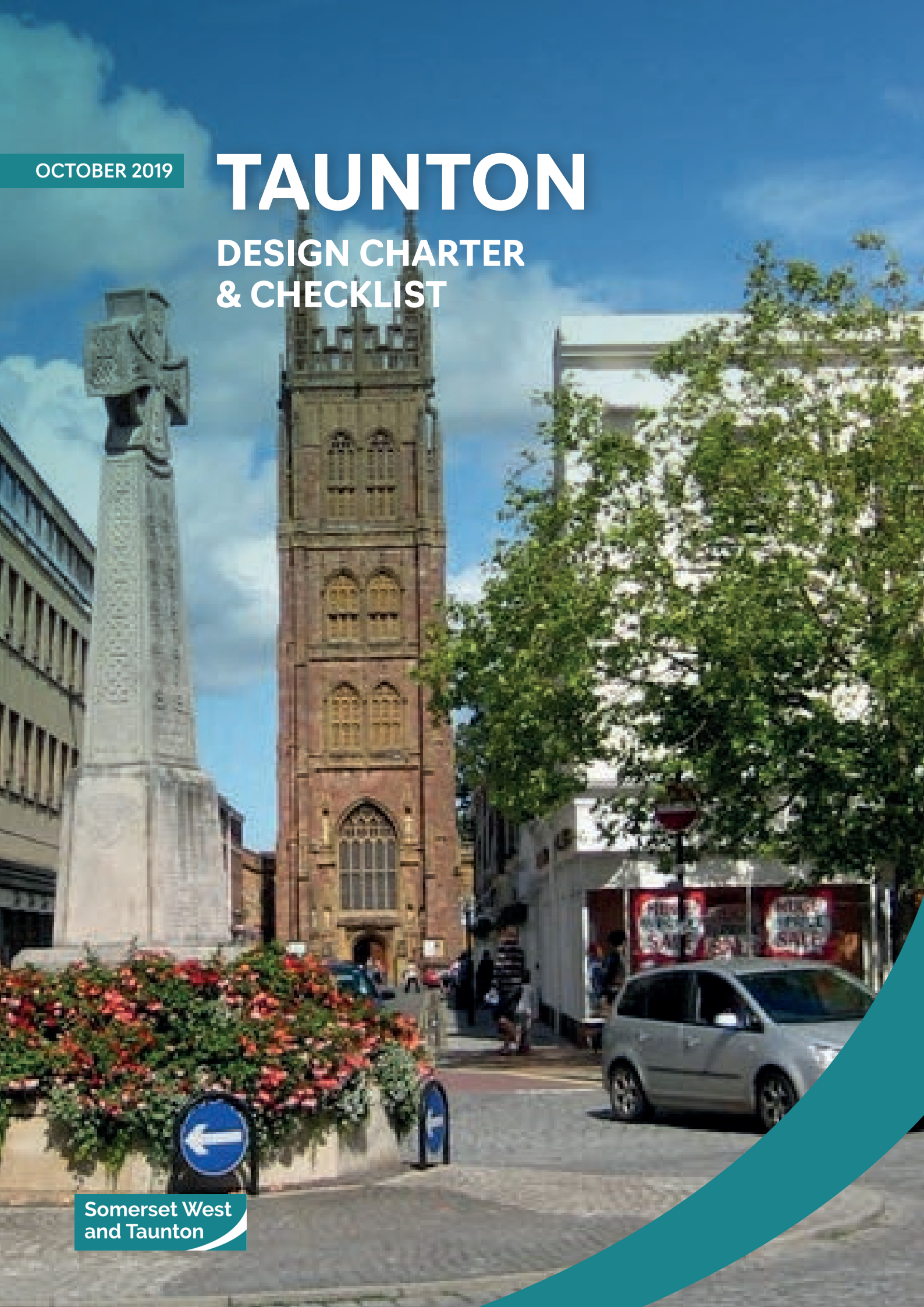


OCTOBER 2019

# TAUNTON

## DESIGN CHARTER & CHECKLIST



Somerset West  
and Taunton



# Background

Somerset West and Taunton takes good design seriously. It welcomes the stronger emphasis provided to design through revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraphs 125 and 126 of the NPPF state that:

***“Plans should, at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable.”***

***“To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, plans or supplementary planning documents should use visual tools such as design guides and codes. These provide a framework for creating distinctive places, with a consistent and high quality standard of design.”***

It continues:

***“...their level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances in each place.”***

Authorities should consider:

