial shortfall over the coming years is approximately £435,000 per annum (depends whom you talk to!). Sensible steps have already been taken for joint administration management with TDBC.

I believe that these merger proposals are contrary to good local democracy and will result in our WSC area being a “second class citizen”, the sheer size of TDBC and its proposed increase in housing development will further contribute to this.

I spoke at the last WSC full Council Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017 raising my objections to a motion which effectively asked for a vote which would further the “merger deal” (I was the only member of the public to speak on the motion) I was supported by Independent Councillors but it was quite clear that the Conservative Cabinet of the WSC had determined which way the vote was to go and a large majority voted in favour of the motion. I quite clearly understand that if the WSC is to become financially unviable then something must be done in all our interests.

The first point that one might consider is that of the Non-Domestic Business rate for Hinkley Point C which would more than sustain WSC however it is likely, following Parliamentary Questions on the subject that HPC Business Rate would flow to the “Central Rating List “ for Business Rates. WSC Councillors therefore, and quite rightly, believe that they cannot rely on rate income from HPC.

However I believe that we and those who represent us have not considered a different approach in the matter of HPC and EDF. Are you aware that within the last 4 weeks two significant alteration requests have been made by EDF Energy the first is a change in the size of the nuclear waste storage building which they describe as being a non-material change; this building is now 250 yards long, 80 yards wide and about 90 feet high (vent stack). This building will remain a feature of our beloved coastline for many years after HPC ceases generation, a grand legacy for our descendants. The second is a request to increase the transportation of materials for the new jetty by 250 vehicle movements per day. The point being that speeding up the jetty build will mean an earlier time for seaborne site deliveries. EDF Energy have agreed to pay £4 million pounds to facilitate this increase; for what and to whom?

Please do not misunderstand me HPC is important to all of us for the future but we have been badly short-changed in the WSC area by not understanding the construction effect and not ensuring our own WSC continuation. Someone said to me recently that we had done well from HPC with CIM Fund and Section 106 funds, it is clearly not understood that these “gifts” have been carefully costed by EDF Energy in order to develop their unit price of electricity already agreed prior to a “turbine turning”

Our Parish Council has been quiet on the issue and listened only to WSC Councillors at Parish Council Meetings who impart the Conservative Cabinet “line” on the issue. We should now be on the “warpath” this monster building project is in our WSC area, our beautiful coastline and our glorious Quantock Hills; we need a local area council to properly look after our interests which a merger will not serve to achieve. Our local MP has done nothing to help except to say that he would not vote on the Brexit issue unless something was done; nothing was and he voted on the Brexit vote.

We must approach EDF Energy at main board level to seek financial help, for at least the next 10 years whilst the project runs, in the running of WSC, we would from our side be “considerate of their needs” This would allow us time to create a viable WSC and maintain local democracy, crucial to us all and our area.

Above all action requires local interest and if that does not exist there is no need of further debate. Please send me an email if you are interested in ensuring the survival of WSC our local district council.

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