

Report Number: SWT 95/22

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6th July 2022

Connecting our Garden Communities – public consultation

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mike Rigby (Planning and Transportation)

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1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Connecting our Garden Communities is a plan for ensuring that modern, futureproofed walking and cycling infrastructure accompanies the delivery of key developments across Taunton Garden Town. The plan builds on and complements the existing Taunton Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan and other related projects being delivered via the Future High Streets Fund.
- 1.2 This report contains links to the draft plan (which forms the main detailed evidence base) and a short-form non-technical summary document (which is more accessible). These are to form the basis of the consultation materials, but an online platform is being used to better enable stakeholders to engage with the proposals spatially and leave targeted comments as well as respond to a survey.
- 1.3 This report recommends approval of the draft plan for public consultation. The final plan, taking account of feedback received during consultation, will return to Executive Committee likely in the autumn and subsequently be presented to Full Council for final approval as a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications likely in December 2022.

2 Recommendations

That Corporate Scrutiny Committee recommends:

- 2.1 That Executive Committee approve the Connecting our Garden Communities draft plan for public consultation.
- 2.2 That responsibility for any minor textual and visual changes and enhancements prior to publication for consultation are delegated to the Director for Development and Place and Climate Change in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation.

3 Risk Assessment

3.1 There are risks associated with the Connecting our Garden Communities project. However, many of these risks are more associated with the delivery of the plan and routes themselves, rather in the decision to approve the draft plan for public consultation.

3.2 The main risks associated with approving the plan for consultation include:

Risk	Explanation and Mitigation
Failure to consult	Whilst consultation is not a statutory requirement for a discretionary plan like this, failure to consult at this stage, and to subsequently move forward with more detailed design work and delivery without involving the public would be irresponsible, unreasonable, and risk significantly greater backlash. Walking and cycling routes need to be delivered in the places people need to go and that they will use. Deliverable project further require at least an element of stakeholder support and ownership, and the most successful schemes are built with communities and other stakeholders playing an active part. This consultation starts this process, which future, more detailed work may develop from. Public consultation further strengthens the case for developer negotiations and funding bids.
Raising expectations / over promising, under-delivering	The plan includes careful wording to ensure it sets out our aspirations, and that each route is subject to detailed design (which may necessitate change) and that it is heavily reliant on developer negotiations and securing external funding in order to deliver.
Raising anxiety / concern in affected communities / parties	The plan identifies routes only, with some commentary about constraints and opportunities which hints at what the design solution may need to consider. It contains no specific detailed proposals. There will be parts of routes that are more sensitive to change than others and where controversy may arise as detail develops (e.g., removal of on-street parking may turn out to be necessary in places). Whilst this level of detail is not included in the plan, the identification of routes does have potential to 'set hares running' in certain locations. As such, the plan includes a commitment to work with communities to develop more detailed proposals, particularly where more transformational change may be required.
Public confusion with other more advanced active travel schemes in the town centre	The plan shows how routes that are more advanced / already referred to in the public domain (such as those funded by the Future High Streets Fund and the Wellington to Taunton route) link with and relate to the routes being proposed by this project. It makes it clear that this is about longer-term vision and aspiration and preparing the pool of projects to work towards delivery of next.
Public confusion with the Taunton LCWIP	The plan clearly states that it builds on and complements the LCWIP. It will influence future iterations of the LCWIP.

