

Community Scrutiny Committee – 27 April 2017

Present: Councillor Coles (Chairman)
Councillor Ms Lisgo (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Blatchford, Cavill, Davies, Mrs Floyd, Gage, Gunner, R Lees, Mrs Prior-Sankey, Ryan, Townsend and Watson.

Officers: Nick Bryant (Planning Policy Manager) Richard Burge (Open Spaces Manager – Deane DLO), Marcus Prouse (Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny).

Also present: Councillors Berry, Habgood, Morrell and Mrs Warmington.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm).

15. Apologies/Substitution

Apologies were received by Councillors Martin-Scott and Mrs Webber.

Substitutions: Councillor Cavill for Councillor Martin-Scott.
Councillor Gunner for Councillor Mrs Webber.

16. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 7 March 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed.

17. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Coles declared personal interests Member of Somerset County Council and Member of Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service. Councillor Ms Lisgo declared personal interests as a Trustee of North Taunton Partnership and as a user of GLL's Feelgood Factory. Councillor Gage declared a personal interest as a Member of the Board for GLL. Councillor Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as a member of St James Church, a Member of Somerset County Council, a member of the 'Home Stop' Scheme at Taunton Association for the Homeless and as her spouse was a user of the CCTV Service. Councillor Townsend declared a personal interest as his business was located in Coal Orchard. Councillor Watson declared a personal interest as a Member of Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council.

18. Report on Dog Waste Bins.

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Dog Waste Bins.

A report on Dog Bins was requested be brought to Community Scrutiny with support from Cllr Coles. The information requested included the number of bins in operation and their locations, the costs of purchasing and maintaining them, the frequency and cost of emptying and which organisations fund them.

The DLO's Parks & Open Spaces department was responsible for the installation

and emptying of Dog Bins. The budget for this service is held by the Environmental Health Department who act as the Client.

Some internal departments and external organisations had decided to supplement the provision of Dog Waste Bins in their areas of responsibility and privately fund the purchase, installation and collection of additional bins.

Across the borough a total of 235 Public Use Dog Waste Bins were in operation. From 1st April 2017 'Internal' bins emptied on behalf of the Council were scheduled to be emptied three times per fortnight, additional 'External' bins were emptied twice per week.

Owner	Number of Bins	Number of Collections
Internal		
Environmental Health	170	13260
TDBC OS	5	390
HOUSING	3	234
Heritage & Landscape	2	156
Community Development	1	78
External		
Parish	45	4368
Somerset County Council	8	832
National Trust	1	104

The following table set out how many bins are in each area, their locations and ownership. A summary of locations was set out as below:-

Area	TDBC Bins	Additional Bins
BISHOPS HULL	10	11
BISHOPS LYDEARD	2	2
BLACKDOWN	1	2
BRADFORD ON TONE	2	0
CHEDDON FITZPAINE	0	1
COMEYTROWE	7	0
COTFORD ST LUKE	6	3
KINGSTON ST MARY	0	1
LANGFORD BUDVILLE	0	2
MILVERTON	1	3
MONUMENT	1	4
NEROCHE	1	0
NORTH CURRY AND STOKE ST GREGORY	1	3
NORTON FITZWARREN	10	2
RUISHTON AND CREECH	6	4
STAPLEGROVE	7	0
TAUNTON BLACKBROOK AND HOLWAY	12	0

TAUNTON EASTGATE	7	1
TAUNTON FAIRWATER	10	0
TAUNTON HALCON	12	3
TAUNTON KILLAMS AND MOUNTFIELD	5	0
TAUNTON LYNCFORD	10	2
TAUNTON MANOR AND WILTON	16	1
TAUNTON PYRLAND AND ROWBARTON	9	0
TRULL	0	3
WELLINGTON EAST	5	2
WELLINGTON NORTH	3	3
WELLINGTON ROCKWELL GREEN AND WEST	13	4
WEST MONKTON	11	6
WIVELISCOMBE AND WEST DEANE	3	1

The costs were set out in the report as follows:-

TDBC Funded Bins: 171

Supply & Installation of Bin: £345

Emptying of bins: £2.85 per visit

This is a cost only charge based on the time taken by the Open Spaces Team.

