

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 7 December 2021

Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide – Review of Public Consultation and Adoption as Supplementary Planning Document

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Mike Rigby

Report Author: Fiona Webb - Placemaking Specialist

Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide for formal adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (“SPD”). The SPD has been produced to provide additional guidance to support policies DM4 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy, D7 of the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan, and NH13 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 on how these and other relevant policies of the adopted development plan should be responded to in relation to securing high quality design.
- 1.2 The draft Design Guide was originally subject to consultation from 3 February to 30 March 2020. Due to the covid pandemic, a number of consultations were significantly delayed including Somerset County Council (SCC). Following representations from SCC Highways, detailed discussions took place between Somerset West and Taunton and SCC as the Highway Authority. As a result, a second formal consultation was carried out for the expanded section on Streets, Parking and Placemaking from 11 December to 5 February 2021. Following SWT’s approval of its Climate Positive Planning guidance, it was considered the Council were not going far enough in its response on climate change. As a result, the Design Guide was further updated to provide a greater focus on the climate emergency and to provide *aspirational* guidance on how development proposals *could* go beyond policy requirements. This also coincided with the release by government of the National Design Guide 2021 and the National Model Design Code which also led to changes to be incorporated. For this reason, and in order to ensure that the Design Guide could be adopted as SPD, it was considered appropriate to carry out a third consultation which took place between 5 July and 16 August 2021.
- 1.3. Following the comments received on the draft design guide amendments are now proposed to the draft Design Guide SPD and it is now ready for adoption as an SPD and for endorsement as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the District.

Recommendations

- 2.1. Recommendations are that Full Council resolves to:

- 1) Approve the Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide for adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document and for endorsement as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the District.
- 2) Note the outcomes of the public consultations on the draft Somerset West and Taunton Design Guide, undertaken 3 February to 30 March 2020, 11 December to 5 February 2021 and 5 July to Monday 16 August 2021 as set out in the consultation statement in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 3) Agree that the Director of Development and Place, in consultation with the Planning and Transport Portfolio Holder be authorised to approve and make minor amendments, prior to the final publication of the Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide.
- 4) Agree the creation and launch of a Districtwide 'Quality of Place' award scheme. This would be linked to the Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide, the Taunton Garden Town Vision, and the Taunton Garden Town Design Charter and Checklist.

Risk Assessment

- 3.1 The SPD provides clear policy guidance for the local planning authority and developers which will support the delivery of sustainable development. The SPD will assist on the deliverability of development proposals, since it clearly sets out for developers' further guidance on the requirements of the Local Planning Authority. Similarly, the SPD clearly sets out Local Planning Authority's requirements for good design which will assist in officers making a balanced judgement against other policy and Council objectives, for example, affordable housing, infrastructure and achieving more energy efficient, climate resilient housing.
- 3.2 The Districtwide Design Guide SPD must be read in conjunction with the development plan as a whole. The planning system must balance multiple factors including the delivery of housing to meet the national housing crisis and the provision of infrastructure such as roads, schools and open space to meet the demands of new housing, together with the need to meet policy requirements and ensure that development remains viable. In this context it can be difficult to ensure that design issues are prioritised. However, high quality, sustainable design should not be seen as an obstacle to the achievement of these other aims, rather an improvement on the way that they are achieved. The Districtwide Design Guide addresses this by providing additional guidance to support the implementation of existing adopted design policies. It does not conflict with existing adopted policy or place new burdens on the viability of development as the requirement for high quality design is already enshrined in adopted policy. Higher quality design does not always have to mean higher development costs, though clearly sometimes it will lead to this. Where viability is a properly justified concern, the Council will need to consider the various policy requirements of the development plan, taken as a whole, to determine whether and how development can be brought forward in a viable way and still contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development. A nuanced and case-specific consideration will be required to understand what the correct balance of requirements should be to result in sustainable development.
- 3.3 The Corporate Risk Register contains a risk associated with failure to have an up-to-date Local Plan or to demonstrate that the district has a five-year land supply or sufficient

Housing Delivery Test score. Failure of the above points could lead to housing policies of the district's local plans being considered out of date and application of / fall back on the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This would lead to unplanned development and likely less sustainable patterns of development. Therefore, careful consideration will be required in relation to these particular risks when implementing the SPD and determining planning applications, particularly where viability has been properly demonstrated as a justified concern. The weight to be given to a viability assessment at application stage is a matter for the decision maker, having regard to all the circumstances in the case.

