



Commended in Excellence in Other Planning Work category

Estate Regeneration in Taunton
(submitted by the Nash Partnership)

The RTPI South West Awards for Planning Excellence 2019

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(25 word summary)

A sensitive, consultation-led regeneration project for Taunton Deane Borough Council which sought to find a strategy to resolve the structural issues of 186 defective Woolaway homes.

(100 word summary)

Nash Partnership's brief was to work with the local community and agree an approach (refurbishment or regeneration) to address the structural issues involving 186 Woolaway properties in Priorswood, Taunton. Either option would cause huge upheaval for the community, needing residents to temporarily move out of the area while the work was completed.

Through a truly inclusive, transparent and "outstanding" (The Design Review Panel) approach to engagement, Nash Partnership gained the support from many residents who gradually agreed design and delivery solutions for this sensitive project. Proposals have since been approved and will bring economic, social, environmental benefits for the place and its people.

Background

Please outline the background to the project:

- Context, timeline

Priorswood is a mixed tenure estate of 212 non-traditional Woolaway homes, mostly owned by Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC). Woolaway homes' construction is now considered a defective form according to the 1984 Housing Defects Act. As planners and architects, our task was to lead an option appraisal process to find a strategy to resolve the structural issues of these properties.

TDBC wanted to ensure that local residents and the wider community were part of the design and decision-making process. Building trust between residents, stakeholders and our client was key. Throughout, we took time to get to know the residents and understand their individual needs/concerns which included a high proportion of physical and mental health issues.

As part of the planning process, we led a programme of events and extensive community consultation, allowing the project team to generate a design which is deliverable and addresses the objectives of both the community and TDBC. Our extensive plan included:

- A series of meetings with the Local Planning Authority and Highway Authority
- 4 public consultation events (with nearly 100% attendance)
- 12 Residents' Design Group meetings (see below for details)
- Evening meetings
- 4 newsletters
- A project web page
- A community office on site (open 5 days per week), enabling residents to review all the information at their convenience.
- Door-knocking and 1-2-1 meetings with residents
- Meeting local agencies
- Social media updates

Residents' Design Group

This voluntary group was made up of 25 local residents (across all age groups) to voice the needs/aspirations of their neighbours. The group was key to the project's success.

- It enabled residents to gain skills in chairing meetings, generating ideas, preparing/recording information – building social capacity in the community including inspiring young people to get involved and developing career opportunities
- TDBC and Nash Partnership developed options for the area; these were tested against criteria developed/refined by this group
- Using information gathered from 1-2-1 consultations with over 90% of residents, we worked with the Design Group to develop a range of house types to suit the current and future community
- Many group members were unfamiliar with layout drawings. We made the process accessible/understandable by explaining ideas through sketches and precedents.
- Members commented on the proposed layout and house designs throughout the process. Changes to the masterplan and dwellings were made following their comments.

The extent of this engagement led the Council to describe this as the most significant engagement project that has ever taken place in the town and an exemplar for future projects. [The Design Review Panel](#) has also said: "The design process and community consultation process undertaken to date has been extremely rigorous and is considered to be outstanding".

Timeline:

Project launched in 2017; series of stakeholder/resident workshops ran throughout 2018; planning submission in Dec 2018; outline and detailed permission gained in 2019. Now working with TDBC to select contractors for phase 1 works. Work on Reserved Matters for remaining phases expected later in 2019.

Outcomes

Please outline what positive impacts the project has provided for:

- the local community
- the economy
- the environment

(insert your answer here – MAX 500 words)

The community:

