

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022

### Governance arrangements for Taunton Garden Town

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mike Rigby (Planning and Transportation)

Report Author: Jenny Clifford, Garden Town Implementation Manager

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

1.1 This report seeks to establish formal governance arrangements for Taunton Garden Town (TGT) in order to create good collaborative working and effective decision-making among public and private sector partners and stakeholders. The proposals have consciously sought to keep things simple, allow for a strategic fit with other pre-existing groups and structures; transition through into Somerset Council; allow for continued formal decision making through existing Committee channels and accommodate political and community representation. The proposals have been designed to accommodate and acknowledge rather than duplicate or replace pre-existing governance associated with established projects and work streams.

1.2 Proposed as set out in **Appendix 1** is:

- **TGT Delivery Board** to provide strategic leadership and oversight of the project. Decisions by the Board are proposed to take the form of recommendations to Council decision-making bodies. Formal decision making would continue as existing in accordance with the Constitution.
- **Community/Stakeholder Forum** to bring together a range of local groups including community representatives and a range of local groups with an interest in delivering the TGT Vision.
- **Landowner/Developer Forum** would bring together land and development interests and provide an opportunity to engage more widely with TGT land and development interests than on individual schemes or planning applications where significant commercial interests would hinder wider discussion. Forum engagement would be fed up to the Delivery Board.
- **Project Team** structure within which the day-to-day management, monitoring, resourcing and delivery aspects of the TGT would be positioned. Reporting to the TGT Delivery Board, functions within the project team would include identification and overseeing aspects of the TGT programme/work as well as liaison with Homes England over the Garden Town project and grants/programmes including the Housing Infrastructure Fund. The creation of a TGT Project Team within the structure is not intended to suggest new staff, changes to staff line management or service structure.
- Below the Project Team and Forums would be positioned a wide **programme of TGT**

**delivery areas and projects**, many of which are well established and have their own project leads and agreed governance arrangements. It is not proposed to duplicate or replace these.

- **Technical working groups** could be established as needed to support delivery areas or projects. Flexibility of approach is proposed to reflect the wide range of projects, many of which are mature and at differing stages in delivery.
- A range of **existing growth and infrastructure bodies/boards** external to Somerset West and Taunton Council across different geographies are recognised in the proposed governance. They would provide advisory and steering functions as well as opportunity for wider discussion and dissemination of information which would pull through at Delivery Board level.
- A range of **Taunton interest groups** is also recognised within the proposals. Representatives of these groups would directly engage with the TGT project through the Community/Stakeholder Forum.
- Recognising the **Council as developer** on some TGT sites, the proposed governance structure allows for advisory and steering functions that are separate to the TGT Delivery Board. In this way the commercial interests of the Council are kept separate from the delivery of the TGT Vision via the Delivery Board.

1.3 No risks have been identified as directly arising from the proposals and there are no significant financial implications from the recommendations. Minor expenses anticipated in connection with the establishment of the proposals will be met through Government capacity funding, rather than service budgets. The proposals will bring increased partnership working together with stakeholder, community and local interest group participation. A stakeholder mapping exercise will inform initial non-Councils representation, until such time as the Delivery Board and Forums first meet and agree terms of reference, the latter to be drafted in advance.

1.4 Homes England has encouraged the establishment of formal governance arrangements for TGT and via its Garden Communities Toolkit, has identified a range of key benefits which are set out in the report. This proposal builds on initial work to set up the project, which has seen the adoption of a Vision for TGT in 2019. Should the proposals be agreed, it is likely that the first meeting of the Delivery Board would take place in January 2023.

## 2 Recommendations

### That Corporate Scrutiny Committee recommends:

2.1 That Executive Committee approve

- i) The Taunton Garden Town governance proposals.
- ii) That responsibility for the finalisation of initial non-political representation on the proposed Delivery Board and Forums is delegated to the Director of Development and Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation.

- iii) That delegated authority is granted to the Director of Development and Place in consultation with Legal Services to prepare initial governance documents for approval at the first meeting of the Delivery Board.

### **3 Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 The proposed governance structure is not considered to directly impact upon Corporate risks. However, robust and appropriate governance arrangements will assist in driving project progress and build relationships with the local community and stakeholders, thereby reducing risk. Effective governance arrangements will also ensure that best use is made of grant money and funding opportunities. The governance arrangements provide a structure within which the project will continue to develop and will increase reporting and accountability.