- Making use of tools for review like Design Panels; and,
- Assessment tools like BfL

The involvement of the local community is also highlighted:

***“Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.”***

The guidance also encourages the highest quality design, noting:

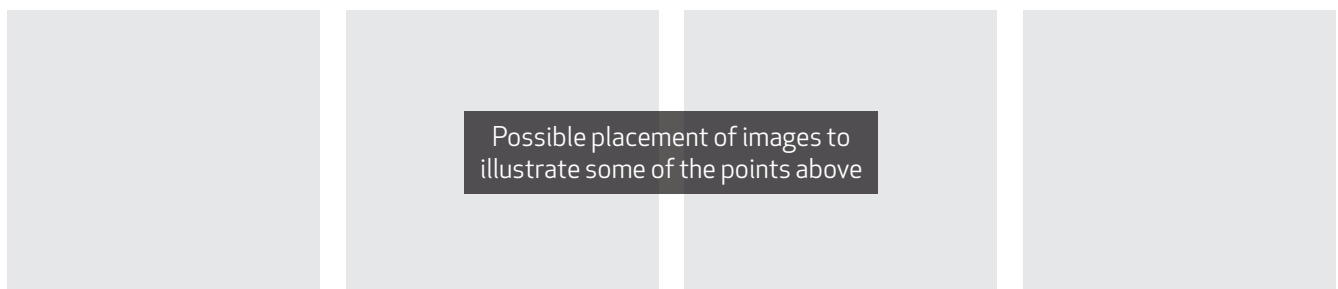
***“...great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.”***

The new National Design Guidance (published October 2019) now usefully expands on all aspects of good practice and sets out a common framework to which all projects must respond.

At a local level and specifically through the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP) a suite of design policies have been adopted. Specifically Policy D7 Design quality of the SADMP states:

**New housing and commercial developments shall create a high standard of design quality and sense of place by:**

1. *Creating places with locally inspired or otherwise distinctive characteristics and materials;*
2. *Reflecting the site and its context, including existing topography, landscape features and the historic environment;*
3. *Integrating into their surroundings through the reinforcement of existing connections and the creation of new ones, and creating legible, connected street networks; and*
4. *Ensuring that buildings define and enhance the streets and spaces, and that buildings turn street corners well.*



Possible placement of images to illustrate some of the points above

### Image Caption

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In early 2017 Taunton was designated as a Garden Town. This designation reflects not just the Council's commitment to transformational levels of growth but also to strive for a higher standard of new development.

The Taunton Garden Town Vision was adopted in July 2019, our Vision is:

***“Taunton, the County Town of Somerset, will be flourishing, distinctive, and healthy – and the country’s benchmark Garden Town. We will be proud to live and work in a place where the outstanding natural environment, diverse and thriving economy and inspiring cultural offer, contribute to an exceptional quality of life and well-being.”***

Four themes have been identified against which the Garden Town activity will be structured:

1. *Grow our town greener – transforming our open spaces and streets;*
2. *Branching out – moving cleaner, moving smarter;*
3. *Growing quality green places to live – town centre, new and existing neighbourhoods; and*
4. *New shoots and blossom – a dynamic and prosperous community founded on knowledge, culture and business*

Our Garden Town status and the commitment made through the Garden Town Vision places quality design at its heart but the Vision itself is necessarily high level. It needs to be complemented by a suite of more detailed plans, policies, guidance that will ensure we deliver against our aspirations.

Our Council became one of the first in the country to declare a ‘climate emergency’ in March of this year, setting itself the ambitious target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. This ambition has now been articulated as the number one priority within the Council’s new Corporate Strategy. We expect new development to take account of the need to plan positively for a carbon neutral future.

**“...provide a framework for creating distinctive places, with a consistent and high quality standard of design.”**



## Purpose of the Charter & Checklist

The purpose of the Taunton Garden Town Design Charter and Checklist is twofold. This document sets the Council's expectations in terms of design of key sites within the Garden Town and also provides a framework against which prospective developers, communities and the Council as planning authority can assess relevant planning applications.

Much of the large scale new development planned for Taunton Garden Town benefits from Outline Planning Permission. Reserved Matters applications will be expected to comply with those outline consents, but we want to use the Charter and Checklist to further influence the thinking of developers and housebuilders in the evolution of the detail design of their proposals.

The Charter and Checklist will be incorporated within and endorsed by the wider Somerset West and Taunton District Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Further, as part of the Local Plan review, we will consider how good design can be fully incorporated into the statutory development plan and consequently carry the fullest weight within the planning decision-making process.

