

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Council
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	26 September 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Tewkesbury Garden Town Review – Progress Update
<b>Report of:</b>	Interim Executive Director: Place
<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>	Five

## **Executive Summary:**

In May this year, the Council undertook a gateway review of its Garden Town programme. The review created a pause and a chance to reflect on progress to date; it resulted in 17 recommendations on how the Council could do things differently to make a positive impact on programme delivery and stakeholder engagement; these recommendations were reported to Council on 25 July 2023. This report provides an update on progress made in implementing the recommendations, in particular refreshing the Garden Town's work programme and the commitment made to establish meaningful engagement with stakeholders. It also seeks approval for new governance arrangements to be implemented and for the Council as promoter, to explore opportunities with developers/landowners within the Garden Town to align their development proposals with the developing Garden Town vision and aspirations. This report was presented to Executive Committee as a confidential paper on Wednesday 6 September 2023. The Committee made minor amendments to the governance proposal, which have been incorporated and highlighted within this report. Since the Executive Committee meeting, and reflecting the Council's commitment to improved stakeholder engagement, workshops on the contents of this report took place with all Members and local Parish Councils and their feedback has been incorporated.

## **Recommendation:**

- 1. To CONSIDER progress made against the 17 recommendations from the gateway review report, in particular the new approaches to engagement with communities and robust programme management.**
- 2. To APPROVE the new governance arrangements, including revised programme monitoring and reporting designed to improve visibility and transparency.**
- 3. That AGREE that the Council, as promoter, explores opportunities with developers and landowners within the Garden Town area to align their proposals for development with the developing vision and aspirations for Tewkesbury Garden Town.**

**Financial Implications:**

Given the anticipated medium term budgetary deficit and the uncertainty around funding streams it is unlikely that the Council will be able to absorb the full annual cost of the project within its base budget. The Council will need to continue to seek and use capacity funding from Homes England and central government departments as well as securing funds through Planning Performance Agreements with developers.

At this point in the new programme's development, we cannot be specific regarding the cost of the programme and what contributions will be forthcoming from various funding sources, as it depends on further negotiations as to what aspects of the programme the Council leads on; however, should the recommendations to Council be approved, the costs associated with the Council's future role in the Garden Town programme will be the subject of a further report to Council.

**Legal Implications:**

The legal implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations and the new programme are addressed in the appropriate sections of this report.

**Environmental and Sustainability Implications:**

Environmental and sustainability implications associated with the development of the Garden Town proposal will be managed within the programme with environmental improvements, flooding infrastructure and biodiversity net gain being emphasised as key deliverables.

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

Implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations and the new programme are addressed in the relevant sections of this report.

**Safeguarding Implications:**

There are no safeguarding implications resulting directly from this report.

**Impact on the Customer:**

A key recommendation from the review was to create an integrated stakeholder community engagement plan. This is underway and will ensure all stakeholders including residents, business and communities, particularly those impacted by the programme, are 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 development, 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 priority for the Council in respect of the Garden Town is to ensure that development is promoted by the Council, rather than developer-led. The Council is committed to ensuring development is well 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 commissioned a gateway review of the programme. The 17 recommendations arising from the gateway review were reported to Council at its meeting on 25 July 2023. An update on progress made since July 2023 is shown at Appendix 1.
- 1.4** The gateway review placed particular emphasis on the importance of recommendations 1 (Planning Policy) and 5 (Work Programme) because they form the foundations for most of the other recommendations. Given their significance, they are covered in greater detail within this report at Paragraphs 3 and 4 respectively. Further detail is also provided on the recommendations relating to engagement (recommendations 10 to 17) at Paragraph 5.

## **2.0 GOVERNANCE**

- 2.1** A strong governance structure provides a solid framework for the delivery of the Garden Town programme. The new governance structure set out at Appendix 2 seeks to:

- (i) deliver a structure that assists in aligning stakeholder expectations by having boards with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the garden town programme;
- (ii) support timely decision making by ensuring information is shared at the appropriate level at the appropriate time;
- (iii) enable the Garden Town programme to maintain pace in a controlled environment;
- (iv) provide a framework which can be consistently applied throughout the life of the garden town programme; and
- (v) ensure programme oversight is provided to all stakeholders, particularly local Parish Council representatives.

The new governance structure does not introduce any new decision-making powers or bodies and decision making will remain with the Council (subject to any delegations made) but does follow recognised programme management principles.

- 2.2** Following a discussion on Garden Town governance at the Executive Committee, the following amendments were agreed and are reflected in the attached governance structure in Appendix 2.
- Page No. 135, Paragraph 4.1 - Membership of the Tewkesbury Garden Town Assurance Board to be updated to include three Members from the Members Engagement Forum.
  - Page No. 136, Paragraph 4.3.1 – Reference to the Programme Board to be changed to the Project Board.
  - Page No. 136, Paragraph 4.6.1 – Members Engagement Forum to meet once a month for the first six months following which meeting frequency would be reviewed by the Tewkesbury Garden Town Assurance Board.

