



Report on Gateway Review of the  
**Tewkesbury Garden Town**



## **Tewkesbury Garden Town was identified within the Government's Garden Communities Programme in March 2019.**

The Town and Country Planning Act defines a garden town 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".

A key strategic objective for Tewkesbury Borough Council was to ensure that development is led by the council, rather than developer led. The council will be better placed to seek to ensure development is strategic, controlled, methodical and planned and delivers the expected social, economic, and environmental benefits. Council-led development aims to ensure that the best interests of the new and existing local communities are considered side by side, along with appropriate infrastructure improvements.

Cratus was engaged by Tewkesbury Borough Council to support a gateway review 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.

- Council plans
- Officer capabilities
- Communications, engagement, and expectations

## 1. Approach

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.

Cratus is a specialist consultancy with expertise in planning, communications, community engagement and advisory support for local councils.

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.

The onsite team reported that the engagement and interest from Officers and Members was positive.

The Cratus team included Steve Quartermain, formerly Chief Planner at MHCLG 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.

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.

The review provided an internal focus on the work that the Garden Town team has undertaken and had planned – and given its scope, there was no requirement for the views of external stakeholders to be sought to enable consultants to reach their conclusions.

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.

## 2. Overview of findings

In summary, the Cratus Review found the following:

1. The golden thread for the delivery of the TGT was the requirement for strong programme management underpinned by clear and appropriate planning policy. The Cratus Review found that both these elements are currently missing.
2. They also found that during their interviews, desktop research and from the documentation reviewed, they were unable to gain a full picture of the delivery programme for the garden town, including outline form, or how it was linked to other areas with the council or external stakeholders.
3. Once strong programme management and a clear and appropriate planning policy plan is in place, then the Cratus team felt there is opportunity for appropriate task allocation, resourcing and communications to be developed – including resetting the engagement processes with stakeholders and communities.
4. The developing Strategic Framework Plan (SFP) will help align developers who are looking to bring sites forward prior to the JSP adoption – and it will be crucial to engage proactively with developers and the community to ensure appropriate control of the site.
5. Improvements are required for both internal and external communications and community engagement – and resetting relationships will be key to the successful delivery of the garden town. Reflecting this, the Cratus Review points out that through genuine collaboration and co-creation of compelling communications, the council will ensure that the best interests of the new and existing local communities are considered together with appropriate infrastructure improvements.
6. That a new identity and name for the garden town will be a key component of creating a sense of excitement and ownership among communities.



### **3. Areas considered as part of the review**

The overall findings from the review are summarised through 17 recommendations (found on page 15 of this report), which cover the following key areas:

#### **1. Council plans**

It was clear to the review team that there was a lack of policy base for the land for the garden town to support its wholesale delivery. With the council's 5-year land supply status, there is a risk of speculative development in the area, leading to the absence of joined-up delivery and piecemeal infrastructure. There is a risk that the amount of speculative development that comes forward will impact the delivery of needed infrastructure improvements – and they referred to J9/A46 and the road network as key examples.

The developing Strategic Framework Plan was regarded to be a positive move by the Cratus Team, which will help align developers should plans come forward prior to the JSP adoption and will help the council maintain control over the quality of the development of the garden town.

#### **2. JCS delivery plan**

The Cratus Review team highlighted the recruitment activity that is taking place to properly resource the JCS delivery, including the creation of the role of Executive Director of Place to give oversight of both the garden town and the planning policy position, which will ensure they are joined up. However, the review of the delivery plan for the planning policy revealed that there is scope for the timeline to slip again, which could have a significant impact on the submission of the plan within the planning reform timescales.

The council has rectified this through the publishing of a Local Development Scheme, which identifies the timeline for the delivery of the plan and financially, alongside Cheltenham Borough and Gloucester City, fully resourcing a programme team.

### **3. Funding**

The Garden Town Team was set up by the previous administration and chief executive and until recently has operated as a discreet unit reporting directly to the chief executive.

The Cratus team reported that interviews with officers and members revealed a perception that the team is siloed, although it was recognised that steps have recently been taken to integrate the team back into the wider organisation.

The way the team has historically been funded – through Homes England capacity building funding, predicated on delivering results – has created an environment where staff are required to spend energy and resources securing external funding, potentially at the expense of the activities required to deliver the garden town.

