

## Public consultation methodology and communication

Recently, a period of public consultation was held to share information and gather feedback on the proposed Design Guide for the Eastern Neighbourhood. A Design Guide sets out general design principles and standards for an area, to shape future designs and planning applications – and the Consortium wanted to ensure stakeholders had an active part in its development.

As part of this consultation process, a presentation on the Eastern Neighbourhood Design Guide was made to the Design South West Review Panel to seek independent, specialist quality assurance. In May, a presentation was delivered to the Local Planning Authority, Parish Councillors, and Trull community representatives. This was followed by a month-long period of public consultation that ended on 18 July.

In consulting the public, the Consortium sought to share information with those living near Orchard Grove, while working within the constraints of the pandemic. Unfortunately, national Covid-19 restrictions prevented in-person gatherings from taking place at this time.

The traditional method of hosting an in-person meeting and physical display of plans has evolved in recent years to include digital alternatives, to involve a broader demographic and provide people with options for how they would like to engage.

The team considered the most effective, responsible, safe and timely methods of sharing information with local residents. With its duty of care to the general public in mind, the decision was made to proceed with a digital public consultation, promoted on the Orchard Grove website and supported by an extensive local leaflet drop to raise awareness and encourage participation.

Planning information, and the Design Guide presentation were made available on the Orchard Grove website, with a corresponding online survey, developed using specialist survey software (TypeForm). Survey questions related directly to the Design Guide presentation and the survey design also gave respondents the opportunity to provide free-text comments of their own.

The steps taken to communicate the consultation are outlined below in more detail:

#### Website:

- The Orchard Grove website had an additional 'Planning' page added to host all digital content. This new page was clearly signposted from the top menu and promoted with a new post on the 'News' page. This section contained all the information needed to take part in the consultation including detailed text and visuals.
- This clear and concise page explained to visitors the purpose of the public consultation, directing them to the presentation – hosted as an embedded PDF, so no need to download any files. It was also recommended that page visitors watch the explanatory video, which was also embedded on the page. Any queries not answered by the presentation or video were directed to a central email address. The link to the survey was made obvious to encourage participation.

#### The presentation:

- The extensive presentation document was hosted online as a PDF – embedded in a new Planning page on the Orchard Grove website. At 25 pages in length, it was unsuitable for mass printing and distribution. It was discussed that some shared copies could be printed and placed in public facilities, however asking people to attend a couple of locations and handle the same printed material was deemed too much of a Covid-19 threat without having a team on the ground to put safety procedures in place.
- The presentation included a range of plans, maps and drawings. Throughout, the use of a 'red line' indicated the site boundary lines, with the Consortium only responsible for the areas contained within the boundary, to help manage public expectations of what the Design Guide could cover.

#### Explanatory video content:

- A virtual stakeholder meeting took place in May, which was recorded and hosted online. As part of the public consultation, the video was signposted as an additional resource to watch to find out more about the presentation, and understand the plans in more detail. It included an hour-long run through of the presentation.
- At that stakeholder meeting there was a Q&A session. Unfortunately, the meeting saw several individuals join late in the proceedings without having given their consent to being recorded, which was gained at the outset of the meeting. There would have been no issue with sharing the full Q&As in the spirit of transparency if full consent had been obtained. However, the presentation itself was the core focus on the meeting and this was recorded and published online in full.

#### Leaflet campaign:

- Printed leaflets outlining the consultation, and inviting those living locally to view the materials online and share their views via a survey, were distributed to 3,000 homes and businesses in the area during the week of 21st June.

- This was undertaken by a local distribution firm that handles the circulation of local media publications and marketing. Responsible for a previous letter drop for the Consortium, they have in-depth knowledge of the area. The distributor advised on the most suitable target areas for the Eastern Neighbourhood.

While there may be some disappointment in the lack of physical event, there is also merit in the use of a digital public consultation. In the UK, 89% of households have access to the internet.

Digital content is increasingly used in public participation because of its accessibility; it is accessible 24/7 through various devices and reaches a broader range of audience, especially families with young children, those with disabilities, and the working population who may be excluded by more traditional public consultation events.

The Orchard Grove Consortium is committed to working with local residents, community groups and Councillors – and in partnership with planning officers – to create an outstanding new development that benefits the area.