Privately Funded Bins: 64

Supply & Installation of Bin: £345

Emptying of bins: £2.85 per visit

The charge had not been increased at a rate to match cost and resulted in an under recovery of £832 per year. This has been corrected and all private customers currently paying for this service have been written to advising them of the increase to £2.85 per visit.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements and asked questions which included:-

- The costs of dog bins was established at around £350 per bin with it costing £1000 pounds a year to empty a bin. The needs of areas were based on usage and complaints.
- The lifespan of dog bins was determined on usage, these were maintained until unusable.
- A question was raised over the disparity between external bins and TDBC bins – due to need?
- Complaints were common relating to the introduction of three weekly collections of general waste.
- Comment was made that the waste bins across the district were in bad states of repair. It was recognised that the replacement of bins were needed in the district.

- In relation to dog waste it was considered if there was a policy on writing to known offenders and conducting a leaflet drop in specific areas
- It was requested for mapping Software be used to map the locations on the spreadsheet.

Resolved that the report be noted.

19. **Proposed Garden Town Plan for Taunton.**

Considered report previously circulated, which set out the proposed Garden Town Plan for Taunton.

In early 2017 Taunton was designated by Government as one of only nine Garden Towns nationally. This designation 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.

Since 2012, national planning policy had 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.

There were a suite of development plans in Taunton Deane: 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) (the West Somerset LPA area does not include the part of the District lying within the Exmoor National Park).

The Taunton Deane Core Strategy and TTCAAP were 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 could 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.

The Garden Town Plan could 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.

The Report therefore sought 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 had 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.

The Garden Town designation was made on the basis of the Taunton Garden Town Expression of Interest (EoI) document submitted in the summer of 2016. 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 was an expectation that a future award may be available for the year 2017/18 for which the Council had already made a request for funding.

As one of 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 had not been 'ring-fenced' though Officers recognised 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 TTCAAP and Core Strategy were both in need of review. In the case of the Town Centre Plan, some of the policies were no longer relevant or consistent with national policy, whilst some sites had now been built out or 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.

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 would be given a freer hand in determining how they wish to prepare local plans for their area and keep them under review.

The proposed response recognised the need to review two of the Council's development plan documents and the recent Garden Town designation.

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 was the logical priority for Taunton Deane Borough Council through 2017 and beyond.

Work on evidence gathering for subsequent planning policy documents had commenced. A new Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was published towards the end of 2016 while the Planning Policy Team had 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.

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 would need to be made during 2018.

Councils were 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 indicated the timetable for preparation of the local plan(s), critical dependencies, resources and assumptions.

The current LDS for Taunton Deane is out-of-date and would benefit from an update. Officers did not consider that there was any real benefit in refreshing this document now, or indeed until a decision on the new council had been made. There could be no certainty about how and in what form local plans would be prepared across Taunton Deane and West Somerset.

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 would 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.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements and asked questions which included:-

- The basis of the submission was detailed and discussed.
- There had been a change in government policy and Flexibility with how local plans are prepared.
- The plan included further work outside the town.
- Reported that a baseline study was being undertaken alongside a formal public consultation document around Taunton and the Local Development Scheme.
- Delivering the prospectus was recognised as important to achieve funding.
- It was requested that a focus be applied to harder infrastructure in view of the implementation of a new garden town.
- CIL would be subject to less pressure.
- There had been County Council Dialogue in relation to plans.
- The plan was submitted with help from Somerset County Council, there had been a meeting with County Officers and government ministers to set out a long term strategy.
- Members were concerned with the potential of funding not being ring-fenced
- There was no other Garden Town in the South West, the nearest is located in Didcot or Basingstoke.
- A detailed transport Strategy was requested from members.
- Learning from the successes of other garden towns was key, it was recognised that a detailed transport plan would be needed.
- An officer forum for learning from each of the Garden Towns that have been named was suggested.
- A focus would be on delivering high quality green and open spaces. Part of the answer would be the recruitment of a Green Infrastructure officer.