## **3.0 KEY RECOMMENDATION 1: PLANNING POLICY**

- 3.1** Delivery of the Garden Town depends heavily on having robust policy in place to shape high quality development not just in the garden town area but across the borough. In July 2023, the Council agreed funding for a new joint Strategic and Local Plan (SLP) and approved a timetable for the production of the plan, which was set out in the Local Development Scheme.

#### **4.0 KEY RECOMMENDATION 5: WORK PROGRAMME**

- 4.1** The gateway review identified areas for improvement in Council's running of the Garden Town programme. There was clear slippage in the timeline and a lack of tangible milestones and outputs. There was a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities and no clear 'golden thread' for the programme.
- 4.2** Since the review, work has been undertaken to pull all project information together into one project management system. The key benefit of taking this step is that all information is held in one place, in a common format, and capable of being interrogated for different purposes.
- 4.3** The golden thread (critical path for Garden Town delivery) is evolving as the overall programme detail is entered into the new programme management software. Project updates will subsequently be reported through the new governance structure at future meetings.
- 4.4** Based upon the size/geography of the Garden Town development proposal, the area should be split into character areas (see maps at Appendix 5).
- 4.5** The proposed character areas of the Garden Town include:
- Area to the north of the A46 'Aston Fields' - which covers the area around the rail station and St Nicolas Church.
  - 'Fiddington Fields' - which includes the consented sites for both employment and housing growth.
  - Land to the southeast: 'Seven Bends' and 'Oxenton Borders' which includes the strategic employment opportunity.
- 4.6** Reflecting the importance of creating strong connections between the Garden Town and Tewkesbury Town Centre, the High Street Heritage Action Zone project has been aligned with the Garden Town programme.

#### **5.0 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS 10 TO 15: ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

- 5.1** The Council has engaged Cratus to devise and consult on a new integrated stakeholder engagement strategy. This will address recommendations 10 to 15 in the gateway review.
- 5.2** The integrated stakeholder engagement strategy will ensure the Council has a plan and an approach to involve and work closely with the people and groups who are interested in and affected by the Garden Town programme, both now and in the future. It will cover ways to listen, communicate, and involve communities and stakeholders in the programme. It will also have a focus on transparency – reflecting the Council's commitment to being open and honest about the garden town, including its challenges.
- 5.3** As part of developing its strategy, Cratus will be facilitating a range of engagement workshops over the period of 10 weeks from October. These sessions will support the refresh of the existing vision and narrative for the Garden Town, as well as asking for input into an emerging 'charter' document.

**5.4** The emerging charter has been developed to stimulate discussion on the expectations for the delivery of the Garden Town. Structured around the existing nine Garden Town principles, it will offer some broad concepts to help inspire ideas and discussions. Once the charter has been developed, it will set the Council's and communities' expectations as to what developers will need to deliver to ensure the principles of the Garden Town programme are met.

**5.5** This work has commenced but is at an early stage, and the high-level programme is shown within Appendix 3.

## **6.0 ENGAGEMENT WITH COUNCILLORS AND PARISH COUNCILS**

**6.1** As part of its commitment to more meaningful engagement, the Council also met with Borough Councillors and impacted Parish Councils on the content of this report during September 2023.

**6.2** The Parish Council session was critical in understanding the extent to which affected communities have lost trust in the Council due to its previous approach to delivering the Garden Town, and it was recognised that this trust will need to be rebuilt over time and through a genuine commitment to working with these Parish Councils to deliver the programme.

**6.3** In addition, the Parish Councils requested that the governance structure is reviewed as the programme progresses to ensure each governance board is represented by the appropriate Members and that it continues to serve the purpose of giving true oversight of the programme to all stakeholders.

**6.4** Parish Councils also expressed concerns with decisions relating to the name of the Garden Town and areas within it seemingly being taken by developers and the Council, with no engagement with local communities affected.

**6.5** During the Parish Council session, it was clear there is considerable resentment and anger within the communities. Whilst the parishes agreed to continue to engage with the programme, it is clear they need to see the Council has fundamentally changed its approach, supported by the delivery of a genuinely robust and transparent process.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

**7.1** As described in section 6.

## **8.0 ASSOCIATED RISKS**

**8.1** Recommendation 1 - The risk is that recommendations are not implemented. This report and the proposal to enhance governance will help to mitigate risk.

Recommendation 2 - The governance arrangements have been designed to reduce risk. The risk registers will be reviewed on a regular basis through these new arrangements.

Recommendation 3 - Developers and landowners within the Garden Town decline the opportunity to engage or their proposals do not align with the aspirations of the Garden Town.

## **9.0 MONITORING**

**9.1** The revised governance arrangements include a number of review and check points to ensure full oversight and monitoring of the Garden Town programme. Most importantly, it schedules a regular review of risks associated with the programme so that, wherever possible, mitigation can be implemented.

## **10.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES/COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

**10.1** The delivery of the Garden Town programme is a priority within the current Council Plan.

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**Background Papers:** None

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**Appendices:** Appendix 1 – Gateway Review – Progress Against Recommendations  
Appendix 2 – New Garden Town Governance Structure  
Appendix 3 – Engagement Strategy – Progress Report from Cratus  
Appendix 4 – Cratus engagement timetable  
Appendix 5 – Opportunity and constraints plan and a plan of character areas