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

#### **4.1 Background**

4.1.1 Taunton was awarded Garden Town status by the Government in January 2017 following the submission of an expression of interest by Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC). The 2016 TGT expression of interest recognised the importance of governance arrangements but did not set out a proposed governance structure. Instead, it identified the need for clear links between governance for TGT and other local structures. To date the establishment of governance arrangements for TGT has not taken place. The current proposals are an important opportunity to address this outstanding area and bring greater clarity and structure to arrangements for the Garden Town.

4.1.2 Homes England has encouraged the Council to address governance. The Homes England Garden Communities Toolkit provides guidance on ensuring robust governance arrangements are in place in order to create good collaborative working and effective decision-making among public and private sector partners and stakeholders. It identifies the key benefits of clear project governance arrangements as:

- Ensuring common objectives and outcomes are shared by relevant parties.
- Giving various parties clarity on their roles and responsibilities.
- Speeding up the delivery programme with efficient decision-making processes.
- Involving relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process to increase buy-in.
- Providing strategic direction, so delivery of a garden community is moved forward.
- Identifying barriers and challenges to successful delivery of the project and find solutions.
- Supporting partnership working between the public and private sectors.
- Providing consistency and ensure delivery of the initial vision.

The toolkit also describes typical main tiers of governance structure as:

- A decision-making body or board
- A strategic steering group
- A project delivery team
- Stakeholder groups and /or specific project task and finish project areas typically used to feed into topic areas.

4.1.3 In 2017 consultants were commissioned by TDBC to provide advice and consultancy to support the delivery of TGT in a range of areas including governance arrangements and TDBC organisational design to support the Council's growth ambitions. An advice note on governance arrangements was produced and followed a review of the Garden Town's context, stakeholder mapping and governance structures already in existence at that time. A workshop was held with TDBC officers to identify gaps in key stakeholders, consideration of the effectiveness of current arrangements and organisational capacity to support arrangements going forward. Still of relevance to current governance proposals were the following points:

- Consideration should be given to the establishment of a Developer Forum to attract interest and input from key delivery stakeholders relevant to TGT, vision and strategic growth ambitions.
- Consideration should be given to the establishment of a Community Forum to provide a collective community voice.
- The challenge of bringing competing landowners/developers together in an overall Developer Forum given their project specific focus.
- The relationship between any over-arching forums and individual project structures and existing community groups would require careful consideration.

4.1.4 The 2017 governance review also identified a series of broader issues, many of which remain relevant to this review and TGT work going forward:

- To recognise the contributory role of housing enabling and Council land/assets and regeneration activities to the delivery of successful place-shaping for the TGT.
- The need for an integrated and flexible approach to funding governance, especially for infrastructure.
- Ensuring the right balance between decision-making, communication and the capacity to deliver. The new Council will provide an opportunity to review the scope and extent of decision-making and financial spend delegations to assist delivery and be fleet of foot/ responsive as required.
- The need to ensure there is opportunity for TGT ambitions to be integrated into the approach over other plans and strategies from an organisational/governance perspective.
- Integration of communication, consultation and engagement activities including linked consultations, consultations 'branded' to support the delivery of TGT and promotion of the TGT brand with consistency of messaging. A future area of work which would seek to address many of these points would be the development of a TGT communications strategy.

4.1.5 At that time (2017) a range of pre-existing governance structures were in place with a growth and regeneration focus. It is clear from the current governance work that many of the previous structures identified in 2017 did not transition through the formation of Somerset West and Taunton Council or for other reasons are no longer in place. In addition, major projects had governance arrangements in place, for example a Memorandum of Understanding for Junction 25 M5 employment site and a Collaboration Agreement for Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvement Scheme.

## 4.2 Existing governance of relevance

4.2.1 With the establishment of Somerset West and Taunton Council in April 2019 the

governance landscape relevant to TGT changed. Existing relevant governance arrangements include:

### **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

**Council, Executive and Planning Committee:** Formal decision making by the Council in accordance with responsibilities and terms of reference set by the Constitution. The proposed governance arrangements for TGT do not affect the mechanisms and structure of formal decision making on behalf of the Council.

**Corporate Scrutiny Committee:** To perform scrutiny function on behalf of the Council with remit for matters including the Development and Place Directorate including Taunton Garden Town, associated performance indicators and budget monitoring.

**Senior Management Team:** Led by the Chief Executive with Deputy CEOs/Directors, these senior managers are responsible for the running of the Council and provide strategic oversight and steer across all areas of the Council's activity.

