

Community Governance Review

Stage 2 Consultation

Somerset West
and Taunton

A Town Council For Taunton

Have Your Say

Somerset West and Taunton Council is carrying out a review (known as a community governance review) to decide whether changes should be made to the local governance arrangements, including whether a new town council* should be set up to represent Taunton and if so, what areas should be included within its boundary and whether any other changes should be made to the surrounding parishes.

All local residents, business people, and organisations are invited to give their views on the Council's recommendations by completing the consultation questionnaire by **26 July 2022**.

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SECTION 1

Background

Taunton is currently the only area in Somerset that does not have a Town or Parish Council to represent its residents. For many years authorities in the area have wanted to address this anomaly. The former Taunton Deane Borough Council resolved to do so in 2018 and its successor Somerset West and Taunton District Council restated this commitment in March 2021.

Somerset County Council has also previously indicated a wish to see a review undertaken and within both unitary business cases there was the expectation that a town council would be created for Taunton to enable the proposals to work effectively, particularly as Somerset West and Taunton Council will be abolished as part of the local government reorganisation. In October 2021 the District Council decided to go ahead with a community governance review of the unparished area of Taunton and eight surrounding parishes (Trull, Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove, Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove, Kingston St. Mary, Cheddon Fitzpaine and West Monkton), with a view to any new parish/town council coming into being from 1 April 2023 so that it could play a full and proper role, alongside the town and parish councils representing other areas, in negotiations with the unitary authority.

The review was launched on 12 November 2021 with a first round of public consultation running until 12 January 2022. On 3 March 2022 a special

meeting of Somerset West and Taunton Council considered the responses to that consultation and drew up draft recommendations for changes to local governance in Taunton and surrounding parishes. Those recommendations are now set out in this document for a second round of consultation.

Somerset West and Taunton Council has recommended that a new parish should be created for Taunton and a council established to serve that parish. It has further recommended that the area to be covered by the new parish/town council should not be limited to the currently unparished area but should also take in areas of urban extension that have been developed over the years or are proposed into some surrounding parishes, so as to reflect the reality of the area covered by present-day Taunton and the community identity of its residents. As a result of this the Council also recommends some changes to the boundaries or electoral arrangements of those parishes.

***Note re: terminology:** A principal council may, following a community governance review, create, abolish, or alter the area of any parish within its area and may establish a parish council to serve a newly created parish. Once established a parish council serving an urban area may resolve to be called a town council. It is thought likely that any parish council established to serve Taunton will do so. Therefore, this report uses the term Town.

SECTION 2

The Proposal

A. That a single parish be created to serve the currently unparished areas of Taunton and that in addition:

(i) Comeytrowe Parish Council be abolished, and the entire area of Comeytrowe Parish be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.

(ii) The Killams Green area, currently within Trull Parish Council area, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.

(iii) The part of the forthcoming development in the south-west corner of Taunton that falls within Trull Parish should be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.

(iv) The boundary of Trull Parish to the north-west of Cotlake Hill be altered to follow the green wedge around the Sherford urban area, with the small area to the south of that boundary that is currently within the unparished area of Taunton becoming part of Trull Parish.

(v) The urban area covered within the Maidenbrook Ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council, including sites earmarked for housing development in the near future, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.

(vi) The urban parts of Staplegrove Parish, including the entirety of the forthcoming development in the north-west corner of Taunton, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.

(vii) The slim part of Staplegrove Parish jutting to the west of Silk Mills Lane be included within the boundary of Norton Fitzwarren Parish.

(viii) If the proposed changes bring about a remaining Staplegrove Parish area of fewer than 150 electors, that area be merged with Kingston St. Mary Parish.

(ix) A small southern portion of the Kingston St. Mary Parish area, representing that part of the proposed Staplegrove East development that falls within the parish, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.

(x) With the exception of Galmington Trading Estate and a small section south of the A38 near Rumwell, no part of Bishops Hull Parish should become part of the proposed new Taunton Parish, and the small triangular residential area at the cross-section with Wellington Road, currently within the unparished area, should become part of Bishops Hull Parish.

