



CONSULTATION STATEMENT

Somerset West and Taunton Council: Taunton Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

Introduction

Somerset West and Taunton Council (the Council) has produced a Taunton Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which seeks to raise the standard of the public realm and streetworks consistently across our Garden Town. The guide is aimed at guiding the design of public realm and street works by the highway authority, developers, utility companies and their agents and contractors. It also shows how current principles of highway design and layout can be incorporated into good placemaking. A draft Public Realm Design Guide SPD was considered by the Council's Executive meeting on 28 January 2020 and approved for key stakeholder consultation. Following key stakeholder consultation in spring 2020, public consultation took place in winter 2020/21 and summer 2021. The Council has made a number of amendments across the document in response to comments received. The Council has now finalised the document in anticipation of adoption as an SPD.

This Consultation Report explains how the Council has undertaken public consultation to inform the development of the SPD, and how the engagement, feedback and responses received have influenced its development. The report covers: which bodies and persons were invited to make comment; how those bodies and persons were invited to make comment; the material that was subject to consultation; a summary of the responses received; and a summary of how the responses influenced the development of the SPD.

The Council has an adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The SCI outlines that the Council is committed to effective community engagement, and seeks to use a wide range of methods for involving the community in the plan making process. SWT's Statement of Community Involvement was adopted in November 2019. In relation to plan preparation, the SCI relates to the preparation of Development Plan Documents (DPDs), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA), Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and Neighbourhood Plans. As such, the SPD is required to comply with the SCI.

The Town and Country Planning (local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out what is required in terms of public participation and making of representations in relation to the production of SPD's. In response to Regulation 12(b), a Draft Consultation Statement was made available for public consultation alongside the SPD itself in the final round of consultation. This final Statement complies with the requirements of Regulation 12(a).

Consultation Summary

The Taunton Public Realm Design Guide SPD has been subject to three separate periods of consultation:

- Spring 2020 (3 February to 30 March 2020) – first draft Design Guide (technical stakeholder only)
- Winter 2020/21 (11 December 2020 to 5 February 2021)
- Summer 2021 (5 July 2021 to 16 August 2021) – Updated draft Design Guide

Summer 2021 Consultation

Consultation on an updated Taunton Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) took place from 05 July 2021 until Monday 16 August 2021 (six weeks). In accordance with Regulation 12(b)(i) of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, consultation responses had to be submitted within this time period in order to be taken into consideration.

The documents available to comment on as part of this consultation included the following:

- Updated Draft Taunton Public Realm Design Guide SPD;
- Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment / Habitat Regulations Assessment (SEA/HRA) Screening Report; and
- Draft Consultation Statement

Purpose of the Consultation

This updated draft Taunton Public Realm Design Guide SPD was produced as a response to a number of the issues raised in the previous rounds of consultations, particularly in relation to updated government guidance on cycling and active travel, standards in conservation areas and SCC adoption and how this is integral to high quality design. Links across to existing adopted planning policies as well as the Council's Climate Emergency declaration were also strengthened.

As such, the purpose of the consultations was four-fold:

- To seek views of stakeholders and raise awareness in relation to the proposed amended design guidance,
- To ensure that the final SPD has been informed by a demonstrable level of public engagement and input as expected by the Planning Practice Guidance
- To ensure legal compliance with relevant Regulations and to ensure statutory consultee consultation in relation to the Draft SEA/HRA Screening; and
- To provide notice to the development industry, of the Council's design guidance and that as SPD it will influence planning decisions where it is a material consideration.

Who We Consulted

A list of Specific Consultation Bodies, General Consultation Bodies, and other organisations and groups the Council seeks to involve in plan-making is included in the SCI. As a non-statutory plan, there is no statutory list of bodies and organisations that the Council was required to consult in preparation of the SPD. However, in accordance with Regulation 13(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations

2012, any person may make representations about an SPD. As such, all those on this list were consulted at this stage.

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (Habitat Regulations) set out that Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England are statutory consultees in relation to the Draft SEA/HRA Screening Report and as such these bodies were specifically invited to respond to this element.

The Council is committed to ensuring that local groups, organisations and individuals are provided with the opportunity to be involved in the preparation of planning policy documents.