**Development and Place Directorate Board:** Currently utilised to ensure the sharing of information and updates on the activities across the Directorate, there is an opportunity for this officer group to provide a more focussed steering function on growth and economy matters, including those associated with TGT.

**Innovation Leadership Group:** A district wide group focussed on growing innovation.

### **Somerset**

**Somerset Growth Board:** See above - this board continues since its establishment in 2014. A Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan was agreed in 2021.

**Joint Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil Infrastructure Board:** Officer Board to oversee the delivery of Somerset transport projects. Chaired by SCC Highways and Transport with attendance by District representatives.

### **Sub-Regional**

**HotSW Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Joint Committee:** Strategic public sector partnership providing political leadership and drawn together to approve and oversee the delivery of the HotSW Productivity Strategy with authority to progress discussions with Government for help to deliver its objectives. Its remit includes discussion/negotiation with Government and relevant agencies to secure the delivery of the Government's strategic infrastructure commitments. Reporting directly to the Joint Committee is the **Chief Executive's Advisory Group**, (the latter being supported by the **Chief Executive's Delivery Board**) and the **Policy and Technical Advisory Group** (officers).

**Peninsula Transport:** A shadow sub-national transport body bringing together the five lead transport authorities in the SW peninsula including the Peninsula Rail Task Force sub-group. The purpose being to ensure effective engagement between the partner authorities and the Department for Transport on strategic transport investment matters linked to growth ambitions. The transport body is supported by the Senior Officer Group and Transport Forum.

4.2.2 The proposed governance structure has sought to keep things simple, allow for a

strategic fit with other pre-existing groups and structures; transition through into Somerset Council; allow for continued formal decision making through existing Committee channels and accommodate political and community representation. At this stage in the TGT project, it is recognised that representation within a formal governance structure for community groups and land/developer interests would be of benefit. The proposals also identify that there are existing projects which could be considered to fall within the Taunton Garden Town (TGT) programme, many of which have existing governance arrangements in place. The proposals have been designed to accommodate and acknowledge rather than duplicate or replace pre-existing governance associated with established projects and work streams.

### 4.3 Governance proposals

4.3.1 The proposed governance structure is set out at **Appendix 1** to this report. One of the main proposals is the establishment of a **TGT Delivery Board** which would provide strategic leadership and oversight of the project. It would:

- Steer the direction of the project, its objectives and monitor progress.
- Provide opportunity for consultation with Board members.
- Monitor, manage and coordinate the overall delivery of TGT via project workstreams.
- Act as the forum for issue resolution in order to enable progress.
- Ensure effective community and stakeholder engagement.
- Make recommendations through the formal decision-making processes of the organisations represented on the Board.
- Ensure sufficient resources are in place to deliver against the Vision, programme and priorities.
- Coordinate the public sector contribution to the delivery of key programme elements.

The Project Team would report to the Board. It is also proposed that the thematic programme delivery areas, projects and forums would feed up to the Board.

4.3.2 Importantly, the proposed structure retains formal Council decision making in accordance with the Constitution via the Executive, Council and Planning Committee as appropriate. Accordingly, decisions by the Board are proposed to take the form of recommendations to those formal Council decision-making bodies.

4.3.3 The Board would comprise political leadership of SWT/SCC (Somerset Council) including Executive Portfolio holders, Taunton Mayor/Deputy Major, representative of Taunton Town Council (once established), representative of other Parish Councils within which garden community allocations are located (such as West Monkton, Creech St Michael and Trull). It is recognised that the final make-up of political representation awaits the outcome of the Community Governance Review process for the currently unparished area of Taunton. Pending subsequent decision making, it is likely that TGT governance will initially engage with a representative of the Taunton Chartered Trustees and then the potential new Council once established. Representatives from key stakeholders such as HotSW LEP, Homes England and National Highways would also be invited to sit on the Board. It is proposed that an invitation also be extended to the Member for Parliament. Given the maturity towards delivery of many of the TGT development sites, it is appropriate that a landowner/developer representative attends

to act as a direct conduit between the Board and the Landowner/Developer Forum. Lead/senior officers would also attend in an advisory/steering capacity. As with similar garden community delivery boards elsewhere, an independent chair could be sought. This is the emerging preference.

