

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Community Scrutiny Committee - 27 April 2017

Proposed Garden Town Plan for Taunton

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Roger Habgood

Report Author: Nick Bryant, Planning Policy Manager

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 In early 2017 Taunton was designated by Government as one of only nine Garden Towns nationally. This designation has brought £350,000 of revenue funding for the year 2016/17 with the likelihood of future direct and possibly indirect funding awards to be made on the back of the status. With this status comes an expectation and level of scrutiny on the Council's ambitious plans for the Town.
- 1.2 Since 2012, national planning policy has advocated that local planning authorities prepare a singular development plan document rather than the suite of plans that had previously been promoted through the 'Local Development Framework' approach set out by earlier policy and guidance. In the recent Housing White Paper, the Government has intimated that local planning authorities will be given a freer hand in determining how they wish to prepare local plans for their area and keep them under review.
- 1.3 In Taunton Deane, we currently have a suite of development plans: the Core Strategy (2012), Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (2008) and Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (2016). Should a new Council be formed comprising Taunton Deane and West Somerset, a local plan should be prepared covering the consolidated Local Planning Authority area building in the constituent parts of the plans listed above as well as the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 (2016) (it should be noted that the West Somerset LPA area does not include the part of the District lying within the Exmoor National Park).
- 1.4 The Taunton Deane Core Strategy and TTCAAP are due for review. The Taunton Urban Area would be the primary focus of a new planning area in any new authority area and is the primary focus of the existing Core Strategy. Officers recognise that the 'fast-tracking' of a new Garden Town Plan for Taunton can take forward the Council's outline vision set out in our Garden Town Expression of Interest while responding to the very real need to review existing strategic allocations in Taunton.
- 1.5 The Garden Town Plan can progress to an initial public consultation during 2017 with work on the evidence base to support it and the broader local plan carrying on in parallel. A decision on whether to consolidate the Garden Town Plan into the broader local plan or to keep it as a separate, stand-alone document would be made during 2018 once a decision on the new council has been made.
- 1.6 In addition, it is important to demonstrate accountability and transparency in relation to

the Garden Town status. The Report therefore also seeks authority to 'ring-fence' the award of £350,000 to-date (and any subsequent award) to a specific Garden Town Reserve. A further £125,000 for the year 2016/17 has now been awarded by DCLG, this may or may not impact on the Council's award for 2017/18. Future expenditure would be authorised by the Planning Policy and Transportation Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Section 151 Officer.

2 Recommendations

2.1 The Community Scrutiny Committee recommends that the relevant Portfolio Holder:

- a) informally support the preparation of the Taunton Garden Town Plan (an item will subsequently be taken to the Council's Community Scrutiny Committee prior to a formal decision being made by the Executive); and
- b) informally support the establishment of a Garden Town Reserve with future expenditure made in line with the Garden Town Expression of Interest document or activities associated with the realisation of the Garden Town for Taunton where agreed by the Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy and Transportation (also to be addressed in the same aforementioned Scrutiny and Executive Report); and
- c) note the commitment to review the Local Development Scheme for Taunton Deane as soon as practicable after the decision on the new council has been made.

3 Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

Risk Matrix

Description	Likelihood	Impact	Overall
<i>Risk: That the Council does not continue to articulate its plan for Taunton; potentially reducing its ability to leverage in public monies to support the delivery of essential infrastructure and realisation of the Garden Town Vision.</i>	4	4	16
<i>Residual risk after proposed mitigation: Preparation of the Garden Town Plan will provide a very clear, focused way of carrying forward the principles set out in adopted Plans and the Garden Town EoI. This could prove important in ensuring a clear vision is set and the Council can effectively bid for monies.</i>	1	4	4

Risk Scoring Matrix

Likelihood	5	Almost Certain	Low (5)	Medium (10)	High (15)	Very High (20)	Very High (25)
	4	Likely	Low (4)	Medium (8)	Medium (12)	High (16)	Very High (20)
	3	Possible	Low (3)	Low (6)	Medium (9)	Medium (12)	High (15)
	2	Unlikely	Low (2)	Low (4)	Low (6)	Medium (8)	Medium (10)
	1	Rare	Low (1)	Low (2)	Low (3)	Low (4)	Low (5)
			1	2	3	4	5
			Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Catastrophic
			Impact				

Likelihood of risk occurring	Indicator	Description (chance of occurrence)
1. Very Unlikely	May occur in exceptional circumstances	< 10%
2. Slight	Is unlikely to, but could occur at some time	10 – 25%
3. Feasible	Fairly likely to occur at same time	25 – 50%
4. Likely	Likely to occur within the next 1-2 years, or occurs occasionally	50 – 75%
5. Very Likely	Regular occurrence (daily / weekly / monthly)	> 75%

4 Background and Full details of the Report

Background to the Garden Town Bid and spending of budget

- 4.1 Taunton was designated as one of only nine Garden Towns nationally in early 2017. This designation was made on the basis of the Taunton Garden Town Expression of Interest (Eol) document submitted in the Summer of 2016 (Appendix A). Revenue funding of £350,000 was secured for the year 2016/17 (a further £125,000 was paid to Taunton Deane on 31 March 2017) and there is an expectation that a future award may be available for the year 2017/18 for which the Council has already made a request for funding.
- 4.2 As one of comparatively few newly designated Garden Towns nationally and, having been awarded a substantial sum of public money, it is important that the Council demonstrates accountability and transparency. The money awarded to-date has not been 'ring-fenced' though Officers recognise the need to ensure it is spent in accord with the Expression of Interest and any other projects associated with the realisation of a Garden Town for Taunton.

The need for a plan review

- 4.3 Local Planning Authorities are required to keep their Local Plans up-to-date through programmed review. These reviews are generally undertaken periodically, often, every five years.

- 4.4 The TTCAAP and Core Strategy are both in need of review. In the case of the Town Centre Plan, some of the policies are no longer relevant or consistent with national policy, whilst some sites have now been built out or are subject to planning applications. Similarly, some of the policies and allocations in the Core Strategy should be revisited to ensure consistency with national policy and that the Plan remains deliverable.
- 4.5 Nationally, planning policy has recently advocated that local planning authorities prepare a singular development plan document rather than the suite of plans that had previously been promoted through the 'Local Development Framework' approach set out in earlier policy and guidance. In the recent Housing White Paper, the Government has intimated that local planning authorities will be given a freer hand in determining how they wish to prepare local plans for their area and keep them under review.

Proposed response

- 4.6 With a need to review two of the Council's development plan documents and the recent Garden Town designation resulting in a number of queries and questions about: 'what is the vision for Taunton'?, it is considered that a Taunton Garden Town Plan is an appropriate focus for the Council's Planning Policy Team for the short-medium term. This Plan would be more focused than previous development plans with a strong emphasis on project implementation.
- 4.7 Until such time as a decision has been made on the establishment of the 'new council', it could be seen to be premature to commence work on a joint local plan for the combined Taunton Deane and West Somerset planning areas. As much of any new council's focus will be on its largest centre: Taunton, preparing the Garden Town Plan is the logical priority for Taunton Deane Borough Council through 2017 and beyond.
- 4.8 Work on evidence gathering for subsequent planning policy documents has commenced. Members will recall a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was published towards the end of 2016 while the Planning Policy Team have made good progress with other key studies including publishing a new Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and towards commissioning and completing a refreshed Green Infrastructure Strategy and Employment, Retail and Leisure Study.
- 4.9 The evidence base referred to above will be used to inform not just the Garden Town Plan but also any subsequent Local Plan produced either independently by Taunton Deane or by a 'new council'. A decision on whether the Garden Town Plan will remain a separate development plan document or will be incorporated as a discrete chapter of a new local plan will need to be made during 2018.
- 4.10 Councils are required to set out a project plan for intended development plan production called a 'Local Development Scheme' (LDS). The LDS is a useful tool for the public, stakeholders and other interested parties insofar as it indicates the timetable for preparation of the local plan(s), critical dependencies, resources and assumptions.
- 4.11 The current LDS for Taunton Deane is now very out-of-date and would benefit from an update. Officers do not consider that there is any real benefit in refreshing this document now, or indeed until a decision on the new council has been made. This is because there can be no certainty about how and in what form local plans will be prepared across Taunton Deane and West Somerset.
- 4.12 Officers would recommend that, subject to a decision being reached on the new council, a new Local Development Scheme is prepared outlining the programme of planning

policy work over the period 2018-2021 early in the New Year. In the intervening period the Planning Policy Team will work to compile the evidence base required to support the emerging Garden Town and Local Plan with a view to undertaking an early consultation on the Taunton Garden Town Plan in the Autumn of 2017.