(xi) The Hankridge Retail Park, Creech Castle and the associated Toneway Road, currently within West Monkton Parish, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish, which should run along the railway to the M5.

(xii) The boundary between Norton Fitzwarren Parish and Bishops Hull Parish, just north of Mill Cottages, be amended to follow the route of the railway line.

(xiii) Further consideration be given to whether the current boundary between West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine parishes between Maidenbrook and Yallands Hill south of the Country Park should be amended, for example by following the A3259 westwards to Maidenbrook Lane, in the light of any comments from the parish councils.

B. That the new parish be named 'Taunton Parish' and that a parish council be established to serve the new parish with effect from 1 April 2023.

C. That with the exception of the area described at A (xi) above, the area of West Monkton Parish Council be completely removed from further consideration of the review and its inclusion in any new Taunton Parish/Town Council.

D. That the area of Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council be completely removed from further consideration of the review and its inclusion in any new Taunton Parish/Town Council.

E. That the first elections to the proposed new Parish/Town Council for Taunton should be held on the ordinary day of elections (the first Thursday in May) in 2023.

F. That the Council established to serve the proposed new Taunton Parish should have a council size of at least 20 councillors, with the final number to be determined in the context of the proposals to be developed in regard to the warding arrangements within the new parish.

G. That the proposed new Taunton Parish be warded and that draft proposals for the warding arrangements, and those of any other warded parishes in the area under review, be developed for inclusion in the second stage of consultation.

H. That no change be made to the number of Parish Councillors of any of the other continuing parishes within the area under review.

SECTION 3

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Community Governance Review?

A Community Governance Review is a formal process involving consultation with local electors and other interested parties on potential changes such as creating new parishes, setting up or abolishing town/parish councils, changing their boundaries or electoral arrangements.

What are town and parish councils?

Town and parish councils exist in many areas, both rural and urban, and are the most local tier of government in England. Somerset West and Taunton Council as a 'principal council' is responsible for deciding whether to create, amend or abolish parish areas within its boundaries and whether to establish a council to serve any parish.

A parish council that serves a town area may decide to call itself a 'town council'.

Town and parish councils do not have statutory responsibility for services such as social care, education or housing but they may decide to provide some local services for their residents or in some cases to take over responsibility for services previously delivered by Somerset West and Taunton Council or Somerset County Council.

Town and parish councils also represent their communities. These local councils can also play a key role in communities by the promotion of community engagement between the council and residents and more inclusive local government. They must be consulted on planning applications within their area and may work with the principal council to create a Neighbourhood Plan for development in their area. They may bid to purchase assets of community value or express an interest in running a local authority service.

Town and parish councils are directly elected by local voters and are independent of the other layers of local government. Any new town or parish council, for example in Taunton, would not replace Somerset West and Taunton Council or the new Unitary Authority but would exist alongside.

What kinds of services could a town or parish council provide and how much would it cost?

There are almost 10,000 parish and town councils across England, with populations ranging from fewer than 200 to almost 100,000. The range of services provided varies accordingly and each town or parish council decides what, if any, services it will provide. There are examples of different types of services being delegated to councils, for example street cleaning and CCTV in Salisbury, and a library in Charnwood.

The Working Group has looked at some of these typical examples and the types of services that could be provided by a Town Council could be as follows:

- Very local services e.g. Parks Maintenance
- Some services which make money e.g. Crematoria or Small Car Parks attached to a Park
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Play Areas, plus skate parks, sports walls and youth shelters
- Allotment Sites (these transfer automatically by statute)
- Cemeteries and Churchyards
- Memorial Trees and Benches
- Public Conveniences
- Community Development
- Farmers Markets
- Carnival, Armed Forces Day, Remembrance, Christmas lights and other special events
- Dog Waste/ Litter Bins
- Litter Enforcement
- Bus Shelters
- Office Premises