- **New skills and learning.** Each Design Group meeting involved some training before we could move the process forward. This empowered the members to engage in technical discussions and to share learning with the wider community. Examples of areas of learning that we led this group through:
 - Planning Standards and the planning process
 - Development Terminology
 - Site Constraints
 - Urban Design Principles
 - Highways Standards
 - Building Control Standards including energy and accessibility
 - Landscaping & Garden Town criteria
 - Ecology
 - Housing standards
- **Health and wellbeing.** New homes are larger than the current homes and the standards required by space standards. Accessibility issues have been addressed with a range of part M standards for disabled access (determined through 1-2-1 interviews with residents).
- **Community partnership.** Proposals were developed in consultation with the community.
- **New group activities.** Residents have since set up their own Regeneration Group as a result of the project, which organises community events to support and raise money for charity. They have also set up events including a Christmas party and summer fete
- **New amenities.** The Residents' Design Group identified the need for additional space for community activities and organised a questionnaire/survey to show what activities would take place. This resulted in the inclusion of a community centre in the ground floor of an apartment building.
- The Community Residents' Charter says all existing residents have a right to return to the neighbourhood on completion. This will be phased, enabling particular groups of residents/neighbours to remain together
- **Mix of housing** is based on a housing needs assessment carried out by the project team within the existing community, via 1-2-1 meetings with each household wherever possible.

The economy:

- Improved thermal performance of homes, reducing fuel bills
- New shared ownership options
- Identification of areas suitable for higher density development
- Additional affordable homes to counter 60 lost p/a through right to buy
- Learning and skills acquired by members of the Resident Design Group

The environment:

- Improved thermal performance of the dwellings, reducing CO2 emissions
- New street trees
- Sustainable drainage
- Taunton garden town demonstration project, promoting the integration of green space within a neighbourhood. Open space also has the potential to provide wider social/economic opportunities (eg. training in managing/maintaining the space).
- Identification of opportunities for improving habitat connectivity across the site and provision of biodiversity enhancements.
- Promotion of sustainable modes of transport through the creation of new and improved pedestrian routes through the site, and enhanced access points linking to existing local shops.

Planning contribution

Please outline how the project has benefitted from the involvement of a planner or planners:

- providing strong and effective leadership and vision
- working in partnership with others
- managing implementation and delivery

Leadership and vision: Nash Partnership's planning team was involved with the project from the outset, ensuring that the vision for the area was shaped to provide the objectives of TDBC (as client), the local community, and the aspirations set out in local planning policy and guidance.

A sensitive leadership approach was required due to the wide range of sensitivities associated with the project, including apprehensive residents worried about losing their homes and concerned about how the development might impact them physically and mentally. The planning consultancy role for this project focused on helping residents to understand the planning process through effective consultation and engagement, in order to build trust and confidence within the community.

This leadership approach enabled the creation of a vision for the area based on the real needs of residents, together with aspirations of other stakeholders.

Partnership working: Partnership working was crucial to the successful delivery of this project. Key partners included TDBC as client, the Planning Case Officer, the County Council (highways and drainage), and - importantly - the local community, including a Residents' Design Group.

Lead by Nash Partnership, the Residents' Design Group undertook training in planning-related knowledge, to provide an understanding of the policies and guidance which shaped the way the proposals developed, the workings of the planning process, and the variety of ways in which the local community could be involved. This knowledge allowed members of the group to understand the reasoning behind certain decisions and objectives, provided them with the information required to input into the process throughout, and enabled them to share information with the wider community.

Within the development project team, Nash Partnership worked in close partnership with consultants from a wide range of professional disciplines, including highways, drainage, landscape, ecology and arboriculture, to provide a deliverable scheme which met the objectives of both the community and TDBC.

Implementation and delivery: Delivery of the project to set timescales and receiving support from Members at planning committee were of great importance to the project due to the impact that such milestones have on the lives of the residents involved in the process.

The planning consultancy role for the project included working in partnership with urban designers and architects to develop an effective engagement strategy and delivery programme focussed on providing residents with as much certainty as possible in relation to how the timescales might impact their lives. All work carried out during the preparation of the planning applications was focused on this delivery objective. Importantly, the delivery strategy also covered the construction stage of the project, in relation to the phasing of the development, and how decants will work, in order to cause as little disruption to the lives of residents as possible.

Ensuring an early understanding of the aspirations and objectives of stakeholders, coupled with provision of a detailed, comprehensive delivery strategy, allowed the development proposals to move through the planning system with ease, delivering a scheme which was unanimously supported by Members at planning committee.

Sustainable development

The sustainability of the approved outline plan is reflected in its approach to the re-use of land that has previously been developed, to provide additional affordable housing in a sustainable location within Taunton.