5 Links to Corporate Aims / Priorities

- 5.1 A Garden Town Plan for Taunton will deliver outcomes against three of the four key themes outlined in the Council's Corporate Strategy, namely: 'People', 'Business and Enterprise' and 'Our Place'.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 It is anticipated that the costs associated with preparing a Garden Town Plan for Taunton can be borne from a combination of committed Garden Town funding secured to-date and existing Planning Policy Reserves.

7 Legal Implications (if any)

- 7.1 None identified.

8 Environmental Impact Implications (if any)

- 8.1 The Garden Town Plan will be underpinned by a Sustainability Appraisal which considers the environmental implications of the proposals set out in the Plan. It will be important that the Garden Town Plan reflects the principles of new Garden communities and aims for high environmental standards.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications (if any)

- 9.1 None identified.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications (if any)

- 10.1 The Taunton Garden Town Plan will be underpinned by an Equalities Impact Assessment.

11 Social Value Implications (if any)

- 11.1 None identified.

12 Partnership Implications (if any)

- 12.1 The Garden Town Plan will be prepared in partnership with a range of key stakeholders and infrastructure providers. Moreover, the successful delivery of the outcomes set by the Plan will be dependent on an on-going partnership-based approach to the delivery of sites and associated infrastructure.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications (if any)

- 13.1 There are a number of opportunities which preparing a Garden Town Plan for Taunton will open up to make a stronger connection between spatial planning and health and well-being. These include, but are not limited to, the delivery of green infrastructure projects such as improved green and blue corridors through the Town that will promote walking and cycling and recreation.

14 Asset Management Implications (if any)

14.1 The existing TTCAAP includes a number of Council-owned sites, which, subject to continued availability, may well be allocated for development through the Garden Town Plan for Taunton, such as Coal Orchard and Firepool.

15 Consultation Implications (if any)

15.1 The Plan will need to be subject to a to be agreed programme of public consultation including a formal six week representation period on any future proposed submission document.

16 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s) (if any)

16.1 N/A

Democratic Path:

- **Community Scrutiny**
- **Portfolio Holder Decision**

Reporting Frequency : ☐ **Once only**

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	Taunton Garden Town Expression of Interest
------------	--

Contact Officer

Name	Nick Bryant
Direct Dial	01823356482
Email	n.bryant@tauntondeane.gov.uk



Taunton Garden Town

Expression of interest





Nestled between two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and close to Exmoor National Park, Taunton is the gateway to beautiful scenic landscapes and picturesque coastline of the South West.



Taunton in 2028 and beyond

Taunton will have strengthened its position as a first class destination at the heart of the South West, within easy reach of Bristol, Exeter, London and the Midlands.

The regeneration of the town centre will provide a stronger and more vibrant core, with a dynamic and diversified economy. The River Tone will be an attractive green corridor, providing high quality riverside development and enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes into the town centre.

Taunton will retain high levels of self-containment and foster the opportunities arising from the growth agenda to create construction-related apprenticeships. The current reliance on public sector employment will be rebalanced with increased skilled jobs in the green knowledge and digital economy, healthcare and hi-tech industries.



Well-integrated green infrastructure projects will lie at the heart of Taunton. Enhanced pedestrian and cycle links from the town out to the Quantock Hills AONB, a new country park, community orchards and additional green wedges will ensure the surrounding rural setting continues to penetrate the town, blending town and country.

The new garden communities will be a key driver and tool, in the delivery of the transformational growth and vision for Taunton as a Garden Town. They will be unique settings, coordinating landscape, wildlife, and leisure in a person friendly environment. Sustainable public transport links and improved footpaths and cycleways, will reduce car dependence and deliver wider physical and mental health benefits for residents.

The garden communities and publicly owned regeneration sites will provide a wide range of tenure options for new households and an increased diversity of specialist housing, to meet the different levels of care support sought by the increasing older population in Taunton.

Above all, Taunton will remain a place for residents, retaining the highly valued county town 'quality of life'.



Taunton in context

Taunton is an attractive location, in close proximity to the Quantock and Blackdown Hills AONB and south west coastline. As Somerset's largest settlement, it is centrally located between Exeter and Bristol on the strategic road network, with both the M5 and A358/A303 corridor. Taunton provides excellent rail links to London and the Midlands and planned enhancements to Taunton station, will meet projected passenger increases of over 40% over the next 15-20 years.

Taunton serves a large catchment of approximately 350,000 people extending into much of Somerset and parts of Devon. A number of major employers are based in Taunton, including the Hydrographic Office, Debenhams Financial Office, the local authorities and Musgrove Park Hospital.

Identified as a Principal Growth Area in the LEP's devolution bid, 'A Prospectus for Productivity', Taunton is located within the Hinkley Point C housing impact area. This major infrastructure project will provide significant employment and business growth opportunities for the area.

The town has a high level of self-containment, with approximately 81% of the resident population working in the town. Taunton offers a wide range



of exceptional schools and colleges with half of the top ten Somerset schools (GCSE grade A-C) in the Taunton area (2012). The education offer, with both state and independent schools, make it an attractive location for families. The health facilities and leisure opportunities also provide for the needs of Taunton's increasing older population.

The wide range of sport and leisure attractions (Somerset County Cricket Ground, Taunton Racecourse, Brewhouse Theatre and enhanced swimming and leisure facilities) and the night time economy, provide a high quality offer.





Hinkley Point Nuclear New Build

- 45 minute drive time from site
- Largest construction project in Europe
- £18bn investment in the Somerset economy
- Massive supply chain opportunities for new and existing businesses

New Communities

- 13,000 new homes planned in Taunton with over 2,000 completed to date, delivering a 40% increase in the housing stock.
- Three new garden communities delivering over 8,000 new homes, with one already under construction
- Sustainable communities, including new schools, leisure, transport and business infrastructure



New Employment Site at Junction 25, M5

- A planned new 25 hectare site
- Excellent location
- Up to 4,000 jobs in businesses across all sectors
- Backed by Government

Transport Infrastructure - Major investments to further enhance Taunton as Somerset's best connected Town:

- £9m rail station enhancement
- £18m major scheme to improve Junction 25 of M5 (Taunton)
- New A303/358 'SW Expressway', connecting to Taunton at M5.J25
- New local routes



Town Centre Investment

- A thriving Town Centre with low vacancy rates for shops
- New investment opportunities for retail, leisure, office & residential
- Prime riverside development sites



Taunton – A Future Garden Town for the South West

Taunton provides a unique opportunity to respond to the Government's Garden Town Prospectus. The Council has sought to put forward a proposal which reflects local priorities and aspirations and delivers real benefits to local communities.

Taunton Deane Borough Council is committed to delivering truly transformational growth. The adopted development plan outlines plans to deliver 17,000 new homes over the period to 2028; a rate of development which exceeds the long-term average of completions and the Government's household projections, by approximately 70%.

The plan identifies the Taunton urban area as the strategic focus for growth within the Borough and wider sub-region. The Heart of the SW LEP identifies Taunton as a Principal Growth Area, with Exeter and Plymouth.

Working closely with key partners, Taunton will accommodate at least 13,000 new homes as

well as 9,500 new jobs, sustainable transport links and a range of other higher order services and facilities, that will strengthen and enhance its role. The planned growth for Taunton will deliver a 40% increase in the existing housing stock and will take the population of Taunton to approximately 85,000. This is the largest proportional increase of any of the major settlements in the South West.