<p>Risk of being seen to overly focus on Taunton</p>	<p>The plan states that it is directly related to the designation of Taunton as a Garden Town, and the capacity and capital funding related to this. It further justifies the focus on Taunton in terms of the scale of opportunity it provides for carbon reduction and health and wellbeing improvements in comparison to other parts of the district. It identifies the aspiration to develop future external linkages to neighbouring settlements. It explains our existing commitments to deliver an LCWIP for Wellington, and within the CNCR Action Plan to further widen work on active travel across the district over time. Furthermore, it references that there are wider community aspirations for other routes which are not captured within the plan and that this does not mean these linkages are not important, or that they won't be pursued – we remain open to considering further routes. However, it will be vital that we prioritise route delivery appropriately.</p>
<p>Risk of being seen to overly focus on the Garden Communities over existing communities.</p>	<p>As explained above, this plan is directly related to the designation of Taunton as a Garden Town. This designation is as much the town as a whole as it is about delivering the new communities and knitting them in with the existing. However, the Garden Town capacity funding from which the supporting evidence work has been funded is intended by Homes England for unlocking housing growth and development aspirations, as such this is the primary focus. Furthermore, it is routes to support these new developments which stand greatest chance of being externally funded, and only these routes which we stand a chance of being able to negotiate developer contributions towards. The routes included within the plan do not think of the Garden Community areas in isolation. They bear in mind existing users and communities, which were the key focus of the LCWIP routes, and collectively they will deliver a comprehensive network across the town. Early engagement with ward members and parish councils around the Taunton area was used to identify any local aspirations which the routes could look to respond to in part and where relevant to the Garden Communities. However, there may well be other routes felt to be necessary within and beyond the town, to serve existing communities, but which have no direct relationship with the Garden Communities themselves, in which case these are not picked up.</p>

3.3 The following risks are relevant, but more in relation to final approval of the final plan and delivery of routes.

Risk	Explanation and Mitigation
<p>Not achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 /</p>	<p>Developing the plan will contribute towards tackling climate change and the transport sector which is the source of most emissions locally. Delivery of new routes against an</p>

failure to address climate change	evidence-based plan increases the effectiveness of this action.
Failure to deliver sufficient housing or demonstrate sufficient land supply for housing	The plan identifies infrastructure related to the Garden Community developments around Taunton. All developments generate finite values and therefore have finite viability. Over-burdening costs on new development may risk making development unviable and stymie the delivery of housing. The plan essentially sets out a starting point for developer negotiations at the planning application stage. Planning obligations must be necessary to make a development acceptable in planning terms, relevant to the development and fairly related in scale and kind. Planning must balance a wide range of policy requirements and material considerations in order to consider whether development proposals constitute sustainable development. As such, the plan itself does not result in failure to deliver housing / land supply.
Risk of slowing, stalling or pausing of major capital programmes and project delivery	The Firepool development is a key part of the Council's corporate plan (and local planning policy), capital programme and project delivery. As a Garden Community, the plan covers connections associated with the Firepool development which the emerging Masterplan and future planning applications will need to respond to. The same terms referred to in the risk above apply to Firepool as any other development.
Risk of stymying wider Council aspirations in relation to Council assets	The Council owns significant land holdings within Taunton as part of its general fund, housing and open spaces functions. The use of any of this land for delivery of walking and cycling routes could, in theory stymie wider aspirations that the Council may have for those assets (e.g., disposal, regeneration, tree planting etc.). The starting principle for the design of any of the emerging routes will be to accommodate the route in line with the following hierarchy: 1) Highways land; 2) Other SCC or SWT land; 3) Third party land. Following this hierarchy increases the likelihood and ability to deliver routes, potentially reduces costs, and avoids being overly and unnecessarily constrained solely by existing highway widths. The use of any SWT land will of course need to be subject to appropriate discussion and negotiation with the relevant asset holder within the Council to understand long term aspirations for that land and ensure that these would not be compromised. Early engagement has taken place with Housing, Assets and Open Spaces teams to raise awareness of the routes.
Failure to allocate and spend Section 106 funds	The plan provides an evidence-based approach against which to secure future planning obligations, making it easier to allocate and spend the funds and increasing the transparency of doing so.
Failure to act on low physical activity levels	Developing the plan will contribute towards tackling low levels of physical activity. The focus on enabling key