Taunton provides high quality, low carbon, sustainable homes alongside natural green spaces and enhanced streetscapes. It reflects the local character of the area and considers the local community through involvement and engagement of the site-wide designs. This, in turn, will create a strong community sense of ownership to the proposals the public open spaces. The designs for the scheme reflect the need for future proofing, designing resilient places that allow for changes due to climate change, technological change and community growth.

Public benefit:

- **Short term:** Somerset Art Trust is working with local residents on a memory project that will be built into the new community centre. The engagement has provided training and new networking opportunities for residents. One resident (aged 15) has applied for apprenticeships in communication as a result.
- **Medium term:** Defective houses will be replaced with larger, more energy efficient and accessible homes. A new community centre will be provided.
- **Long term:** Additional affordable homes will be provided including shared ownership. Street trees, local community green space will provide a strong sense of place. Re-grading the site will improve accessibility and a wide range of housing needs will be met. Community management group will be established. All existing tenants will have a right to return to the neighbourhood. Friendship and support groups will be considered in the housing allocation.

A balance of objectives: The Council's main objective was to address the Woolaway structural issues and provide additional homes through better land use. Its social objectives were to work with the community to provide training and support and homes that met their individual needs. The project is a case study for Taunton Garden town meeting helping to meet its environment and placemaking objectives.

Sustainable Development Goals:

1. Reducing poverty by providing 280 affordable homes
2. Nutrition - raised allotment beds are provided
3. Health and wellbeing – new community open space is provided, surrounded by traffic calming. Improved construction will address damp and condensation issues
4. Education - a sustainable location and route to school is integrated in the layout. Training provided through the Residents' Design Group.
6. Water and sanitation – ground floor accessible WCs to all new homes. Surface water storage in the green space
7. Energy – replacing poor structures with energy efficient homes
8. Economic growth – encouraging jobs, local training and community management of the green space
9. Infrastructure – integrated street trees and water storage
10. Reduce inequality – providing wide mix of affordable homes, support with moving costs, offering homeowners with a range of housing options.
11. Safe, resilient and sustainable communities – a range of Part M house types, larger than national space standards and secure by design.
12. Consumption - increased density and improved land use. Promoting recycling at front doors.
13. Climate action – more energy efficient buildings
15. Sustainable land use - increased density. Biodiversity promoted in the public realm – Garden Town exemplar
16. Inclusive societies – extensive engagement with the local community and opportunities for future local management

Please outline how the project has supported:

- positive short, medium and long term public benefit
- a balance of economic, social and environmental objectives
- the UN's Sustainable Development Goals



Illustrative masterplan showing the replacement and refurbishment of the Woolaway homes. A new community open space is provided and Rochester Road is realigned to provide traffic calming.

Community benefit

Please outline how the project has provided:

- positive and constructive engagement and dialogue with local people and businesses
- a better quality of life for people, especially for disadvantaged communities
- tangible benefits for communities such as facilities, infrastructure, jobs, training etc

(insert your answer here – MAX 500 words)

Engagement/dialogue: From the outset, the key principles implemented throughout the community engagement process comprised:

- Early engagement with the community and local authority
- Transparent and open design development
- Variety of consultation approaches to reach as many residents as possible, including 1 to 1 meetings, Residents' Design Group meetings and public consultation events
- Clear presentation of the evolving and proposed development
- Listen to the views of different stakeholders

These guided the engagement activities outlined in our 'background' section.

Engagement rates for individual residents were high:

- 90% of households engaged with the project team or at consultation events
- 152 tenants engaged (ie. 91% of capacity)
- 40 private owners have engaged (ie. 88% of capacity)

Feedback received from the engagement events fed into the emerging design, influencing issues such as the community facility, open space, building variety and positioning as well as the detailed design of the proposed development. Some changes requested had a significant impact on the masterplan. The professional team was not afraid to adopt as many as possible so residents could see they really were being listened to. An open space was added at the heart of the development in response to their comments, a road was diverted to facilitate safe pedestrian movement and a new community facility was incorporated in the ground floor of the proposed flats.

As a result, this process has shaped a more robust, coherent and contextually sensitive design that will contribute significantly to the character, vibrancy and vitality of this part of Taunton.