- 3.4 Similarly, such costs associated with infrastructure and policy requirements must also be borne by our own developments. There will be a public expectation that we 'practice as we preach' with regards to issues like design, with a particular focus on developments in Taunton due to its Garden Town Status. That being the case, the Council must be cognisant of this, whilst also recognising that the risk is probably reasonably low as our own schemes are already aiming to be exemplars, particularly regarding environmental standards and sustainability.

Background and Full Report

- 4.1 The purpose of the Districtwide Design Guide is to seek a step change in the quality of new development in the district in support of adopted local plan policies. It aims to ensure that the significant level of housing growth needed in the district to meet future need is designed to create healthy, inclusive, sustainable places to live for everyone promoting a common approach to the main principles which underpin the various adopted Local Plans that are used for assessing planning applications. If adopted, the Design Guide will be a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and a material consideration in determining relevant planning proposals and applications.
- 4.2 This means that the SPD will be afforded weight in the decision-making process.

Policy Context

- 4.3 National planning and design policy underline the need for local authorities to ensure that the quality of the design of new development is both sensitive to the positive aspects of the character of local areas and to incorporate the principles of placemaking, to achieve viable resilient neighbourhoods. The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF), the National Design Guide 2021 and the National Model Design Code all advocate that local authorities produce design guides and design codes as a means to achieve a higher quality of development which addresses the aims above. The NPPF recommends Design Guides should be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) in order they are given as much weight as possible in the decision-making process,
- 4.4 Section 12 of the NPPF – Achieving Well Designed Places sets out the government's agenda for good design. Paragraph 126 states that 'The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this'.

- 4.5 It should be noted that the NPPF was updated in July 2021. This now places the additional requirement for development to be 'beautiful' as well as high quality and sustainable. This update also emphasises the importance of guidance contained in the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. In addition, there is new guidance for the requirement of street trees in Paragraph 131 which states 'Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible.'
- 4.6 The emerging Districtwide Design Guide SPD (see Appendix 2) has been produced to support policies DM4 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy, D7 of the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan, and NH13 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032, which aim to promote high quality design in the district. From adoption, the SPD will provide additional guidance on how these and other relevant policies of the adopted development plan should be responded to.
- 4.7 The diagram 1.0c in the draft Districtwide Design Guide illustrates the relationship between national policies involving design, related national guidance, County Council standards (particularly regarding highways) and the local design policies and guidance in both the draft Districtwide Design Guide and the suite of documents regarding Taunton Garden Town.
- 4.8 Regarding public art, existing adopted planning policies in the former Taunton Deane area set out requirements for public art in policies D13 and D7 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP), policies ED1 and ED2 of the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP) and DM4 of the Core Strategy. The policies all either refer to the Public Art and Design Policy adopted by the Council in 2007, the Public Art Code adopted in 2010, or otherwise refer to public art being provided at 1% of development costs either via commissioning and integrating public art into the design of buildings and the public realm, or by a commuted sum. Additionally, in the case of Taunton, they refer to the Town Centre Design Code SPD which includes specific codes relating to public art and which identifies specific art and design sites relating to the public realm areas. The Districtwide and Public Realm Design Guides refer to this existing policy context and recommend that public art is primarily integrated into the design of buildings and the public realm and is part of what constitutes good design.

Consultation

- 4.9 A draft Districtwide Design Guide was considered by Members at their Executive meeting on 28 January 2020 and approved for public consultation. Public consultation originally took place on the draft Design Guide between Monday 3 February to Monday 30 March 2020. Due to the covid pandemic, several consultations were significantly delayed including that with Somerset County Council (SCC).
- 4.10 Following representations from SCC Highways to the original draft Design Guide, detailed discussions took place in a series of workshop sessions between Somerset West and Taunton and SCC as the Highway Authority. The concerns from SCC Highways were based on conventional highway practice for the provision of generous engineered highway solutions, rather than current good practice for reducing speeds in residential areas (20m/hr) through tighter street design, tighter road junctions and reduced visibility splays. As a result, a second formal consultation was carried out for

the expanded section on Streets, Parking and Placemaking from 11 December to 5 February 2021.