### **4. Programme**

Prior to arrival, the Cratus Review team received copies of forward planning charts in the style of Gantt charts that laid out the path to support the delivery of the garden town.

The review team reported that upon inspection, some of these charts were out of date and lacked the level of detail expected for a project of this size and importance to the council.

From reviewing the desktop elements of the delivery programme, the review team was concerned that the garden town delivery was not on track and was lacking in tangible milestones. The review team felt unable to ascertain:

- Who was responsible for each part of the delivery.
- How individuals contribute to the overall programme.
- Whether or how other council departments, most importantly the planning policy resource, were linked into the delivery.

#### **4. Programme (Continued)**

The review team felt that this lack of tangible, granular detail and a golden thread to deliver the garden town represents a significant level of concern. Rectifying these issues should be given the highest level of importance.

The review team found that the absence of a baseline programme for the garden town has a number of consequential effects that are directly affecting the delivery:

- Unclear definitions of the project's objectives and the tasks assigned to individuals within the teams. Without a clear plan, tasks cannot be appropriately understood and allocated. The people assigned to do various project tasks may not be suitable because the work may not be fully understood. This limits team members from fully exploiting their potential, or from drawing down more appropriate resources to deliver the project.
- Poor time management. Until a schedule is set out for team members to follow, the project teams will not clearly understand their expectations as they work on the project and key milestones, dependencies or external factors may be missed.
- Lack of support from stakeholders. Key stakeholders would have no clear understanding of what to expect and when. Without a clear definition of what the aims and timescales of the project will be, there would be a limit to the support that could be garnered from within the council or from external stakeholders.
- Lack of visibility of budget and costs.
- Exposure to unpredicted risks and problems

## **5. Programme management**

It was outside the scope of the review to say whether the council has the required skills and experience to produce or manage a work programme of this scale, nor to integrate it with the required planning policy.

The review team noted that there are officers within the council who do not feel their skills and capabilities have been fully understood and effectively drawn upon in support of delivering the garden town programme.

## **6. Officer capabilities**

Throughout the time on site at Tewkesbury, the team reported that it became clear that the lack of definition of the project's objectives and the corresponding tasks assigned to individuals made it impossible to fairly assess the capability of the team to deliver against requirements.

## **7. Garden Town Team integration**

The review team reported that it found evidence that the officers within the council were passionate and excited about the garden town concept. However, the team also reported a lack of understanding from those outside the Garden Town Team about what the garden town is, what the Garden Town Team is doing and where individuals fit into the programme of delivery.

The Garden Town Team was set up purposefully to be separate from the council and the review team felt this was a mistake that has led to several consequential issues, including the lack of information sharing between teams. This has led to officers and members feeling uninformed and disempowered. This has since been rectified through a management restructure, which went live in April 2023.

## **8. Garden Town programme performance and effectiveness**

The review team's opinion was that funding was being secured without a clear plan of how to spend it and there was a risk that funding is being spent without the correct controls and detail (see recommendation 4). There was concern that there was limited forecasting and forward planning within the programme. Furthermore, in the team's opinion, many of the reports the team reviewed had significant overlap and were not furthering the delivery of the garden town.

The team found some evidence that advice from the external consultant reports was not being translated into action plans or being followed at a corporate level. The team was also unable to ascertain the detail needed to confirm this during the interview phase.

Without clear planning policy, the review reported that officers are unable to work effectively and deliver what they have been employed to do. Lack of effective working between the Garden Town Team and the planning team has hindered the development of this policy. It does not appear that there has been consideration of how best to use resource to support the delivery of the required policy.

The review team reported that the programme lacked key milestones and a culture of accountability and performance management. The review team felt that those interviewed were unable to articulate clearly what they were accountable for and where their role fits into the delivery.

This was highlighted during the 'blank wall' exercise where at the end of the Cratus team's time on site there were very few tangible milestones, goals or names next to actions up on the board.

The review team reported that there was demonstrable enthusiasm to take part and be involved, but no deliverable actions were identified. The review team said it heard anecdotal evidence that the lack of a clear programme might be due to fear of committing to milestones or activities that might be unrealistic or not take place.

## **9. Internal communications**

From interviews with officers and members, the review team found that there is an absence of internal communication about the garden town project at a corporate level.