The Council has a database of consultees, who have either commented upon, or expressed an interest in being involved with the development of local plans. This database is used to keep individuals, companies and organisations informed on the production of the Local Plan and other planning policy documents. New consultees are added to the consultation database via e-mail or letter to the Strategy Team requesting inclusion on to the database. The General Data Protection Regulations are followed to ensure that personal data is only required and retained where proportionate and necessary, is only gathered where explicit consent has been provided, is kept securely and is not disclosed to others. All bodies and persons identified within this database were emailed with notification of the consultation.

How We Consulted

Consultation on the updated Draft Taunton Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) ran from 05 July 2021 until Monday 16 August 2021 (six weeks). During this time a variety of methods were employed, though the full range of methods was limited by definitive restrictions and a cautiously proportionate approach due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and gradual loosening of lockdown restrictions.

Responses to the consultation were invited:

- Online via the Council's consultation portal at <https://yoursay.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/public-realm/prdgtfortgt/>
- By email: strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk
- By writing to the Council at: Placemaking Specialist, Planning and Development, Somerset West and Taunton Council, Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE;

To publicise the consultation, the Council:

- Emailed notification of the consultation to all bodies and persons identified within the consultation database.
- Made the above consultation documents available for inspection at the Council's principal offices at:
 - Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE (Monday – Friday, 8.30am to 5pm)
 - West Somerset House, Killick Way, Williton, TA4 4QA (Monday – Friday, 8.30am to 5pm)
- Publishing the documents on the Council's website at <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/taunton-garden->

[town-public-realm-design-guide-spd/](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/news/swt-announces-further-design-guide-consultations/)

- Published a press release via the Council's website and social media posts via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn in order to raise interest, and encourage participation, at <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/news/swt-announces-further-design-guide-consultations/>
- Presented to a virtual meeting of the Agents Forum – 12 July 2021
- Presented to a virtual meeting of the Taunton Design Circle – 28 July 2021
- Presented to a virtual meeting of the Somerset Affordable Housing Group – 22 July 2021
- Hosted a virtual Town and Parish Councils Event – 13 July 2021
- Held a virtual General Question & Answer Session for Members of the Public – 14 July 2021 between 12.30 – 4.30pm

In light of the covid restrictions, it was decided not to arrange any in-person consultation events as would normally take place.

The consultation documents could also be viewed online at all libraries in Somerset West and Taunton.

Level of Response

Overall, there were 19 responses to the consultation. Of the 19 respondents, 14 submitted their representation by email, 0 by post, 0 by social media and the remaining 5 respondents responded online.

Summary of Responses Received

The results of the consultation were representative of a wide spectrum of respondents, including statutory consultees, community and amenity groups, developers and internal staff. In total 19 responses were received.

There was a positive response to the revised draft design guide, with comments such as 'We support the intent of this Design Guide to raise the standard of public realm and street works in Taunton Garden Town', 'The guidance supports the creation of healthy communities through the land use planning system by encouraging people to be more physically active through their everyday lives', and 'We strongly support the overarching principle that all works in the public realm should seek to be flood resilient, adaptable to any climate change impacts, and where possible, contribute towards net carbon zero outcomes'.

The responses covered a wide variety of points, which is to be expected given the range of respondents' interests. The comments relating to the volume house builders are treated separately as their range, emphasis and depth was more substantial. Responses received from other parties can be broadly summarised under the following headings – a) People First Public Realm; b) Flood resilient, adaptable to climate change and contribute towards net carbon zero outcomes; c) Street Trees; and d) Public Art.

- a) People First Public Realm – The green and clean' objective and people first public realm was welcomed by a number of respondents. New guidance on cycling was mentioned and the need for cycles to be treated as vehicles and not as pedestrians. It was also stressed that we need to ensure that our streets are accessible for disabled cycle users to access all areas. It was also emphasised that

on urban streets, cyclists must be physically separated from pedestrians and should not share space with pedestrians. – In response all comments have been incorporated into the design guide and appropriate guidance included. The recent update of the NPPF which requires that buildings are designed beautifully has been also been addressed.