- 4.11 As a result of SWT approving the final version of Climate Positive Planning, there were a number of responses to this consultation that considered that the Council was not going further in its response on climate change. As a result, the Design Guide was updated to provide a greater focus on the climate emergency and to provide *aspirational* guidance on how development proposals *could* go beyond policy requirements. This also coincided with the release by government of the National Design Guide 2021 and the National Model Design Code which also required an update of the draft Design Guide. For this reason, and in order to ensure that the Design Guide could be adopted as SPD, it was considered appropriate to carry out a third consultation which took place 5 July to Monday 16 August 2021.
- 4.12 During the three consultations carried out, the majority of the consultees welcomed the draft Design Guide SPD and were impressed with its attractive layout, illustrative material, and its ambition to improve the standard of design. It was particularly welcomed as some consultees considered that the standard of design in the district was generally mediocre and lacked local distinctiveness.
- 4.13 A total of 36 representations were received during the first consultation on the draft Districtwide Design Guide SPD, 7 during the second consultation and 31 during the third consultation. These consultation responses were from Councillors, members of the public, amenity bodies, parish councils, developers, and internal staff. A table showing all representations received is set out in the table in Appendix 1 of this report together with SWT's responses.
- 4.14 Consideration of representations received during the three public consultations on the Design Guide has resulted in the following proposed changes within the Design Guide, as summarised below:
- 4.15 First and Second Consultations (3 February to 30 March 2020 and 11 December to 5 February 2021)

Substantial Revisions and Additions:

- Section 4.4 – Streets, Parking and Placemaking were amended following a series of workshops resulting in the preparation of an expanded section based on more progressive approaches to street design as advocated in the original section of the Design Guide. SCC Highways were more willing to engage as their own 1991 'Red Book' standards were at that time being revised.
- Section 5.9 - Residential Alterations and Extensions was revised and expanded on both in text and illustrations to clarify the distinction between permitted development and those alterations which required planning permission.
- Section 5.10 on Shop front Design was expanded to include a response to the changing high street in terms of the conversion of retail premises to alternative uses.
- A new section under Part 5.0 Design Topics addressed the development of smaller sites. This showed how the principles of placemaking should be applied even at the scale of small developments (under 10 units).
- Section 4.3 on House Typologies was revised and expanded upon to clarify the recommendations and to improve the illustrations.

Other Changes:

- The Introduction clarified the role of illustrations within the design guide and the fact that these are indicative only, not implying a preference for a particular architectural style.
- Section 3.1 on Context and Distinctiveness was revised to show the importance of promoting a design approach which is responsive to local distinctiveness without resorting to superficial stylistic treatments. This was also in response to a number of representations, both within this consultation period and other Garden Town events, where participants encouraged the Local Authority to ensure that all developments should reflect local distinctiveness.
- Additional clarification was applied throughout the text to reinforce the aims of the design guide that it should be relevant to considerations regarding:
 - a) the incorporation of modern methods of construction,
 - b) the inclusion of renewable energy sources,
 - c) the importance of landscape for tackling climate change and encouraging biodiversity and aiding a sense of wellbeing, and
 - d) the inclusion of active travel within developments.
- Updated policy and guidance e.g. change from Building for Life 12 to Building for a Healthy Life
- Expanded section 7.2 - References section included recent documents

4.16 Of the 36 respondents to the first consultation and 7 respondents to the second consultation, 4 were from volume house builders already developing major sites in Taunton. The detailed comments from the volume house builders (which often overlap) and SWT's responses to them are show in detail in the summary of consultations in Appendix 1. These can broadly be summarised under the following headings – a) Viability; b) Level of Prescription; c) Local Distinctiveness; and d) Relationship with SCC Highways and parking.