There is a long history of consulting stakeholders, and this will continue to be the case in the future.

## **Consultation reach**

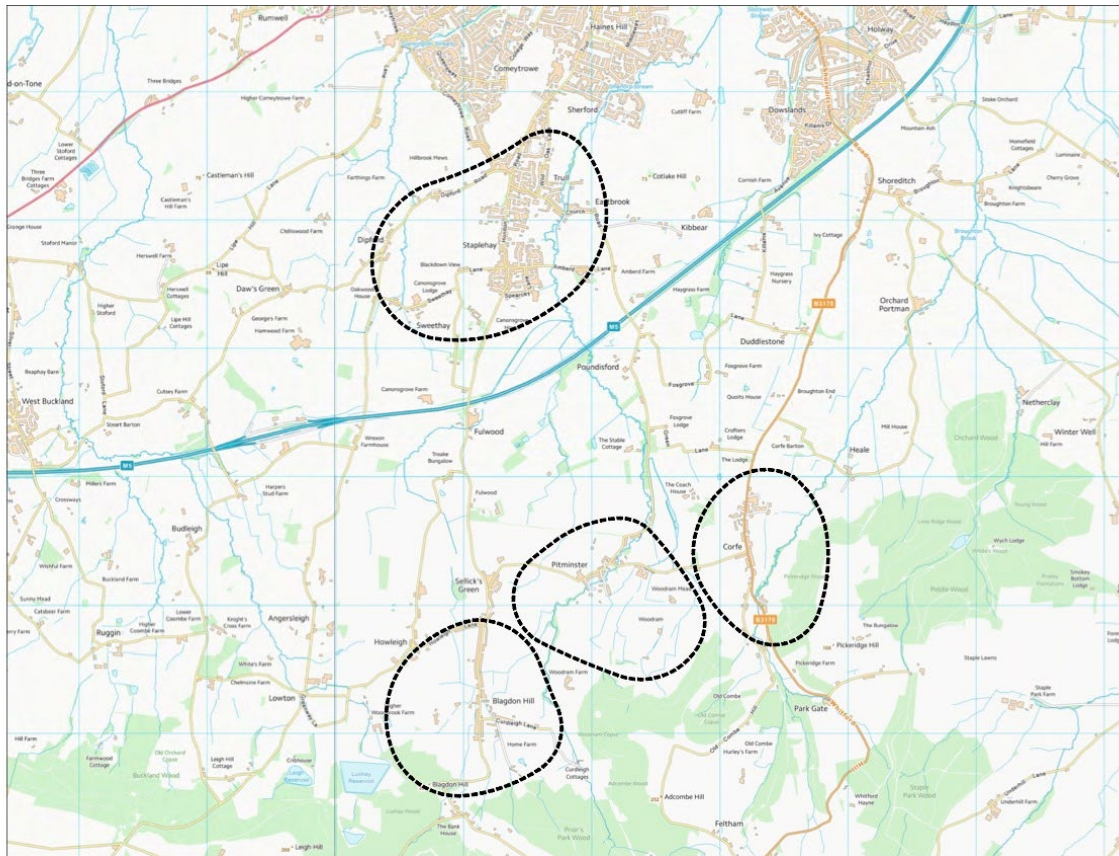