As the level of services provided varies significantly between town or parish councils, so does the level of the precept that they charge Council Tax payers. For example, the average town/parish precept payable in 2022-23 by a Band D Council Tax payer within the Somerset West and Taunton Council area is £47.79 per annum. The national average Band D precept of all precepting parish and town councils in 21/22 the current year is £74.81 per annum. The Charter Trustees for Taunton for 22/23 precepted £58,722, from the Unparished Area of Taunton ratepayers. This was equivalent to £3.85 expenditure per Band D property. In addition to this amount, Somerset West and Taunton are able to precept a limited amount for Special Expenses on the Unparished Area of Taunton ratepayers to fund the types of activities that a Town or Parish Council would usually provide. In 2022/23 this amounted to £29,458 or £1.93 on a Band D property. These two charges would be replaced by any Town or Parish Council precept. The level of precept could be reduced if the Town Council provides services which generate income.

A town or parish council itself decides what level of precept to charge but in the case of any new town or parish councils, the Principal Council would set the precept for their first year of operation based on the estimated cost of the level of activity expected. In relation to service delivery and the level of precept, just as for any town or parish councils elsewhere in Somerset West and Taunton, a new Town or Parish Council could decide in future to take on additional services of the sort set out above, in negotiations with the new Unitary Council.

Will the Taunton Charter Trustees remain in place?

Not under this proposal. The Charter Trustees for Taunton were established in 2019 in order to be able to save the historic Mayoralty for Taunton from being abolished. They are the 16 Somerset West and Taunton councillors elected to represent wards in the unparished area of Taunton. The Trustees elect a Mayor and Deputy Mayor for Taunton each year. The Mayor and Deputy uphold the traditional roles previously carried out by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Taunton Deane within the boundary of the unparished area.

Charter Trustees only have the power to raise a precept to cover the costs of their administration and the associated costs for the upkeep of the Civic Insignia or 'Silver' and the Mayoralty of Taunton. They cannot legally precept for taking on responsibilities and costs that Parish and Town Councils can such as grass cutting and public conveniences.

This review is an opportunity for local people to comment on any changes that they might like to suggest in respect of the existence of the Unparished Area, the Taunton Charter Trustees, the area covered by it and its electoral arrangements (the number of councillors, wards etc). In the event that following the Community Governance Review a decision is made to parish the Unparished Area, the Charter Trustees would be dissolved upon the vesting of the new Council and their assets transferred.

Will Taunton continue to have a Mayor?

Yes. As mentioned above, the assets of the Charter Trustees including the civic regalia would transfer to the new council once the area becomes parished. Any new Town Council would elect one of its number to be the Mayor each year, as well as a Deputy Mayor.

Somerset West and Taunton Council recognises the value of the role of the Mayor of Taunton which embodies the town, is a symbol and focus for civic pride and carries out a wide range of functions during the year celebrating local achievements, raising money for local charities and representing the town socially and formally. The creation of a Town Council will enable this tradition to continue.

Issues to be considered by the review.

In arriving at its recommendations the law requires that Somerset West and Taunton Council must have regard to the need for community governance arrangements to:

- Reflect the identities and interests of the community in the area; and
- Promote effective and convenient local government.

It must also consider the impact of town or parish councils on community cohesion and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish; and must take into account any other existing or potential arrangements for community representation or engagement in the area.

In coming to decisions on the electoral arrangements for any town or parish council the Council must consider the number of electors in the area(s) under review and any change in the number or distribution of those electors which is likely to occur in the next five years.

Any town or parish council should reflect distinctive and recognisable communities of interest, with their own sense of identity and electors should be able to identify with the town or parish in which they live. Any submissions providing evidence of community identity or local linkages will be important considerations in this review.

When would any new town or parish council(s) be set up?

By law the review must be completed within 12 months of starting it. This review started in November 2021 and is planned

to be completed by October 2022. It is anticipated that if any new town or parish councils were to be established following this review they would come into existence no later than April 2023.

Electoral Arrangements.

If a new Town Council is established, Somerset West and Taunton Council is required to decide whether it should be divided into wards for the purpose of electing town councillors, taking into account (i) whether the number, or distribution, of the local government electors for the parish would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and (ii) whether it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the council.

