

## Community Governance Review of the Unparished Area of Taunton Communications Master Text

# NEW TOWN OR PARISH COUNCILS IN TAUNTON? HAVE YOUR SAY

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

All local residents and organisations are invited to give their views.

### 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.

Town and parish councils also represent their communities. They must be consulted on planning applications within their area and may work with Somerset West and Taunton 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 but would exist alongside it.

### **Why is Somerset West and Taunton Council carrying out the review at this time?**

Somerset West and Taunton Council took the decision that a Community Governance Review should be undertaken at this time because the former Taunton Deane Borough Council committed to address this anomaly in 2018, and the new Council restated this commitment in March 2021, to ensure that a review was undertaken with the resulting arrangements to be in place for April 2023.

Taunton is the only area in Somerset that does not have a Town or Parish Council level of local government. Across the country, many areas that were previously unparished have been turned into town and parish councils in previous years. Town or parish councils may also promote community engagement and effective local government.

In addition, Government guidance is that a Community Governance Review should be carried out every 10-15 years.

### **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. Typically, these can include the provision of allotments (a statutory responsibility, if there is demand); parks and recreation grounds; public conveniences; control of litter; play areas; community centres; crime prevention; festivals and fetes; traffic calming; tourism activities and/or markets. However recently 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.

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 precept payable in 2020-21 by a Band D Council Tax payer within the Council area is £43.86 per annum. The national average Band D precept of all precepting parish and town councils in the current year is £64.05 per annum and for approximately 30 of the larger councils, some of which have taken on responsibility for a range of services 'devolved' from their principal authority, the Band D figure is between £200 and £300 per annum.

A town or parish council itself decides what level of precept to charge but in the case of any new town or parish councils, Somerset West and Taunton Council would set the precept for their first year of operation based on the estimated cost of the level of activity expected and any services anticipated to be transferred.

### **What area(s) could any new town or parish council(s) cover?**

The Council wishes to consult with the public before consulting on any initial suggestions so as not to influence the consultation process towards any particular result.

The guidance is clear however that the division of a cohesive area, such as a Charter Trustee town, may not reflect the sense of community that needs to lie behind all parishes; or places where there were no recognisable smaller communities.

However, alternative options are possible - for example there could be a larger number of small town or parish councils representing individual areas, parts of Taunton could remain unparished, or we could simply retain the status quo. Somerset West and Taunton Council wants to know your views.

### **Will the Taunton Charter Trustees remain in place?**

Not necessarily. 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.

Proposals to create a parish or parish council covering all or part of a charter trustee area need to be judged in particular against the following considerations:

- a) the effect on the historic cohesiveness of the area
- b) what are the other community interests in the area?
- c) Is there a demonstrable sense of community identity encompassing the charter trustee area?
- d) Are there smaller areas within it which have a demonstrable community identity and which would be viable as administrative units?

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 relation to service delivery and the level of precept, just as for any new town or parish councils that might be established elsewhere in Somerset West and Taunton, a new Town or Parish(es) Council could decide in future to take on additional services of the sort set out above.