The Taunton town centre regeneration sites offer fantastic opportunities to maximise growth on brownfield sites, with much of the land in public ownership. Many of these sites have been promoted for the Starter Home programme. The Council is working in close partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency, Network Rail, Somerset County Council, the Environment Agency and key development partners, to ensure these brownfield sites come forward. Taunton rail station is identified as one of three major regeneration areas under the Government's 'Rail Hub' programme.

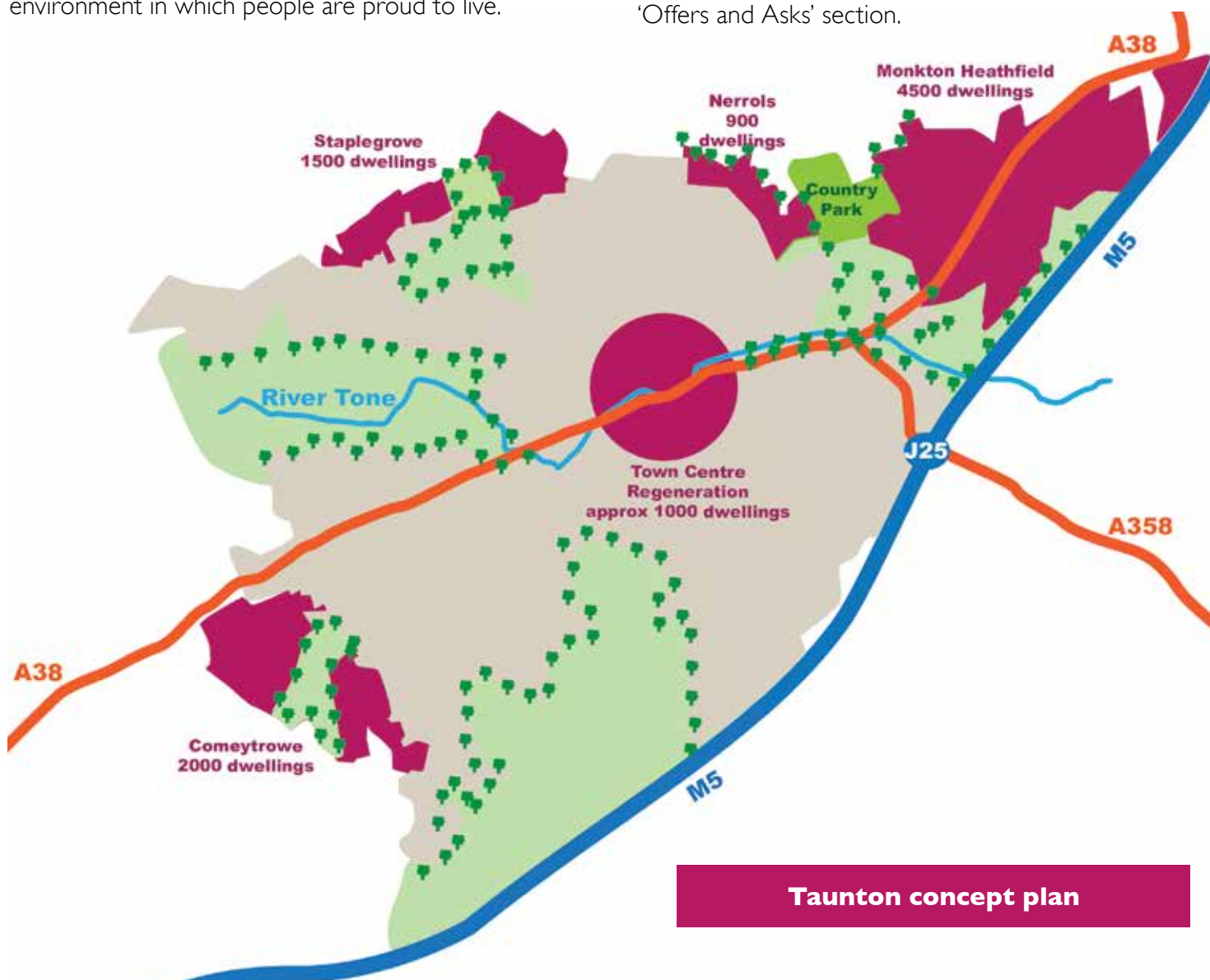


Further substantial growth will be delivered through sustainable, high quality new communities and smaller allocations around the town, delivering enhanced public transport corridors and cycle links.

The new garden communities, will be a key driver and tool in the delivery of transformational growth and the vision for Taunton as a Garden Town. They will be exemplars of quality place making. Although well-connected to Taunton, each community will provide a clear, distinct sense of identity. They will be mixed-use developments where people can meet their daily needs locally, incorporating a range of housing, employment, open space, local facilities and an environment in which people are proud to live.

Together these developments and other smaller allocations in Taunton, will provide over 11,000 new homes by 2028 and can assist in delivering the Government's commitment to increase housing delivery. Beyond 2028 the Core Strategy has identified further potential for 4,000-6,000 dwellings in the south west sector of Taunton, subject to further work to consider the physical infrastructure constraints and solutions.

In order to maintain a significant acceleration in housing delivery, assistance will be required to ensure timely delivery of critical infrastructure, to unlock the development sites. Further detail is provided in the 'Offers and Asks' section.



Delivering Garden Town principles

The council is working with the Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Local Nature Partnership, to encourage a closer tie between wildlife in our gardens, streets and parks and our daily activities, so that wildlife is no longer seen as separate but as part of our daily lives. To facilitate this, the detailed master planning for the proposed new communities, will seek to link the green spaces within the development and surrounding areas, through establishing country parks, community woodlands and 'green necklaces' of open space. This multi-functional green infrastructure will serve to provide leisure facilities and sustainable water management measures and enhance biodiversity.

TDBC recognises that access to open spaces, leisure and recreational facilities has direct and indirect impacts on people's physical and mental health. We are working closely with partners to ensure that the delivery of green infrastructure projects, maximise the opportunities for improving health outcomes for the existing and new population. This is in line with the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Board's priority, of building stronger communities and reducing loneliness and isolation. Public Health funding was committed through our Borough Health and Wellbeing Programme, to assist with a specific project, to improve cycle links from Taunton to the Quantock Hills, in recognition

of the wider public health benefits that could arise from the project.

The provision of additional informal open space, will seek to integrate children's play and adult recreation, through the co-location of green gyms with children's play and space for informal sports, to be enjoyed by local communities. Early delivery of key green infrastructure projects, will assist in promoting public health and community cohesion.

The future growth in Taunton, has a key role to play in delivering supported housing for the increasing older population and those with long term health needs. The Garden Town proposals have been informed by our membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board and our commitment to promoting the aims of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This proposal offers the opportunity to address some of the current and future challenges facing the health and independent living needs for this population.

Local authorities and partners in Somerset, recognise the wider benefits that Garden Town status could deliver. Our local partners are particularly keen to maximise the development of positive social and mental capital, in the delivery of small scale green infrastructure projects, working closely with relevant mental and physical health related projects and capturing the learning from these projects to share more widely. This work aligns directly with the Joint Strategy for Positive Mental Health in Somerset.





Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure and access to community facilities, is the critical building block to establishing a strong sense of community identity and cohesion, creating a high quality sense of place.

Central to the Council's growth agenda, is to protect and extend the Town's distinctive Green Wedges and corridors and develop a comprehensive network of green and blue infrastructure, linking the heart of the town with the surrounding countryside and reconnecting with the River Tone.

The urban form of Taunton will remain self-contained, below ridge lines which are sensitive to development and will preserve the setting and character of Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills AONB. The Green Wedges extending into Taunton town centre, provide notable opportunities for enhancing the landscape character and setting of Taunton, whilst improving areas for recreation, visual amenity and play.

For over 25 years, the protection of Green Wedges has been an important part of the planning policy framework for Taunton Deane.

