

# **Taunton Deane Borough Council**

**Executive – 14 October 2009**

## **The Public Life of Public Space: The Taunton Deane Public Art Code**

### **Report of the Arts Manager**

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Simon Coles)

#### **1. Summary**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to introduce members to the Taunton Deane Public Art Code and its implications for development of the public realm in the future.
- 1.2. It also requests endorsement of the Code by this Committee and seeks support in principle for the Legibility and Connectivity Study: Rail, River, Routes and the other opportunities for public art recommended in the Commissioning Plan

#### **2. Introduction**

- 2.1. Taunton Deane Borough Council formally adopted the 1% for public art policy in June 2007 by the former Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel, who also recommended the establishment of the Public Art and Design Panel to ensure implementation of the policy.
- 2.2. The Public Art and Design Panel is chaired by Councillor Simon Coles and includes representatives from Somerset County Council, Project Taunton and the Council's Economic Development, Strategy and Development Management teams. The panel is currently supported by Public Art South West, a regional Arts Council agency.
- 2.3. Recognising the difficulties associated with requesting 1% of costs towards Public Art, the panel commissioned Independent Cultural Consultants to produce clearer guidelines for developers and a commissioning plan for Taunton as developments move forward. The Public Life of Public Space: The Taunton Deane Public Art Code is the resultant document, whose text was agreed by the Panel in August 2009. Copies of the Code (44 pages) can be found in the Member's Room.

#### **3. The Public Life of Public Space**

- 3.1. The Code clarifies the Council's policy statement as follows:-

**Taunton Deane Borough Council adopted a Public Art and Design Policy in June 2007. The aim is to promote and support excellence in public art as an integral element of the design of buildings and development and enhancement of the public realm. The policy relates to large new buildings and open space developments in Taunton Deane under private and public ownership.**

**All developments in excess of 15 residential units or 2500 square metres (gross) of commercial floorspace will be required to contribute towards the public art and public realm enhancements through commissioning and integrating public art into the design of buildings and the public realm or by a commuted sum to the value of one percent of development costs.**

- 3.2. The Code contains policy and guidance on the planning process and how artists can be used at each stage of development, from the master planning process to community engagement as well as the creation of site specific pieces of work.
- 3.3. The Commissioning Plan gives the creative rationale underlying the Code, and recommends adopting the three themes of 'Play, Knowledge and Nature' to inspire public art approaches.
- 3.4. The plan identifies connectivity and legibility as key issues that public art can help address and the need for the public realm to be designed for multiple end uses. It identifies a need for an audit to assess the current spaces that can or could potentially be used for public activities such as markets, performances, busking, temporary artworks and to future proof plans underway for the new spaces.
- 3.5. The plan also recognises a need for Taunton to enhance residents' and visitors' experiences in the public realm and promote the cultural offer through an animation programme linked to Taunton's wider leisure programme.
- 3.6. Site specific guidance on public art is given on each of the major development areas of Taunton including:-
  - Firepool
  - Firepool Lock
  - Cultural Quarter
  - Tangier
  - The High Street and East Street.

#### **4. Proposed next steps**

- 4.1. The Code will be designed into an attractive publication with images and examples of best practice and will also be available on the website. A smaller leaflet for initial contact and awareness raising will also be produced for Development Manager officers and those in first

contact with developers. We are aiming to achieve best practice in developing Taunton as a sustainable, green, imaginative and distinctive town through creative contributions into planning and using public space.

4.2. The plan for the rest of this financial year includes the need to move ahead with the Connectivity and Legibility Study and secure agreement on approaches to routes to, and from, the station and other transport interchanges, the River Tone and the Town Centre. The draft brief is attached as Appendix 1. I am currently working to secure £10,000 for the specialist public art consultant to facilitate the study and for artists to undertake the community engagement.

4.3. It is proposed that a public art seminar is held in January to present their proposals for cohesive and imaginative commissioning for the Riverside and connecting routes.