In considering the electoral arrangements for a parish, the council must also consider any change in the number or distribution of the electors which is likely to occur in the period of five years beginning with the day when the review starts, taking into account for example likely growth within the area arising from local plans and planning permissions.

The total projected local electorate for the proposed new parish of Taunton is 43,487. For the purposes of district council elections the currently unparished area is divided into nine wards returning a total of 16 councillors. Somerset West and Taunton Council believes that it would not be practicable or convenient for a single election to be held for the whole of any new town council for the area. The proposal is therefore for the new Parish to be divided into wards as follows:

Proposed Ward Name	Area Covered	Projected Electorate 2027 <small>(Electoral register published 1 December 2026)</small>	Number of Councillors
Blackbrook & Holway	Existing Blackbrook & Holway district ward.	4,646	2
Comeytrove	Existing Comeytrove Parish plus (i) adjacent part of the forthcoming development that is currently within Trull Parish; (ii) Galmington Trading Estate and small section south of the A38 near Rumwell, currently in Bishops Hull Parish.	4,629	2
Halcon & Lane	Existing Halcon & Lane district ward plus Hankridge Retail Park, Creech Castle and associated Toneway Road, currently in West Monkton Parish.	4,351	2
Maidenbrook	Existing Maidenbrook ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish, except for small section south of the Country Park and A3259 (to West Monkton Parish).	1,814	1
Manor & Tangier	Existing Manor & Tangier district ward minus the small triangular residential area at the cross-section with Wellington Road (to Bishops Hull Parish).	2,426	1

Proposed Ward Name	Area Covered	Projected Electorate 2027 <small>(Electoral register published 1 December 2026)</small>	Number of Councillors
North Town	Existing North Town district ward.	2,130	1
Priorswood	Existing Priorswood district ward.	6,686	3
Staplegrove	The urban parts of the existing Staplegrove Parish including the whole of the forthcoming development in the north-west corner of Taunton, plus the small southern portion of the existing Kingston St Mary Parish included in the proposed Staplegrove East development.	2,455	1
Victoria	Existing Victoria district ward.	4,125	2
Vivary	Existing Vivary district ward (including Killams Green area currently in Trull Parish).	3,762	2
Wellsprings & Rowbarton	Existing Wellsprings & Rowbarton district ward.	4,418	2
Wilton & Sherford	Existing Wilton & Sherford district ward minus the small area to the south of the green wedge around the Sherford urban area and to the north west of Cotlake Hill (to Trull Parish).	2,045	1
Totals		43,487	20

Comments are invited on the warding proposals including the suggested boundaries and names of the wards.

The creation of a Taunton Parish with the boundaries proposed would have a knock on effect to a number of surrounding parishes which in some cases would require changes to their electoral arrangements. These proposed changes are as follows:

Parish	Proposed Change (if any)	Reason for Proposal
Bishops Hull	No change.	Changes proposed to parish boundary do not significantly affect electorate or require warding.
Cheddon Fitzpaine	Parish to no longer be warded. Number of parish councillors to be 5.	Once Maidenbrook ward is transferred Cheddon Fitzpaine will have only one ward. Projected electorate 2027 for the proposed new parish boundary is 304.
Kingston St Mary	No change.	Changes proposed to parish boundary do not significantly affect electorate or require warding.
Norton Fitzwarren	No change.	Changes proposed to parish boundary do not significantly affect electorate or require warding.
Trull	Parish to no longer be warded. Number of parish councillors to reduce from ten to nine.	Once Killams ward is transferred to Taunton Parish Trull will have only one ward. Killams Ward currently elects one councillor to Trull Parish Council. The projected electorate 2027 for Trull Parish on its proposed new boundary is 1,758 and it is proposed that the number of councillors serving this area should remain unchanged.
West Monkton	No change.	Changes proposed to parish boundary do not significantly affect electorate or require warding.

How to find out more.

Full information about the Community Governance Review including the terms of reference and detailed timetable are on the website at:

www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/cgr

Map.

The two maps at the end of this document show the following:

A. MAP A -The adopted preferred option for the proposed geographical scope for a single parish to serve part of the area under review.

