

## **EXECUTIVE**

**Leader: Cllr Gordon Hook**

**Portfolio Holder: Cllr Gary Taylor**

**DATE:** **5 September 2019**

**REPORT OF:** **SIMON THORNLEY, BUSINESS MANAGER STRATEGIC PLACE**

**SUBJECT:** **Newton Abbot Garden Community**  
**PART I**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That Executive:**

- 1. Confirms Newton Abbot's status as a Garden Community**
- 2. Confirms Teignbridge's support for the Exeter and East Garden Communities status**
- 3. Agrees receipt of associated 'capacity funding' from Government**

### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1. To confirm support for Garden Community status and for associated capacity funding to be used in planning high quality new neighbourhoods.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. Across the country the government has been designating new and existing communities as Garden Communities. Since 2017 the government has announced 48 Garden Communities across England. Culm Garden Village in Mid Devon was announced in 2017. "Exeter and East Devon" Garden Communities was announced in May this year. The most recent announcement of 19 'Garden Villages' included Newton Abbot, after a successful bid by Teignbridge Council made in 2018.

- 2.2. It should be noted that the government have used the terminology of 'Garden Towns' or 'Garden Villages' depending on their own criteria, irrespective of the nature of any existing community. Therefore, while Newton Abbot is referred to as a Garden Village by the government clearly this does not reflect its status as a bustling market town.

- 2.3. This is not a planning decision, but the start of a conversation through the local plan process with our communities and with government about the infrastructure and other support available to Teignbridge to ensure that future growth in the area is as high quality as possible.

- 2.4. The main characteristics of a Garden Community, summarised from the prospectus, are:

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- Offer the opportunity for long term housing and economic growth in a local area with a wide range of high quality, distinctive homes, including affordable housing
  - A clear and distinct sense of identity, attractive town/village centre and attractive public realm
  - Vibrant, mixed use communities where people live, work and play, supporting a range of local employment types and premises, retail opportunities, recreational and community facilities
  - Holistically, planned growth which is self-sustaining and characterful
  - Ambitions to create a variety of jobs and timely delivery of infrastructure
  - Integrated, forward looking transport options
  - A whole systems approach to creating healthy places
  - Generous, accessible and good quality greenspace and environmental/biodiversity gains
  - Involving the community at an early stage and include strategies for continued engagement
  - Long term legacy and stewardship arrangements and future proofing for demographic, technological and climate changes
- 2.5. The government published a Garden Communities prospectus in August 2018 with a November 2018 deadline. Officers of the Greater Exeter councils, supported by the then council leaders, considered the matter and decided to make a number of linked bids to the programme, to join the existing Culm Garden Village which had been confirmed in 2017. The government has supported the proposals for 'Exeter and East Devon' and Newton Abbot. The first of these was announced in May this year.

### 3. NEWTON ABBOT GARDEN COMMUNITY

- 3.1. Looking forward, it seems clear that national planning policy will ensure that all local authorities will make an appropriate contribution towards the target that 300,000 homes are built each year in England, to meet pre-existing and new housing needs. There have historically been different ways that governments have sought to achieve national housing targets, including through Structure Plans, Regional Strategies and guidance on calculating Objectively Assessed Need. The method may change in future years. However, whatever the approach it is inevitable that future plans in Teignbridge will need to bring forward housing, employment, infrastructure and other forms of development. The most recent government approach has been to prepare a specific formula, using nationally published data, which defines the housing need of an area district-by-district. Councillors will be aware that this calculation currently gives a housing need of 760 per year, which is more than 20% above our current local plan housing target of 620. The implications of this are that more than 7000 net additional homes (over and above the net total of existing allocations and planning permissions) will need to be allocated within Teignbridge by the year 2040.
- 3.2. The "Heart of Teignbridge", centred on Newton Abbot, is the pre-eminent settlement within Teignbridge, in terms of size, commercial and employment provision, public services and public transport accessibility. It has been the planned focus for housing and employment growth in the current and previous plans going back many years. This is reflected in the current local plan's strategic objective that it will be "the business, educational, leisure and retail centre for South Devon" and the Neighbourhood Plan vision of "an ambitious town which positively embraces

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sustainable development and change ... founded on creativity, accessibility and sustainability; seeking to ensure the highest possible standards in all forms of development." The increasing national and local emphasis on mitigating climate change will only increase the need to provide for new homes in places with sustainable access to jobs, services and facilities.