### **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?**

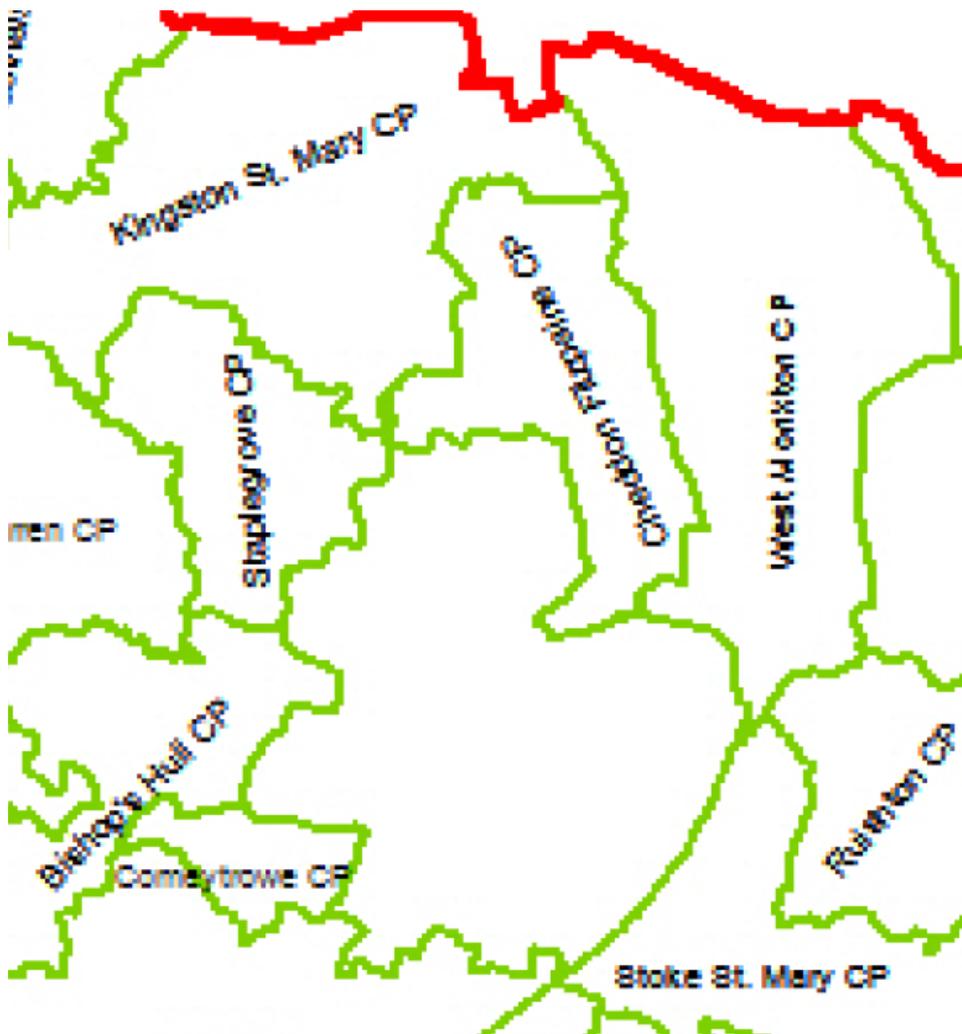
By law the review must be completed within 12 months of starting it. This review started on July 2021, and therefore it has to be finished by July 2022. It is anticipated that if any new town or parish councils were to be established following this review they would come into existence no later than April 2023.