- a) Viability – the house builders considered that the Design Guide should recognise the relationship between what is recommended and required against the financial viability of housing development. In response, the value of having Design Guides and Codes is that they provide a level playing field for developers to understand the costs which are likely to be incurred and to take this into account in their land valuations. The main thrust of the design guide is to make efficient use of sites and plots to ensure optimum utilisation of land; this is particularly so in advocating the reduction of land-take for highways. Moreover, all the planned footprints of the indicative schemes show very simple and therefore cost-efficient plan shapes. Additionally, the government commitments to early carbon neutrality and the climate emergency are creating significant challenges for the development industry and these are reflected in SWT's policies and consequently the Design Guide as SPD.
- b) Level of Prescription – the house builders felt that the Design Guide should avoid being over prescriptive in terms of design and style. The challenge for any Design Guide is to strike a balance between seen to be vague in its requirements and on the other hand to be interpreted as being over prescriptive. The approach taken by the Design Guide is in all cases to show indicative illustrations which demonstrate how objectives might be encapsulated in built form. But at the outset of the Design Guide it stresses that alternative contemporary solutions would be valid if they demonstrate that the design process advocated has been thoroughly undertaken. Furthermore, the illustrations depict relatively style neutral built form in order to explain layouts/concepts.

- c) Local Distinctiveness – the house builders recommended that the advocacy of local distinctiveness should recognise interwar suburban forms of housing as a locally distinctive feature of Taunton. The advocacy of creating locally distinctive built environments has been a constant theme of planning legislation in the post war era and is reiterated in the NPPF and the National Design Guide. It is further reinforced in numerous places in the Local Plan. The Design Guide identifies aspects of local distinctiveness relevant in the SWT area. It avoids identifying styles and forms found in any urban location in the country as by definition these are not locally distinctive. Furthermore, in the case of interwar suburban development, this tends to be road dominated and low density and militates against active travel and the efficient use of land. The challenge for both the Design Guide and the developer is to identify aspects of topography, layout, and materials which are both relevant for good placemaking and which respond to but not mimic solutions to local contexts.
- d) Relationship with SCC Highways and parking – The developers raised the issue of the relationship of the Highway Authority and those of Planning and Placemaking. As part of preparing the Design Guide it has been recognised that there is a tension between the conventional highway prescriptions based on the 1991 Highway Authority Standards and those now advocated in Manual for Streets and the publications emanating from CIHT. As this latter approach is now advocated by the National Design Guide and is recognised by SCC in their proposed draft new highway standards, these differences should be minimised. Indeed, the Design Guide Team and a working party of SCC Highway officers embarked on a series of workshops to agree a common approach and design principles based on recently developed best practice. In regard to parking the developers urged that parking spaces should be located close to front doors; this is agreed, and the advocacy of parking streets and squares should ensure that parking spaces are close to and easily observed from nearby houses. The Highway Authority also advocates contextually based parking standards related to the varied location of developments within the district and the relative accessibility to facilities by active travel and public transport. This approach is endorsed by the Design Guide and should give developers appropriate flexibility.

4.17 Third consultation - 5 July to Monday 16 August 2021

Substantial Revisions and Additions:

- The Design Guide has been updated to take into account of the new NPPF guidance on achieving 'Beauty' in new development as well as high quality and sustainability. Section 6.5 – Quality Review has been amended to clearly set out the Local Planning Authorities criteria for schemes where Design Review will be strongly encouraged as part of the authority's consideration of a development proposal. A bespoke Quality Review Panel is currently being set up for SWT district area and it is hoped that this will assist in making judgements on whether a scheme achieves high quality, beauty, and sustainability.
- Throughout the Design Guide, references and photographs have been expanded on to encourage the use of contemporary design solutions as well as traditional. The Design Guide emphasises that the guidance should be treated as a springboard for good design rather than a straitjacket for development.
- Design guidance for flood resilience has been expanded on in relation to the need for sustainable urban drainage, this is particularly in relation to recent guidance from the Construction Industry Research and Information Association. This publication is also included in the References section.

- An amended and revised section has been included on House Types to show the range and type of house types which are necessary as components to make successful streets and places (Section 4.3).
- A new Design Topic on Public Art has been included in the guidance. This subject was considered too light touch in the previous consultation drafts. This guidance corresponds to that contained in the Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town. It emphasises that public art should not just be thought of as individual pieces of art but should also be integral to building design. It also emphasises the importance of achieving beauty in the built environment.
- The design guidance for achieving the urban block in a layout has also been expanded upon to reflect the density requirements and variations shown in the National Model Design Code.

