

TGT Vision document – public engagement & consultation summary

Engagement / consultation period: 1 March – 26 April 2019

Methodology & approach:

- Draft document made available on TDBC / SWT Council websites
- On-line (+ paper version) questionnaire **(see appendix C)**
- Town Centre (Orchard Centre) exhibitions over a 2 week period in April – estimated that approx. 600 people visited the stand and engaged in conversations with the council officers and communications support commissioned (Daffodil PR & Communications)

Survey responses - summary:

Total 114 responses:

- 79 questionnaire completions
- + 35 e-mails or letters submitted

33 organisations/stakeholder group responses

- 6 Parish councils + 2 residents groups
- 6 Environmental groups (incl. Somerset Wildlife Trust, Taunton Transition Town)
- 4 Developers
- 3 Arts & cultural organisations (Arts Taunton, TTA/Brewhouse, Go Create)
- 2 from SCC (covering all themes)
- 2 Planning consultants
- Taunton Area Cycling Campaign

Overall, a strong degree of support and positivity was evident (as shown in the table below):

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Overall Vision | 7 | 45 | 14 | 6 | 1 | |
| | 70% | | 19% | 9% | | |
| Theme 1 'Celebrate our roots' | 14 | 33 | 20 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| | 64% | | 27% | 8% | | |
| Theme 2 'Grow our town greener' | 25 | 34 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| | 81% | | 14% | 5% | | |
| Theme 3 'Branching out' | 18 | 34 | 15 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| | 72% | | 21% | 7% | | |
| Theme 4 'Growing quality places to live' | 20 | 30 | 14 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| | 72% | | 20% | 9% | | |
| Theme 5 'New shoots' | 12 | 36 | 15 | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| | 67% | | 21% | 13% | | |

- 70% agree that the vision is clear & makes sense, and the themes provide good ideas (only disagreed with by 10-15%)
- Significantly higher level of agreement with Vision & themes from stakeholder organisations (approx. 80-90%), than individuals (60-70%).
- The MOST agreed with is theme '*Grow our town greener – open spaces & streets*'
- The LEAST agreed with was the original theme 1 '*Celebrate our roots – our special character*' (64%) (also with the highest 'neutral' response 27%, and described as 'least impactful'). This has subsequently been removed as a 'theme' and is now included as important contextual information that informs the future-looking themes.

Regarding the vision (and document as a whole), key stakeholder organisations demonstrated support as per the following:

- Somerset County Council - *supports the overall aspirations of the TGT*
- Arts Taunton - *The commitment to a 'greenification' of the town, as outlined in the document, is admirable and a great deal of thought has gone into it. The vision appears to be on a well-conceived analysis of Taunton's current past, present and possible future. This is broadly a positive vision that we would largely endorse.*
- Taunton Area Cycling Campaign - *We warmly welcome many of the principles set out in the document, particularly those relating to sustainable travel and the public realm. The document is highly ambitious*
- Somerset Wildlife Trust - *We fully support your ideas for growing our town greener and this theme is critical to ensuring Taunton is a true garden town and capitalises on its best assets – its blue and green infrastructure.*
- Peter Brett Associates - *We welcome the core text of the vision and it sets a firm base of the document*
- Go Create - *Overall this is a very impressive document*
- Taunton Theatre Assoc - *Broadly, we welcome the compelling vision*
- Taunton Transition Town - *We strongly support many of the principles set out in the document. The vision is extremely ambitious*
- The Kingston St Mary Community - *strongly agrees with the Vision particularly Theme 2 - Growing Our Town, Theme 3 - Branching Out - Moving Cleaner, Moving Smarter and Theme 4 - Growing Quality Green Places to Live.*
- Whitmore Area Residents Group - *It makes sense and we would support all of these Themes*
- Trull Parish Council - *appreciates the aspirational concept encompassed in the document.*
- Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council - *the Vision is a good starting point.*

Some key topics

The following is a summary of the most common topics / areas of interest & concern arising from the questionnaires submitted, together with anecdotal feedback received at the staffed exhibition stands in the town centre during April. A staffed exhibition / display stand was made available in Taunton's Orchard shopping centre for a two week period 8 – 18th April (3 hours per day). A key aim was to encourage people to read the draft Vision document and complete the questionnaire. Exact numbers of people visiting the stand and engaging in conversations with staff were not recorded, however it is estimated to be approx. 500.