	journeys to be undertaken by active means increases the effectiveness of this action and focusing on schools in particular drives potential for greater long-term health gains.
Failure to deliver modal shift – congestion, air quality, road capacity improvements – vicious cycle	Continuation of the business-as-usual approach to addressing transport needs of new developments drives demand for roads. It is well established that freeing up road capacity encourages people to drive. Developing the plan will contribute pro-actively towards tackling these issues, though needs to be accompanied by wider action (e.g. around behavioural change) to have most impact. Delivery of some routes will likely require the reduction of road/junction capacity in places and as such there may be some shorter-term negative impacts in this regard, to be understood at the detailed design stage for routes. The focus on enabling key journeys to be undertaken by active means increases the effectiveness of this action.
Legal issues could arise in detailed design	The plan includes careful wording to ensure that it is clear that the exact routing of routes may change and the detail of provision is not set, to be determined through detailed design. The plan is at a high enough level to avoid triggering any legal issues at this stage. The plan includes text to clarify that routes will wherever possible look to avoid third party land and utilise SCC/SWT land (and in the main highways land).

4 Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 Connecting our Garden Communities is a plan for ensuring that modern, futureproofed walking and cycling infrastructure accompanies the delivery of key developments across Taunton Garden Town. The intention is to ensure that the Garden Communities of Comeytrove, Staplegrove, Monkton Heathfield, Firepool, Nexus25, Nerrols and Ford Farm:
- link in to the strategic routes identified in the Taunton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP),
 - connect to key services and facilities beyond their site boundaries, and
 - ensure routes address associated links which may have been missed by the LCWIP, whilst delivering against strategic green infrastructure opportunities.
- 4.2 The plan includes an evidenced network plan which builds on the LCWIP and shows our ambition for connecting the garden communities across the town. Appendix A to this report identifies the draft network plan which will form the basis of the public consultation. This plan is not intended to show every single piece of existing cycling infrastructure across the town, but to show specific routes which will be important to meeting the needs of the Garden Communities.
- 4.3 The draft Connecting our Garden Communities plan (see Appendix B to this report) provides the written evidence base and explanation behind the routes. This detailed plan is likely of most interest to site developers/promoters and more technical stakeholders.
- 4.4 A short-form non-technical summary plan is being produced to distil key information for

the general public, making it more accessible. This will be available alongside the report to Executive Committee.

- 4.5 The plan focuses on Taunton and explicitly the Garden Communities because:
- Taunton has an already reasonably high modal share base for cycling and walking, and due to its size, range of services and facilities and reasonably flat topography, presents the greatest opportunity in the district for shifting modal choice to sustainable, zero carbon active travel.
 - The Garden Town Vision is closely linked with increasing active travel and delivery of associated infrastructure. The Garden Town designation provides access to funding opportunities which are not available in other parts of the district.
 - The CNCR Action Plan includes a number of actions associated with the delivery of active travel routes, with a particular focus on Taunton, which this builds on.
 - The Garden Communities present opportunities to negotiate and secure funding and delivery of routes. Taunton is the greatest focus for development in the district, and ensuring these new communities knit into and integrate with existing communities is key.
- 4.6 The plan responds directly to:
- The Vision for our Garden Town
 - Our declarations of Climate and Ecological Emergencies
 - The Taunton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)
 - The Government's more recent positive policy shift in relation to walking and cycling infrastructure
 - Local community aspirations
- 4.7 The plan builds on and complements the existing Taunton LCWIP. The LCWIP did take account of the locations of the Garden Communities but was built primarily on data relating to existing/historic movements and travel demand, serving existing and new communities generally. Key connections associated with the Garden Communities were missed. The routes which emerged from the LCWIP are primarily radial, in that they connect from the more peripheral parts of the town into the town centre.
- 4.8 The Council's Climate Emergency Declaration, Corporate Strategy, Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and the CNCR Action Plan set the authority for developing projects and proposals in line with the actions of the CNCR Action Plan. A significant number of actions within the CNCR Action Plan relate to the delivery of walking and cycling infrastructure, particularly in Taunton, or otherwise enabling the shift to more sustainable and healthy active modes of travel.
- 4.9 The Vision for our Garden Town is closely aligned to our aspirations of working towards carbon neutrality by 2030. This manifests itself in many ways within the Vision, but in particular in relation to the promotion of walking and cycling, removal of barriers to modal shift and the giving over of more street space to these modes in order to achieve this. Beyond climate/carbon factors, the Vision focuses in on active travel as a key part of placemaking with a focus on people, the creation of more attractive and investable environment, and using these to revitalise the town and connect communities.
- 4.10 There are a number of existing adopted planning policies through which the Local Planning Authority may seek contribution towards the improvement of off-site walking