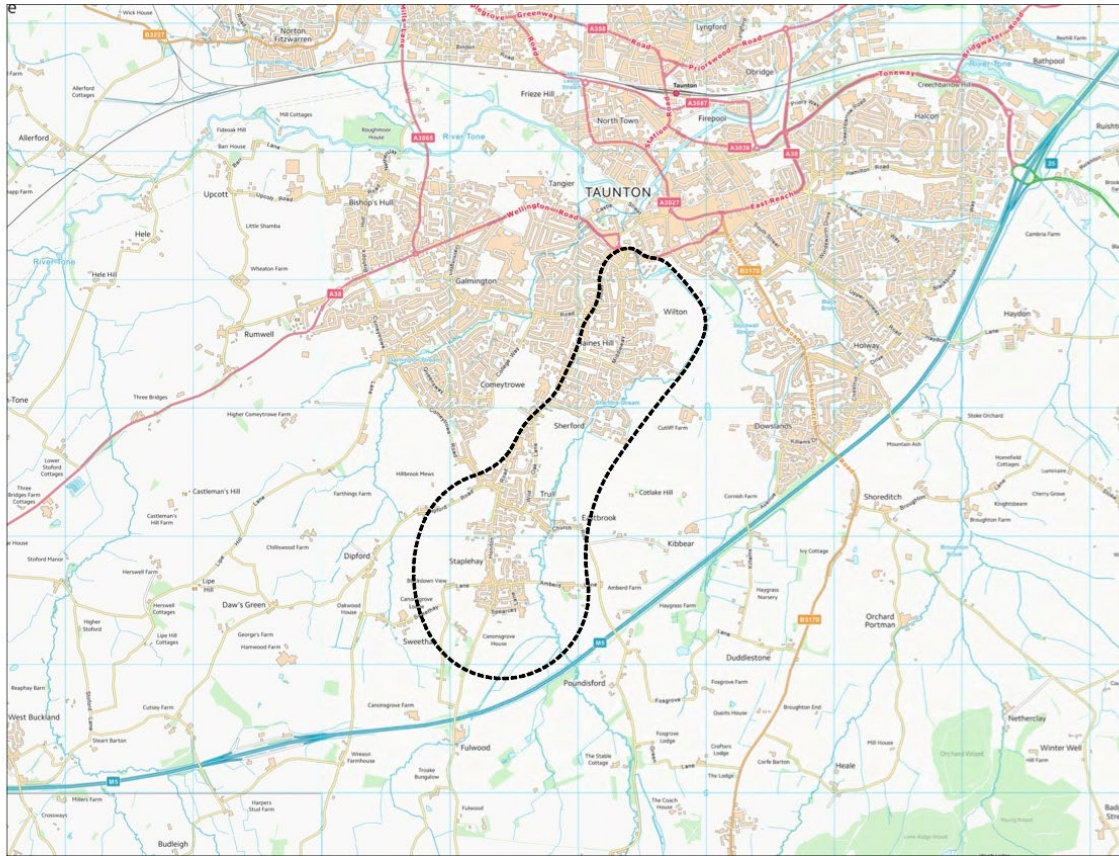
While this mid-pandemic public consultation may have differed to previous experiences, significant effort was made to encourage engagement.