The key policy objectives of Green Wedges are to:

- *prevent the coalescence of settlements and maintain a sense of place and identity for neighbourhoods;*
- *maintain the open character of a green lung contributing to health and wellbeing for residents;*
- *bring the countryside into the heart of town;*
- *provide accessible formal and informal recreation, sport and play;*
- *provide valuable wildlife corridors and habitat;*
- *protect areas of landscape importance and visual amenity;*
- *provide surface water attenuation; and*
- *provide a positive approach to land use.*

Wider benefits of Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure is an integral part of the Garden Town vision and will serve both the new communities proposed in Taunton and the wider area. A new Country Park and 'Green Necklace' is proposed alongside the Monkton Heathfield new community, with links out towards the Quantocks. This strategic green infrastructure will provide leisure, biodiversity and flood management benefits.

In coordinating landscape, wildlife, leisure, sustainable urban drainage, footpaths and cycleways, this offers the chance for new and existing communities to access local facilities in a person friendly environment, without needing to use the car.

Working in close partnership with the Local Nature Partnership, Sport England, the Local Health and Wellbeing Board and other key partners, the Council is seeking to ensure that a holistic approach to delivering development and green infrastructure, also delivers wider community and public health benefits. Taunton Deane's co-ordinating role working with key partners, seeks to foster social capital and enable existing and new communities to forge greater ownership and involvement in the proposed green infrastructure projects.



Taunton's Economic Potential

In the Heart of SW LEP area, Taunton, alongside Plymouth and Exeter, is identified as a Principal Growth Area for the sub-region. The town is located within the Hinkley Point Impact Area and is just a 45 minute drive time from the site. The Hinkley Point nuclear project will generate approximately 25,000 jobs during the construction phase of the project and 1,000 apprenticeships. This major infrastructure project will also deliver significant supply chain opportunities for local businesses in the Hinkley Impact Area.

In addition to the Hinkley Point project, Taunton will see the delivery of a Strategic Employment site at Junction 25. This site is currently being progressed through a Local Development Order and will provide approximately 4,000 jobs.

Major growth and infrastructure investment in Taunton over the next 20 years with the rail station improvements, Junction 25 improvements, A303/A358 Expressway, the strategic flood project and major housing and regeneration development, will offer significant employment, training and supply chain opportunities in Taunton.

Taunton Deane is seeking to maximise the training and job opportunities arising from the wide range of construction projects. Taunton Deane works with the Construction Industry Training Board, to deliver employment apprenticeships and training through planning obligations related to major construction projects. In partnership with the Environment Agency, the Council will also explore links with the delivery of the flooding related infrastructure projects and the acknowledged Water Management and Environment skills shortage (CIWEM). The Council will seek to foster links with the water management courses and apprenticeship scheme offered at the University of the West of England.

In partnership with the local schools and colleges, the Garden Town project will seek to raise awareness of skills shortages in construction and water management related careers and promote the employment opportunities this presents for young people in Taunton Deane and the wider sub-region.





Growth Cluster

Business and Professional Services

Growing on Taunton's strong profile in this cluster, creating more highly qualified jobs in sectors such as business administration, law, architects services, insurance, accountancy, consultancy and management.

Health and Care Industries

Reflecting the changing demographic profile and the existing organisations (public and private) already present in this sector, with key employers such as Musgrove Park Hospital, Nuffield Hospital, Exmoor Plastics, Pearsalls and South West Pathology Services. There will be an increase in higher qualified health related jobs, based in new as well as existing facilities.

Hi Tech, Scientific and Advanced Industries

An emerging cluster, based on hi-tech opportunities arising from Hinkley nuclear development and supply chain opportunities, advanced engineering and low carbon technologies, and specialist scientific industries. Also to strengthen links with existing key Taunton employers such as UK Hydrographic Office and GSI Exotec to address their skills, employment and infrastructure requirements.



Major Town Centre Regeneration

Key to the Council's growth agenda and supporting the vision for a Garden Town, is the regeneration of Taunton's town centre, providing a stronger and more vibrant core with a dynamic and diversified economy. Many of the town centre regeneration sites are publicly-owned and the Council is working in close partnership with the HCA, Somerset County, the LEP, Network Rail and the Environment Agency to ensure these sites come forward. The vision seeks to provide a choice of residential accommodation, retail, leisure, sporting and community activities.

Taunton has a compact, flat town centre with access to an attractive riverside and high quality green spaces. It has a good retail offer, with a significant number of high quality independent shops and a farmers market.

Despite these positive features there are issues that need to be addressed – the River Tone is underutilised; vehicles dominate key shopping streets; the cultural and leisure offer must be enhanced to attract more people into the town and support wider investment in Taunton.

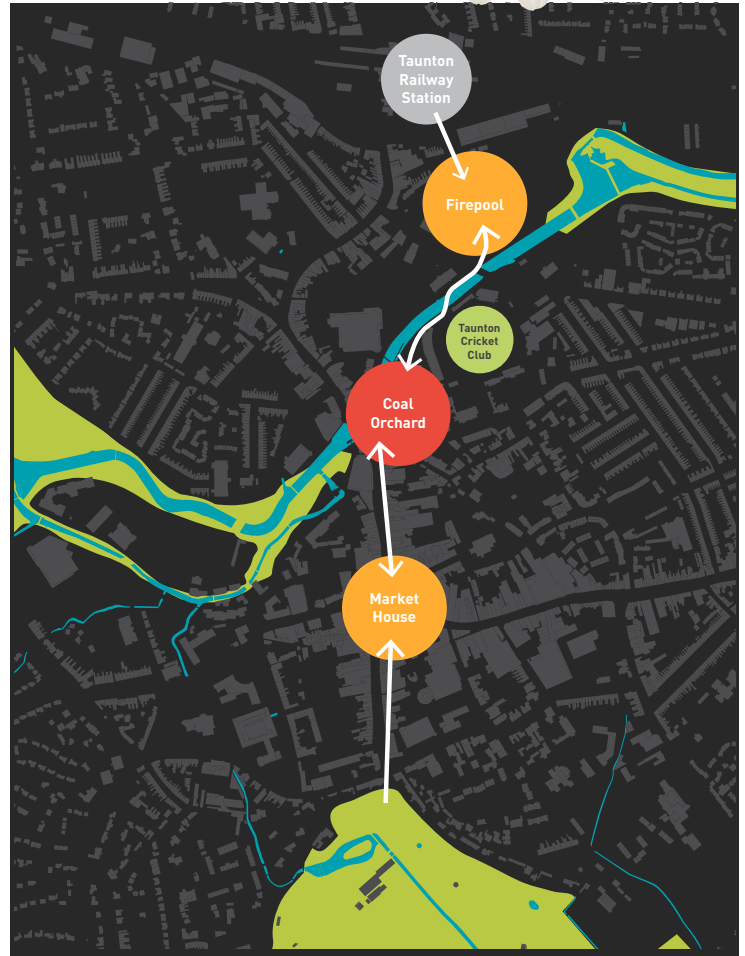
The River Tone provides opportunities for enhancing and creating multifunctional green infrastructure corridors, balancing access and ecological enhancements and linking the regeneration sites. The existing green connections into the town from Longrun Meadow, Firepool Lock and Vivary Park need to be joined up, through the creation of pleasant and attractive pedestrian and cycle routes along the River Tone and through the town centre.





A high-quality, north-south pedestrian route, from the Railway Station to High Street, is proposed to improve pedestrian links with the town centre. High quality waterfront development at Coal Orchard, will deliver a more attractive public space with cultural activities, cafes, restaurants, artist's studios and galleries and active use of the river. An enhanced east-west river corridor, linking key leisure and retail destinations at Longrun Meadow, Firepool and Hankridge, will provide enhanced pedestrian and cycle links.

Redevelopment at Firepool will provide a mixed-use development and provide a new gateway to the town centre from the north. There are a number of other town centre redevelopment sites, that may provide opportunities for mixed-use development to deliver the wider vision. The town centre sites have the capacity to deliver approximately 1,000 residential units, some of which are being considered through the Starter Home initiative. Several of these sites are dependent on the delivery of the upstream flood attenuation scheme.