and cycling connectivity from developments in Taunton including:

- Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan policies Tr4 (Travel Plans), Tr6 (Developer Contributions to Transport), Tr10 (Cycle Schemes), Tr11 (Signing).
- Taunton Deane Core Strategy Policy CP6 (Transport and Accessibility).
- Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan policies A2 (Travel Planning), A3 (Cycle Network), A5 (Accessibility of Development), D7 (Design Quality), and D9 (A Co-ordinated Approach to Development and Highway Planning).

The principle of seeking such infrastructure or contributions towards, is therefore already set in policy.

4.11 However, when determining relevant planning applications previously, there hasn't always been sufficient evidence available to negotiate or secure delivery of significant off-site routes or otherwise contribution towards via Section 106 Agreements. The publication of the LCWIP helps this position greatly, but it is felt that additional evidence is necessary to give the greatest chances of securing such routes/contributions from planning applications in the future. Connecting our Garden Communities looks to address some of the above elements considered to be missing from the LCWIP where they are relevant to the Garden Communities. This includes circumferential routes, missing radial routes, making finer grain connections to key services and facilities, and hinting at aspirations for future external linkages where associated with / relevant to these developments. This plan will provide an evidence-based pool of projects to act as a starting point for negotiation with developers of the Garden Communities.

4.12 Key objectives for the plan are to:

- Develop a network plan identifying key active travel routes linking the Garden Communities into the LCWIP strategic routes and key destinations in order to enable significant modal shift,
- Ensure infrastructure proposed will provide modern and futureproofed cycle and pedestrian routes,
- Ensure routes are informed by key community and technical stakeholder engagement to maximise support and chances of delivery, and
- Provide an evidence base to support developer negotiations, funding bids and further work.

4.13 The plan will be used as the starting point for negotiating improved connectivity in relation to the Garden Communities as and when relevant planning applications are received, and in relation to master planning activities. To these ends, the emerging network plan is already informing such negotiations, though consultation and approval of the plan will help to give greater weight to this. It will further become an important resource for use in funding bids and business case development, enabling projects to be moved forward towards delivery as and when opportunities arise.

4.14 The routes included in the draft plan have been arrived at through the following process:

- Considering the facilities planned to be delivered within the Garden Communities which residents of the sites will be able to access on-site,
- Mapping key off-site services and facilities that people living on the developments will reasonably need to access,
- Grouping destinations and considering any synergies between the destinations for each of the Garden Communities,
- Considering what facilities within the Garden Communities may be destination

- facilities for wider existing communities,
- Auditing potential route options, and
- Identifying preferred routes where possible.

