

# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

**Executive – 28 January 2020**

## **Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide**

**This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Mike Rigby**

**Report Author: Fiona Webb - Placemaking Specialist**

### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 A draft districtwide design guide has been prepared for public consultation. It is intended that the districtwide design guide will eventually become an adopted Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) via a SWT Full Council resolution.
- 1.2 The purpose of the design guide is to seek a step change in the quality of new development in the District in support of adopted local plan policies. It aims to ensure that the significant level of housing growth needed in the District to meet future need is designed to create healthy, inclusive, sustainable places to live for everyone promoting a common approach to the main principles which underpin the various adopted Local Plans that are used for assessing planning applications.
- 1.3 The process for preparing SPD's is similar to a Local Plan document. However, they are not subject to independent examination by the Planning Inspectorate. To enable the design guide to be adopted as SPD, it needs to undergo a formal public consultation period. Thereafter, the next stage of the process is consideration of representations and comments made before the completion stage and a resolution to adopt the final draft of the SPD.
- 1.4 This report seeks Executive approval to undertake public consultation on the draft document.

### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Recommendations are that Executive resolves to:
  - 1) That the draft districtwide Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document, attached in Appendix 1, be approved as the basis for a public consultation period of eight weeks.
  - 2) That the outcome of the public consultation, including any appropriate suggested amendments, be reported back to the Executive as soon as possible with a view to seeking approval to adopt the draft districtwide design guide as a

Supplementary Planning Document.

- 4) That authority be delegated to the Head of Strategy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to carry out any minor amendments of a drafting or similar nature necessary, prior to consulting on the draft Design Guide.
- 5) That the creation and launch of a District-wide 'Quality of Place' award scheme be explored, which would be linked to the Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide, and the Taunton Garden Town Vision, Design Charter and Checklist.

### **3 Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 SPD must be consistent with national planning policy, must undergo consultation and must be in conformity with policies contained within an adopted Local Plan. Potential risks that might impact on the preparation and timely delivery of the Local Plan and other Development Plan documents are set out the "Risk Assessment" section of the Local Development Scheme. It is not foreseen that any legal, financial, reputation or other risks will arise if the recommendation of this report are accepted.

### **4 Background and Full details of the Report**

- 4.1 The original commission for a Design Guide was for the West Somerset area.
- 4.2 Following the designation of Taunton as a Garden Town in 2017 and the creation of the new council, officers took the initiative of expanding the commission to district-wide to promote a common approach to the main principles which underpin the various Local Plans that are used for assessing planning applications. This wider commission reflects the Council's commitment to deliver significant new housing growth focused on a number of new communities as well as a regenerated town centre for Taunton as the county town. The purpose of the Guide is to encourage a higher standard of design for development within the whole Local Planning Authority area, including Taunton Garden Town. The draft Design Guide therefore also forms part of a suite of documents for Taunton Garden Town seeking needed to deliver a step change in the quality of new development. Together the draft Design Guide, Taunton Garden Town Vision and Charter and Checklist establish the mechanisms by which the progress and success of the Garden Town can be measured.
- 4.3 The objectives for design in Somerset West and Taunton is to ensure that new development is of high quality, is sustainable and maintains or enhances the character and local distinctiveness of the locality in which it is proposed.
- 4.4 The draft Design Guide has been produced to set out the twin interacting principles of placemaking and sustainability and how these can be reconciled with each other to produce resilient, healthy and attractive places. For new schemes within the Taunton Garden Town area this is especially relevant given the aims of the Vision and Charter and Checklist. In schemes for allocated sites in other parts of the district, it seeks that the majority of the placemaking and sustainability features shown will be incorporated subject to individual circumstances. Where schemes have been already been approved at outline and are subject to reserved matters, it seeks to incorporate as many features as possible. Similarly when existing neighbourhoods are being renewed or improved, it is likely that many of these features should be retrofitted.

4.5 The draft Design Guide provides a schedule of considerations which broadly follow the stages of the design process. It should therefore prove useful at the pre-application stage in assisting designers and others to achieve high standards of design and construction. It will also provide planning committee members and officers with the tools to refuse consent for poor design. The document is expected to be used as a Supplementary Planning Document attached to various adopted local plan policies which will be listed within an appendix.