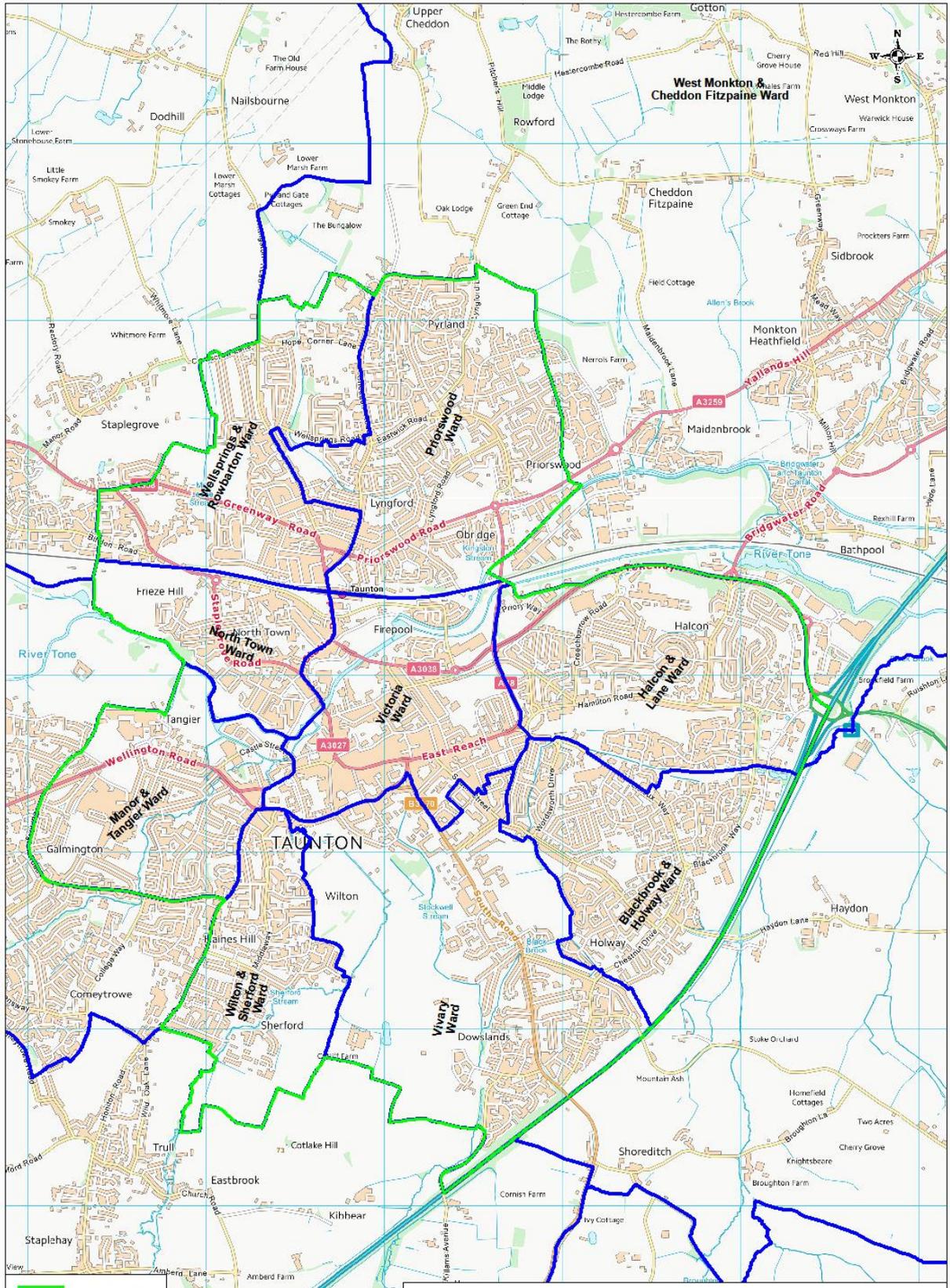
### **How to find out more**

Full information about the Community Governance Review including the terms of reference and detailed timetable are on the website at [www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

## Map

The map below shows the existing Unparished Area Boundaries together with the Somerset West and Taunton Council Wards (revised with effect from May 2019).





## 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 14 September 2021**. Somerset West and Taunton Council will consider all submissions received before coming to its draft recommendations, which will then be published for further consultation before any final decisions are made.

## Community Governance Review - Questionnaire

# NEW TOWN OR PARISH COUNCILS IN TAUNTON?

### INTRODUCTORY PAGE

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

Full information about the review including the terms of reference and a timetable, are on our website at [www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

All local residents, business owners and organisations are invited to give their views.

The Council will consider all feedback before making draft recommendations. These will then be published for further public consultation before any final decisions are made.

You can complete this questionnaire online, or download a paper version and return it to Governance Team, Somerset West and Taunton Council, PO Box 866, Taunton, TA1 9GS or hand it in one of our offices.

Alternatively you can tell us your views by e-mailing:  
**[governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)**

This first stage of the consultation will close on **Tuesday 14 September 2021**.

**1. Please tell us whether you are a:**

- Local resident
- Local employee
- Local business person

Official representative of community organisation – Please state which one.....

Other (please state) .....

### Town and parish councils

Town and parish councils exist in many rural and urban areas and are the most local tier of government in England. Somerset West and Taunton Council is classed as a Principal Authority and therefore has responsibility for deciding whether to create, amend or abolish parish areas within its boundaries and whether to establish

councils to serve any of the parishes. A parish council that serves a town area may call itself a 'town council'.

Town or 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.

In some cases, they may take over responsibility for services previously or currently delivered by Somerset West and Taunton Council. The Council is undertaking the review as it is a key corporate priority for the 21/22 municipal year. A resolution was made by Taunton Deane Borough Council on 19th March 2018, that a Community Governance Review (CGR) of the Unparished Area of Taunton is commenced with a view to creating a new Town or Parish Council(s) from 1st April 2023, and this was re-affirmed by SWT Council on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021. Town or parish councils may also promote community engagement and effective local government. In addition, Government guidance states that it is good practice for principal councils to conduct a community governance review every 10-15 years, except in areas with very low populations.

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.

### Community Representation

Town or parish councils represent their communities. They must be consulted on planning applications within their area and they may bid to purchase assets of community value or express an interest in running a local authority service.

Town or 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 but would exist alongside it or any future unitary authority.

There are some bodies in place already in Taunton which represent local residents such as local community groups.

## 2. Should a town or parish councils be set up to serve the parts of Taunton that do not currently have them?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

REASONS/COMMENTS (free text) .....

**3. Do you think that creating town or parish councils would provide more benefits than if Somerset West and Taunton Council worked with the existing bodies in place?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

REASONS/COMMENTS (free text) .....

**Services provided by town or parish councils**

The range of services provided by town or parish councils varies with each council deciding what, if any, services it will provide. Typically, these can include allotments; parks and recreation grounds; public conveniences; control of litter; play areas; community centres; crime prevention; festivals and fetes; traffic calming; tourism activities and/or markets. However, recently there are examples of different types of services being delegated to them for example, street cleaning and CCTV in Salisbury, and a library in Charnwood.

