

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Executive – 28 January 2020

Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town

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 Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town has been prepared for key stakeholder consultation. It is intended that this document will eventually become a material consideration via a SWT Full Council resolution.
- 1.2 The purpose of the design guide is to seek a step change in the quality of the public realm and street works consistently in Taunton Garden Town in support of adopted local plan policies. It aims to guide street works by the highways authority, developers, utility companies and their agents and contractors and will be used for determining planning applications and informing discussions with our statutory consultees.
- 1.3 Our Garden Town Vision was adopted in July 2019. One aspect of this is to make our town 'A gentler town...putting people before cars.' This means enhancing walkability and cycling, making it easier to get around, and improving bus access and quality of service to encourage modal shift.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Recommendations are that Executive resolves to:
 - 1) That the draft Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town attached in Appendix 1, be approved as the basis for key stakeholder consultation for a period of eight weeks.
 - 2) That the outcome of the key stakeholder consultations, 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 Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town a material consideration when determining planning applications and will inform discussions with our statutory consultees.
 - 3) 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 Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town.

3 Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

3.1 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 It is inevitable with the expected growth of 30% in Taunton's population by 2035 that the pressures on our road space will increase. The public realm is facing challenges not previously experienced – with additional use from us all as well as dealing with the need to respond to our aging population and climate change. Under 8% of people currently walk to work or school in Taunton and we want to raise this to 20% by 2030 as we grow as a town.

4.2 Our main aspiration is a people first public realm in order to accommodate people well. Our aim is that our Garden Town's public realm will be:

- Healthy and well – streets and public space need to promote social resilience by prioritising activity and making comfortable and convenience movement
- Quiet and slow – reducing noise and rapid movement increases the enjoyment of public space, curating recovered time
- Green and clean – for clean air, clean pavements, and a green environment for shade, biodiversity, water management and beauty

4.3 Traditionally the public space between buildings is often treated as merely the channel for vehicles and great steps are taken to negotiate the space given to and safety of use of the different users – whether they be people walking, people on bicycles or in cars and larger vehicles. The traditional way of doing this has been given too much emphasis to the engineering of vehicle requirements to the detriment of people walking and cycling.

4.4 Government guidance on street design in the form of Manual for Streets (2007) and Manual for Streets 2 (2010) now forms part of Somerset County Council's highways and asset management policy. Both of these guides emphasise the role of places that occur on road routes where local need for accessing services, shops, community facilities and space for socialising need to have a priority over movement. Places needn't be wide spaces or squares along a street, rather they are composed of anywhere where social and pedestrian movement activities like shops, schools, gardens mix with one another in the town. This public realm design guide sets out where those places are in Taunton and how the public realm will be designed there.

4.5 The Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town is set out in two sections:

A: Material and components – material standards, materials, detailed design and public realm components

B: Types of place – illustrative layouts for a range of urban conditions that demonstrate the application of these standards.

4.6 In the Materials and Components section, the public realm palette in the Garden Town is proposed to be set by 4 area standards based on a priority of areas for movement, vitality and activity:

- Main Town Centre – applies to the main town centre retail, station and business area. This would have the highest quality public realm with emphasis on best walking and cycling environment, excellent visual appearance and high durability using natural stone paving materials and good quality street furniture
- Wider Town Centre – applies to wider town centre hinterland. This would have a similar style to the main town centre but with more modest manufactured materials.
- Edge of Town – applies to approach streets, edge of town gateways and neighbourhood centres. This would have similar elemental paving materials to the wider town centre but with reduced palette and more modest street furniture.
- Waterside & Green Space – applies to riverside, canalside and greenspaces. This would have paving and street furniture suited to more rural character with bound surfaces and robust timber detailed street furniture.

This treatment will enable a clear definition of places and links and their hierarchy in the movement network.

- 4.7 The second section of the document shows a series of illustrative layouts for a range of urban conditions that demonstrate the application of these standards. Examples of these design approaches are - all vehicle streets and pedestrian streets. The plans and street view sketches are concept designs and are illustrative.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Theme 1 – objectives to ‘Work towards making our District carbon neutral by 2030’; including a 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 – ‘Homes and Communities’ sets out the objectives to ‘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 Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town have been funded from the Local Plan Reserves. The cost of key stakeholder consultation on the guide will also be funded by Local Plan Reserves.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 The preparation of the draft Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town and the recommended period of key stakeholder 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 Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town will have positive implications in terms of sustainability through guidance including the

following examples:

- Cycling – includes design guidance on how to actively encourage cycle usage as an alternative means of travel and cycle requirements for different types of homes.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 A priority of the draft Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town is to create safe access and movement for all with direct routes, choice of routes, clear routes and permeability.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 A number of workshops have taken place to inform the preparation of the draft Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town involving officers and statutory consultees from a range of disciplines - planning, landscape, ecology, trees, heritage and highways.
- 10.2 This has enabled an insight into many issues affecting statutory consultees and different user groups.
- 10.3 If adopted the Public Realm Design Guide would be a material consideration in support of policies in the Adopted Local Plans which have been subject to a full Equalities Impact Assessment.

11 Social Value Implications

- 11.1 The draft Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town Design Guide are 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)

- 11.1 As part of the Duty to Cooperate requirement (Town & Country Planning (Local

Contact Officers

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