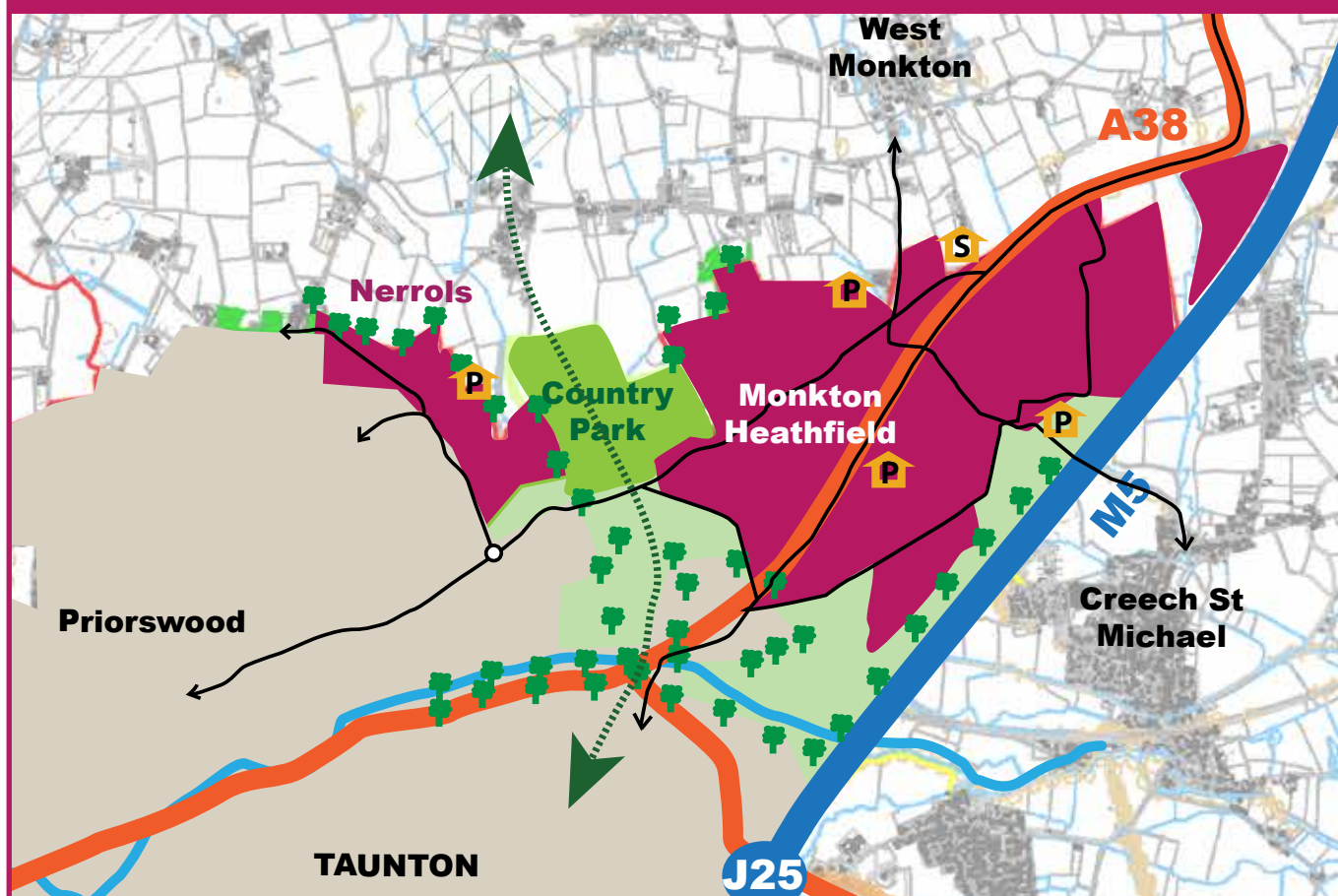
Taunton Rethink - concept diagram



The new Garden Communities

Monkton Heathfield / Priorswood/Nerrols

Monkton Heathfield and Nerrols concept plan



The largest new garden community will provide a new sustainable neighbourhood in Monkton Heathfield, towards the North East of Taunton. The new community will provide phased delivery of around 5,400 new homes (4,500 at Monkton Heathfield and 900 at Nerrols and 25% affordable housing), a new district centre, 32 ha of employment land, 3 new primary schools, a secondary school and a country park and community woodland within the green wedge, between Monkton Heathfield and Priorswood.

Development of this new community has commenced with around 700 houses, a new

primary school and a network of green and blue infrastructure links, incorporating footpath/cycle links, drainage and a range of play and open spaces.

Sustainable transport improvements seek to enhance pedestrian and cycle links to Taunton town centre. The provision of a rapid bus corridor along the A38 and a park and ride / bus site, will provide improved transport linkages from Bridgwater (to the North East of the town) to the railway station, the town centre and further south to the proposed new community in South West Taunton.





There are a number of constraints and opportunities, that will guide the future development of Monkton Heathfield and Nerrols as sustainable, mixed-use communities. To the north, the land slopes up past Hestercombe House towards the Quantocks AONB. Development will be accompanied by measures to mitigate its effect on the landscape setting and will include new areas of woodland planting to, mitigate the loss of foraging areas for the lesser horseshoe bats from Hestercombe House SAC.

The integrity of the green wedge, separating Monkton Heathfield from Taunton, will be retained. A woodland buffer around the new boundaries to the green wedge and north, will prevent light spilling from the development into the surrounding countryside and will mitigate the effect of development on the Hestercombe House SAC. There is an aspiration for a multi-purpose 'green necklace' of landscape and public open space, to surround the new settlement providing for allotments, outdoor recreation, flood mitigation measures and wildlife habitat.

A strategic green link from Halcon, the most deprived ward in Somerset, running north through the green wedge to the Quantock Hills AONB, will deliver wider social and health related benefits for existing residents. There is also potential for surface water attenuation and SUDS within the green wedge, along both Maidenbrook and Allen's Brook, which will promote and enhance the biodiversity of the local area.

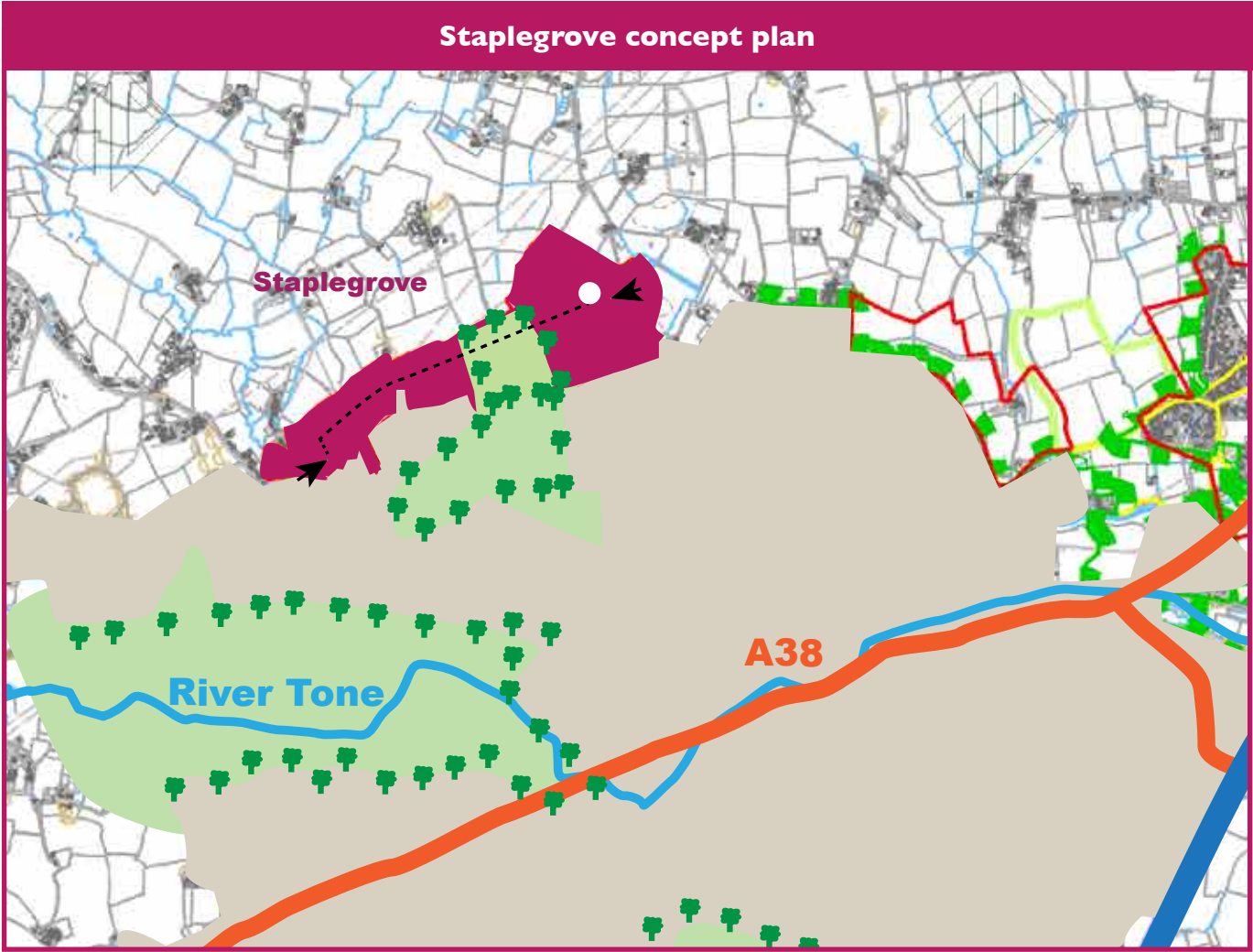
The Bridgwater and Taunton Canal is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and provides informal recreation opportunities, together with off-road footpath and cycleway links to the town centre.

