



## **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) is producing a Taunton Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which is seeking 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 attempts to show 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. The Council has made a number of amendments across the document in response to comments received. The Council is now consulting on an updated draft of the SPD.

This Consultation Report explains how the Council is undertaking public consultation to inform the development of the SPD, and how the engagement, feedback and responses received to date have influenced its development. The report covers: which bodies and persons are being invited to make comments; how those bodies and persons are invited to make comment; the material that was subject to consultation; a summary of the responses received to date; 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 the making of representations in relation to the production of SPDs. As part of this process, the Council must make a Consultation Statement available for public consultation alongside the SPD itself. This Statement complies with these Regulations.

## **Consultation Summary**

Consultation on an updated Taunton Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will take 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 must be submitted within this time period in order to be taken into consideration.

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

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

By its nature, the draft Design Guide document is a technical and text heavy, though officers have tried through graphics to ensure that it is as accessible as possible considering its nature and purpose.

## **Purpose of the Consultation**

This updated draft of the SPD has been produced as a response to a number of the issues raised in consultation on the previous draft, 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 have been strengthened.

As such, the purpose of the consultation is 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 Are Consulting**

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 is 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 have been included in this exercise.

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 are specifically being 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 Are Consulting**

Consultation on the updated Draft Taunton Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will run from 05 July 2021 until Monday 16 August 2021. During this time a variety of methods will be employed, though the full range of methods has been limited by definitive restrictions and a cautiously proportionate approach considering the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and gradual loosening of lockdown restrictions.

Responses to the consultation can be made:

- Online via the Council's consultation portal at [https://yoursay.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/consultation\\_finder/](https://yoursay.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/consultation_finder/)
- By email: [strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto: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 is:

- Emailing notification of the consultation to all bodies and persons identified within the consultation database.
- Making the above consultation documents available for inspection at the following locations:
  - 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)

For any viewing of the document at Deane House or West Somerset House, due to Covid restrictions, please call to make an appointment 0300 3048000.

- Publishing the documents on the Council's website at <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/districtwide-design-guide-spd/>

- Publishing a press release via the Council's website and social media posts via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn raising interest, communicating the consultation and encouraging participation.
- Presenting to the Agents Forum – 12 July 2021
- Presenting to the Taunton Design Circle – 28 July 2021
- Presenting to the Somerset Affordable Housing Group – 22 July 2021
- Hosting a Town and Parish Councils Event – 13 July 2021
- Holding a General Question & Answer Session for Members of the Public – 14 July 2021 between 12.30 – 4.30pm

If you wish to attend one of these sessions or to make an appointment for the General Question & Answer Session for Members of the Public, please contact us on 0300 3048000 or email: [strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

In light of the current restrictions and gradual re-opening of society and the economy, it has been decided not to arrange any in-person consultation events as would normally take place.

The consultation documents can also be viewed online at all libraries in Somerset West and Taunton (please check with the library in question for their opening times).

### **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 agree that Taunton Garden Town needs 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: agreement to 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. Clarification on whether the Guide's use was to be on existing as well as new roads was sought.

## **You said, we did**

The updated Draft Public Realm Design Guide has taken into account the responses received to date and the following substantial revisions and additions have been carried out as a result:

- Section 1 – Introduction – this resulted in an expanded section on the nature of the guide as for the Garden Town public realm (i.e. not a full highway technical guide). It also clarified it as being for existing as well as new streets. The section also amplified the role the public realm plays in responding to the climate emergency and recent Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and SWTC Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilient Action Plan. The section adds more detail on relationship to national Planning Practice Guidance on Local Design Guides and relevant material in the new National Design Guide.
- Section 2 on Materials and Components was amended to refine street lighting standards to include a General Standard Conservation Areas – add to map and explain that Town or Core Standard may be applied by Conservation Officer in these areas. Conservation Area lighting.
- Section 3 on illustrative layouts was revised to provide an approach cycle facilities at Outer Gateway junctions that would conform in principle with recent Local Transport Note and, where relevant, the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges national guidance.

A number of smaller changes have also been carried out as a result of consultation responses and these are also set out below:

- The Introduction now clarifies who the guide is for – the councils and developers.
- Setts laid in carriageways will be imprint.
- Cycle track colours amended - CORE terracotta, TOWN terracotta, GENERAL red, GREEN – red
- Blue street name plates traditional to Taunton will be applied to Core Standard Area.
- Strengthening of policy and climate emergency declaration links.