Guidance published by the Town and Country Planning Association sets out a Garden City 'Design Ethic':

***"The original Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn have strong design associations, from tree-lined streets to Arts and Crafts architecture, and this is an important factor in their enduring popularity. However, these visual associations almost obscure a deeper philosophy rooted in the pursuit of beauty – embracing everything from co-operative working to connection with the natural world."***

***"New Garden Cities are unlikely to look like Letchworth or Welwyn, but applying the design ethic behind these places is essential to realising the Garden City principles today. The philosophy that should underpin the design approach to new Garden Cities can be considered under five key themes:***

- ***innovation and imagination;***
- ***marrying town and country;***
- ***co-operation in design and place-making;***
- ***character, distinctiveness and harmony; and***
- ***room to breathe."***

The Charter and Checklist sets out how the Council expects that this ethic can be interpreted and embraced in order to realise the Taunton Garden Town Vision. It identifies good design process and then some specific design outcomes that should provide particular character and quality to the neighbourhoods of the Garden Town. These espouse and extend the fundamental principles of 'good design' that must underpin all new development, which have usefully been articulated in the Government's new National Design Guidance (NDG).

The Charter and Checklist will therefore encompass and add to the policy and guidance that is already in place to ensure developers and those looking to deliver inward investment are influenced by consistent and clear advice.



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separate the sections



# Design Charter – What We Expect

**Achieving excellent outcomes in completed projects relies heavily on all parties adopting a good process and working collaboratively. Adherence to The Charter will require partners to commit to the following stages:**

## ***Skills and Engagement – Preparing to Succeed***

The design process should be multi-disciplinary, inclusive and draw on all the appropriate professional skills and expertise necessary to deliver high quality results. An integrity needs to be pursued from concept through to detail and if different design personnel and teams contribute at each stage then this can be lost – processes and systems need to be in place to counter this potential leaching away of quality, but ideally those key individuals that lead and direct the design process should remain in charge throughout. A ‘lead consultant’ responsible for coordinating briefs and managing inputs from all disciplines within the design team should be appointed.

Engagement with public and community stakeholders and interest groups should be carefully planned alongside formal consultation and negotiations with the local planning authority. The Garden Town projects will consult with stakeholders at each stage of the planning process, quite possibly over and above statutory requirements.

## ***Context Appraisal***

To build an understanding of the existing place in which the project is located the strengths, weaknesses and existing planning policy within the context surrounding the site should be explored:

- *The setting of the site within the Garden Town and wider landscape. Analysis of its special landscape relationships, water, critical skylines, rooflines and landmarks, with view corridors to these. Approaches to the site (pedestrian, cycle, bus, other vehicles). Walking distance to local facilities and services. Demonstrate early discussions with bus providers, car club and sharing providers, etc.*
- *Appraisal of adjacent/nearby land uses. Assessment of likely change and relationship to the proposals. Condition.*
- *Appraisal of adjacent townscape; grain, scale, heights, spaces and places, built form typologies, age/period, materials/colours/details, vegetation significance. Degree of useful cues. Assessment of response (egs. (a) Deference: setting of Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, other Heritage Assets, assets of community value, etc (b) Positive Intervention: area of decline and/or poor quality or layout, etc).*
- *Appraisal of the nature and significance of nearby landscapes, green and blue spaces, topography and accessibility, habitats/ biodiversity and waterscape, flood risk.*
- *Appraisal of the evolution of the site morphology within its setting; sequence of historic maps. This will indicate previous street and building layout, uses, boundaries, significant names. Possible archaeological interest and contamination risks.*
- *Any culturally significant associations, eg; significant people who lived in the area, literary or artistic associations, locally distinctive place names.*



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 Image Caption/Description

### Site Appraisal

The constraints and opportunities of the site that is being developed should be examined in full detail with supporting surveys:

- *Boundaries and Access/Connectivity. Nature and condition of the boundaries; sensitivities on boundaries (privacy, view). Determine points of vehicular access to the site. Determine 'desire lines' for pedestrian and cycle links to nearest bus stops, facilities, primary/secondary school etc.*
- *Topography and Landscape. Contours on and adjacent to the site; slope analysis as appropriate. Tree survey including height, species, spread, age, condition, (as per standard practice); TPOs; potential for increased planting. Hedgerows; condition, Ecology/biodiversity. Critical gradients. Drainage and percolation characteristics.*
- *Orientation; sun's path; shelter exposure; prospect/aspect.*
- *Existing buildings and structures; these can help to 'anchor' the proposed development to its locality.*
- *Services/utilities crossing the site. Establish the route/s of underground services and related wayleaves. Overhead lines, sub-stations.*

