

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Council
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	25 July 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Garden Town Gateway Review Findings and Next Steps
<b>Report of:</b>	Chief Executive / Leader of the Council
<b>Head of Service/Director:</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Leader of the Council / Lead Member for Built Environment
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	One

## **Executive Summary:**

In March 2023, given its complexity and profile, and following significant concerns raised by Members, the Chief Executive committed to undertake a gateway review of the Garden Town programme. A review of this kind is considered best practice for major programme delivery and is undertaken to ensure the original aims and objectives are still being met. The review was undertaken by Cratus Consultancy between April and May, with the final report received on 16 June 2023. It was agreed that a report advising of the outcomes of the review would be presented to Executive Committee and Council as soon as possible once the report was received. The review found no fundamental concerns with the aims or the principles of the Garden Town programme, which would have caused the Council to reconsider its role in driving delivery of this programme. It does, however, provide clear recommendations that will have a fundamentally positive impact on the programme's delivery – particularly in relation to meaningful engagement and working with local communities, partners, and developers. Reflecting the growth that will happen in this area with or without a Garden Town programme, the report makes it clear that a garden town approach mitigates against the risk of piecemeal development. Without a Garden Town, developers will be far more likely to come forward with proposals that don't have the required infrastructure and community benefits, as well as not aligning to the Garden Town design principles. It should be noted that currently the developers and landowners aligned to phase one of the delivery are working constructively with the Garden Town and Local Planning Authority. However, without the Garden Town programme, there would be no reason for them align with the garden town ethos and principles. At its meeting on 12 July 2023, Executive Committee recommended to Council that the 17 recommendations from the review form the basis of a new approach, which would be brought back to Executive Committee for approval in September 2023. This report shares the findings and recommendations for a refreshed approach to the Garden Town programme.

## **Recommendation:**

### **To RESOLVE:**

- 1. That the 17 recommendations from the gateway review report will form the basis of a new approach, with greater focus on engagement with our communities and robust programme management.**
- 2. That the new approach will be brought back to Executive Committee for approval in September 2023, including details on how the programme will be monitored.**

**Financial Implications:**

The Council has funded the gateway review from its reserves. It is envisaged that the review and subsequent refresh programme will enable further capacity funding to be released by Homes England to take the Garden Town forward. It is expected that discussions will take place with Homes England in the following weeks to agree the release of funding and the quantum being made available, following which, decisions can be made as to the optimum use of that funding to deliver the new approach. As per the recommendations, the Council will also need to consider, through its future budget rounds, whether the Council itself can integrate the funding of the programme within its own budgets. However, given the anticipated medium term budgetary deficit and the uncertainty around funding streams it is unlikely that the Council would be able to absorb the full annual cost of the project within its base budget.

**Legal Implications:**

There are no legal implications arising from the Cratus report which sets out a series of recommendations to be considered, the Council is under no obligation to implement any of the recommendations.

There will be legal implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations and the new programme, and these will be addressed in the Executive Committee report on the recommendations and new programme which is due in September 2023.

The development of the new Joint Strategic Plan is required to meet the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) and will be subject of a separate decision.

**Environmental and Sustainability Implications:**

None directly from this report, although environmental and sustainability implications for the Garden Town will be managed within the programme, with environmental improvements, flooding infrastructure gain and net biodiversity gain being emphasised as key deliverables.

**Resource Implications (including impact on equalities):**

There are no implications resulting directly from this report. There may be implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations and the new programme, and these will be addressed in the Executive Committee report on the recommendations and new programme, which is due in September 2023.

**Safeguarding Implications:**

There are no safeguarding implications resulting directly from this report.

**Impact on the Customer:**

A key recommendation from the review is to create an integrated stakeholder community engagement plan, which includes both statutory and non-statutory engagement. This will ensure our customers, particularly those impacted by the garden town programme, will be given the opportunity to be effectively engaged.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** Tewkesbury Garden Town was identified within the government's Garden Communities Programme in March 2019. A Garden Town is defined as a 'holistically planned new settlement, which enhances the natural environment, tackles climate change and provides high quality housing locally and accessible jobs in beautiful, healthy and sociable communities.'
- 1.2** A key priority for the Council in respect of the Garden Town is to ensure that development is led by the Council, rather than developer led. This will enable the Council to ensure development is strategic, controlled, methodical and planned – and delivers the expected social, economic and environmental benefits. It also helps to ensure that the best interests of the new and existing local communities are considered side-by-side, with appropriate infrastructure improvements.
- 1.3** Given the complexity and profile of the Garden Town programme, and following significant concerns raised by Members, the Chief Executive committed to undertake a gateway review of the Garden Town, to assess three elements in connection with the readiness of the Council to continue to progress to the next delivery stage for the new Garden Town:
1. Council plans.
  2. Officer capabilities.
  3. Communications, engagement and expectations.
- 1.4** At its meeting on 12 July 2023, Executive Committee recommended to Council that the 17 recommendations from the review form the basis of a new approach, and for the new approach to be brought back to Executive Committee for approval in September 2023.
- 1.5** Appendix 1 is the Council's report on the gateway review findings.

## **2.0 GATEWAY REVIEW APPROACH**

- 2.1** A gateway review process gives independent guidance to Senior Responsible Owners (the Chief Executive) and the organisation (the Council) on how best to ensure that their programmes and projects are successful. It looks to examine a programme at a key decision point in its lifecycle, to give assurance that it can progress successfully to the next stage.
- 2.2** Cratus carried out the gateway review on behalf of the Council. Cratus is a specialist consultancy with expertise in planning, communications, community engagement and advisory support for local councils.
- 2.3** Cratus provided an onsite team who interviewed a total of 26 Members and Officers in person over two days in April 2023. The team also reviewed a range of documentation provided by the Council, which is listed on Pages 7 and 8 of the report. The onsite team reported that the engagement and interest from Officers and Members was positive.
- 2.4** The Cratus team included Steve Quartermain, formerly Chief Planner at Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (now Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities) for 12 years, who provided an expert and holistic view of the Council's planning policy against a national backdrop, in the context of the Garden Town.
- 2.5** In addition, Cratus conducted an internally focused desktop review of information in the public domain about the Garden Town, including research of websites, public documents and records of meetings.