- 4.3.4 The proposed structure includes the creation of a **Project Team** structure within which the day-to-day management, monitoring, resourcing and delivery aspects of the TGT would be positioned. Reporting to the TGT Delivery Board, functions within the project team would include identification and overseeing aspects of the TGT programme/work as well as liaison with Homes England over the Garden Town project and grants/programmes including the Housing Infrastructure Fund. The creation of a TGT Project Team within the structure is not intended to suggest new staff, changes to staff line management or service structure. Instead, it is intended to reflect the role of the Garden Town Implementation Manager, supplemented by other existing staff with relevant responsibilities including a Highway resource. The work of other officers will also be of relevance, dependent upon the projects and programmes being progressed. It is within this area of the proposed governance that work will be generated and momentum maintained.
- 4.3.5 Following the creation of Somerset Council, there is opportunity for the scope of work relevant to the Project Team to become more multi-disciplinary, drawing from both SWT and SCC work areas. However, care will be needed to ensure existing governance of wider work areas is not duplicated. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) workstreams will need to capture and take account of this proposed governance, addressing the scope of work within the Project Team following establishment of Somerset Council.
- 4.3.6 Alongside the Project Team would be the creation of two forums for engagement, firstly the **Community/Stakeholder Forum** and secondly, **Landowner/ Developer Forum**. At this stage in the TGT project, there is a need to engage more comprehensively and in a more structured manner via these forums. It is through these forums that TGT relevant information would be circulated, discussions take place and views gained from the key external stakeholders including community representatives. Officer support would be provided from the TGT Project Team, through which outcomes from Forum engagement would be fed up to the Delivery Board. Ward Member participation is proposed via the Community/Stakeholder Forum.
- 4.3.7 The **Community Forum** would provide opportunity to bring together a range of local groups including community representatives and a range of local groups with an interest in delivering the TGT Vision and good quality of life for TGT existing and future residents.
- 4.3.8 The **Landowner/Developer Forum** would bring together land and development interests for updates on progress, key strategic issues and to explore common interests such as those affecting delivery. It would provide an opportunity to engage more widely with TGT land and development interests than on individual schemes or planning applications where significant commercial interests would hinder wider discussion.
- 4.3.9 Below the Project Team and Forums would be positioned a wide **programme of TGT delivery areas and projects**, many of which are well established and have their own project leads and agreed governance arrangements, which it is not proposed to duplicate or replace. **Technical working groups** could be established as needed to support these. Flexibility of approach is proposed to reflect the wide range of projects, many of

which are mature and at differing stages in delivery. Thematically they can be grouped into different workstreams reflective of TGT Vision and garden city principles:

- Taunton town centre generation
- New garden communities delivery
- Transport and movement
- Strategic infrastructure e.g. flooding
- Employment and innovation
- Climate change and sustainability
- Quality place and culture
- Community and health

4.3.10 Recognising the role of **the Council as developer** on some TGT sites, the proposed governance structure allows for the Council's Leadership Team and the Growth Directorate Board to operate in an advisory and steering capacity separate to the TGT Delivery Board. This recognises the need for the commercial interests of the Council to be considered separately from the delivery of the TGT Vision via the Delivery Board.

4.3.11 A range of **growth and infrastructure bodies/boards** exist external to Somerset West and Taunton Council across different geographies: Taunton, District, Somerset and sub-regional. These are recognised in the proposed governance as providing advisory and steering functions as well as opportunity for wider discussion and dissemination of information which would pull through at Delivery Board level.

4.3.12 The proposed governance structure also recognises the range of **Taunton interest groups**, with which discussion and engagement is valuable over TGT matters. Representatives of these groups will directly engage with the TGT project through the Community/Stakeholder Forum.

4.3.13 It is proposed that flexibility be retained over positions on the Board and Forums to reflect that the project and its key issues will continue to evolve. Upon establishment of those governance arrangements, terms of reference will be drawn up for agreement and will set out the stakeholders, groups and bodies to be represented. Periodic review of the terms of reference is anticipated. A proposed stakeholder mapping exercise against strands of the TGT Vision and work areas will inform which stakeholders, groups and bodies will be initially be invited to be represented. The recommendation at 2.1 ii) seeks to delegate the responsibility for the finalisation of initial non-Councils representation on the proposed Delivery Board and Forums to the Director of Development and Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation. This will allow for the initial establishment of the governance structure until terms of reference can be drafted and formally agreed.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

5.1 The establishment of governance arrangements for TGT will assist in delivering the Council's Vision for the Garden Town 2019. This is considered to align with the objectives in the Council's strategic themes of "Our Environment and Economy," "A Transparent and Customer Focused Council" and "Homes and Communities."