### Development of the Design Concept

Before proceeding to an outline or detailed design stage, an appropriate concept needs to be developed and agreed:

#### The basic questions that the concept should address are;

- *What is the character of the proposed development? (formal/informal, uniform/varied, density range, areas of character, etc). It may be appropriate to divide the site into character areas, each with its distinctive identity.*
- *How does it respond to its context? (contrast/integrated, character of interface, etc)*
- *How does it incorporate the vision and the principles of Taunton Garden Town in a way that demonstrates it to be a step change from conventional approaches to development design? (character and quantity of greenspaces, water-sensitive urban design, green buildings, opportunities to grow food, design prompts for social interaction and cooperation, integration with bus/bike routes to counter dependence on car usage, etc).*
- *What additional strategies and studies will be required to inform the design process in further stages?*



# The Special Characteristics of Garden Town Projects – What We Aim to Achieve

Projects within the Garden Town will comply with the established principles of good architectural, urban and landscape design that should apply to all developments. In addition, there are some measures and particular emphases that will make the Garden Town projects distinct.

These are set out in more detail in the Checklist but, to summarise here, they include:

## **Grow our Town Greener**

- 1. We expect green infrastructure to be fully-integrated into the design of new residential developments, whilst re-establishing connections to our landscape, and connecting up our green corridors and watersides**

**WHY?** This is in order to promote health and well-being; biodiversity; improved air quality; urban cooling; opportunities for cultivation and communal food production. To provide a joined-up network, easily accessible and convenient to use, a pleasure to look at and experience – to promote physical activity, play and social interaction, fostering healthy and communal lifestyles.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- *The use of street trees and hedges*
- *Recreational walking and cycling routes*
- *Pocket parks and community orchards*
- *Swales and rain gardens,*
- *Micro-allotments*
- *Green walls and roofs*

- 2. Improve our water and air management and habitat creation.**

**WHY?** To minimise flooding, facilitate irrigation, naturally filter and improve water and air quality, and promote a diverse range of habitats resilient to flooding and climate change and rich in biodiversity.

Potential design responses for each neighbourhood, its streets, parks and buildings should consider how surface water can be managed intelligently and in combination with techniques that enhance the environment, for example:

- *Wetlands,*
- *Rain gardens*
- *Withy-beds in our green spaces*
- *Permeable hard surfaces*
- *Restoring and enhancing neglected green spaces*
- *Urban trees and structural planting*

- 3. Significantly reduce energy consumption and harness individual and site-wide renewable or low-carbon energy solutions, whilst promoting the use of recycled and locally sourced materials**

**WHY?** The Climate Emergency requires new development to aim to be zero-carbon and energy-positive.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- *Passive design solutions for individual buildings (shading, natural lighting, heating/cooling)*
- *Solar masterplanning, providing good orientation for roof-mounted solar PV collectors and passive management of micro-climates through urban tree planting and permeable layouts*
- *Fabric first approach to energy conservation*
- *Passiv-haus techniques*
- *Neighbourhood renewable energy and combined heat and power / energy centre solutions*
- *Low carbon heat networks for larger/denser projects*
- *Private wire renewable energy distribution*
- *Self-sufficiency in water for irrigation and gardening*
- *Off-site construction techniques that maximise efficiency / minimise waste*
- *Specification of materials which have low embodied energy*



## Branching Out

### 1. We expect that the design and layout of the neighbourhoods of the Garden Town will promote sustainable and active modes of travel over all others

**WHY?** Transportation by private vehicles increases congestion and reduces air quality, whilst movement by walking, cycling and public transport has benefits for the health and well-being of individuals and for the vitality of the wider urban environment.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- Street layouts and cross-sections that prioritise comfortable and convenient movement for pedestrians, cyclists and buses
- Highway designs that recognise the place value of good streets alongside their movement functions
- Safe walking routes to school as part of the urban layout
- Direct and swift cycle routes for commuters to key centres of employment and the town centre
- Urban form and typologies that concentrate dwellings and populations along public transport corridors and in the vicinity of stops
- Convenient, distinctive and attractive shelters provided for those using public transport

### 2. Provisions to facilitate the use of cycles and electric vehicles will be exemplary

**WHY?** Movement for regular journeys that are beyond comfortable walking distance by low-emission transport modes need to be encouraged.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- Secure and convenient cycle storage in a location accessible from the front of dwellings
- Electric charging points provided for each parking space
- Generous cycle parking at local centres, schools and other key destinations
- Charging infrastructure for public parking at the key destinations within the neighbourhoods