4.6 The draft Design Guide is organised into two parts:

1. The core Design Guide – this sets out the policy context and generic design guidance relevant to almost every type of development to be encountered in the district. It also provides advice on the character of the area and methods of appraising sites and their settings. It should therefore be consulted whatever the type of development being undertaken.
2. Design Supplements – each design supplement provides detailed advice on a specific type of development. Examples of the design supplements are Infill and intensification, Taller Buildings, Storage and Recycling, and Non-residential and Community Buildings.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

5.1 Theme 1 – objectives towards the District **carbon neutral by 2030**’; clear vision and delivery plan for the Taunton Garden Town’; ‘Provide and maintain green open spaces and parks, enhanced public spaces, as well as additional opportunities to safely walk or cycle in order to encourage active and healthy lifestyles’. Theme 3 – objectives to ‘Increase the number of affordable and social homes in our urban towns, rural and coastal communities; Facilitate the development of the residential blocks at Firepool, Taunton, in order to deliver new homes and public open spaces’; and ‘Seek additional funding for new strategic infrastructure and regeneration projects from developers, investors, Government and other funders, which support or enable existing or new communities within our district

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

6.1 The cost of preparing the draft design guide has been funded from the Local Plan Reserves. The cost of public consultation on the guide will also be funded by Local Plan Reserves.

## **7 Legal Implications**

7.1 The preparation of the districtwide Design Guide and the recommended period of public consultation is in compliance with relevant legislation and guidance regarding supplementary planning documents including the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2012 and the government’s Planning Practice Guidance (revised 15 March 2019).

## **8 Climate and Sustainability Implications**

8.1 It is considered that the draft Design Guide will have positive implications in terms of sustainability through guidance including the integration of placemaking and sustainability principles. This includes the following:

- Green Streets – requires streets to be designed to be greener which could include more street trees, swales, and planting/hedgerows for garden boundaries.
- Water – requires that priority is given to sustainable drainage processes and that a drainage strategy should help to shape the design of the open space, landscape and streets.
- Biodiversity – identifies how development can provide a net gain in biodiversity by including design features at the scales of neighbourhood, street and individual house.
- Air Quality – the issue of air quality is addressed throughout the document through requiring that developments: - Prioritise active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport. - Incorporate street trees, planting, open spaces and landscape. - Include EV charging points for vehicles.
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions - The draft guide should help to reduce greenhouse gas emission impacts through prioritising active travel and public transport over the car, making developments greener with more trees and landscape, requiring the provision of electric vehicle charging points and encouraging better energy efficiency in homes.

## **9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

- 9.1 A priority of the draft design guide is to create safe communities. It has been prepared in accordance with ‘Secure By Design’ principles and includes guidance on making inclusive places for people with safe streets and spaces and secure properties. The draft design guide adheres to the principles relevant to crime prevention – natural surveillance (spaces around buildings open to public view from adjoining properties, front entrances clearly visible from the street, well used illuminated routes); access and movement (direct routes, choice of routes, clear routes, permeability); activity (levels of activity provide natural surveillance together with a mix of uses); sense of ownership (clear definition of public/private space, activity in public spaces, sociable places, perception of space); defensible space (buffer zones, spill out spaces, restricting access to private areas); physical protection (boundaries sensitive to context, building materials and security features); management and maintenance (allocated resources, design quality and detail, community management).

## **10 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 No additional implications. SPD’s add further detail to the policies within adopted Local Plans. In order to comply with the public sector equality duty, Impact Assessments (IAs) were prepared as part of the plan making process. Further, details of the various IAs can be found within the evidence based underpinning the adopted Local Plan and are available on our web site e.g. <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/1406/core-strategy-equalities-impact-assessment.pdf>

## **11 Social Value Implications**

- 11.1 The draft Design Guide is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life, resulting in economic, social value and environmental benefits for the community.

## **12 Partnership Implications (if any)**

12.1 As part of the Duty to Cooperate requirement (Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012), we will be expected to work with other public bodies, particularly neighbouring planning authorities and the County Council on any cross boundary issues.

## **13 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

13.1 The draft Design Guide is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life, resulting in economic, social value and environmental benefits for the community.

## **14 Asset Management Implications**

14.1 None at this stage, however the Council will consider opportunities for use of its assets to contribute to the delivery and promotion of high quality and sustainable built environments.

## **15 Data Protection Implications**

15.1 None at this stage.

## **16 Consultation Implications (if any)**

16.1 The consultation on this document will be in line with the emerging Statement of Community Involvement and the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015. Following the consultation exercises, SWT will consider what modifications need to be made to the draft Design Guide and urban design Masterplan Frameworks

## **17 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)**

17.1 Not applicable

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – No**

**Reporting Frequency:**  **Once only**       **Ad-hoc**     **Quarterly**  
 **Twice-yearly**       **Annually**

### **New Section:**

### **Background papers and links**

**Insert link to SWT LDC**

**Insert link to legislation governing adoption of SPD guidance**

## List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix 1	Draft Districtwide Design Guide
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