- 3.3. It continues to be your officers' view that the most sustainable strategy in climate change, transport, economic and environmental terms will be that new homes and other development are continued to be provided in the Heart of Teignbridge. Other settlements in Teignbridge have fewer services, poorer public transport and smaller economies. While Garden Community status indicates the local authority's commitment to development in the area this would not, in the view of your officers, affect the level of development at Newton Abbot and the Heart of Teignbridge going forward, given the district's geography and national planning policy. The key issue facing the town, therefore, is how the councils ensure that its continued growth is carried out at the level of quality and sustainability necessary to meet our agreed objectives/vision.
- 3.4. The Garden Communities prospectus provides the opportunity to give us more influence and better tools to achieve our quality and sustainability objectives. When the prospectus was published it appeared probable that this would be the last set of Garden Communities bids open to local authorities, at least for a number of years. It was therefore considered appropriate to make the bids, reflecting the benefits which are set to flow from a positive outcome. This view, taken at the time, is now reinforced by the fact that only about 30% of bids were successful. With 48 garden communities now designated across England, it has to be doubtful if Homes England and the government have the capacity to support many more of them.
- 3.5. The Newton Abbot Garden Community submission highlighted that the Heart of Teignbridge holds the right ingredients for high quality development to prevail as its growth continues. This is a view that has gathered government support and Executive is now being asked to confirm the designation. Appendix A summarises some of the opportunities available as a Garden Community.
- 3.6. The bid indicated that about 6,800 homes could be provided between now and the year 2040 in the context of the known government figures for housing need. When considering this figure, Executive is asked to take three factors into consideration.
  - Paragraph 2.3 confirms that designation of a garden community does not, itself, make any decisions about development. The legal position in relation to making decisions on development strategy and allocations is clear – this must be carried out through the preparation of local plans (such as the Teignbridge Local Plan Update and/or Greater Exeter Strategic Plan). Therefore, there is no pre-empting of that formal legal process. Public consultation, consideration of options, sustainability appraisal and other assessments are part of the legal requirements leading to decision-making via an independent Local Plan Inspector. Discussions will be needed with government about infrastructure investment and other support available to Teignbridge to ensure that future growth in the area is as high quality as possible. The Garden Communities status will help to support this process, directly by additional revenue funding and indirectly because of the greater government support (referred to as "brokerage") going forward. Consultation on a number of matters concerning the local plan review has already taken place.
  - Much of this is already included within existing local plan allocations and sites with planning permission; of course the local plan is being reviewed.
  - As outlined above, the figure reflects the reality of planning going forward because housing growth in the Heart of Teignbridge is highly likely in any case given the

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national housing policy and the geography of the district, subject to the planning processes outlined above.

### *Driving up quality*

- 3.7. As a Garden Community there will be more scope to secure funding for new facilities like parks, transport routes, schools and a new leisure centre. Much of this is set out in the letter from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) at Appendix B, which also confirms Teignbridge's eligibility for a £150,000 first tranche of 'capacity' revenue funding, to be used for design work, public engagement, infrastructure bid preparation and so on.
- 3.8. The capacity funding would be used to support work that includes more detailed investigation of brownfield development sites and preparation of an up to date sustainable travel strategy for the town. The funding would also be used to support thorough public engagement and establish priorities when it comes to the location, design, qualities and environmental sustainability of the town's new neighbourhoods.
- 3.9. Garden Community status also presents an opportunity to commit to the affordable, low carbon homes and the range of accommodation that the town needs. It raises the prospect of harnessing the government funding and support that can make those objectives a reality.
- 3.10. The government has committed to £150,000 this year, but the level of corporate support within government means that additional funding in future years can be expected. As an illustration of this, it is understood that the Culm Garden Village has received almost £1m in revenue support from government since its identification.
- 3.11. Beyond this, the very fact of Garden Community status gives us greater weight in seeking to achieve greater quality. Ministerial statements, which are statements of government policy and are therefore material considerations, have emphasised the importance placed by government on quality outcomes from this programme. We will be in a position to use that status in our discussions with developers.