### 3. Town 'Gateways' will be upgraded with greenery

**WHY?** First impressions of the Garden Town are important and should be positive and memorable.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- Distinctive landscape design
- The use of innovative lighting and public art to further enhance the identity of arrival places
- Coordination and de-cluttering of signage

## Growing Quality Green Places to Live

### 1. The Town Centre will be made more attractive and accessible

**WHY?** The Town Centre is the 'heart' of Taunton and should be an excellent urban environment with a high-quality public realm which is inclusive and welcoming to residents and visitors, in order to engender civic pride and encourage inward investment.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- Implementation of the Public Spaces project in accordance with the public realm design guide, including the introduction of new urban street trees / planting
- Prioritisation of access for only those vehicles that must enter for essential needs
- Removal of 'blockages' that impede cycling and accessible pedestrian routes into and within the Town Centre

### 2. Vitality and Diversification of the Town Centre will be encouraged

**WHY?** The Town Centre needs to respond to current trends, challenges and opportunities in the retail, commercial and leisure sectors

Examples of potential design responses include:

- Developments that encourage flexibility and can promote a greater mix of uses, including residential accommodation / small commercial workspaces
- Major regeneration sites designed to be mutually supportive of the existing uses and enhance the evening economy
- Sensitive and creative re-use of historic buildings to capitalise on their contribution to the identity and character of the Town Centre
- New buildings that are of the highest quality and that bring a considered contemporary and distinctive contribution to the townscape.
- Proposals for temporary and meanwhile/pop-up uses where voids and vacant sites persist

### **3. New Garden Neighbourhoods will be created that are well-designed places with a clear identity**

**WHY?** The new neighbourhoods should respond to the local character of the area and also embrace the 'design ethic' of the Garden City movement.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- *A distinctive local identity that is a sympathetic response to the landscape setting and character of the context*
- *A legible layout that has strong townscape qualities utilising key building groupings, landmark and focal buildings and well-composed street elevations*
- *Creation of a mixed-use 'walkable neighbourhood' providing essential facilities and open spaces*
- *A mix of dwelling types and tenures for all stages of life / type of household*
- *A clear compositional approach with the adoption of good proportions that might achieve a harmonious and cohesive architectural language*
- *Modest decorative effect and pattern-making by allowing constructional detail to add interest, texture and richness to the architectural aesthetic*

### **4. New Garden Neighbourhoods should be designed to promote community cohesion and resilience**

**WHY?** The Garden City ethos promoted social interaction and cooperation alongside closeness to nature and engagement with cultivation. The well-being and happiness of residents is an important pre-requisite in facilitating the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles and choices.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- *Adaptable dwellings that are robust enough to provide a 'lifetime home' or accommodate a good place within to 'work from home'.*
- *Legacy and stewardship arrangements for active participation of the community in managing shared community assets, infrastructure and spaces.*
- *Generously-sized windows and doors in dwellings that are welcoming - having a human scale, with porches, thresholds and opportunities for informal seating providing 'prompts' for residents to occupy and colonise space near to the entrance of dwellings.*
- *Opportunities for micro-allotments, door-step play and public art within the public realm creating a stimulating inter-generational environment.*

### **5. Rejuvenated Neighbourhoods should be carefully planned with the close cooperation of existing residents to improve the efficiency, amenity and character of their place**

**WHY?** The thorough and effective involvement with the people that live in a neighbourhood is essential if all the opportunities are to be identified and seized.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- *More efficient use of brownfield land to provide more housing and create better streets and spaces.*
- *Improvements to the energy performance of the dwellings.*
- *Provision of new open space and planting (including street trees).*
- *Improved mix of dwelling types and tenures.*
- *Improved legibility and better public realm making it easier and more attractive to walk and cycle.*
- *Enlightened parking strategy with good integration of the vehicles within the streetscene.*

## **New Shoots & Blossom**

### **1. Development should help to facilitate a new dynamism and prosperity that draws on and supports the knowledge, culture and business communities of Taunton**

**WHY?** Creativity and enterprise can bring innovation and resilience to both new and regenerated neighbourhoods and the general quality of life is strongly linked to the economic performance of the wider town.