Resolved that:-

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) noted 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.

20. Proposed Response to the Housing White Paper

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Proposed Response to the Housing White Paper

The report set out a summary of the proposed changes to Planning and to a lesser extent Housing policy expressed through the recently published Housing White Paper. It had been put together with contributions drawn from Strategy, Enabling and Planning Officers, all of whom had contributed towards the proposed consultation response.

The White Paper emphasised the importance of the Plan-led system as the basis against which decisions about where and how much housing can be permitted. Measures are proposed which should help to streamline the process of plan-making to make it quicker (including a standardised methodology to calculating housing requirements) and greater flexibilities are proposed about how plans are prepared.

There was a strong emphasis on delivery with greater sanctions potentially applied to local authorities that fail to meet housing targets (despite the fact that generally it will not be the local authority constructing new houses). There are some measures that may encourage housebuilders to build more quickly and Councils could take into account likely build out rates and phasing as well as a developer's previous 'track record' of delivery in determining whether to grant planning permission or not.

A stronger role for small and medium-sized housebuilders was recognised. The Government was also keen to accelerate the delivery of housing through improved construction techniques. A further key measure is that 10% of affordable housing is proposed for affordable home ownership.

The Council's proposed response was to focus upon those areas in which officers perceive the Council would be most affected. This would then be signed off by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation and submitted ahead of the consultation deadline of 2 May.

The Government published its Housing White Paper in early February 2017 set out in Appendix A. The paper set out a number of key measures which were designed to ensure that housebuilding was boosted significantly nationally. The document was structured into four parts, namely:

- Planning for the right homes in the right places;
- Building homes faster;
- Diversifying the market; and
- Helping people now

The report was set out in two sections, section one sets out the key proposed measures against the four parts outlined above with some commentary on possible implications for Taunton Deane Borough Council while section two sets out a proposed consultation response to the questions raised in the White Paper itself. Officers from Enabling, Strategy and Planning Policy have helped put together the summary of proposals, officer comments and proposed response (set out in Appendix B).

The White Paper confirmed the Government will intervene to ensure plans are put in-place, regulations would clarify a requirement for local plans to be reviewed at least every five years. A standardised approach to dealing with the duty-to-cooperate (the way local planning authorities are expected to engage with one another on cross-border strategic issues like housing) is also proposed.

Recent Government thinking had been that Local Planning Authorities should prepare a singular Local Plan and this is emphasised by the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework). The White Paper recognised the importance of flexible and responsive plans.

A standardised methodology for assessing housing requirements was proposed. This followed an earlier study by a Government-appointed 'Local Plans Expert Group'. A consultation on this methodology was expected. Where plans are considered out-of-date it is proposed this standardised methodology would be used to form the baseline of five year housing land supply requirements.

Taunton Deane had a very strong track record of development plan delivery. It had adopted three development plans in the last decade as well as introducing the Community Infrastructure Levy. That development plan preparation continued to be prioritised and this will include a review of strategic policies set out in the Core Strategy which was adopted nearly five years ago (September 2012).

Reference to a more flexible approach to plan preparation is a positive change because it will enable the Council to consider whether it wishes to consolidate all its development plans together (the current Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan, Core Strategy and Site Allocations and Development Management Plan). Officers suggest fast-tracking a Garden Town Plan for Taunton in response to this change of Government direction.

Amendments to The Framework were proposed, these would include a strong underlying commitment to meeting housing needs in full unless other Framework policies provide strong reasons for doing otherwise. A greater emphasis on the use

of brownfield land within settlements is proposed with a presumption that such land is suitable for housing unless there are clear and specific reasons to the contrary.