Other Changes:

- The context and local distinctiveness of the architectural character of Taunton has been expanded upon to better reflect the predominant vernacular house types in the settlement.
- The guidance for shopfronts has been expanded upon particularly to include more guidance for signage and advertisements.
- Guidance on Taller Buildings has been expanded upon particularly to include SWT's requirements for assessing such proposals. The indicative drawing showing a taller building has also been amended to better reflect the height of proposed building anticipated within the larger settlements in the district.
- Greater guidance has been provided for agricultural buildings with their landscape setting, particularly regarding topography and the land profile of a site.
- Greater reference has been made to security and safety within layouts and the need to consult the Police Crime Prevention Officer.
- Guidance has been expanded on for the preparation of Heritage Statements in accordance with comments from Historic England.

4.18 Of the 31 respondents to the third consultation, 8 received were from volume house builders. A number of the comments were broadly similar to those expressed in the previous consultations, particularly on issues of the level of prescription and local distinctiveness. The comments from the volume house builders and SWT's responses to them are shown in the summary of consultations in Appendix 1. These can broadly be summarised under the following headings – a) Over Prescriptive, Stifling Innovation and Document Too Lengthy; b) Local Distinctiveness; c) Requirements of SCC Highways and EV Charging; d) Zero Carbon and Future Homes Standards; and d) Design Review.

- a) Over Prescriptive, Stifling Innovation and Document Too Lengthy – The house builders consider that the draft Design Guide is too prescriptive, will stifle innovative contemporary design and that the document is too lengthy. The issue of prescription was raised in the previous consultations. - In response, it is important for a design guide to strike a balance between policy requirements and to demonstrate through examples how these can be achieved in practise. The nature of the design process means that not everything can be clearly explained unambiguously in words, therefore diagrammatic illustrations of layouts and forms are required. These diagrams are illustrative, and it is made clear in the guidance that if an applicant can demonstrate that other solutions would achieve the stated requirements, then other such solutions could be a valid approach. The draft Design Guide clearly states (section 1.7) that the guidance should not be taken as a straitjacket but should act as a springboard for good design, and it sets

out the minimum standards from which good design is expected. It is accepted that the document is comprehensive given the ever-expanding agenda from government on design and the need to address all aspects of design relating to climate and ecological emergency both at the local and national level. However, the draft Design Guide is a manual requiring applicants to consider the relevant sections of the document to their application, i.e., the character area within their site is located, the design process, and the relevant design topic(s).

- b) Local Distinctiveness – this was mentioned by a minority of the developers as being an issue and was also raised in the previous consultations. The house builder's concerns relate to interwar suburban development not being recognised within the design guide as locally distinctive, that the distinctiveness of Taunton's vernacular is not sufficiently defined and that the section on distinctiveness over emphasises traditional built forms. – In response, interwar suburban development is universal throughout the whole country due to the standardisation of house types, layouts, road standards and density. These factors have resulted in uniform 'anywhere' character which is often at odds with the townscape and landscape of existing traditional settlements within the district. Furthermore, there is a need to make settlements walkable and to raise densities in areas which are most sustainable and nearest to facilities; this means that suburban low-density development is far less applicable than two generations ago. In regard to the Taunton's vernacular not being sufficiently defined, much of Taunton built form is 19 Century development with many characteristics that are common with building forms in other towns. There is however a palette of materials and a limited number of building details which are common to Taunton. On this point the house builders do not appear to appreciate that the guidance sets out pointers for applicants to make their own character appraisal of their site and its context. Regarding traditional building forms, the guidance is not suggesting that an applicant slavishly copies historic buildings found in the district. The Design Guide advocates that traditional buildings provide a sense of place and identity, through establishing a scale, form, layout, and palette of materials which should be recognised and used as a springboard for design interpretation in new development.
- c) Relationship with SCC Highways Guidance – The house builders raise the issue of the relationship of the Highway Authority and those of Planning and Placemaking. – In response, a series of workshop meetings have been held with SCC Highways to attempt to resolve differing approaches to streetmaking. Substantial progress has been made as is reflected in section 4.4. At the time of writing this report officers were still finalising the design guide to take account of SCC Highways comments. SWT officers are working to best practise contained in the NPPF, Manual for Streets, National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.
- d) Working Towards Zero Carbon Design and Construction – Several of the house builders raise the question of the degree to which the guidance on Towards Zero Carbon Construction (section 5.2) is mandatory. In addition, some house builders raise the question of the design guide's relationship to the Future Homes Standard. In response, the design topic 'Towards Zero Carbon Design and Construction' sets out a design process to help move development towards delivering zero carbon buildings. Tackling carbon emissions and climate impact via such a design process is integral to good design and aligns with existing planning policies. The topic clearly differentiates between what is policy requirement and what is aspirational/illustrative as the document does throughout. Additional text is proposed to clarify the relationship with the Government's proposed interim update to Building Regulations Part L (due December 2021) and the Future Homes Standard (due 2025). However, it remains valid and reasonable to illustrate how new development could and should be looking to push ambition in this