The following information shows how effective the chosen routes to communicate with the public were.

The purpose of the information leaflet was to create awareness of the digital consultation and encourage people to visit the website, engage with the materials and complete the survey.

The results data shows that this was a successful strategy.

- Leaflet geographical reach: 3,000 leaflets were distributed within the relevant area, specifically in Trull, Staplehay, Pitminster, Blagdon Hill, Corfe, Sherford – and areas to the left of Trull Road, heading from Taunton to Trull and Blagdon Hill.



- Data shows that the website was a successful method of communication. Website traffic was at a constant low level – rising slightly at points when new news stories were uploaded – but surging when the leaflet drop took place. Traffic headed to the new planning page, which had not been promoted anywhere other than via the leaflets. This new page went from 43 unique users to having 277 unique users visit it in early July, which we can attribute to the leaflet distribution.

Diagram 1: Orchard Grove website traffic.

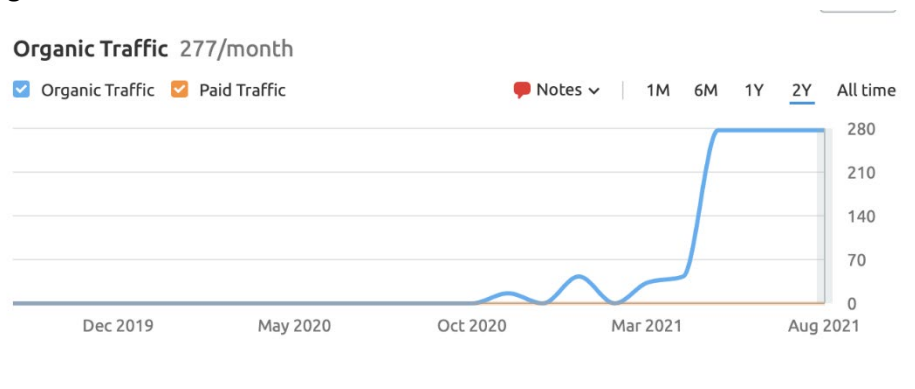
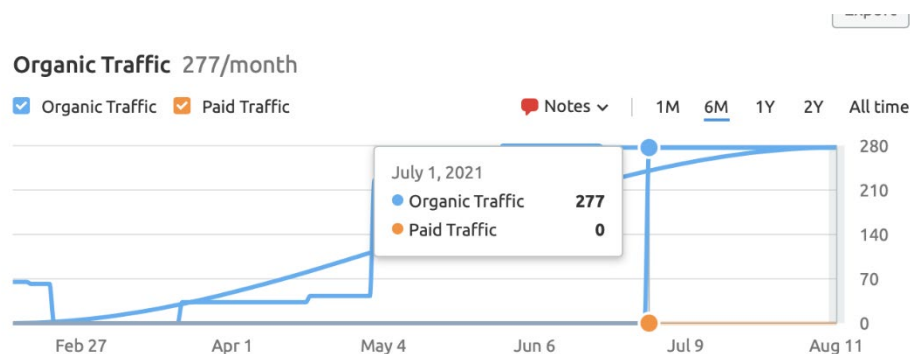


Diagram 2:

Line one – smooth, gradual incline: overall website traffic

Line two – stepped increase: the news page

Line three – straight vertical line: the planning page. Please note that while the graph indicates this traffic arrived on one day, the software puts all retrospective data onto the 1st of each month – so this will have captured the data from late June through to mid-July.



The public consultation online survey was live for a period of a month and recorded 56 responses. The participation data is as follows:

- Views: 314
- Starts: 167
- Responses: 56
- Completion rate: 33.5%
- Average time to complete: 05:40
- Mobile devices: 138 views, 78 starts, 23 responses, average time to complete 04:46



- Desktop: 96 views, 60 starts, 27 responses, average time to complete 07:06
- Tablet: 80 views, 29 starts, 6 responses, average time to complete 02:47

It is the view of the team involved that having 277 unique users visit the Planning page – the digital public consultation page – followed by 314 views of the online survey, and 56 responses is an above average level of public participation in a public consultation event of any format, in-person or digital.

At a comparable physical event, an average of 100 attendees would be likely. It would be likely that significantly fewer comment cards/survey forms would be returned than were recorded in the online survey.

## Consultation survey responses

A series of questions were asked in the online survey, relating directly to the Eastern Neighbourhood Design Guide presentation, which all respondents were directed to prior to completing the survey. This also helped respondents become familiar with the terminology used in the survey questions and possible answers.

Six questions were posed with a selection of multiple-choice answers available. Respondents were able to choose multiple responses, and where they felt another option was preferable, could select 'other' and leave their own viewpoint as free-text, in their own words.

The following results and any pertinent points raised in emails during the public consultation period will be incorporated into the design guide. The intention of the consultation was to inform the final guide and help shape future plans, and the feedback gained from the public has been invaluable in this process.

Survey questions and responses:

Question 1:

**What do you think are the most important aspects of the master plan?**

Green corridors **84.8%**

Spaces and edges **60.9%**

Main connections and key paths **54.3%**

Key frontages **26.1%**

Nodes **0.0%**

Other **8.7%**

- "Light pollution & sound pollution"

- "That the development looks like a Garden Town i.e. with well-designed buildings that blending in with the adjoining in Trull conservation area"
- "Low carbon"
- "Impact on Comeytrove Road"

Question 2:

**What do you think of the internal routes and connections to existing access points in the Masterplan?**

They need to focus on pedestrians and cyclists **72.7%**

Routes need to be direct and easy to way find **47.3%**

Bus routes need to be central in the development **27.3%**

Other **10.9%**

- "Don't ruin the existing park just to serve your own purposes. How can you ensure Comeytrove Road won't be accessed by the new residents as it is already a small, busy road?"
- "The roundabout proposed for Honiton Road junction is too large and will have a detrimental impact on the conservation area and the cottages adjoining it in Dipford Road. It should be moved further back in the development and away from these houses."
- "Consideration should be made to split Comeytrove Road as it will become gridlocked"
- "Not sufficiently clear or developed particularly in relation to Dipford Road"
- "Would also like to see a detailed plan of how Comeytrove Road resident s access Trull and Taunton"
- "Need to limit and divert traffic from existing roads"