B. MAP B - The proposed wards for the proposed single parish.

We want to hear your views.

Please tell us what you think about the matters above or any other issues concerning governance at the town or parish council level by **Tuesday 26 July 2022**. Somerset West and Taunton Council will consider all submissions received before coming to its final recommendations.

A Town Council For Taunton

Questionnaire

Somerset West and Taunton Council is carrying out a review to decide on changes to existing local governance arrangements, including whether or not a new town council* should be set up in those parts of Taunton where they don't currently exist.

***Note re: terminology:** A principal council may, following a community governance review, create, abolish, or alter the area of any parish within its area and may establish a parish council to serve a newly created parish. Once established a parish council serving an urban area may resolve to be called a town council. It is thought likely that any parish council established to serve Taunton will do so. Therefore, this report uses the term Town Council when referring to the possible creation of a new Taunton Parish Council.

Full information about the review including the terms of reference and a timetable, are on our website at:

www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/cgr

All local residents, business owners and organisations within the area of the scope of the review are invited to give their views. The Council will consider all feedback before making final recommendations. The submissions will be analysed, published and considered by Councillors at a Full Council meeting this autumn, with the potential for a new Council to be in place on 1st April 2023.

You can complete this questionnaire online, or obtain a paper version and return it to the following address (or by handing it in one of our offices):

**Governance Team,
Somerset West and Taunton Council,
PO Box 866, Taunton
TA1 9GS**

Alternatively you can tell us your views by e-mailing:

governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

This consultation will close on **Tuesday 26 July 2022**.

1. Please tell us whether you are a:

- Local resident
- Local employee
- Local business person
- Official representative of community organisation (please state)

- Other (please state)

2. Please enter the postcode of your home (if a local resident) or work/other premises with which you have a local connection:

3. Do you agree that Taunton should be represented by a town council?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

4. Do you agree that a town council for Taunton could help to promote a sense of community in the town and promote community cohesion?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

(If No, what other forum(s) or initiatives could do this more effectively?)

5. If a town council is established for Taunton, do you agree that its boundary should reflect the current reality of the town and include areas where urban development has occurred or is under way extending beyond the historic boundary?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

6. Do you agree with the proposal made by Somerset West and Taunton Council for changes at the parish level including the establishment of a new Taunton Town Council covering the area shown in Map A, and consequential changes in a number of surrounding parishes?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

(If No, which aspects of the proposal do you think should be changed?)

7. Do you believe that services such as parks and open spaces, public toilets, control of litter, Car Parking and community events e.g. Christmas Lights Switch On are important to the place where you live?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

(If Yes, should parish and town councils consider providing such services if the principal council is unable to continue doing so?)

8. Do you agree that any new Taunton Town Council should be divided into wards for the purpose of electing councillors to represent local people?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

9. Do you agree with the proposal by Somerset West and Taunton Council that the number of councillors to be elected to any new Taunton Town Council should be 20 and the ward boundaries and names should be as shown in Map B?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

(If No, what aspects of the proposal do you think should be changed?)

10. Principal council ward boundaries. If the parish and parish ward boundaries are changed as proposed, these will no longer match the corresponding district council ward boundaries or county/unitary council division boundaries in some places. In the interests of clarity therefore, if the proposed changes to the parish and parish ward boundaries go ahead do you agree that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England should be asked to amend the relevant district ward and county/unitary division boundaries where necessary to align them with the revised parish boundaries?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Further comments or reasons for your response

11. Do you have any other comments on town/parish boundaries or any other aspect of the arrangements for town/parish governance in the area?

Response

Further consultation.

Once this second stage of consultation has completed the Council will consider the results and then publish final recommendations. If you would like to be contacted about the results of the second stage of consultation, please leave your email details below. We will only use your information to contact you about the matters above.