Early engagement

- 4.15 The plan has already been subject to early informal engagement with selected key stakeholders including Taunton Area Cycling Campaign (TACC), relevant ward members, relevant parish councils, Somerset County Council highways, safety audit, transport policy and public health teams, as well as relevant teams internal to SWT.
- 4.16 TACC have provided significant volunteer support both in undertaking a large number of audits and discussing options, ideas and solutions. Officers would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support.
- 4.17 In December 2021, officers wrote to relevant ward members and parish councils introducing them to the project and seeking early inputs on the key services that the Garden Communities should be linked to, specific barriers to walking and cycling, and to understand if there were any related community aspirations that this project could consider. Response received helped to inform the direction of the project.
- 4.18 In March 2022, officers invited relevant ward members, parish councils and TACC to a series of stakeholder workshops where attendees were briefed in the context of the project and the emerging objectives. Attendees were asked a series of questions relating to types of destination, specific key destinations to be picked up, route prioritisation. High quality walking and cycling infrastructure was seen by attendees as being essential to meeting the Vision for our Garden Town and our carbon neutrality commitments. Attendees generally supported the idea of re-allocating road space away from vehicular traffic to walking and cycling in the right places, though recognised that this will not always be appropriate.
- 4.19 Attendees of the sessions were asked about the top three types of destinations which need to be linked with the Garden Communities. There was generally fairly good correlation between responses which overall ranked the top 3 connections as being:
1. Schools
 2. Employment
 3. Town centre/station
- 4.20 This was further reflected in responses to how routes should be prioritised:
1. Connect to schools
 2. Connect to other essential services
 3. Serve existing users as well as the new communities
- “Community support” also came out reasonably well also in the sessions with ward members and parish councils, whilst “Transformational” was an important element for TACC in particular.
- 4.21 The process for considering the necessary connections, route options and the emerging routes were explained. A number of comments were made about various barriers to movement, key destinations, opportunities and aspirations. However, attendees of all sessions “mostly” supported the emerging routes at that point. The comments received have informed updated, amended and in some cases additional routes.

4.22 In addition to the above engagement with community stakeholders, officers have also engaged extensively with technical stakeholders, particularly Somerset County Council highways, transport policy and safety audit through route scoping workshops and the countywide Active Travel Group with a view to getting broad support for the routes included in the draft plan. The views of these technical stakeholders have informed the routes included and thinking on what may be possible along them. However, the routes will need to be subject to detailed design in time.

Draft plan proposals and future delivery

4.23 The draft plan explains the context for the project, the process through which the emerging routes have been arrived at, and the evidence for their inclusion. It sets out an aspiration for the delivery of a network of walking and cycling routes which serve the needs of the Garden Communities.

4.24 The draft plan identifies a total of 33 “core” routes, which are reasonably specific in terms of their routes. It also identifies 10 more “aspirational”, Green Infrastructure-led routes which are less specific, more indicative of the places they might look to connect. It places these routes spatially alongside routes which are already further progressed including those associated with the Future High Streets Fund, East Street, and the Killams route being progressed by SCC.

4.25 A number of the core routes included within the draft plan have been subject to broad scoping workshops and review by transport consultants Stantec, funded through the Garden Town Capacity Fund. The considerations arising from this scoping have informed the content of the draft plan. Some of the routes are also in the process of being concept planned with a view to informing more pressing negotiations and potential funding bid opportunities.

4.26 Going forward, all routes will need to go through concept planning, business case development and detailed design stages ahead of delivery. As routes progress through this design path, it may be that some routes fall away as infeasible once more detailed issues are understood or need tweaking to overcome such issues. The plan is clear that by identifying the routes, the Council is not bound to deliver any of them, and delivery will be heavily reliant upon successful negotiation with developers and securing of other external funding. A principal purpose of the plan is to enable negotiation with developers in order to secure developer contributions towards scheme delivery, and to inform business case development and funding bids to secure other external funding sources.

4.27 The Government has had a step change in its approach to walking and cycling over the last few years and committed to significant funding being made available towards delivery of active travel infrastructure. The Department for Transport’s new executive agency, Active Travel England has been set up to ensure that this, and wider transport investment, is well spent, and to help raise the standard of cycling and walking infrastructure to align with Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20 as far as at all possible. Having proposals sufficiently developed and ready to go is essential for making the best of these funding opportunities when they are announced, often with short timescales to submit bids.

4.28 The overall network of routes has an aspirational element to it. It sets out the extent of routes which are likely needed to meet our Climate Emergency commitments and Garden Town Vision, both of which realistically necessitate transformational change.