Comments received on the way feedback was used include:

- "Final' plans to be taken forward are a massive improvement from where we started this journey! Was a brilliant feeling when plans were changed and then re-changed to accommodate the concerns of the Design Group. We all felt that Nash and TDBC were actually listening and working alongside us all.' **Resident, Ludlow Avenue**

Quality of life: The existing community is made up of families with young children through to elderly residents who have lived in the homes since they were built. Many have brought up families in the houses and their extended families continue to live in the neighbourhood. This means there is a strong sense of community and local identity which the team had to get to know during the engagement process.

We identified the opportunity to make quality local services a focal point of the neighbourhoods, fostering a sense of local identity and pride, and improving the quality of life for people there. This includes providing a new community centre and the potential future management of the open space.

Taunton's strategic proposals for housing provision were developed to protect vital green corridors and links to the wider countryside. This vision has been strengthened by the successful Garden Town Bid. High quality open spaces are essential features of the plans, as are improving access to schools and education, better transport infrastructure and enhancing the range/quality of employment opportunities.

Tangible community benefits: open spaces, new street trees, new larger homes, homes that meet a range of accessibility needs including fully accessible wheelchair homes and chalet bungalows, new community amenities, community art including a memory project built into the fabric of the new community centre.



Leading practice

Please outline how the project:

- is creative and innovative

(insert your answer here – MAX 500 words)

Creativity/innovation: The project's most innovative part was the engagement strategy. It included forming a Residents' Design Group, 21 community events, 1-2-1 interviews and evening meetings. One of the most effective tools we used was an old-fashioned largescale cardboard model, which the residents understood easily. The model is still on site and can be adapted as later phases are developed with the community.

In 2017, Taunton received Garden Town status. Nash Partnership took part in stakeholder consultations with the Council to define the Garden Town's vision and the project has been included in the Council's Garden Town documentation as a case study.

An exemplar: The extent of engagement led the Council to describe this as the most significant engagement project that has ever taken place in the town and an exemplar for future projects. The Design Review Panel also said: "The design process and community consultation process undertaken to date has been extremely rigorous and is considered to be outstanding".

In February 2019, Nash Partnership took up an invitation to present at a Westminster Briefing event entitled 'Developing your Estate Regeneration Strategy: Policy Update and Learning From Good Practice'.

Equality: A Residents' Charter was produced, creating a framework to ensure everybody was treated equally with integrity, honesty and trust. It specified the Council's commitments to respond to residents' immediate concerns. Eg everybody would have a home, nobody would be forced to downsize as a result of the project (unless they specifically wanted to) and all residents who wanted to return to the area when the properties were ready could equally do so.

A series of options for private homeowners within the area also set out how their current home would be valued and offers to buy them back would be consistent.

A Residents' Implementation Charter is now being prepared with the community, setting out the mechanics of the redevelopment (eg. payments for moving costs, home loss compensation) so that everybody affected will have an equal opportunity to claim.

Diversity: The Residents' Design Group was purposefully comprised of tenants/homeowners with a diversity of skills, ages, experience and backgrounds. We encouraged the group to work together and acknowledge their differences to create a productive and effective working group.

1-2-1 interviews were offered to all residents, including tenants and homeowners; the vast majority of households took those up. These interviews captured otherwise unknown information about the bespoke needs of individuals/families in existing properties and revealed the diversity of residents' requirements. The Council embraced this diversity and formulated a design team brief to accommodate it. This also had to consider phasing and the ability of residents to move and those who would require assistance. 23 bespoke house types were designed for the outline application. These included three levels of Part M4 (2, 3 and 4) accessibility standards. The plans were rigorously examined by residents and a technical audit within Nash ensured they complied with the standards. This engagement empowered residents, demonstrating that the team respected/appreciated what made them different (age, tenure, status, mental/physical need etc).

Groups of neighbours with particular friendship/support groups were designed to be relocated together, despite having different house type requirements. Diversity on this project was respected and valued and the resultant mix of house types will create a lively streetscape, varied character and maintain the sense of community that currently exists.

- is an exemplar that is transferable across the UK
- promotes equality and diversity



White cardboard model used at resident engagement events