The Government had previously stated an ambition to see surplus public land released for housing with an estimated capacity of circa 160,000 new homes. Beyond this it is proposed that authorities could dispose of land with planning permission they have granted themselves. Flexibilities to dispose of land at less than best consideration are also proposed. There is also support for estate regeneration with LPAs encouraged to consider the social and economic benefits; using their planning powers to help deliver regeneration to a high standard.

The White Paper sought to reinforce the provision of small and medium-sized housing sites. This would be achieved through changes to The Framework that would require LPAs to include policies on small windfalls and to attach 'great weight' to using small undeveloped sites within settlements. Other measures related to this aim included providing stronger support for affordable housing for local people, a requirement for at least 10% of sites allocated in local plans to be less than 0.5ha and encourage developers to sub-divide large sites. The use of LDOs to bring forward small sites is also encouraged.

Amendments to Neighbourhood Planning would see Neighbourhood Plan Groups being able to request a housing requirement figure from the LPA while further funding will be available to NPGs over the period 2018-2020. There is a much stronger commitment to good design with policies in Local and Neighbourhood Plans setting out clear expectations and the use of widely accepted standards such as Building for Life.

Building standards could be simplified and rationalised and Government would consult on higher environmental standards if evidence suggests such standards can be met without making homes less affordable for those who want to buy their own home.

There is a stronger commitment to building at higher densities, particularly around urban locations such as public transport hubs, this would be achieved through changes to The Framework. Minimum space standards would be revisited.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements and asked questions which included:-

- Presentation was given by Nick Bryant, colleagues responses, some from strategy some from enabling housing enabling were set out following the publishing of The Housing White Paper in February
- Reform of the Planning system was welcomed, if there was a strong basis on delivery, the white paper set out that Local Authorities would be held to account on delivery. Taunton Deane Borough Council held a good record of completion
- Some measures tailored toward House Builders and developers such as Land Banking issues and planning the right homes for the right places.
- The Government were reinforcing importance of the planning led system. There was flexibility with local plans

- Proposing a standard in calculating housing regulation was considered in principle a good idea
- Some minimum Space Standards change had been adopted in SADMP.
- An increase in planning fee's, considering the increase in housing development was discussed.
- Addressing building regulations and the Infrastructure needed in view of a potential future garden town developments were considered, along with digital infrastructure.
- The density across the developments were discussed, efficient use of land was a primary factor.
- Understanding the principles of housing need was key in achieving the right development mixes in the right places.
- Trying to create a one size fits all policy would need a set of principles to be agreed. Local Authorities could tailor things to suit individual areas and requirements.
- Travellers sites were addressed in separate Planning Policy as a separate requirement under the Housing Act
- The aim was to encourage house builders in bringing forward planning permission for sites.
- Local Development allowed for certain flexibility, it was not prescriptive.
- Private Sector Housing was discussed along with what could be done to challenge agents fees and rent.
- Members expressed concerns over Developers offering new Houses with leases of which have a large increase in costs once the house is purchased.
- Further concerns were expressed over the height of the Quantock House development.
- It was questioned if there were any plans to encourage self-build.
- Analysis on the rate of affordable housing policy was discussed. A target of 200 units per year had been met.
- The Planning Policy Department were commended as being one of top 3 in Country.

Resolved that:-

The Community Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of this Report and endorses the proposed consultation response enclosed at Appendix B.

21. Community Scrutiny Forward Plan

Submitted for information the proposed Forward Plan of the Community Scrutiny Committee.

During the discussion of this item, Members requested that the following be added onto the Forward Plan:-

Requests were made for reports to be considered at future Community Scrutiny Committees relating to housing stock works, a broadband update, along with a report

on the signage on skate parks in the district and an Unparished Area Fund quarterly meeting and spend recommendation against the CIL budget.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

(The meeting ended at 8.50 p.m.)