Question 3:

**What do you think of the configuration of the initial street sections in the design guide, the Main Road, Village Lane and Private Drive?**

Provision for safe and off-road cycleways **58.3%**

Streets need to be designed for the needs of all **54.2%**

Shared surfaces for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists **20.8%**

Other **6.2%**

- "Currently there is easy access to open countryside. We want to be able to still get to the countryside without having to walk through residential streets"
- "provision must be made for visitor parking and electric vehicle charge points"
- "You need to make sure that all houses built give enough off road parking, unlike most major housing estates, not enough parking is provided especially for growing families"

Question 4:

**There is a provision for a range of multifunctional open spaces on the development. What do you think these spaces should be used for?**

Green corridors and protection of wildlife habitat **77.8%**

Including new parkland adjacent to existing and new homes **68.5%**

Protecting views from existing homes **66.7%**

New sports facilities, including pitches **25.9%**

More public rights of way **22.2%**

Other **7.4%**

- "We have our own pitches in Trull. If you want these, put them the other side of the development."
- "Keep Trull separate from new development"
- "create a safe link between new parks and Comeytrove Neighbourhood Park"
- "sports facilities should be on the Wellington side of the development not on the Trull side, increasing traffic through the village which cannot cope at peak times as it is, also the increase traffic coming down and through Blagdon Hill"

Question 5:

**The Masterplan has been divided into different areas types; one of these areas has been identified as Trull Park. What do you think the character of the area should be?**

Similar to the character of Trull village **70.9%**

Low density **49.1%**

Organic and informal **41.8%**

Have its own identity **30.9%**

Other **7.3%**

- "Don't build houses on it. Leave it as nice countryside. If you really have to, build nice eco houses with good design, not modern generic estate houses."
- "to fit in with the immediately adjoining houses in the conservation area"
- "Large trees and informal planting"
- "Provision of mixed low density development with local design features not bland featureless frontages which seen to be the norm in the Western development plans bland"

Question 6:

**The development seeks to promote active travel. The design of streets is orientated to favour pedestrians and cyclists. What do you think of this approach?**

Cyclists should use a segregated route **45.8%**

Cycleways should be integrated within the streets **20.8%**

Vehicles are important to the movement of the surrounding areas of the development **14.6%**



Pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles should share streets **12.5%**

Other **6.2%**

- "Just don't cause extra traffic on the town side of Honiton Road as its already too busy. Also do not make it possible for more people to use Comeytrowe Road."
- "Good but it is inevitable that there will be cars and proper provision should be made for visitor parking and electric charging"
- "Streets should ensure safety for all users. Street design should encourage larger vehicles to access the link road from the Western end/A38 rather than clogging up Trull Road."

## Q&As

In communications about the public consultation, any queries not answered by the presentation were directed to the central email address. All responses from this were monitored; those with urgent requests relating directly to the consultation material, such as requesting larger images from the presentation, were dealt with promptly. All other queries were reviewed, discussed and the responses are provided below.

It should be noted that the queries received were largely about matters not within the scope of the Eastern Neighbourhood Design Guide, relating to areas outside of the development, referencing plans that already have consent, or raising matters not within the control of the developers.

In the spirit of engaging with stakeholders, and being open and transparent, these questions have also been covered and responded to. This is not an action usually taken during public consultations, and the Consortium has gone above and beyond in this instance.

To ensure all those who submitted questions are able to see the answers, these will be added to the Orchard Grove website FAQ section. As the development progresses and elements of the responses below become outdated or updates are available, the responses will be revised accordingly.

For brevity and clarity, the following questions have come from paraphrasing queries raised in the emails and grouping similar questions by topic.

Sustainability:

### **How sustainable will the Eastern Neighbourhood be?**

Considerations are being made within the emerging Eastern Neighbourhood Design Guide that aim to respond to the way in which the world is currently changing. These include encouraging active travel through segregated cycleways, including along the spine road; supporting walking and cycling through the provision of a Primary School, which will aim to be delivered to Passivhaus standard; and electric vehicle charging points considered in the local centre.