Name -----

Email -----

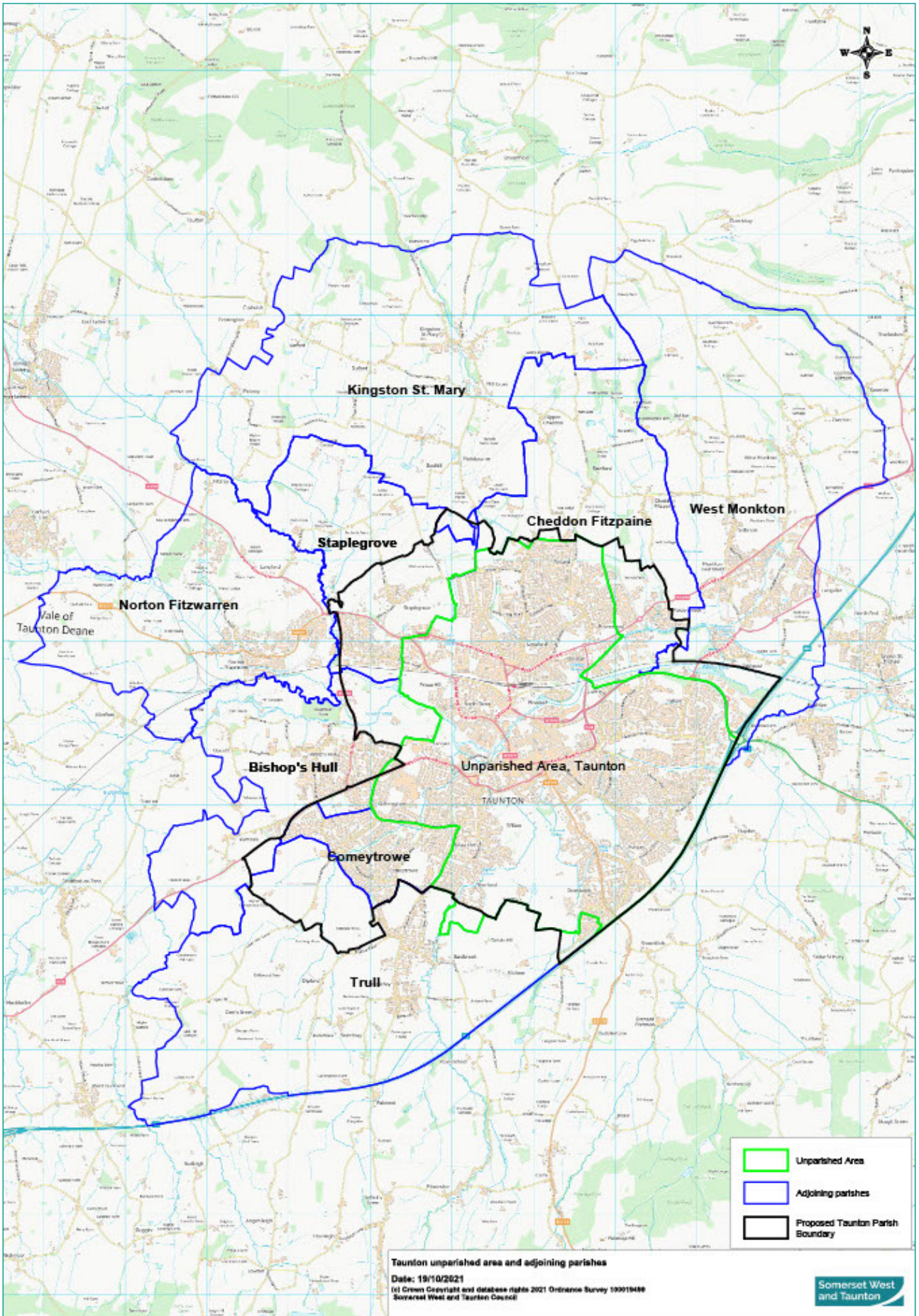
Privacy Notice.

Somerset West and Taunton Council will hold this information for the purpose of contacting you about the second stage of this consultation, this information will not be used for any other purpose. We will hold your personal information for no longer than five years.

If you feel any information Somerset West and Taunton Council holds about you is incorrect, or if you wish to see a copy of the information we hold about you, please contact:

**governance@
somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk**

Map A



Map B