- b) Flood resilient, adaptable to climate change and contribute towards net carbon zero outcomes – A number of respondents were keen to support the carbon sequestration opportunities, flood resilience and biodiversity net gain outcomes sought by the guide. – In response this topic has been emphasised in guidance.
- c) Street Trees – Many respondents wanted to be assured that street trees would be included in the public realm. However issues were raised concerning regard to be given to tree planting potential size at maturity and potential to affect nearby buildings, structures or underground utilities and not to obstruct walking and cycling routes. Further comments were given on care to be taken to avoid impacts on heritage assets and that sourcing of trees should be from UK endorsed nurseries to reduce the risk of introducing pests and diseases. – In response these points have been emphasised in the guide.
- d) Public Art – A member raised the issue of a lack of guidance regarding public art. – In response this has been addressed in the creation of a new design topic on public art.

Of the 19 respondents to the third consultation, 5 comments were received from developers, 4 of whom sent very similar responses. All supported the production and aims of the Public Realm Design Guide, which they agreed would be a valuable and helpful tool for raising design standards within Taunton's public realm but were concerned with the availability and cost of materials in some situations. They suggested that the Design Guide needed to recognise that in some cases a lesser design approach or other materials will or may be equally acceptable and that the materials and specifications requested might not be available and (or) better solutions for paving could materialise in the future. – In response to this, SWT produced the design guide since ad hoc materials selections in the past have led to poor quality public spaces. We acknowledge that materials or specifications may need to change in future, but this does not prevent us from addressing what is required now. As such it is recognised that the guide may need to be revisited in future to maintain its relevance to current standards and availability of materials and furnishings.

Developers also expressed concerns over any conflict between what SWT and SCC require on highways, such as road materials, street trees, street furniture and sustainable urban drainage measures in the public realm and they suggested that the Guide does not offer further clarification as to how this would be addressed. They requested that the implications of requiring enhanced materials on future commuted sums be clearer - In response, a note to clarify the role of the planning officer to negotiate highways designs was added.

One developer suggested the guide was not for SWT to require but for the highway authority. – In response, this was noted but SWT as planning authority is intricately involved in approving applications that involve place making, urban design for health,

environment, and movement on and off the highway network often before the highway authority get involved. As such this is the opportunity to raise design standards.

You Said, We Did

As a result of the 19 responses received during the third consultation, the following substantial addition was carried out to the document:

- Additional section on public art added, cross referencing the Public Life for Public Space, Public Art Code SPD, 2006.

Other smaller changes included:

- Highlighting in section 1.1.8 the need to conserve historic paving in the Garden Town and the wording was strengthened on potential for streetworks to affect the historic environment and the need to conserve existing historic materials and furniture, including lighting.
- The Equalities and Inclusion section 1.1.9 noted DfT advice in LTN 1/20 that cycles must be treated as vehicles and not as pedestrians. However, it was also stressed that we need to ensure that our streets are accessible for disabled cycle users to access all areas. It was also emphasised that on urban streets, cyclists must be physically separated from pedestrians and should not share space with pedestrians.
- Guidance was added in the Equalities and Inclusion section on the need for public spaces to be designed to enhance community safety. It was also added that designers must take into consideration Secure by Design principles and minimize opportunities for crime.
- An additional note was also included in section 2.4 and 2.20.21. that materials and components at river and canal side locations may be subject to a Flood Risk Activity Permit (FRAP) from the Environment Agency. It was also added that signs on the canal may need to comply with Canal & River Trust design standards.
- In section 2.18 - Tree Planting - Notes were added on consideration to be given to tree planting potential size at maturity and potential to affect nearby buildings, structures or underground utilities and not obstructing walking and cycling routes. Also, further comments were included on care to be taken to avoid impacts on heritage assets. In addition, further comments were added to ensure that tree planting is supported by a management plan and that sourcing of trees should be from UKISG endorsed nurseries to reduce the risk of introducing pests and diseases.
- Notes were added to River and Canal corridor section 3.5 that riparian planting should not damage the riverbank. Nature conservation enhancements shall have a long-term management plan approved prior to implementation.
- The following References were also added:
 - Active Design, Planning for health and wellbeing through sport and physical activity, Sport England, 2015
 - Designing for Physical Activity, Routes and Wayfinding, Sport England, 2019
 - Streets for All, Advice for Highway and Public Realm Works in Historic Places. Historic England, 2018
 - Streets for All South West, Historic England, 2018

- External lighting of historic buildings, Historic England, 2020
- Designing, Installing and Maintaining an External Lighting Scheme, Historic England, 2020
- Secure Stations Scheme, British Transport Police Authority and DfT. 2018
- Cycle Rail Toolkit 2, Cycle Rail Working Group, Rail Delivery Group 2016
- Secured by Design, Design guides, Police Crime Prevention Initiatives, various

Previous Consultations

The Taunton Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Design Guide was initially subject to key stakeholder 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 an objection from SCC Highways on the Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide, detailed discussions took place in a series of workshop sessions between Somerset West and Taunton and SCC as the Highway Authority.