Officers in other council departments are unsure what progress has been made on the garden town and were unsure how their departments might fit into the programme. There was significant evidence that the separation of the Garden Town Team from the rest of the council officers was having a negative impact on internal relationships (see recommendation 7).

The review team found that the historic approach has been to publish information once, without ongoing associated communications. While the quality of the published information is largely good, they reported there is too much to be of real use.

Publishing once without follow up is not sufficient to engender understanding, excitement and buy-in from internal teams. It would appear that over time, this approach has led to council members feeling that they were not given the right levels of information and had to find information on their own.

The review team reported that there are individuals with expertise within the council who feel they could be of help to the Garden Town programme and could use their skills and experience to benefit the project. The review team was told about a number of innovative engagement ideas that had not been adopted, nor was any feedback provided as to why not.



## 10. External communications

The review noted that externally the garden town concept has been launched and concept plans have been placed online. From the website it was noted that it is unclear that this is backed by the council, and therefore lacks credibility to the external eye. The documents uploaded onto the site are up to five years out of date and have not been adapted for public consumption.

There is also a copy of the Tewkesbury Storybook on the website, which the review team felt irrelevant to the garden town and lacks any credible content. The review team reported that the concept behind the Tewkesbury Storybook is good, and anecdotally the document appears to have been well received at the time.

The review team felt the quality of the printed publication demonstrates investment in the vision, and a book of this nature is an inviting introduction to the garden town. However, the concern was raised that this publication does not appear to have any particular ongoing purpose and does not sit within a clearly articulated communications plan.

The review team heard evidence that external communications for the garden town have been drafted but are rarely released due to reasons such as 'plans might change' and 'purdah'. These delays in releasing external communications are not constructive and have led to the disempowerment of communications staff.

The review pointed out that external communications are a vital part of the delivery and community engagement that need to take place. When undertaking a project of this scale it is normal for plans to change and the public understand this if communicated well.

The review team highlighted that by providing visibility of the evolution of the plans and timelines will help the public to understand the process and work that is being undertaken by the council, as well as create a sense of agency in contributing their opinions to the engagement process.

## **10. External communications (Continued)**

The review pointed out that the lack of a clear communications strategy and communication support is having an impact both internally and externally. It stated that the vision is good, but there needs to be more detail about how the council intends to deliver on the vision (see recommendations 5 and 10).

The review team also found evidence that there is confusion about how developers, the council and other stakeholders are interacting. This is exacerbated by the separation of the Garden Town Team from the rest of the council (see recommendation 7). For example, the team heard that there is confusion within the community as developers seek to bring forward sites that are in the garden town area without mentioning the wider vision. It was pointed out that this is something that needs to be rectified swiftly as developers are not going to wait for the new JCS to be in place before bringing their sites forward.

The review noted that the Strategic Framework Plan that is currently being developed will support bringing the developers together under a shared vision. It also made it clear that once completed, the council needs to continue proactively engaging with developers in relation to the Strategic Framework Plan and how they are bringing forward their sites.

The review team made it clear that it is vital that there are clear definitions and explanations of the social, economic and environmental benefits that the garden town approach brings and that the council is driving the process for these reasons. This means that clear explanations of the roles of the council as a planning authority and their relationships with developers are also required, to underpin and make it clear how these benefits will be delivered. The review team highlighted that external communications should be both proactive and reactive and aligned to the strategic objectives of the programme.

As the programme changes and evolves, it is important to keep both internal and external audiences informed. The review stated that the approach adopted to date of sharing information by exception, appears to have created disinformation and suspicion among stakeholders.



## 11. Community engagement

It was not within the scope of the Gateway Review to conduct a holistic review of the community engagement from outside the council, however the review team did take views and opinions from members and officers involved in the review, which were as follows:

The Garden Town Team has lead all community engagement activity of late. It was generally felt that at best these engagement activities have not been able to bring the communities into the plans, and at worst have contributed to high levels of opposition from parish councils and the wider community.

Members at times also felt that they had been put in an uncomfortable position when speaking to their residents. This appears to be due in part to a lack of information followed by a series of updates in quick succession. They also raised issues with how the information was released and that it was not easy to understand for residents. This was echoed by an officer who raised concerns about the accessibility of the published communications materials and information issued ahead of meetings.