## **5. Recommendations**

5.1. The current public art policy sits within the Design Code of the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan. It is not a Supplementary Planning Document although it is referenced with the Local Development Framework Core Strategy under culture and public art.

5.2. In order to strengthen its credibility as a policy that must be given due material consideration at planning, it is recommended that the 'Public Life in Public Spaces: The Taunton Deane Public Art Code' be endorsed.

Contact Officer : Caroline Corfe 01823 356521 or  
[c.corfe@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:c.corfe@tauntondeane.gov.uk)

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## The Public Life of Public Space The Taunton Deane Public Art Code

### Routes River Rail: A Connectivity and Legibility Study

#### Purpose

This paper sets out proposals for implementation of the Connectivity and Legibility Study as recommended in 'The Public Life of Public Space: The Taunton Deane Public Art Code'.

#### Introduction

The scale of development across Taunton Deane provides an exceptional opportunity to create an outstanding network of pedestrian routes and cycle ways from town and country linking Taunton Station, the planned urban extensions and the new park and rides with the town centre and the river and canal side promenades. Enhancing the legibility of routes and transport connections and the quality of experience for people using the public realm contributes directly to successful development particularly as development is being undertaken by a number of different private and public sector developers over an extended period of time.

#### Proposal

Taunton Deane Borough Council are commissioning a Connectivity + Legibility Study to create guidance to improve and enhance way-finding and ensure a coordinated approach to public art across Taunton. The guidance would sit alongside existing public art and design policy and all developers would be expected to follow its recommendations.

Private sector developers already investing in Taunton and Somerset County Council are invited to join with TDBC to commission the study to ensure a joined up approach to all aspects of connectivity and legibility. Arts Council England South West will also be invited to advise on the study.

The purpose of the guidance is to:

- Contribute to quality of place – what makes Taunton special and distinctive
- Increase connectivity and legibility between development sites
- Coordinate public realm treatments and approaches to public art across development sites in Taunton
- Guide an holistic approach to the design, quality and user experience of the public realm
- Take account of the cultural identities and heritage of the people of Taunton
- Enable the creation of a co-ordinated network of safe, attractive and accessible pedestrian routes, cycle ways and public transport nodes that link people with communities, places of recreation, work and commercial activity

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## The Content of the Study

The study has two main interrelated strands and phases. **The first phase will involve the facilitation and agreement on the overall approach to improving Connectivity and Legibility and will make recommendations on specific public art and design commissions. These commissions will follow as the second phase.**

### **Strand 1: Connectivity: To define a strategic and coherent overview to routes and public spaces in and through the Town Centre**

i.e. Development of the River Tone and related pedestrian and cycle routes connecting the town centre and existing and new neighbourhoods with the green infrastructure and the rest of the Borough:

Consideration will be given to:

- Coherent overall design approach to routes
- Coherent proposals for public art commissions to enhance the linkage and treatment of public spaces in the town centre including new publicly accessible spaces at Taunton railway station and TTCAAP development sites
- Hard and soft surface and edge treatments
- Responses to flooding and wildlife habitat issues
- Opportunities for people to access and use both the water's edge and the water
- Functional commissions such as seating, lighting, fishing stands, viewing points
- Opportunities for creative planting schemes
- Creative community engagement projects exploring the meaning of the river to local people and the past and future of the town

### **Strand 2 : Legibility:**

Development of a coherent overall design approach to a legible public realm where the external environment helps people find their way around and navigate from place to place:

Consideration will be given to:

- Public art and design to contribute to legibility through signage, street furniture, energy efficient lighting
- Paving and planting treatments
- Marking public transport routes and design of shelters
- Landmark and orientation commissions
- Resting and 'people watching' places
- Relationship between new public spaces and existing squares and parks for performance and route finding
- Creative community engagement projects including, for example, digital and mind mapping techniques to involve local people in shaping a legible town centre

The key outcomes required are:

- Production of recommendations for public art commissions and guidance in an appropriate textual and visual format for use by developers responsible for the refurbishment or creation of the public realm in Taunton. The guidance

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must take account of known developer priorities and objectives as well as the rationale and design principles of the Public Art Code and Taunton Town Centre Design Code SPD.