regard in advance of and beyond these standards in order to deliver on the adopted target of working towards carbon neutrality by 2030. Regarding the Future Homes Standard, this was a government consultation and no additional regulations have currently been issued. However, the aspirations set out in Working Towards Zero Carbon Design and Construction (section 5.2) appear to be fully in line with the proposals. In response to the house builder's concerns at how to mitigate the effects of overheating in residential buildings, an additional illustrative diagram has been provided in the design guide.

- e) Design Review – Several of the house builders expressed concern at the status and need for Design Review (to be renamed Quality Review) – In response, Design Review Panels are a well-established feature of the planning process, and their use is advocated in the NPPF and Policy D7 of the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan. They offer independent critical friend advice to both applicants and the local planning authority on the quality of a scheme and are best employed at the earliest stages of any proposals. The criteria for triggering the need for design review relates to the significance of a proposal as well as its size. The number of likely applications received per year, triggering the need for design review, will be small in comparison to the total number of applications received.

Adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

- 4.19 In order to be legally compliant, an SPD must be prepared, consulted upon, and adopted by resolution of Full Council in line with certain regulations as set out in the Town and County Planning (Local Plans) (England) Regulations 2012. A draft Adoption Statement (Appendix 4) and Consultation Statement (Appendix 3). Together, these documents set out how the SPD is legally compliant and comply with key regulations.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)/ Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening

- 4.20 Under the European Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive) and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations), an SEA is required for all plans which may have a significant effect on the environment. In addition to this, under Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive and Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 an HRA is required when it is deemed that the implementation of the plan is likely to cause significant negative effects upon protected European Sites (Natura 2000 sites).
- 4.21 An SEA/HRA Screening Assessment has been undertaken to ascertain whether or not significant effects are considered likely to arise as a result of the District-wide Design Guide SPD, requiring full SEA/HRA. A draft Screening Assessment was consulted on with the statutory consultees, and the final report (see Appendix 5) takes account of comments received. The conclusion of the assessment is that the SPD does not require full SEA or HRA to be conducted.

5. Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Theme 1 – objectives towards the District **Carbon neutral by 2030**’; clear vision and delivery plan for the Taunton Garden Town’; ‘Provide and maintain green open spaces and parks, enhanced public spaces, as well as additional opportunities to safely walk or cycle in order to encourage active and healthy lifestyles’. Theme 3 – objectives to ‘Increase the number of affordable and social homes in our urban towns, rural and

coastal communities; Facilitate the development of the residential blocks at Firepool, Taunton, in order to deliver new homes and public open spaces'; and 'Seek additional funding for new strategic infrastructure and regeneration projects from developers, investors, Government and other funders, which support or enable existing or new communities within our district

6. Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 The cost of preparing the Districtwide Design Guide has been funded from the Local Plan budget. The cost of public consultation on the guide has also been funded by Local Plan budget.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 The preparation of the draft Districtwide Design Guide and the period of public consultation is in compliance with relevant legislation and guidance regarding supplementary planning documents including the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2012 and the government's Planning Practice Guidance. A draft Adoption Statement (Appendix 4) and Consultation Statement (Appendix 3). Together, these documents set out how the SPD is legally compliant and comply with key regulations. If approved the SPD will be adopted by resolution by Full Council following which the Adoption Statement (Appendix 4) will be published.

The final draft Districtwide Design Guide has been prepared in line with the relevant planning regulations. The draft District-wide Design Guide SPD (see Appendix 2) is clearly identified as having been produced pursuant to policies DM4 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy, D7 of the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan, and NH13 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032, which aim to promote high quality design in the district.