- 2.6** The review provided an internal focus on the work that Garden Town team has undertaken and had planned – and given its scope, as outlined within this report, there was no requirement for the views of external stakeholders to be sought to enable to consultants to reach their conclusions.
- 2.7** As with reviews of this nature, the review team’s findings focus on the required improvements to ensure the programme is deliverable. It does not highlight all the achievements and progress the programme has delivered to date.

### **3.0 REVIEW FINDINGS**

- 3.1** The overall findings from the review are summarised through 17 recommendations, which cover the following key areas:
1. Council plans
  2. JCS delivery plan
  3. Funding
  4. Programme
  5. Programme management
  6. Officer capabilities
  7. Garden Town team integration
  8. Garden Town team performance and effectiveness
  9. Internal communications
  10. External communications
  11. Community stakeholder and engagement
- 3.2** Importantly, the review team found no fundamental concerns with the aims or the principles of the Garden Town programme that would suggest that the Council should move away from delivering it.
- 3.3** The overarching proposal from the review is that a programme underpinned by the 17 recommendations will ensure the Garden Town can be delivered effectively, particularly in relation to meaningful engagement and working with local communities, partners and developers.
- 3.4** The review team identified that the ‘golden thread’ for the delivery of an effective Garden Town, which requires strong programme management underpinned by clear and appropriate planning policy, was missing from the current delivery programme. It is clear from the report that once this is in place, the appropriate and required task allocation, resourcing and communications can be developed. Alongside this, it was highlighted that there is an opportunity to reset the engagement process with stakeholders and communities, enabling their views to be brought into the programme as it develops.
- 3.5** The review team recognises that important steps have been taken to address the issue of there being no policy base in place for the Garden Town, with progress including the development of a programme for the new Joint Strategic Plan (JSP), which has been committed to and appropriately resourced.
- 3.6** However, the review team also points out that it will not be possible for the new JSP to be delivered in time to inform the Garden Town programme and the applications that the developers will bring forward. In line with this, the report identified the positive steps the council has taken to developing a Strategic Framework Plan (SFP).

- 3.7** The SFP builds on the Tewkesbury Garden Town Concept Plan and, with the emphasis of high-quality design from national government, sets out key outcomes and expectations that are important to set the quality of design for Tewkesbury Garden Town. It seeks to shape development, influence planning proposals and inform decision making; through setting out a clear framework that all parties can refer to. It will enable a collaborative and cohesive approach to designing and building the Garden Town over the coming decades, helping to align developers who are looking to bring forward sites prior to the adoption of a strategic plan.
- 3.8** Reflecting the growth that will happen in this area with or without a Garden Town programme, the review team makes it clear that a Garden Town approach mitigates against the risk of piecemeal development – without a Garden Town, developers will be far more likely to come forward with proposals that don't have the required infrastructure and community benefits, as well as not aligning to the Garden Town design principles. It should be noted that currently the developers and landowners aligned to phase one of the delivery are working constructively with the Garden Town team and Local Planning Authority. However, without the Garden Town programme, there would be no reason for them align with the Garden Town ethos and principles.
- 3.9** The advice from the Cratus team in relation to the SFP is that it provides an opportunity for the document to be used as a refreshed approach manifesto and a statement of intent for how the programme will be delivered following this review.

## **4.0 CONSULTATION**

- 4.1** The review report was received from Cratus on 14 June 2023. Since then, briefing sessions have taken place with:
- The Leader, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Built Environment: 27 June 2023.
  - The Garden Town team: 28 June 2023.
  - The Communications team: 29 June 2023.
  - Executive Committee: 12 July 2023
  - All-Member seminar: 13 July 2023
- 4.2** A communications plan has been developed to ensure the outcome of the Council decision on 23 July 2023 is effectively communicated across stakeholders and communities.

## **5.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1** This report asks Council to approve:
1. That the 17 recommendations from the gateway review report will form the basis of a new approach, with greater focus on engagement with our communities and robust programme management.
  2. That the new approach will be brought back to Executive Committee for approval in September, including details on how the programme will be monitored.
- 5.2** If Council approve the two recommendations set out in this report, there will be a communications and engagement plan to support the development of the new approach, which will include an all-member seminar prior to the new approach being presented to Executive Committee in September.

**6.0 ASSOCIATED RISKS**

- 6.1** As set out by the review team, if the Council does not respond to the recommendations, particularly in respect to appropriate policy and strong programme management, there is a significant risk of developers bringing forward sites within the Garden Town area without the provision of the required infrastructure and community benefits, as well as not aligning to the Garden Town design principles.
- 6.2** Improving engagement with communities and resetting relationships will be key to the successful delivery of the Garden Town – and if this is not responded to through genuine collaboration and co-creation of compelling communications that clearly explain the benefits of the programme, there is a significant risk to the programme and the Council's reputation.

**7.0 MONITORING**

- 7.1** As part of the recommendation within this report, it is proposed that an effective monitoring approach is developed to oversee the refresh programme.

**8.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES/COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

- 8.1** The delivery of the Garden Town programme is a priority with the Council Plan

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**Background Papers:** None

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**Appendices:** Appendix 1 - Report on Gateway Review of the Tewkesbury Garden Town