- The process through which the guidance is prepared must enhance and strengthen working relationships between the agencies responsible for delivery of the public realm in Taunton
- The process should also generate enthusiasm and awareness for the objectives of both the study and the development agenda in Taunton, for example, amongst local residents, businesses and other users of the existing town centre, river and canal
- National and international profile for development in Taunton through a symposium to review the interim guidance and share experience of innovation and quality in design, delivery and use of the public realm

Responsibility for delivery of the study rests with the members and officers of the Public Art and Design Panel.

## **Process**

The TDBC panel will appoint a public art specialist to co-ordinate an inter-disciplinary member team.

Initial discussion with St Modwen, appointed developer for Firepool, suggests scope for practical collaboration. St Modwen has committed to TDBC public art policy as part of its development agreement with Project Taunton and has already appointed a public art consultant and made provision for public art related expenditure.

It is proposed that St Modwen contribute a number of days of their public art consultant's time towards the Connectivity and Legibility Study as a whole, as part of their public art contribution at Firepool.

The Public Art specialist will work with the built environment professionals already involved in the development of Taunton: architects, landscape architects, engineers and urban designers. Collaboration with the Environment Agency, British Waterways, First Great Western, Sustrans and other relevant agencies will be essential.

There is also an opportunity to involve local people and existing users of the rivers and canals, ecologists, geographers, staff and students of Somerset College, young people and schools, local historians, a range of local artists and established arts and environment projects in the vicinity, such as the Neroche Scheme, to contribute their experience and knowledge to the study. Creative community engagement will be an integral part of the process.

A national symposium is proposed as an integral part of the commission in order to raise the profile of work in Taunton and attract investment in development opportunities in the borough. The symposium could invite three leading innovators in

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urban design, art and public space to a workshop format day with the Lead Artist and members of the team. This will allow practical review of the proposals, following a similar model to the 'Design Review Panel' method established nationwide by CABE, and include a public seminar addressed by the team and invited innovators. This would also give Project Taunton a platform for marketing initiatives and enable existing developers to highlight their schemes.

## Recruitment

A long list of public art specialists, and/or arts organisations suitable for appointment is being prepared to facilitate the Connectivity and Legibility study and project manage a lead artist to undertake community engagement. Candidates must have a track record of facilitation and policy making and facilitating high quality creative work in the public realm combined with substantial experience of social and physical development, collaborative team working and community engagement.

The Lead Artist will be expected to have experience of creative community engagement and to define an inclusive and rigorous methodology to conduct and deliver the commission. The Public Art and Design Panel of TDBC will appoint the Lead Artist through written submission and interview.

## Resources and Programme

Funding is required towards delivery of Phase 1. The scale and sources of Phase 2 funding will depend on the outcomes of Phase 1.

### Phase 1

<b>Public Art specialist</b>	<b>5,000</b>
Lead Artist: Fees and Expenses	5,000
St Modwen's Public Art consultant	5 days in kind?
Symposium to review the interim proposals	1500
Production costs of guidance document	2000
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,500</b>

It is proposed that TDBC contribute £5,000 with additional in kind contributions of, for example, expertise from staff and consultants, access to office facilities for use by the lead artist and financial contributions from Project Taunton, Somerset County Council and St Modwen.

It would be beneficial for Phase 1 to be completed by the end of October 2009 in order to meet St Modwen's development programme.

A Grant for the Arts funding bid will be submitted to Arts Council England for up to £30,000 per annum for three years in order to contribute to implementation of the overall recommendations of the Public Art Code including this study. However ACE requires three months to consider applications so an outcome is unlikely before December 2009. It is therefore recommended that the costs of Phase 1 be met from the resources indicated above.

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Caroline Corfe  
[c.corfe@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:c.corfe@tauntondeane.gov.uk)  
01823 356521