The final draft Districtwide Design Guide SPD has been subject to consultation in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). Following consultation and adoption, the SPD will be a material consideration in the determination of all relevant planning applications. However, the SPD will be without any prejudice to any decisions that the Council may take as Local Planning Authority in respect of individual site/s and any future planning applications.

8. Climate and Sustainability Implications

8.1 Completion, adoption and implementation of the Districtwide Design Guide and Public Realm Design Guide are identified in the Council's Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan as key actions. The Design Guide recognises that sustainable, energy efficient and climate resilient design is integral to what constitutes good design. It is considered that the Design Guide will have positive implications in terms of sustainability through guidance including the integration of placemaking and sustainability principles. This includes the following:

- Green Streets – requires streets to be designed to be greener which could include more street trees, swales, and planting/hedgerows for garden boundaries.
- Water – requires that priority is given to sustainable drainage processes and that a drainage strategy should help to shape the design of the open space, landscape and streets.

- Biodiversity – identifies how development can provide a net gain in biodiversity by including design features at the scales of neighbourhood, street and individual house.
- Air Quality – the issue of air quality is addressed throughout the document through requiring that developments: - Prioritise active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport. - Incorporate street trees, planting, open spaces and landscape. - Include EV charging points for vehicles.
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions - The draft guide should help to reduce greenhouse gas emission impacts through prioritising active travel and public transport over the car, making developments greener with more trees and landscape, requiring the provision of electric vehicle charging points and encouraging better energy efficiency in homes.

9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 A priority of the Districtwide Design Guide is to create safe communities. They have been prepared in accordance with ‘Secure By Design’ principles and includes guidance on making inclusive places for people with safe streets and spaces and secure properties. The draft design guide and masterplan frameworks adhere to the principles relevant to crime prevention – natural surveillance (spaces around buildings open to public view from adjoining properties, front entrances clearly visible from the street, well used illuminated routes); access and movement (direct routes, choice of routes, clear routes, permeability); activity (levels of activity provide natural surveillance together with a mix of uses); sense of ownership (clear definition of public/private space, activity in public spaces, sociable places, perception of space); defensible space (buffer zones, spill out spaces, restricting access to private areas); physical protection (boundaries sensitive to context, building materials and security features); management and maintenance (allocated resources, design quality and detail, community management).

10. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is appended to the report at Appendix 6. Additionally extensive public consultation has taken place in accordance with the Council’s adopted Statement of Community Involvement. No representations were received from the community or from groups representing people with Protected Characteristics suggesting or requesting changes be made to the design guide.

11. Social Value Implications

- 11.1 The Districtwide Design Guide is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life, resulting in economic, social value and environmental benefits for the community.

12. Partnership Implications

- 12.1 As part of the Duty to Cooperate requirement (Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012), we will be expected to work with other public bodies, particularly neighbouring planning authorities and the County Council on any cross boundary issues. Close working has particularly taken place with SCC Highways through a number of workshop meetings.

13. Health and Wellbeing Implications

13.1 The Districtwide Design Guide is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life, resulting in economic, social value and environmental benefits for the community.

14. Asset Management Implications

14.1 None at this stage, however the Council will consider opportunities for use of its assets to contribute to the delivery and promotion of high quality and sustainable built environments.

15. Data Protection Implications

15.1 None at this stage.

16. Consultation Implications

16.1 The consultations on this document have been in line with the SWT's Statement of Community Involvement and the Council's legal obligations. Following the consultation exercises, this report considers what modifications need to be made to the Districtwide Design Guide.

17. Executive Recommendation(s)

17.1 The Executive unanimously supported the recommendations of this report.

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – Yes**

Reporting Frequency: X Once only

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix 1	Schedule of Responses to Consultations
Appendix 2	Districtwide Design Guide - Appendix 2 - Districtwide Design Guide.pdf (somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)
Appendix 3	Consultation Statement
Appendix 4	Adoption Statement SPD
Appendix 5	Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment
Appendix 6	Equality Impact Assessment

Contact Officers

Name	Fiona Webb
Direct Dial	01823 219458
Email	f.webb@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk