

# Taunton Deane Borough Council

**Executive – 9 February 2010**

## **Taunton Growth Board**

### **Report of the Strategic Director, Joy Wislade**

(This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ross Henley)

#### **1. The Need**

- 1.1 The growth of Taunton is the biggest challenge the area faces in the next decade. To ensure success, how the growth is brought about and delivered needs to be over-seen by a range of relevant agencies, organisations and the private sector. It is vitally important that all these need to buy into the delivery requirements as it is not something that any one agency can deliver on its own. Without the strategic buy-in of partners, the growth either will not happen, or will occur in a way which will be detrimental to the eventual outcome.
- 1.2 It is also evident that Taunton needs the support of regional agencies such as the South West Regional Development Agency, the Homes and Communities Agency and the Government Office of the South West to succeed. It is the support of these agencies, not only in the advice we have received, but perhaps more importantly by financial support, that has enabled us to make the progress with Project Taunton that we have to date. It is clear also that having advocacy support for Taunton at the highest level has been hugely beneficial.
- 1.3 We already have a Project Taunton Advisory Board with an independent chair. The terms of reference of this group have been extended to be able to include the growth of Taunton as well as the regeneration of the town centre (Advisory Board minutes). There is also a Memorandum of Understanding between the three key parties for delivery of Project Taunton – Somerset County Council, the South West Regional Development Agency and Taunton Deane Borough Council (Appendix 1) which has been extended to March 2010 when it is required to be reviewed.

- 1.4 However, as we move forward with more of a focus on the future size and shape of Taunton (whilst also carrying on delivery of the town centre regeneration), simply extending the remit of the current Advisory Board does not provide the clarity and status that will be required to deliver the huge and challenging remit of the economic and housing growth of Taunton. On the other hand to set up a completely new and separate Board, involving many of the same people, is a duplication and would lead to a lack of commitment from attendees (many have said they would not want to attend two meetings).

## **2. The Mandate**

- 2.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council accepted the designation of Taunton as a PUA (Principal Urban Area) in 2000 and undertook work on investigating what that might mean for Taunton. This in turn, led to the envisioning work and the original Vision for Taunton. In 2005 Taunton was designated as a Growth Point, which meant that Taunton would take a higher than average growth in housing, a position which again the Borough Council accepted. Although there is now some doubt about the publication of the Regional Spatial Strategy and therefore the target numbers which the final draft contained, Taunton Deane Borough Council remains supportive of the concept that there is a need to provide significantly more houses in and around Taunton, to increase the number of jobs and types of employment and to see the town centre re-vitalised. Evidence of this position is contained in the Corporate Strategy 2009 – 12, the emerging Core Strategy as part of the Local Development Framework, the adopted Town Centre Area Action Plan and the emerging Economic Development Strategy.
- 2.2 However, if a Growth Board is to succeed it does require Taunton Deane Borough Council as the key local democratically accountable organisation, to give their full support.

## **3. The Proposal**

- 3.1 That we officially dissolve the current Advisory Board and inaugurate a Taunton Growth Board whose responsibility encompasses both the regeneration of the town centre (Project Taunton) and the wider economic and housing growth. The membership of the Growth Board should broadly mirror that of the current Advisory Board and should reflect which agencies need to be involved as well as key local representation from both the public and private sector.
- 3.2 The remit of the Growth Board is suggested as:

- Champion the regeneration of the town centre and the growth and economic development of Taunton
- Over see the growth and development of Taunton to ensure that key outcomes are delivered.
- Ensure strategic planning and delivery issues are addressed by relevant partners
- Identify and recommend funding priorities and over-see any jointly held partnership budget that the Growth Team might attract

3.3 Membership – it is suggested that the following organisations should be represented:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Representatives</b>
Taunton Deane Borough Council	Leader Leader of the Opposition Chief Executive
Somerset County Council	Leader Chief Executive
Homes and Communities Agency	Regional Director
South West Regional Development Agency	Regional Director
Highways Agency	Regional Manager
Environment Agency	Area Manager
Government Office for the South West	Growth Team Leader
Somerset College	Principal
Musgrove Hospital	Chief Executive
The Taunton Town Centre Company	Chairman
Private sector representative	Chair, Taunton Business Forum

3.4 The Chair: the current Advisory Board has an independent chair. There will be many complex issues that the Growth Board has to deal with and it is important that the independence of the chair is retained. It is therefore recommended that the current chair of the Advisory Board is appointed chair of the Growth Board, at least for an initial period.