Key challenges:

- *Development of a co-ordinated masterplan*
- *Early completion of relief roads to avoid fragmentation of existing community*
- *Early delivery of Rapid Bus link and other sustainable transport measures to encourage modal shift*
- *Early delivery of primary and secondary schools*
- *Delivery of strategic flood mitigation works*
- *The unlocking of the district centre and employment land*
- *Provision and governance of the 'Green Necklace' and green infrastructure links*



Staplegrove





The adopted framework masterplan for the North Taunton new community, will deliver approximately 1,500 dwellings (seeking up to 25% affordable), a new local centre, primary school, an extension to the existing Green Wedge, improvements to cycle and pedestrian links to the town centre and significant open space and recreational opportunities.

The Green Wedge extension into the countryside, will meet a range of functions, including wildlife habitat, recreation, flood alleviation and visual amenity. The wedge provides a green link to the countryside and helps maintain separate identities for the western development area, as an extension to Staplegrove community and the eastern development area, as an extension to Taunton.

The development will seek to improve access to the open countryside, between Staplegrove and the Quantock Hills, through enhancement of the existing green link (West Deane Way), which runs through the western-most part of the site. This will ultimately create links to Taunton Town Centre via the River Tone 'blue link' and the creation of further green links that penetrate the urban area.

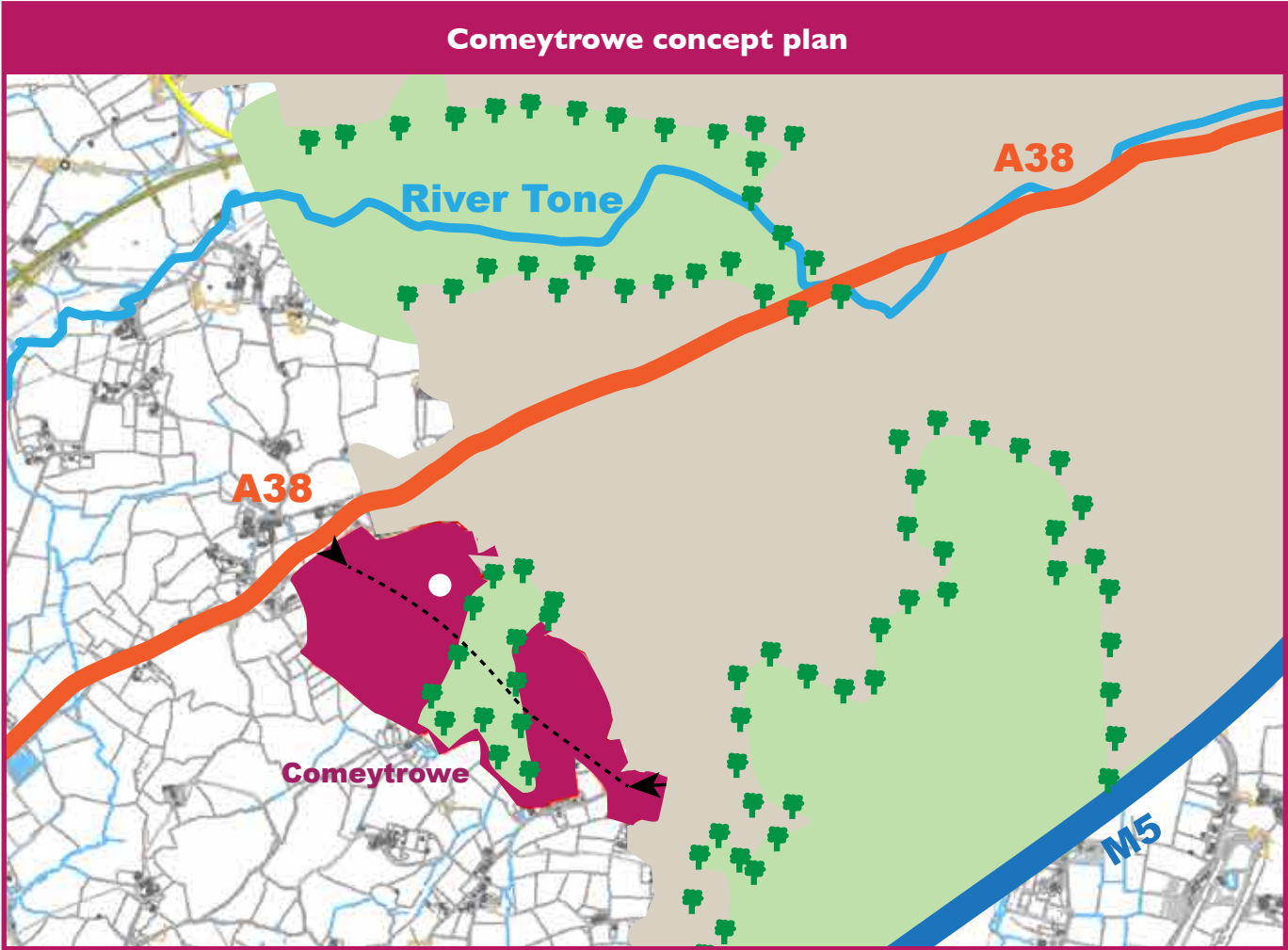
The Hestercombe House Appropriate Assessment, identified lesser horseshoe bat foraging on the eastern part of Staplegrove site and the outer boundaries of the development will require a buffer of woodland planting, plus additional off-site woodland planting, to mitigate the loss of bat foraging area.

Key challenges include:

- *The Hestercombe House Appropriate Assessment requires off-site woodland planting to be established and sufficiently mature, to provide replacement foraging for the bats, before the eastern area can be developed. A potential area for this new woodland has been identified and agreed with the National Trust, who are one of the landowners in the eastern area part of the site.*
- *Early delivery of the link road through the development, is required to alleviate existing traffic congestion in Staplegrove village and will deliver a key benefit to existing residents.*
- *Early delivery of public transport and essential pedestrian and cycle improvements, linking the development with the town centre, to ensure early take-up of sustainable travel behaviour as a lifestyle choice for new residents.*
- *Early delivery of the primary school.*
- *Diversion of or placing underground, the existing 132kv powerlines.*



South West Taunton/Comeytrowe/Trull New Community





The proposed new community benefits from an outline planning resolution (subject to s106) and will deliver approximately 2,000 dwellings (seeking up to 25% affordable housing), a new local centre, a primary school, a new green wedge, open space and green infrastructure enhancements and wider social and community facilities. The site will also deliver wider public transport improvements, including the provision of a park and bus site, that will link with the proposals for a rapid bus corridor on the A38 and an improved town bus service, linking the new community to Taunton town centre via the hospital.