The development will follow the parameters set by the approved outline application, S106 and current government policy on energy provision and performance. As government policy changes, particularly in relation to building regulations and the arrival of the Future Homes Standard in 2025, homes built at Orchard Grove will conform to these requirements accordingly.

### **Are you making provision for cycling?**

Cycle paths will run throughout Orchard Grove and cycle parking is required in the development. We encourage the use of cycles and support local interest groups' ambitious calls to promote cycling uptake and safety through the area. The safety of cyclists is of the utmost importance and the development will be compliant in cycling policy standards. The county council also has a responsibility to ensure the safe passage of cyclists through the locality.

### **Will homes have recycling facilities?**

All properties will be provided with space for recycling bins outside homes and in courtyards. They will all meet the minimum regulations and follow current policy guidelines. The provision of recycling bins and collection will fall to the local authority.

Public transport:

### **What is the plan for a bus route?**

The Consortium is making a contribution to improving bus travel in the vicinity of Orchard Grove as part of the Section 106 agreement. There are options for bus routes but these are at the discretion of Somerset County Council and this decision is still some time away. Roads will be created by the Consortium that can accommodate buses. Somerset County Council may put in place a new bus link that crosses Comeytrowe Road, but will provide more details on this as public transport plans progress.

Homes:

### **Will homes have wheelchair access?**

Orchard Grove will meet the required standard to provide wheelchair accessible homes. Reserved matters planning applications are where this detail will be covered, as plans for new homes are outlined in more detail by each developer.

### **What house styles will there be in the Eastern Neighbourhood?**

There will be an appropriate and bespoke housing mix in the Eastern Neighbourhood. A marketing analysis has been done of the local area to consider the existing styles that the development might reflect, and to assess the what type of homes are needed. Homes in Orchard Grove will reflect the character of the local area, taking cues from local architecture and housing types, but they will also have their own distinct identity.

Facilities:

### **Will there be community facilities in the local centre?**

There certainly is scope to have a community building in the Western Neighbourhood local centre, however designs for this area are yet to be developed. A community facility would

likely be led by the Parish Council using Community Infrastructure Levy funds paid by the developers to the local authorities to help deliver community infrastructure to support the local area.

### **Will there be a doctor's surgery in Orchard Grove?**

The local centre, based within the Western Neighbourhood, has the ability to deliver facilities that could be used for a range of commercial purposes. The detailed plans for this area are yet to be designed. While there is no obligation for the Consortium to provide medical facilities, it is possible that commercial space within the local centre could be of interest as a healthcare facility.

### **Will the Consortium invest in facilities in the wider local area?**

Through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), the Consortium contributes significant funds to the local authorities to invest in local communities – new and existing. Trull Parish Council is in receipt of a quarter of the CIL funds and the remainder goes to the district council. There is a list of projects that this can be spent on, which could include facilities in the wider area.

Public space:

### **Is there sufficient public space in Orchard Grove?**

Designed as a garden community, 100 acres of open and accessible green space will be created, reflecting the surrounding picturesque Somerset countryside. The Eastern Neighbourhood has an abundance of public space that we anticipate both new residents and those living in the local area will enjoy and benefit from.

### **What are the plans for Comeytrowe Park?**

Comeytrowe Park lies outside of the development boundary. However, the Consortium has previously held a Stakeholder Workshop with Parish Council members, local interest groups and business owners to understand the role of Comeytrowe Park and how Orchard Grove could help integrate and facilitate positive change.

Environmental issues:

### **Will you remove trees in the Eastern Neighbourhood?**

Any disruption to current areas of greenery will be done in close consultation with ecologists and with all necessary licenses. Any tree removal will be done in strict accordance with planned outline consent and with permission. Where any trees need to be removed, new trees will be planted to replace them. Our intention is to strengthen the tree belt and boost biodiversity throughout the Eastern Neighbourhood.

### **What measures are being put in place to prevent flooding?**

Our team of experts have been carefully considering the local landscape to mitigate the risk of flooding, as well as looking at the best sustainable drainage solutions for the development. The requirements of the Flood Risk Assessment will be met across the site. Additionally, a surface water drainage strategy has been consulted on and agreed with the Lead Local Flood Authority. Sustainable drainage solutions will continue across the Eastern Neighbourhood, including attenuation basins – but the locations for these are yet to be determined.