- 3.5 Meeting Frequency: it is proposed that meetings are held quarterly.
- 3.6 The Executive Group: the current delivery of the Advisory Board is supported by an Executive Group made up of senior officers from key agencies (TDBC, SWRDA, SCC). The proposal for a Growth Board would retain an extended Executive Group whose remit would be to:
- Provide liaison between partner organisations
  - Ensure the co-ordination of resources
  - Identify priorities
  - Support the Growth Board
  - Raise the profile at Executive level within their own organisations
  - Take responsibility for managing delivery
  - Agree expenditure of any partnership funding

Suggested membership is senior staff from the following agencies:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Representative</b>
Taunton Deane Borough Council	Strategic Director
Somerset County Council	Head of Physical Regeneration
South West Regional Development Agency	Head of Operations
Homes and Communities Agency	Team Leader
Highways Agency	Regional Manager
Government Office of the South West	Senior Planning Manager
Project Taunton	Project Director Project Manager

- 3.7 Chair: it is proposed that the independent chair of the Board should chair these implementation meetings. In his or her absence Taunton Deane should take the chair.

Meeting Frequency: it is proposed that these meetings take place monthly

- 3.8 Delivery: the current arrangement for the delivery of Project Taunton is via a dedicated delivery team – who then tap into the relevant staff of the partner organisations and lead on various sub groups. There is a Co-ordination Group that meets monthly to update all relevant officers on progress and to ensure that activity is co-ordinated. It is suggested that membership of this group should change slightly to include:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Representative</b>
Project Taunton	Project Director Project Manager Project Co-ordinator
Environment Agency	Sustainable Development Manager
Taunton Deane	Growth and Development Manager Strategy Lead Strategy Officer Economic Development Specialist
Somerset County Council	Group Manager, Strategic Planning Spatial Planning Manager Head of Community Regeneration
Highways Agency	Technical Officer
Homes and Communities Agency	Technical Officer
Natural England	Technical Officer.

3.9 Chair: the current Co-ordination Group is chaired by the Project Taunton Director and would continue to be so.

Meeting Frequency: the Co-ordination Group would meet monthly

#### **4. The role of the Borough Council**

There may be concern about the role of the Borough Council within this partnership approach. I believe that it does not reduce the importance of the democratic decision making process within Taunton Deane Borough Council. The above structure currently operates for Project Taunton, but all decisions relating to either funding or priorities are also agreed at the Project Taunton Steering Group (whose remit may need to be widened) and by the Executive. Officers on partnership bodies reflect the will of the Executive. What is evident is that without the will and commitment of other organisations, and their resources in both time and money, we will not achieve the economic and housing growth that Taunton needs.

#### **5. Scrutiny**

This subject was discussed at Corporate Scrutiny on January 21<sup>st</sup>. A resolution was carried to request the Executive to consider a further private sector member to be added to the Growth Board.

## **6. Recommendation**

That the Executive supports these proposals.

**Joy Wishlade**  
**Strategic Director**  
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# Appendix 1

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR PROJECT TAUNTON (FORMERLY TAUNTON VISION)

### Relevant Parties

Somerset County Council  
County Hall  
Taunton

Taunton Deane Borough Council  
The Deane House  
Taunton

South West of England Regional Development Agency  
Sterling House  
Dix's Field  
Exeter

Environment Agency  
Rivers House  
Bridgwater

### Glossary

SWRDA	South West of England Regional Development Agency
SCC	Somerset County Council
TDBC	Taunton Deane Borough Council
EA	Environment Agency
UDF	Urban Design Framework
UES	Urban Extension Study
TTSR	Taunton Transport Strategic Review
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
TTCAAP	Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan

## **1.0 Purpose of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

- 1.1 To provide a framework within which SWRDA, TDBC, SCC and EA can work together to progress Project Taunton. Project Taunton, formerly Taunton Vision, being the regeneration and redevelopment of Taunton and any other relevant areas as may be agreed at any time. It is recognised that partner organisations other than those listed above will be required in order for the full benefits of Project Taunton to be realised. These organisations will be invited to participate as and when relevant.
- 1.2 To undertake to develop, support and implement a delivery mechanism to bring forward the masterplans for the town centre.