- **Transport issues** (mainly theme 2 – ‘Branching out’)
 - Strong support for priority for cycling & walking infrastructure (eg better bike parking, cycle/footpaths need to be wider/safer/better lit etc)
 - Pedestrianisation of the town centre strongly supported (with one concern raised about St James St & East St pedestrianisation causing traffic problems in town)
 - Need for future-proofing (eg electric vehicles/buses, charging points)
 - Need to improve bus services
 - Multi-story parking needed in sensible pinch point locations on the outskirts of the town centre

This topic generated the most comments, and also closely reflect comments received during a Taunton transport public consultation undertaken by SCC in the summer of 2018.

- **Environmental / ‘Green’ / nature-related issues** (mainly theme 1 – ‘Grow our town greener’)
 - Need to be more explicit on climate change
 - Importance of traffic pollution reduction
 - Use of green design / renewable energy wherever possible (eg solar panels, green roofs, rain water harnessing)
 - Strong support for more green spaces & street scene, green / wildlife corridors
 - Need greater emphasis on River Tone and Waterways
 - Concerns raised about building on green spaces

This was the second most commonly commented on topic.

- **Neighbourhoods - Housing development, Design & Infrastructure issues** (mainly theme 3 – ‘Growing quality places to live’)
 - Housing development must be planned carefully and well designed with developers needing to be more innovative when considering green places for people to live (ie space, light, green corridors / gateways / wedges) – for quality of life benefits
 - Concerns about the current quality of design / house building - current developments are not distinctively local – the TGT Vision and other documents should clearly specify how developers of new Garden Neighbourhoods will be required to implement Garden Town Vision / ‘green’ proposals
 - Concerns about the quantity of house building
 - Concerns about new building sprawling into the countryside, and desire for development not to grow around Nexus 25 (ie East of motorway)
- **Town centre**
 - Concerns raised over street cleanliness, litter and maintenance (eg uneven pavements, tree removal/coppicing)
 - Need to focus on ‘the basics’ and ‘quick wins’ (Green space maintenance should be a priority)
 - A desire to see rapid progress on Firepool
 - Support for multi-purpose conference/events centre on Firepool
 - Concerns over empty shops, and quality and variety of town centre offer

- **Cultural and business issues** (mainly theme 4 – ‘New shoots & blossom’)
 - Concerns at the lack of cultural offer and facilities in Taunton (as the County town), and inadequate evening entertainment
 - The Brewhouse Theatre and Museum of Somerset are valued and must continue to be supported
 - Artists’ studios and gallery space needed, and Arts / conference centre required
 - Arts and cultural organisations need to work together to support this vision
 - Taunton could be developed as a cultural hub, exploiting opportunities from the town’s excellent sport and education
 - Need to be ambitious and innovative, eg university, innovation / technology centres
 - Some concern that allocated employment sites have not yet been developed

Other general comments:

- The overall Vision document was described in the following ways by those supporting it:
 - *Impressed by the detail of the document.*
 - *Good to see the care given to the Vision.*
 - *An exciting and inspiring plan - a great, holistic plan for better town.*
 - *The vision is aspirational and idealistic.*
 - *I thought the Vision document was really inspiring.*
 - *Overall, a very good start.*
 - *Vision sounds exciting.*
- Some scepticism was expressed over the council’s drive to deliver plans (eg *“This will take a significant change of approach and determination”*)
- Many wanted to see greater detail (ie evidence of ‘concrete’ delivery plans)
- Several comments asking that the vision and delivery plans are inclusive, ie for vulnerable residents, deprived communities
- Several requests from individuals and groups to get involved and for the council to ensure strong community engagement

For further detail - a summary table of feedback from key stakeholder organisations and our response to these can be seen in **appendix D**.