Living locally:

### **My house backs onto the Eastern Neighbourhood, how will this impact me?**

A small number of homes back onto a section of the development. Minimal distance standards will be met in relation to existing properties. In addition, there are proposals for enhanced planting around the edges of this part of the development and the existing hedgerows will be retained. The approach outlined has already been decided in the outline planning application for the development. Events and exhibitions have previously been held to outline the intentions for the layout of Orchard Grove, including this area, and requests from those living in the locality were included at the time.

### **Will my house be overlooked or be impacted by street lighting?**

A substantial amount of earthworks will take place to alter the levels of the land within the Eastern Neighbourhood. The local authority has planning policies that protect existing homeowners – including specifying minimum distances – and Orchard Grove will adhere to this. Street lighting is also covered by County and District Council policies that ensure no adverse impact on those living nearby. Street lighting on Comeytrowe Road falls outside of the boundary of the development.

### **Will those living locally be negatively affected by the construction of the Eastern Neighbourhood?**

The development is bound by strict rules – a Construction Environmental Management plan – that the groundworks team, developers and sub-contractors must adhere to. This covers air quality, noise pollution, use of vehicles and other factors, and is approved by the local authority. A plan for site traffic has been assessed, considered and approved by local authorities.

Local roads:

### **When will the spine road through Orchard Grove be delivered?**

The spine road, which is the main arterial road running from the top to the bottom of the development, will be complete for the Western Neighbourhood by the 50<sup>th</sup> occupation, which is likely to be in the first half of 2022. The construction of the road is already well underway and the intention is to have this vital piece of infrastructure in place early into the development. The road will then continue down, and work on the Eastern Neighbourhood

section will be completed by the 1,450<sup>th</sup> home built, which is around three quarters of the way through the development.

### **What will the development mean for Comeytrowe Road?**

Comeytrowe Road lies outside of the boundary of the development, and therefore outside of the scope of the Eastern Neighbourhood Design Guide consultation. However, we can reassure those living locally that the Consortium is working with Somerset County Council and the Highways Agency on all matters relating to the roads within the development, as well as routes to connect the new community with existing neighbouring areas. Any decisions about the roads outside of the Orchard Grove boundary will be made by Somerset County Council.

### **Will you still be able to travel along Comeytrowe Road and Dipford Road to reach the wider area?**

Yes, there are no plans to pedestrianise Comeytrowe Road or Dipford Road as part of the development highway works. Plans may include a footpath and cycle route heading South on Dipford Road, with vehicles accessing Taunton via the new Honiton Road roundabout. Providing greater connectivity and travel options, those using Dipford Road will be able to travel west via Orchard Grove's new spine road, which will link to the A38 and offer easy access to the M5.

### **Will Dipford Road continue to provide vehicular and pedestrian access through the site?**

As existing highway, under the planning permission Dipford Road will be retained in its current form and future Reserved Matter applications will therefore need to comply with this. The 'parameter plan' that the Consortium must work to does not identify Dipford Road for development nor does it alter the roads access arrangements which remain in their current form, other than approving the indicative route of the spine road to cross Dipford Road to connect to Honiton Road, as per the approved Honiton Road roundabout access plan.

### **What is planned for the Honiton Road junction?**

A roundabout at Honiton Road has been approved within the Outline Planning permission, with the approved access plan setting the position and layout of the new junction. This roundabout will need to be in place ahead of 1,200 homes being built at Orchard Grove, which is in the region of five years' time.

The plan for Honiton Road will be included in the Design Guide for the Eastern Neighbourhood. Within this, it will show the design principles that need to be followed in future plans. The scope of the Consortium's obligation is to 'make good' the new junction onto Honiton Road and ensure the new roundabout ties into the existing roads.

**Could the plans for Honiton Road include community suggestions?**

Local residents in Trull and the surrounding area may be keen to see additional features and considerations built into the plans. Somerset County Council controls highways and public land and we encourage those with an interest in this area to engage with local authorities accordingly. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, paid by the developers, to the local authorities should be used for community infrastructure. If there is a desire for additions to Honiton Road, which are not covered within the remit of the Orchard Grove Consortium, this could potentially be supported by CIL funds.

**Ends**