- 1.3 To acknowledge and accept the principles of development set out in the Taunton UDF and UES report produced by Terrence O'Rourke in 2004 , the TTSR report produced by Halcrow/Atkins in 2004, and the TTCAAP in 2007.
- 1.4 It is not intended that this document shall create contractual relations or commitments between the partners.

## **2.0 Delivery Mechanism**

2.1 The partners, through this MOU accept that the delivery strategy for the whole and for individual elements of Project Taunton will have regard to the following documents, also accepting that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list

- a UDF
- b USE
- c TTSR
- d UDF Design codes
- e UDF Appendices:
  - Retail Capacity Study
  - Retail Viability Report
  - UDF Viability Report
  - UDF Delivery Report
  - Baseline Report
  - Stakeholder Involvement Report
  - River Corridor Survey
- f TTCAAP
- g Project Taunton Sustainability Protocol

- 2.2 The partners agree to employ a team of professionals with the requisite skills to be tasked with the delivery of Project Taunton (the Delivery Team).
- 2.3 This Delivery Team to be funded after the initial period (2005-2008) from Growth Point funding or other funding opportunities that might arise.
- 2.4 Partners will work together to bring forward individual phases of development in accordance with an agreed Delivery Plan.
- 2.5 Partners agree to co-opt, or invite participation and representation from other organisations relevant to the delivery of Project Taunton.

## **3.0 Financial Agreements**

- 3.1 The partners agree to work collaboratively to identify and deliver the resources required to deliver the UDF. These resources could come from the organisations' budgets, S106 contributions



and other third party agency contributions. Partners agree to work together to maximise private sector income to the project. Taunton has been allocated Growth Point status. The partners agree that this funding will be spent in accordance with a delivery plan authorised by the Project Taunton Executive and approved by the Advisory Board

#### **4.0 Land Ownership / Acquisition**

- 4.1 The partners agree to work together where necessary to acquire and release land parcels critical to the delivery of the vision, whether by negotiation or by CPO.
- 4.2 The partners agree to discuss decisions about use of any of their own land that falls within the regeneration area, prior to making decisions about disposal or change of current usage.

#### **5.0 Communications Protocol**

- 5.1 The partners agree to consider and give appropriate weight to the objectives of Project Taunton when making corporate decisions.
- 5.2 The partners agree to adopt a co-ordinated approach to discussions/involvement with the external organisations to elicit their support and further the aims of Project Taunton.
- 5.3 The partners commit to transparency and to a spirit of open communications in respect of this agreement where that does not breach confidentiality protocols.
- 5.4 The partners agree to work together in good faith to achieve the delivery of Project Taunton. It is recognised that issues will arise for decisions during the term of this MOU not necessarily provided for by its terms.
- 5.5 The partners agree where necessary to a co-ordinated and consistent approach to marketing of Project Taunton, PR and media relations.

#### **6.0 Terms**

- 6.1 No partner shall be liable to pay any contribution or commit any resources without the prior written agreement of the duly authorised representative specifying the extent of such contribution or resources.
- 6.2 Nothing in this MOU fetters the statutory liabilities, duties, responsibilities or roles of the undersigned parties.

6.3 The MOU will be for a further term of two years from date of signing until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 at which point it will be reviewed

Signed by:

Ian Thompson  
Area Director  
South West of England Regional Development Agency

Date:

Penny James  
Chief Executive  
Taunton Deane Borough Council

Date:

Alan Jones  
Chief Executive  
Somerset County Council

Date:

Nick Gupta  
Area Manager  
Environment Agency

Date:

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