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

6.1 TGT is supported financially by capacity funding awarded by the Department of Levelling



Up and Housing and Communities. This supports direct staff resources and the commissioning of vital work to bring forward the delivery of the Council's Vision for the garden town. Further capacity funding bid rounds are expected. In addition, funding from other sources has been awarded, including Government capital programmes to help deliver infrastructure associated with the project. The establishment of a robust governance structure will focus project decision making and accountability.

- 6.2 Financial implications directly arising from the establishment of a governance structure are likely to be minimal, associated with administration of the proposed structure and legal advice over drafting of terms of reference. Funding will be through capacity awards rather than service budgets. Organisational resource will be required to operate the proposed structure. Care will be needed to ensure that there is capacity available for the administration of the proposed governance. It is likely that this resource will rest primarily with the staff most directly involved with TGT.

## **7 Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications**

- 7.1 No direct financial implications for the new unitary council have been identified in connection with the proposed governance arrangements. However, the proposed governance is intended to provide structure and aid decision making over the life of the project. It has therefore been designed to transition into the new unitary council from 1st April 2023 and complement rather than duplicate other governance arrangements. Whilst the proposals will affect the new council, they are not considered to raise S24 Direction implications.

## **8 Legal Implications**

- 8.1 No legal implications arising from the proposed governance structure are anticipated at this time other than the need to draft suitable governance documents such as terms of reference to support the various groups identified in the structure. Once agreed, TGT governance will need to be captured by the relevant LGR workstreams.

## **9 Climate, Ecology and Sustainability Implications**

- 9.1 No direct carbon/environmental impacts arise from the recommendation, although the TGT project itself is expected to significantly contribute to the Council's climate, ecology and sustainability objectives, through work to deliver on the Vision. The establishment of formal governance arrangements will assist in realising positive project outcomes that align with this Vision through steering its direction, its objectives and monitoring progress. It is also expected to bring increased structure and focus around the response of the project to these issues.

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

- 10.1 No direct safeguarding or community safety implications arise from the recommendation. The TGT project itself is expected to deliver improved community safety outcomes via the Vision in terms of quality of life, well-being and placemaking.

## **11 Equality and Diversity Implications**

11.1 No direct equality and diversity implications arise from the recommendation. The Vision for Taunton Garden Town is one of inclusion and quality of opportunity. All project activities and workstreams will need to have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## **12 Social Value Implications**

12.1 No direct social value implications arise from the recommendation. TGT is expected to bring about added social value through the approach to placemaking and the aspiration within the Vision to create environments that people are proud of, want to spend time in and invest in. The benefits of the overall garden community project are economic, social and environmental. The establishment of formal governance arrangements will assist in realising positive project outcomes that align with this Vision as well as greater project representation by stakeholders including local interest groups. The Vision specifically references growing social value through strengths in knowledge, education, culture and business.

## **13 Partnership Implications**

13.1 The proposed governance arrangements draw on a range of stakeholders and partners, providing a formal structure through which they can participate in and/or steer the Garden Town project.

## **14 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

14.1 No direct health and wellbeing implications arise from the recommendation, although positive quality of life and well-being outcomes are at the heart of the TGT project as expressed through the Vision.

## **15 Consultation Implications**

15.1 Prior to consideration of this report, informal briefing/consultation on the emerging governance proposals has been undertaken with representatives of affected Parish Councils and developers/promoters. Feedback from this has indicated developer experience of similar arrangements working positively elsewhere and their broad support for the proposals. Feedback from Parish Council representatives has been limited, with no concerns raised over the proposals.

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Corporate Scrutiny Committee – Yes (2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022)**
- **Executive – Yes (16<sup>th</sup> November 2022)**

**Reporting Frequency: Once only**

### **List of Appendices (background papers to the report)**

|            |                               |
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| Appendix 1 | Proposed Governance structure |
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## Contact Officers

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Name        | Jenny Clifford, Taunton Garden Town Implementation Manager          |
| Direct Dial | 01823 219436  |
| Email       | J.Clifford@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk                            |
| Name        | Alison Blom-Cooper, Assistant Director Strategic Place and Planning |
| Direct Dial | 01823 217517  |
| Email       | A.Blom-Cooper@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk                         |