It was reported to the review team that the communities have said they feel that they are having the garden town 'done to them' and that any engagement activities felt like a presentation of final ideas rather than a consultation. This assertion links to and is supported by the reasons given for the lack of external communications.

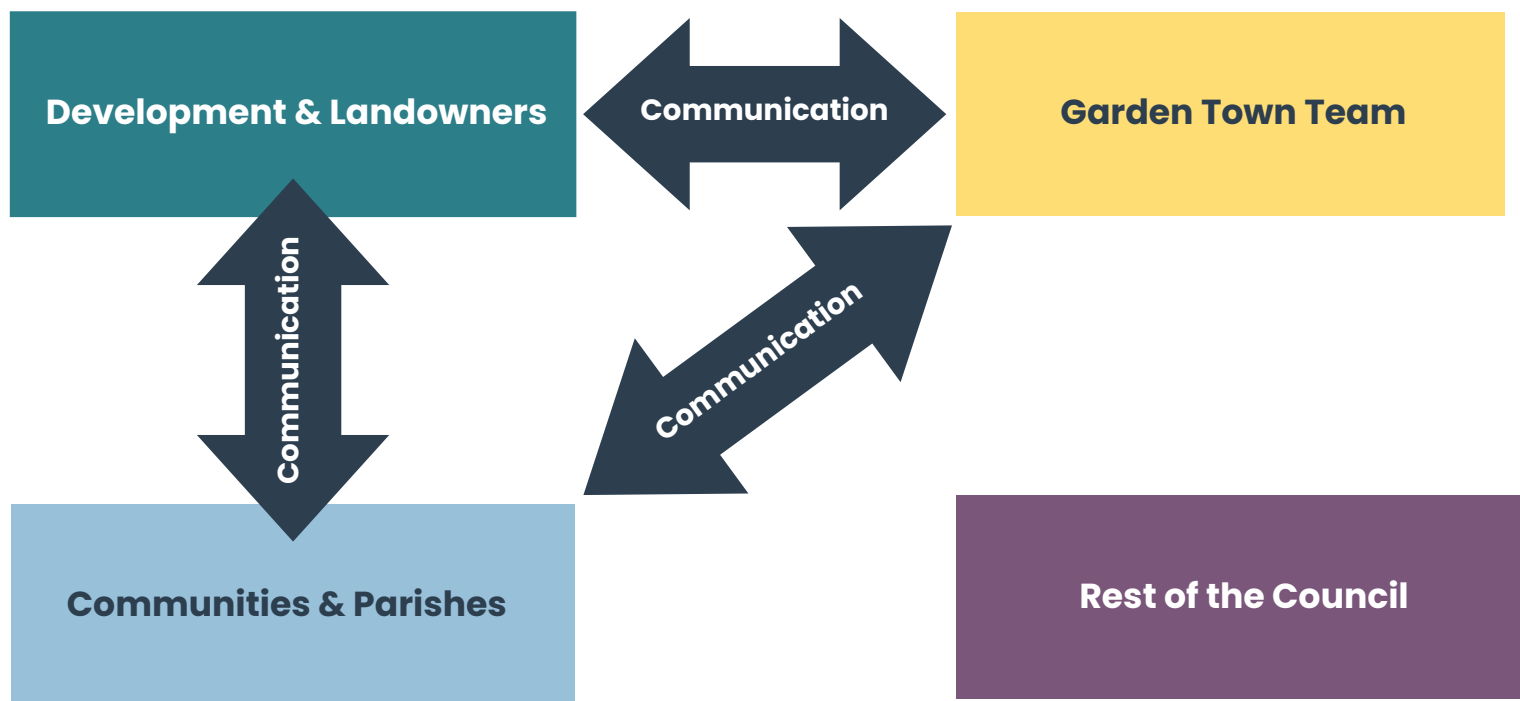
The review team felt there is clearly hesitation to publish or discuss plans that are under review or incomplete. The lack of progression of plans means that information is rarely published. Both internal and external audiences have interpreted this silence as secrecy. It was reported to the review team that both developers and the Garden Town Team are engaging with communities separately.

This is reported to be causing confusion in the community as they are unclear who is responsible for and doing what in relation to the garden town. The Garden Town Team is reported to be engaging with developers who have land within the garden town. However, the review team did not ascertain what the purpose, nature and outcomes of this engagement has been to date.