As the level of services provided varies significantly between town or parish councils, so does the level of precept they charge Council Tax payers. For example, the Council Tax precept payable in 2020-21 for a Band D property in SWT is £43.86 per annum.

The national average Band D precept of all town and parish councils in the current year is £69.89 per annum and for approximately 30 of the larger councils, some of which have taken on responsibility for a range of services 'devolved' from their Principal Authority, the Band D figure is between £200 and £300 per annum.

A town or parish council decides what level of precept it will charge but in the case of any new councils, Somerset West and Taunton Council would set the precept for the first year of operation based on the estimated cost of any services to be transferred and the level of activity expected.

**4. Do you think the new town or parish council(s) should consider delivering some local services that are currently provided by Somerset West and Taunton Council and for these to be paid for by the town council precept?**

YES – If yes, what sort of services do you think town or parish councils could deliver?

NO

Reasons/Comments (free text) .....

## Community Governance

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

Any town or parish council should reflect distinct 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.

**5. Based on where you live, which Somerset West and Taunton town, parish, area or locality do you feel you belong to?**

RESPONSE (free text) .....

**6. Do you consider that any part of the Unparished Area should be grouped with another parish or other parishes?**

If yes, please provide details of the proposals, the reasons for the proposal and explain how the proposal will:

- (a) be reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; and
- (b) be effective and convenient.

You should also include suggestions for a proposed name for the group, whether the group should have a council and what electoral arrangements should apply.

RESPONSE (free text) .....

**7. What is your postcode?**

(We are asking this to understand where you live in relation to the locality you feel you belong to)

.....

## Areas covered by town or parish councils

Somerset West and Taunton Council at this first stage of consultation is wishing to listen to all stakeholders and remain open to all options.

A new town council to represent the current area of the Unparished Area of Taunton is just one of the options the Council could opt for. Alternatively there could be a larger number of small town or parish councils representing individual areas, parts of Taunton could remain unparished, or we could simply keep things the way they are now. The government guidance does state that the division of a cohesive area, such

as a Charter Trustee town, would not reflect the sense of community that needs to lie behind all parishes; or places where there were no recognisable smaller communities, and a larger parish may best suit the needs of the area.

**8. If you do think that new town or parish council(s) should be created:**

**(a) What area(s) should it/they cover?**

RESPONSE (free text) .....

**(b) What would you name the new town or parish council(s)?**

RESPONSE (free text) .....

**Taunton Charter Trustees**

The Charter Trustees for Taunton were established in 2019 and cover the wards of the Unparished Area of Taunton, to enable the historic Taunton Mayoralty to continue, with the sixteen Somerset West and Taunton Councillors elected in May 2019 automatically serving as Charter Trustees. 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 of the Council, the area covered by it and its electoral arrangements.

**9. Do you think that there should be any changes to the area covered by the Unparished Area of Taunton area?**

YES – It should be abolished and replaced with a Town or Parish Council.

NO – it should be kept as it is.

Reasons/Comments (Free text).....

**10. Do you think that there should be any changes to the number of councillors who make up the Unparished Area of Taunton (sixteen)?**

YES – There should be more councillors/There should be fewer councillors

NO

Reasons/Comments (Free text).....

**11. Do you consider the unparished area should be divided into more or less than the nine wards that currently cover the area?**

If yes, please provide details of the proposals including a map illustrating the proposed ward boundary, the reasons for the proposal and explain how the proposal will make the election of councillors more practicable and convenient. You should also include suggestions for proposed ward names and the number of councillors that should represent the electorate in each ward.

Current wards;

1. *Vivary (2 Councillors)*
2. *Victoria (2 Councillors)*
3. *Wellsprings and Rowbarton (2 Councillors)*
4. *Priorswood (3 Councillors)*
5. *Halcon and Lane (2 Councillors)*
6. *Blackbrook and Holway (2 Councillors)*
7. *Wilton and Sherford (1 Councillor)*
8. *Manor and Tangier (1 Councillor)*
9. *North Town ( 1 Councillor)*

Reasons/Comments (Free text).....

**12. Do you have any other comments on governance issues at the parish/town council level?**

RESPONSE (free text) .....

**Further consultation**

If you would like to be contacted to take part in the second stage of this consultation, please leave your email details below. We will only use your information to contact you about the second stage of this consultation.

**Name** .....

**E-mail** .....

**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](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)