As a result on discussions with the Highway Authority, an expanded section in the Districtwide Design Guide was prepared - 'Streets, Parking and Placemaking'. As a second round of public consultation was necessary for this expanded section, it was decided by officers to take the opportunity to also take the Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town out to public consultation (rather than just key stakeholders). The public consultation on the Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town was carried out from 11 December to 5 February 2021.

During both previous consultations a number of methods were employed - the Council's consultation portal survey; by email and by post. All organisations, groups and individual's on the Council's Local Plan data base were notified of the consultation by the Strategy Team. In addition, press releases were issued by the Council's Communication Team and the consultations promoted on social media. The Design Guide was available on the Council's website and a copy was also available for inspection at the Council's office at Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton.

In addition, presentations on the Taunton Public Realm Design Guide were carried out on 12 February 2020 at a CPD event for built environment professionals in Taunton, and for housing enabling providers on 27 February 2020. Also, a presentation on the Taunton Public Realm Design Guide was also given to the Council's Agents Panel on 11 December 2020.

Specialist workshops were held in the scoping of the design guide with heritage, tree care, wildlife, and flood, river and canal water management stakeholders.

SW Heritage Trust, Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Canal & River Trust, Somerset County Council highways Traffic Management, Road Safety and Parking, Service Commissioning Manager Transport Policy, Assistant Highway Service Manager, arboriculture, flood risk, street lighting, ecologist, and Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Project. In addition, officers of SWTC Conservation, Landscape and Green Infrastructure and arboriculture and Programme Manager Town Centre Regeneration were also involved with workshops.

Further meetings were held after consultations on the initial draft guide with SCC Highways Local Cycling and Walking project manager (Sep 2019), and with street lighting engineer and SCC's conservation adviser (July 2020).

All of the consultees agreed that Taunton Garden Town needed a Public Realm Design Guide to raise the standard of the street works and coordinate works by multi agencies. There were many who welcomed the Public Realm Design Guide SPD and liked its method of designating quality standards to areas of public realm in the town and for its use by both councils and developers. Some stated how they saw the guide as making the Garden Town visible. Some expressed strong support for the general principles of the guidance to give much greater emphasis to people and places in the design of streets and public spaces. There was delight by some at the depth of commitment to the public realm shown by SWT in the document.

A total of 20 representations from members of the public, government bodies, amenity and local transport bodies, developers and internal staff were received during the consultations on the Public Realm Design Guide. 6 representations were submitted via the Council's consultation portal and 13 via email. 6 county departments elected not to comment.

Other comments received from residents, county council, amenity bodies etc, can broadly be summarised under the following headings

- Standards: strong agreement on the four standards and their proposed areas
- Paving materials: agreement to the use of high quality materials to suit prestige and premium streets and places within those streets like local centres.
- Signage: Cycle signing by step by step /node points was suggested.
- Street furniture: agreement on most street furniture with some call for more covered areas for cycle parking. The location of furniture to not obstruct cyclists or pedestrians was a common comment. Some suggested a traditional bench be included.
- Lighting: low levels of lighting needed in wildlife sensitive sites like the riverside that still allowed its use as a vehicle free route after dark. Use of lighting styles suited to the historic settings in the town, not solely to Conservation Areas as present.

Illustrative Layouts: there was desire by county council highways to highlight a need for provision of a safe road network with appropriate capacity to keep traffic moving, though the requirement applies to pedestrians and cyclists too.

A number of changes were made following the first and second rounds of consultation, responding to issues raised. Some of these changes were substantial revisions and additions, whilst others were of a smaller nature. For these reasons, the Council published an updated draft for a third round of public consultation before preparing the final draft SPD for adoption.