

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

Council – 30 July 2019

## Taunton Garden Town Vision

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mike Rigby

Report Author: Dan Webb – Strategy Specialist

### 1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The document “*Taunton – the Vision for our Garden Town*” is the culmination of many months of work, public and stakeholder engagement, and concludes the important first stage – the agreement of a shared vision for the Garden Town that can guide the actions of the council and many other stakeholders, and can be championed and owned by the whole town.
- 1.2 The document (see **appendix A**) includes:
  - The Vision statement
  - Context – understanding Taunton’s roots and character (townscape, neighbourhoods and landscape)
  - Four themes:
    - ‘Growing our town greener’ – transforming our open spaces and streets
    - ‘Branching out’ – moving cleaning, moving smarter
    - ‘Growing quality places to live’ – town centre, new and existing neighbourhoods
    - ‘New shoots and blossom’ – a dynamic and prosperous community founded on knowledge, culture and business
  - Next steps
- 1.3 This vision framework is just the start of work on Taunton Garden Town (TGT), but will influence all plan-making (eg the emerging Local Plan) and development management decisions (such as more detailed design guidance emerging through a new Urban Development Framework and Design Guide).
- 1.4 There are no prescriptive guidelines set out by central Government, and each place is expected to be different and determine what the Garden Town status might mean based on local circumstances and characteristics. This document therefore begins to explore and articulate the types of physical change and improvements Taunton might look forward to. The particular themes extending from the vision identify tangible opportunities and challenges that need to be grasped or overcome.
- 1.5 Formal adoption of this vision will enable the next stage to progress – the development of a Delivery Plan that will provide detail to the individual strategies, projects and activities which will deliver the vision.

## 2. Recommendations

### 2.1 Council resolves to:

- a) Formally adopt the Taunton Garden Town Vision document as Council policy, from which a detailed Delivery Plan can be subsequently developed.

## 3. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

### Risk Matrix

Description	Likelihood	Impact	Overall
Failure to adopt the Vision document may delay the development and progress of the Garden Town Delivery Plan. As a result this could have a detrimental impact on Taunton's reputation and status as part of the Government's Garden Town programme	2	4	8
<i>The mitigation for this is to accept the proposed recommendation as set out in the report</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
			<b>Impact</b>				

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

## 4.1 Designation as a Garden Town

Taunton was designated as a 'Garden Town' in early 2017 following a submission to Government. This submission reflected the Council's commitment to transformational housing growth centred around a number of new garden communities and a regenerated town centre supported by essential infrastructure and an enhanced network of green infrastructure. The town is undergoing significant change with key developments like Monkton Heathfield, Staplegrove new community, Comeytrove/Trull/SW Taunton new community, Firepool and plans for the Nexus 25 strategic employment site either underway or at various stages of the planning process.

## 4.2 Activity and process to date (2017 – 2019)

a) Since the designation of the Garden Town in January 2017 the Vision document has been developed as a result of considerable input and involvement from key stakeholders and partners, Council Officers and other external specialists, and the community:

- **Spring 2017 – Autumn 2018** HYAS Planning consultancy commissioned to:
  - Provide advice on the emerging refreshed vision for the TGT in order for it to best reflect Taunton's GT status
  - Provide advice on whether the current governance arrangements are bringing together the right people and organisations in order to deliver the vision and advice on any amendments required to ensure a co-ordinated approach to delivery'
  - Provide advice on whether the current governance arrangements are bringing together the ght people and organisations in order to deliver the vision and advice on any amendments required to ensure a co-ordinated approach to delivery
  - Look at what the Council might do to maximise the opportunities for future funding aligned to Garden Town status
- **May 2017** – a workshop was held with representatives of 3 key Government departments:
  - Homes & Communities Agency (HCA);
  - Dept of Communities & Local Govt (DCLG);
  - Dept for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
- **Summer 2017** - Garden Town public exhibitions / 'listening events': a series of exhibitions held in the town centre over the in which views were invited on the Garden Town and latest plans and proposals for the future were shared.
- **Summer 2017 – Autumn 2018** - Targeted workshops: meetings with Council Officers and many local community interest groups and other key stakeholders including:
  - Taunton Strategic Advisory Board (which also formed a small Garden Town sub-group led by SCC Cllr Rod Williams)
  - TDBC Garden Town Programme Board
  - TDBC Growth Steering Group
  - Somerset Wildlife Trust – Garden Town seminar (October 2017)
- **Autumn – Winter 2017** – The TDBC Planning Policy team drafted a Garden Town Plan Framework document including proposed themes and a detailed 'SWOT' analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- **March 2018** - Taunton Garden Town Visioning Event: a large workshop (facilitated by consultants 'Planning for Real') for approximately 80 delegates,

comprising key stakeholders and local community interest groups where ideas around the draft vision, guiding principles and important projects were shared.

- **Autumn – Winter 2018/19** – following recruitment to the new SWT Council structure, a new TGT Project team was formed led by the Head of Strategy, and includes Officers from the Strategy team, and Place-making Specialist. Consultants working on the Council’s Design Guide were also commissioned in January 2019 to work on the final stage of the creation of a TGT Vision document, using all the evidence and work previously undertaken (as outlined above). The team of consultants (Architects & Urban Designers) includes:
  - Mark Pearson (Architecture Centre Devon & Cornwall)
  - Richard Guise (Context 4D)
  - David Orr Consulting
- **March – May 2019 - Public and stakeholder engagement on the draft Vision document:** The Council ran a public and stakeholder engagement process throughout March and April 2019, which included a campaign to raise awareness of the draft TGT Vision document and an opportunity for comments to be submitted using a survey or in more detail in writing to the Council’s Strategy team. Key stakeholders were contacted directly, and a communications plan was implemented including press releases, social media, and staffed public exhibition stands were based in Taunton town centre (Orchard Centre) throughout a two week period.

A summary of the consultation / engagement findings and responses is found in **Appendices B, C and D.**

4.2.2 Since the designation, a number of important pieces of work have been completed including a Green Infrastructure Strategy and a Retail/Leisure and Employment Study which identifies new floorspace requirements for the town (and indeed for the wider area) while other studies and strategies are underway.

#### 4.3 **The Vision document** (see appendix A)

- a) The document “*Taunton – the vision for our Garden Town*” is the culmination of many months of work, public and stakeholder engagement, and concludes the important first stage – the agreement of a shared vision for the Garden Town that can guide the actions of the council and many other stakeholders, and can be championed and owned by the whole town. The Garden Town designation is now more than 2 years old and during this time many individuals, communities and stakeholders have asked us two questions: ‘what does Taunton being a Garden Town mean?’ and ‘what is our vision for the Garden Town?’. The Vision document seeks to answer these fundamental questions and give us a platform for the more detailed work in the form of reviews to the local plan and detailed design guidance that will need to sit underneath it.
- b) The document includes:
  - The Vision statement
  - Context – to articulate Taunton’s roots and character (townscape, neighbourhoods and landscape)
  - Four themes (described with some brief narrative, and diagrams / illustrations / maps) that outline :
    - some key current issues, challenges and opportunities
    - key principles
    - some key ideas, concepts and proposed projects & initiatives

- Strategies / policies and Delivery documents that align to and inform the vision and themes (some of which are already adopted, and others that are under development)
- Some key measures of success
- The four themes are:
  - 'Growing our town greener' – transforming our open spaces and streets
  - 'Branching out' – moving cleaning, moving smarter
  - 'Growing quality places to live' – town centre, new and existing neighbourhoods
  - 'New shoots and blossom' – a dynamic and prosperous community founded on knowledge, culture and business

4.3.3 It is understood that by its very nature, this vision impacts everyone in the Taunton area, and there are many different perspectives on the range of issues, and those that should be considered as the highest priority. The objective is to keep the Vision document as concise as possible, whilst articulating a strong and meaningful vision together with some tangible and deliverable ideas. A fine balance must be therefore made to include of all key issues and relating themes, principles, actions to address these, whilst avoiding a document that is too long. Greater detail was always intended to follow on from the vision in the next stage – the Delivery Plan, which will predominantly be made available as 'live' and iterative information on a new TGT website / on-line platform from summer 2019.

#### 4.4 Next steps

- **Delivery plan** – following on from this Vision document is a delivery plan, which will help explain how the strategic ambitions will be delivered. It will set out the necessary governance, partners, funding, and a programme of projects and initiatives to implement the ideas within this vision.
- **A stakeholder engagement and community participation plan** – this will be developed and implemented to ensure the council and its partners work together to develop and refine its plans, achieve strong 'buy in', and keep the on-going TGT 'conversation' alive. A new Garden Town website and on-line portal will be developed and launched asap this Autumn for communications / engagement and consultation, and will ensure information is presented in an open and accessible way. A new post is being created to support Garden Town Communications and Engagement activity, and is currently in the process of being recruited. This post will develop and implement innovative ways to inform and engage with the community.
- **Design Guide, Garden Town Charter and Design Checklist** – following on from this Vision document is a Design Guide, Garden Town Charter and Design Checklist. The Design Guide will illustrate the Council's aims and requirements regarding the quality of design expected and indicates how these aims can be achieved. The purpose of the guide will be to encourage developers and designers to be creative and responsive in the achievement of the Taunton Garden Town Vision. It is intended that the Design Guide will be a Supplementary Planning Document. In the interim a Garden Town Charter and Design Checklist will be produced to provide an agenda for discussions between applicants and planning officers for assessment of major development proposals which are coming forward ahead of the Design Guide. It is intended

that the Garden Town Charter and Design Checklist will be technical guidance for development control purposes by the council.

## **5. Links to Corporate Aims / Priorities**

- 5.1 Officers are in the process of preparing a new Corporate Strategy to replace those previously prepared for Taunton Deane and West Somerset.
- 5.2 A review of the District wide Local Plan has also commenced, and the TGT Vision will influence this important document which in turn will help articulate and translate the Council's emerging strategic objectives into planning policy.

## **6. Finance / Resource Implications**

- 6.1 An Earmarked Reserve for 'Garden Town' work has been established following receipt of external Government funding through its Garden Town Capacity Fund. This funding provides budgets for ongoing work on the Garden Town programme, such as:
  - Masterplanning alongside detailed design and delivery work, to inform the updated Taunton Garden Town Plan
  - Specialist support/officer roles to inform/assist a Garden Town Delivery Team eg urban design, community engagement, expertise/assistance with legal, acquisition, financing and land assembly issues. This support will also need to explore and outline the options for ensuring long term stewardship of the Taunton Garden Town programme.

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 None at this stage

## **8. Environmental Impact Implications**

- 8.1 Although there are no direct implications arising from this report, the Garden Town Vision, its themes, principles and subsequent Delivery Plan are intended to have a positive influence on the environment. The Council's aim to make Somerset West & Taunton carbon neutral by 2030 also underpins the Garden Town Vision and themes within the document, and will influence projects and initiatives as these are developed and rolled out.

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

- 9.1 Although there are no direct implications arising from this report, the Garden Town Vision and subsequent Delivery Plan is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life for the community.

## **10. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 None at this stage, however as projects and initiatives are developed and implemented, full consideration to Equality and Diversity impact will be given at that time.

## **11. Social Value Implications**

- 11.1 The Garden Town Vision and subsequent Delivery Plan 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

12.1 A wide range of key stakeholders and partners have been consulted during the development of the Garden Town Vision (as referred to within the report), and on-going effective partnership working will be essential as the delivery plan is developed and implemented.

## 13. Health and Wellbeing Implications

13.1 The Garden Town Vision and subsequent Delivery Plan is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life, resulting in health and wellbeing 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 the Garden Town Vision.

## 15 Data Protection Implications

15.1 None at this stage.

## 16 Consultation Implications

16.1 Extensive public consultation and stakeholder engagement activity has been undertaken during the development the Garden Town Vision document – this is described in the report.

## 17 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)

Not applicable (however Member briefing sessions were held 24 January and 2 July 2019)

### Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**  
(NB - Member briefing sessions held 2 July 2019 and 24 January 2019)
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – Yes**

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

### List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	The Vision document
Appendix B	Consultation summary
Appendix C	Consultation questionnaire
Appendix D	Summary of feedback – stakeholder organisations

## Contact Officers

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