Examples of potential design responses include:

- *A good range of flexible employment space including incubation, innovation and 'grow on' accommodation / types.*
- *Superfast Fibre-optic broadband infrastructure designed in from the outset.*
- *Engagement of the creative sector in influencing and shaping the built environment and public realm.*
- *Flexible ground floor spaces in residential premises adjacent to new local centres that could potentially be used for commercial or retail use in the future.*



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images to illustrate points above



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# Design Checklist – How We Will Measure Success

**The Checklist is in the form of a series of four spreadsheets that can be actively used by all parties in pre-application negotiations or, indeed, in later stages of the development process through to the post-completion auditing of final built quality.**

In order to make the measurement process efficient and effective, the content of the Building for Life 12 framework will be enhanced in scope to include a new section which covers the ‘Climate + Planet Positive’ topics. And then, the familiar assessment methodology of BfL 12 will be adopted throughout the Checklist - whereby, a ‘traffic light’ system of red, amber or green scoring is applied to each measure:

- *Green shows the design of the scheme has responded positively to the question.*
- *Red elements identify aspects of proposals that need to be changed and where the scheme design at the time of assessment fails to respond to the question positively.*
- *Amber is used where there is clear evidence of local constraints on the scheme beyond the control of the design team that prevent it from achieving a green.*

The ambition should be to achieve ‘green’ against as many of the questions as possible. Adherence to the Charter compels all parties to work towards avoiding ‘red’ scores and to constructively and creatively explore modifications to the proposals in order to convert ‘amber’ into ‘green’ scores wherever this is feasible.

In making an assessment then the requirements of each question in relation to national and local policy and guidance will be taken into account in addition to the specific interpretations which are prompted by the Garden Town design ethic as set out in the Checklist.

(A blank Checklist is appended as a separate document and/or available for download at - <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/garden-town/>)



## Garden Town Charter-mark – What You Can Expect From Us

**A Garden Town ‘Charter-mark Award’ will celebrate and reward those developers that are performing well against the Checklist.**



TAUNTON GARDEN TOWN  
CHARTER-MARK

The Council will recognise successful projects and this will allow prospective purchasers and investors to identify good quality design and place-making. It is hoped that knowledge and display of the Award will become a powerful marketing tool for the promoters of new and forthcoming projects. The Council will also endeavour to independently promote and celebrate the award-winning projects.

By using the Building for Life 12 framework as the basis of our Checklist, then successful projects will also be well-placed to apply for a national Built for Life award. The local, and unique Charter-mark recognition will signal the exceptional quality that we expect projects in the Garden Town to achieve by both meeting the requirements in the additional Climate + Planet Positive chapter in the Checklist and the more stringent interpretations of the questions from the standard BfL 12 framework.

### ***Using the Charter (a guide for officers and stakeholders):***

Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) are expected to be established for each major project that contributes to the Garden Town and should set out the key requirements of all parties to achieve an effective and positive working relationship during the pre-application and later project phases. The preambles to these agreements should recognise the acceptance of this Charter and the agreement to adhere to its principles. The performance targets required for the Climate + Planet Positive questions should be explicitly identified in the PPA.

Community engagement is another key topic for the PPA and the likely content/format of this and the stages at which key consultations are to take place should be set out alongside the project programme. The PPA may need to ensure levels of engagement that go beyond statutory requirements.

Once that the ‘Garden Room’ facility has been established in the Town Centre, then public display/exhibition to wider audiences can also be agreed – to promote the Garden Town projects to the whole community of Taunton, not merely those stakeholders that are local to each site.

Design Review is a complementary tool for lifting design quality and will be used alongside the Checklist – both to establish guidance from an independent perspective and to gauge relative success against the aims of the Checklist in relation to wider experience and practice. Design Review is most effective when used early in the development of each design stage. A first review should be anticipated soon-after the development of the Design Concept, with a further review arranged well in advance of the submission of the master-planning and design work associated with an Outline Planning submission. Further reviews, as the Detailed or Reserved Matters information begins to be prepared, can be expected. These will be dependent on the specific circumstances of each project, but certainly where design codes and/or neighbourhood masterplans and guidance is called for by planning condition, then these need to be subject to the independent scrutiny of a design review panel. Feedback and guidance from the design review reports will then be used to inform on-going negotiations within the Charter and Checklist framework.

The design process and the outcomes generated in responding to the Charter and Checklist and the wider Garden Town Vision should be captured as an Appendix to the Design and Access Statement for the project. This will then be submitted with the planning application as clear evidence of ‘Garden Town compliance’ for all the key sites.



With:  
Richard Guise, David Orr, James Webb

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**Taunton**  
The South West's first Garden Town