The outline permission is attached to a Parameters and Principles document that sets the framework for the more detailed master planning required for the two proposed neighbourhoods either side of the new Green Wedge, based on the characteristics of garden cities and suburbs.

A new green wedge will be created along Galmington Stream, which is a designated Local Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve. The new green wedge will deliver functions including: SUDS, wildlife habitat, recreation and visual amenity and will integrate with a parkland area, forming a central feature for the adjoining communities. The new green wedge has the opportunity to increase footpath and cycleway access to the Taunton town centre and the wider countryside.

Challenges:

- *Early delivery of the primary school.*
- *Early delivery of public transport and essential pedestrian and cycle improvements, linking the development with the town centre, to ensure early take up of sustainable travel behaviour as a lifestyle choice for new residents.*



Major strategic infrastructure projects

A number of sustainable transport projects are being progressed in Taunton that will assist in delivering the wider garden town vision.

These include:

- *improvements to the Taunton railway station, to accommodate increased passenger numbers and provide a high-quality public transport interchange.*
- *proposals for the provision of a rapid bus corridor on the A38, serving the new communities and improving connectivity between Bridgwater, Taunton and Wellington*
- *improved pedestrian and cycle links to the town centre.*
- *plans to re-open Wellington railway station to improve sustainable transport links to Taunton, Bridgwater, Exeter and Bristol.*

There are also a number of wider strategic transport projects with improvements to the A303/A358 corridor, linking with the M5 and the capacity works at Junction 25.

In conjunction with the proposed works for improvements to the M5 Junction 25, the Council is progressing a Local Development Order in order to deliver a new Strategic Employment Site to the east of the M5. This proposal will create up to 4000 new jobs in a range of sectors which will enhance Taunton's identity as a high-quality business destination.

Working in close partnership with the Environment Agency and Somerset Rivers Authority, Taunton Deane is progressing work on a major upstream flood alleviation project, necessary to unlock the town centre regeneration sites and to provide enhanced flood protection, for more than 6,000 households and many businesses in the area.



Offer and Asks

Taunton is ideally placed to lead the way in responding to the Garden Town prospectus and to offer a learning opportunity for those areas where new Garden Town proposals are less developed.

The town already benefits from many of the characteristics of a garden town. As Somerset's largest and fastest growing town, Taunton strikes a balance in retaining its distinctive character, beautiful environment and great quality of life. The new communities are already allocated in the adopted development plan and all sites are being actively promoted by housing developers. The first phase of the Monkton Heathfield new community, is under construction, with approximately 700 dwellings completed, and master planning work on the second phase is underway. The South West Taunton new community has a planning resolution and a planning application for the Staplegrove new community has been submitted. With appropriate support through the Garden Towns programme, the development plan for Taunton offers significant acceleration in housing delivery and genuine additional housing supply.

The town centre regeneration sites, of which the majority are publicly owned, offer significant opportunities under the Government's Starter Home initiative and have been put forward for consideration under this scheme. Working with Network Rail and the HCA, the Council is seeking to progress master planning work for the underutilised land around the train station to consider the development opportunities.

Green Infrastructure is integral to Taunton's growth and provides notable opportunities to respond to the Government's Garden Town prospectus. Garden Town status will provide Taunton with the assistance required to deliver the necessary critical infrastructure in a timely fashion, to unlock the sites and ensure the Garden

Town vision is realised. The delivery of critical infrastructure for Taunton is essential to:

- 1. deliver the new sustainable lifetime neighbourhoods envisaged**
- 2. enable developers to focus on delivery**
- 3. maintain community support and provide the wider benefits for current and future Taunton residents and the sub-region.**

The ambitious level of growth exceeds current Government household projections for Taunton Deane and the presence of a wide range of developers demonstrates the strength of the Taunton Deane housing market. However, developing at such a scale and sustaining current delivery rates, presents significant challenges, not least in relation to provision of essential infrastructure requirements, to serve the new communities, but also the wider strategic infrastructure projects and regeneration required for Taunton to maintain the valued quality of life.



Delivery enabling funding and support for 2016/2017

Taunton Deane has a small dedicated delivery team working on the new community at Monkton Heathfield. Additional capacity funding could enable the existing skills in this team to be retained and expanded into a wider implementation team to deliver the wider Garden Town vision. Additional capacity/ expertise may be required to assist with the following areas:

Consultancy Input/Staff Resource

Garden Town Delivery Team:

Approximate cost 2016/17

£75,000-80,000

Further details

Employ temporary staff resource to free up internal staff time, to progress work on Garden Town programme.

Internal programme management training for key members of staff.

Appropriate programme management skills will be essential for driving forward the wider Garden Town vision and the key infrastructure projects. This training could be a shared training programme between the allocated Garden Town/ Community locations.

Expert advice on and assistance with legal, acquisition and land assembly issues

Approximate cost 2016/17

£60,000-75,000

Further details

Commission consultants/expert advice to assist the Council with legal, acquisition and land assembly issues, that arise as part of delivering the wider Garden Town vision and major regeneration sites.

Master planning and viability assessment of potential development sites close to Taunton train station

Approximate cost 2016/17

£40,000-50,000

Further details

More detailed assessment of the development potential around the train station, is necessary to assess the commercial and residential capacity of these sites, which are owned by TDBC and Network Rail.

Master planning input for the new garden communities and town centre regeneration sites

Approximate cost 2016/17

£90,000-100,000

Further details

Commission expert support to provide master planning input and develop design codes for the new garden communities.

Commission expert support to provide master planning input for the town centre regeneration sites.





River Tone Strategy

(linking with the Green Infrastructure Strategy)

Approximate cost 2016/17

£30,000-40,000

Further details

The river plays a fundamental role at the heart of the town, linking all the major regeneration sites. The river presents a significant opportunity to offer an enhanced leisure resource, with improved linkages and connections, cultural events, habitat improvement, water management and potential for renewable energy generation.

Revised Green Infrastructure Strategy

Incorporating Sustainable Urban Drainage Strategy, Ecological Strategy and Sport and Recreation Strategy

Approximate cost 2016/17

£60,000-80,000

Further details

Commission consultants to undertake a review of the Green Infrastructure Strategy, in partnership with the Local Nature Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board, to inform the wider Taunton Infrastructure Delivery Strategy/Implementation Plan.

Strategic Transport Delivery Strategy

incorporating a Public Realm Strategy

Approximate cost 2016/17

£80,000-100,000

Further details

Commission consultants to update current transport strategy for Taunton, to inform the wider Taunton Infrastructure Delivery Strategy/Implementation Plan. This needs to consider Taunton's movement systems, streets, spaces and riverscape. The strategy would reinforce linkages both within the town centre and the urban extensions, working in conjunction with master plans and codes and the updated Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Update the economic projections and review employment land requirements

Approximate cost 2016/17

£40,000-50,000

Further details

Review employment land requirements, in conjunction with updating economic growth projections and need, in line with Taunton Growth Prospectus.

Total 2016/2017

£475,000-575,000



Delivery enabling support for 2017/18 and 2018/19

Consultancy Input/Staff Resource

Garden Town Delivery Team will need to incorporate appropriate project management skills and expertise in the following key areas: transport, urban design, regeneration, green infrastructure, economic development, infrastructure delivery and community engagement.

Approximate cost 2017/18 **£500,000-550,000**

Approximate cost 2018/19 **£500,000-550,000**

Further details: Taunton Deane has a small dedicated delivery team, working on the new community at Monkton Heathfield. Additional capacity funding could enable the existing skills in this team to be retained and expanded into a wider implementation team, to deliver the Garden Town programme.

Additional staff resource, to progress key Green Infrastructure projects in partnership with the Local Nature Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Infrastructure planning and implementation, to ensure identified key infrastructure projects are progressed and delivered.