## 11. Community engagement (Continued)

While the review team welcomed the fact that engagement is taking place with stakeholders it felt it is lacking a joined up approach and completely missing the internal stakeholders within the council.

The review team used the following graphic to highlight this:



The review team felt the draft Strategic Framework Plan would be a valuable tool to engage the wider community in the understanding and further development of the principles that define what the garden town programme should provide.

## 12. Recommendations

The following **17 recommendations** were put forward:

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### **Recommendation 1**

Publish (internally and externally) a clear and tangible timeline for the development of the new JCS. Ensure that the JCS is delivered in line with this timeline, and any exceptions communicated to stakeholders internally and externally. In the meantime, ensure that the Strategic Framework is progressed quickly and is communicated internally and externally.

### **Recommendation 2**

Consider using interim skills to fill vacant positions if permanent solutions cannot be found quickly.

### **Recommendation 3**

Take a 'back to basics' approach to the business case for the Development Corporation, ensuring that it fully aligns with the development of the local plan, is funded through the resource available for that work and properly programme managed in line with the overall project plan.

### **Recommendation 4**

Allocate core funding for the Garden Town Team. Review all external funding received for the Garden Town Team, how it has been spent, whether it has fulfilled funding conditions and whether this funding is at risk.

### **Recommendation 5**

Establish a work programme that is appropriate to supporting the council's strategic objectives for the garden town. This is likely to require investment in specific programme management.

## 12. Recommendations (Continued)

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### **Recommendation 6**

Appoint or recruit an individual, or engage a dedicated project management provider, to establish an appropriate work programme (recommendation 5).

### **Recommendation 7**

Integrate the Garden Town Team back into the core functionality of the council by implementing the new chief executive's plan to recruit an Executive Director of Place. In addition, consideration should be given to the creation of executive boards and/or steering groups with robust governance and terms reference.

### **Recommendation 8**

Implement an ongoing review process to ensure that planning policy (JCS) (recommendation 1) and work programme (recommendation 5) remain linked and consistent.

### **Recommendation 10**

Use the work programme (recommendation 5) and associated milestone plan to develop an internal communications plan for all council officers and members to foster a shared sense of purpose about the garden town.

### **Recommendation 11**

Use the work programme (recommendation 5) and internal communications plan (recommendation 10) to invite contributions to the programme. Use workshops to build an understanding of the work programme and the expertise required to deliver it and invite officers and members to contribute to the programme and make improvement suggestions. This will create awareness and a sense of ownership of the programme throughout the council.

## 12. Recommendations (Continued)

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### Recommendation 12

Include a regular drumbeat of workshops and updates with all members in the internal communications plan (recommendation 10). Even if there are no updates this should be communicated with them.

### Recommendation 13

Adopt a 'back to basics' approach to external communications, starting with the creation of an identity for the garden town, rather than treating it as an extension of Tewkesbury. The naming of the new garden town could form the basis of a re-engagement programme with the community and could include naming competitions with local schools. Best practice from other developments should be examined as part of this approach.

### Recommendation 14

Develop a clear external communication strategy for the garden town that is owned by the council. This should contain both strategic objectives and deliverable plans, which are aligned to the work programme (recommendation 5) internal communications (recommendation 10) and community engagement strategy.

### Recommendation 15

Create an integrated stakeholder and community engagement plan, outlining both statutory and non-statutory engagement. This should be informed by the work programme (recommendation 5) and aligned with the internal and external communications plans (recommendations 10 and 14). It should include stakeholder maps and a tool (eg a RACI matrix) to ensure stakeholders are appropriately engaged. Use the new identity (recommendation 13) as an engagement hook to create real interest in the development and its benefits.

## 12. Recommendations (Continued)

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### **Recommendation 16**

Share the integrated stakeholder and community engagement strategy (recommendation 15) with developers and landowners who are bringing forward sites, parish councils, community leaders and members.

### **Recommendation 17**

Once the new identity for the garden town has been created (recommendation 13) create a new storybook that brings together all the benefits and outcomes of engagement in one place and is aligned with the delivery programme (recommendation 5). This can be used as the basis of the next round of stakeholder and community engagement.