## **4. EXETER AND EAST DEVON GARDEN COMMUNITIES**

- 4.1. The other Teignbridge-related bid was the Exeter and East Devon proposal. This programme consists of considerable scope for brownfield regeneration within Exeter City Council known as Liveable Exeter, together with linked city expansion proposals. Exeter City Council is "underbounded" – that is, the urban area extends up to and in places beyond its administrative boundaries. For this reason, extensions to the city are likely to involve land within adjoining local planning authorities. The South West Exeter/Matford urban extension is an example of this kind of cross-boundary expansion.
- 4.2. The bid was therefore a joint one between Exeter City Council, East Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council. The specifics of which sites and growth areas are proposed will need to be considered through joint work between the councils on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP). Councillors will recall that the GESP must be agreed by all four Greater Exeter local planning authorities, including Teignbridge.
- 4.3. Exeter have accepted the status and you are asked to confirm Teignbridge's support. The general comments above in relation to the Newton Abbot proposal hold true for this joint bid, but clearly in relation to a wider area and involving three separate authorities. Teignbridge would be involved in the programme both because of the joint work on GESP, given the plan-led approach to development, but also directly in the Garden Community projects. A grant of £750,000 was provided by government for the first year, to be spent across the three authorities.

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### 5. FINANCIAL AND INVESTMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. Confirming Newton Abbot's status as a Garden Community will bring a first tranche of £150,000 revenue funding support. Experience from other Garden Communities indicates that further funding will be available if strong progress with planning for high quality new neighbourhoods can be demonstrated. Similarly, being a partner in the Exeter and East Devon Garden Communities work will allow access to a share of the £750,000 received for that bid in the current year and likely future funding.
- 5.2. The funding is not 'ring fenced' but there is an expectation that is used in general accordance with the principles set out at Appendix B.
- 5.3. Garden Community status will also increase the area's prospects of securing additional financial support for infrastructure improvements. This could be along the lines of the Housing Infrastructure Fund where a £55 million investment has already been announced at South West Exeter, along with £4.9 million at Dawlish. This is because the government is committed to the success of the programme, and they will wish to ensure that infrastructure issues do not get in the way of that success. The Homes England strategic plan, for example, states that supporting the delivery of Garden Communities is a strategic priority. Councillors should recall that Homes England are a major investor in infrastructure and the Government Agency which distributes the Affordable Housing grant within England. Their capital budget totals almost £15bn over the next 3 years (excluding Help to Buy).
- 5.4. You are therefore advised that Garden Communities status, combined with the Greater Exeter partnership "brand" are key elements in our ability to bid for and negotiate government funding in competition with other, higher profile parts of the country. Therefore we need to use all the opportunities open to us if we are to maximise our profile and status with government.
- 5.5. Initial discussions with Homes England representatives have involved consideration of whether they could drive up development quality through acquisition of development sites; and whether they could help to unlock delivery of the Jetty Marsh II link road. There have also been discussions with Homes England's affordable housing partners about possible additional investment in the town.

### 6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are no direct legal implications. Contracts do not need to be signed in order to draw down the capacity funding. Future funding and investment opportunities may require a commitment to legal contracts as we have seen recently with the Housing Infrastructure Fund at Dawlish. Decisions on development allocations will need to be taken through the local plan and planning application elements of the planning system.

### 7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1. The main alternative option would be to turn down garden community status. As set out in the report, however, this would not affect the need to continue to prepare local plans for the area, and the need within those to continue to provide for national growth priorities, including in the Heart of Teignbridge as a key sustainable development location in Teignbridge. Therefore, this alternative would not reduce or prevent development but instead would remove a potential tool to improve its quality. Our work on attitudes to development found that while about 39% of Teignbridge

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residents were unlikely to support new development in Teignbridge (compared with 26% who were likely to support), many of those were more likely to support development where local jobs, affordable homes and other benefits of development were secured.

### **8. MAIN IMPLICATIONS AND JUSTIFICATION**

- 8.1. Support for and involvement in the Exeter and East Devon Garden Communities work will ensure that the benefits of Garden Community status would include any urban extensions to Exeter which are located within Teignbridge. This would include access to a share of the central government funding for this and future years.
- 8.2. With Newton Abbot designated as a Garden Community, Teignbridge will receive a first tranche of £150,000 revenue support that can be used to plan for the town's growth. Future funding is highly likely.
- 8.3. The Heart of Teignbridge and Exeter, as key sustainable locations, can be expected to continue to grow through the planning process, irrespective of this decision.
- 8.4. As a Garden Community, the Heart of Teignbridge area can expect to benefit from additional investment in its infrastructure, green spaces and other facilities. Officers will continue to work with Homes England and other government departments, reporting progress and opportunities to Councillors as they arise.

**Simon Thornley,  
Business Manager, Strategic Place**

<b>Wards affected</b>	All in Heart of Teignbridge area.
<b>Contact for more information</b>	Spatial Planning & Delivery, 01626 215702
<b>Key Decision</b>	N
<b>In Forward Plan</b>	N
<b>In O&amp;S Work Programme</b>	N