Additional highways and transport planning expertise, to ensure sympathetic and sustainable transport infrastructure design is integrated and delivered, within the proposed new communities.

Community engagement will be critical to maximise opportunities from social capital.

Infrastructure Delivery Strategy/Implementation Plan

Approximate cost 2017/18 **£60,000-80,000**

Further details: Commission consultants to undertake updated and more detailed master planning work, to inform a detailed implementation/delivery plan for the wider Taunton area. The implementation plan will inform the alignment of infrastructure funding streams, for the delivery of required sustainable transport solutions, green infrastructure projects and key strategic infrastructure projects for the Garden Town vision. Work on updating the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Strategic Transport Study would inform this study.

Assistance: with integration and delivery of a range of employment opportunities and start up units along with community/retail/leisure facilities to ensure self-containment levels are established in the early stages of development

Further details: This could be a shared learning resource between the Garden Towns and Villages and therefore does not identify a specific budget cost.

Capacity and expertise: in the integration of renewable energy generation into the new garden communities

Further details: This could be a shared learning resource between the Garden Towns and Villages and therefore does not identify a specific budget cost.

Assistance: with delivering town centre sites and High Street pedestrianisation

Further details: Capacity support and/or shared learning from other Garden town areas to assist with exploring appropriate finance mechanisms and public/private partnership models to assist with the delivery of the town centre regeneration sites and High Street pedestrianisation.

This could be a shared learning resource between the Garden Towns and Villages and therefore does not identify a specific budget cost

Total 2017/2018

£560,000-£630,000

Total 2018/2019

£500,000-550,000



Brokerage

The Garden Town proposals for Taunton would be seeking further assistance from Government on the following areas:

- *Government's continued funding commitment for the Junction 25 improvements and linkages with the proposed A358/A303 improvements.*
- *Funding for a range of sustainable transport measures, including a bus priority and kerbside infrastructure, re-opening Wellington railway station and cycle infrastructure measures in and around Taunton town centre and links between the town centre, the new garden communities and existing communities.*
- *Commitment of funds from the successful Growth Deal projects being promoted by the Heart of SW LEP for Taunton.*
- *Assistance with accessing DfE Free Schools Programme funding, to ensure the provision of essential educational facilities early in the development of the new garden communities and the longer term requirement for a new secondary school.*
- *Assistance with accessing DoH/NHS England funding to ensure required health facilities/improvements and links with supported housing schemes are delivered in line with the development of new garden communities.*
- *The Heart of SW Devolution deal seeks devolution of five year place based population budgets for health, care and public health. Taunton Deane is working closely with the LEP on the Devolution deal. The Garden Town vision seeks to ensure a greater emphasis on public health and the link between health and housing.*

It also seeks to address the wider health and social care needs arising from the ageing population. Greater influence of the allocation of health funding streams will assist in realising this ambition.

Access to government housing funding streams

- *Taunton Deane has a strong record of affordable housing delivery and continues to be a focus of housing development. The Council's housing association partners are actively developing within the Borough and remain committed to delivering schemes through various Homes and Communities Agency grant funding programmes. Work is underway to submit bids for the 2016-2021 affordable home ownership programme.*
- *The Council has delivered a broad range of tenure options and supported housing schemes in recent years and has also embraced the opportunity of self-financing, developing its own council housing through a dedicated Development team.*
- *Working closely with the HCA, the Council has submitted a number of sites for the current Starter Homes Fund bidding round as part of the Hinkley Housing Impact Zone, many of which are on publicly owned brownfield sites.*

Favourable access to relevant housing funding streams, will ensure the continued delivery of a broad range of affordable housing, to meet current and future housing needs in Taunton.



Financial Flexibilities

- *Taunton Deane responded to the recent NHB consultation proposals and raised concerns regarding the impact on future infrastructure delivery for Taunton Deane. The Council has committed significant sums of future NHB funds towards delivering critical infrastructure projects. However recent proposals in the NHB consultation, threaten to undermine this commitment. TDBC requests that the Government reconsider the particular proposal to reduce the 6 year payments and instead consider supplementary NHB payments for Taunton Deane, if successful in gaining Garden Town status.*

Further discussions could explore how this funding may be committed to ensuring growth related staff resource and infrastructure funding, is committed in the future. This financial flexibility would maintain a direct link between funding and performance delivery, between the nominated Garden Town areas. Increasing NHB payment years for Garden Towns, would also demonstrate to the wider Taunton community, the Government's commitment to delivering growth related infrastructure.

- *Assistance with establishing a Revolving Infrastructure Fund, with upfront funding available to forward fund critical infrastructure projects, that can be recouped against future CIL receipts.*

Planning Freedoms

When large strategic sites are being progressed, there can be a greater risk of speculative residential applications coming forward. The Council's growth ambitions, coupled with any uncertainty surrounding the delivery of critical infrastructure funding, provides an unfair advantage to speculative residential developers who, on this basis, are able to cast doubt on the Council's land supply position. This risk also threatens to undermine positive community engagement in the growth agenda.

Given the Council's significant growth ambitions and commitment to delivering sustainable new communities, the Council request greater certainty that speculative residential planning applications can be resisted with Garden Town status. Particularly if transformational levels of growth are being achieved beyond baseline household projections.

Delivery Vehicles

The Council's regeneration programme is overseen by the Taunton Economic Advisory Board, involving a number of key partners from both the private and public sector. The Monkton Heathfield new community is also supported by a delivery board, involving key partners such as the HCA, Environment Agency, Somerset County and developers.

The Council is establishing a CIL/Infrastructure Delivery Board to consider the infrastructure priorities and the allocation of CIL funds.

If Taunton is successful in gaining Garden Town status, discussions to establish appropriate governance arrangements and delivery vehicles, would need to consider the ongoing discussion on the governance arrangements for the LEP Devolution deal. The Heart of SW LEP Devolution bid, outlines a commitment to undertake a Governance Review for the Combined Authority proposals, to identify the most effective structure and processes for the devolution deal. Taunton Deane is a key partner in these ongoing discussions and will seek to ensure clear links between the Combined Authority governance arrangements and the governance structures for the Taunton Garden Town proposal.



Sources:

Adopted Taunton Deane Core Strategy

<http://consultldf.tauntondeane.gov.uk/portal/corestrat/adoptedcs?pointId=2248409>

Adopted Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan

<http://consultldf.tauntondeane.gov.uk/portal/spatialplanning/ttcaap/ttcaappo?pointId=211109>

Taunton Site Allocations and Development Management Plan

http://tauntondeane.objective.co.uk/portal/sadmppld_sadmp/draft_sadmp_consultation?pointId=2874000

Taunton Deane Infrastructure Delivery Plan

www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/irj/go/km/docs/CouncilDocuments/TDBC/Documents/Forward%20Planning/SADMP%20Evidence%20Base/IDP%20Review%202014.pdf

Adopted Staplegrove Masterplan

<https://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/irj/go/km/docs/CouncilDocuments/TDBC/Documents/Forward%20Planning/SADMP%20Evidence%20Base/CD27%20Staplegrove%20Framework%20Masterplan.pdf>

Taunton Urban Extensions Study

<http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/irj/go/km/docs/CouncilDocuments/TDBC/Documents/Forward%20Planning/Evidence%20Base/Taunton%20Urban%20Extension%20Study%20Terence%20O'Rourke.pdf>

Taunton Sub Area Study

<http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/irj/go/km/docs/CouncilDocuments/TDBC/Documents/Forward%20Planning/Evidence%20Base/Taunton%20Sub%20Area%20Study.pdf>

Taunton Urban Extensions Masterplan

<http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/irj/go/km/docs/CouncilDocuments/TDBC/Documents/Forward%20Planning/Evidence%20Base/Taunton%20Urban%20Extension%20Masterplan.pdf>

Taunton Deane Green Infrastructure Strategy

<http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/irj/go/km/docs/CouncilDocuments/TDBC/Documents/Forward%20Planning/GIReport/TauntonGIReport.pdf>

Taunton Rethink

<http://www.taunton.uk.com/MyFiles/Files/Taunton%20Rethink.pdf>