However, the overall cost associated with delivering all of the “core” routes only is likely in the region of £124-£150 million. As such, delivery of the plan as a whole is heavily reliant upon external funding and developer negotiations. As such it is likely that the Council will need to prioritise routes for delivery. One point which the public consultation will cover is views on how to prioritise.

4.29 An important part of delivery will be ensuring that this work fits with and influences future work on any new integrated transport strategy prepared by the new unitary Council. Delivery of active travel infrastructure cannot be considered completely in isolation from a sustainable transport strategy as a whole. Engagement with key officers within the SCC transport policy, highways and infrastructure and public health teams and through the county-wide Active Travel Group has been crucial to the development of the plan to date and will continue to be so into delivery. This engagement means that we are in a good position and working to ensure that this plan can directly influence future transport planning in the new Council.

Public consultation

4.30 Building on the early engagement which has informed the plan to date, the intention is to now publish the draft plan for public consultation. Consultation will have the following objectives:

- **Inform** – awareness of the project, it’s aims, specific proposals, opportunities and constraints etc. is understood by developers, residents, interest groups, businesses and wider stakeholders.
- **Consult** – views are gathered on the emerging proposals, their impacts and deliverability and the form they should take, and these views are taken into account in the final version of the plan.
- **Respond** – calls for greater action on walking and cycling in Taunton from TACC and others, are responded to.
- **Partnership** – encouraging and enabling an element of active participation and co-design with stakeholders through direct inputs and suggestions on routes, constraints, opportunities, potential solutions and alternatives for consideration. The pool of participants is widened to be more representative.

4.31 The consultation will be hosted online using the Commonplace platform, which the County Council hold a licence for, available to each of the district councils in Somerset to use. It will include:

- A “heatmap” style tool which enables participants to actively engage with the proposals spatially, adding comments about specific routes/parts of routes or otherwise about potential alternatives/solutions.
- A survey seeking written responses to specific questions.
- Key information about the plan and links to the main plan document and summary document.

The County Council previously successfully used the Commonplace “heatmap” function during the height of the pandemic to gather views on where quick interventions could improve the ability for people to socially distance. The levels of engagement through this platform were good and lead to fast and targeted action.

4.32 This online consultation will be supported by the usual Council press release and social media posts as well as potentially placing an article in the local press in order to drive wider interest and engagement.

- 4.33 An online session will be organised for town and parish councils to attend building on the early engagement workshops held previously. Officers are actively looking at ways to engage with harder to reach groups, particularly younger people.
- 4.34 Following public consultation, amendments may be made as considered necessary. The final version of the plan will then be reported back to Executive Committee and on to Full Council for formal approval as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Connecting our Garden Communities responds directly to objectives 1, 2 and 5 of the “Our Environment and Economy” theme and objectives 6 and 7 of the “Homes and Communities” theme of the Corporate Strategy. The consultation responds directly to objective 5 of the “A Transparent and Customer Focused Council” theme of the Corporate Strategy. By engaging with TACC in the development of the plan to this point, and continuing to do so going forward, we are responding directly to objective 5 of the “Homes and Communities” theme of the Corporate Strategy. If Council assets are required to assist in the delivery of any of the routes, then this would be directly responding to objective 3 of the “An Enterprising Council” theme of the Corporate Strategy.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 The Connecting our Garden Communities plan sets out an aspiration for the delivery of a network of walking and cycling routes. There is no explicit request for funding, or expectation that the routes will be funded by the Council. All consultation activities are already funded / nil cost.
- 6.2 A principal purpose of the plan is to enable negotiation with developers in order to secure developer contributions towards scheme delivery, and to inform funding bids to secure other external funding sources. It is likely that the Council will need to contribute some funding towards the delivery of some routes, including through CIL receipts, capital and revenue budgets. However, such requests will be made on a project-by-project basis further down the line.
- 6.3 Finance have reviewed this report which is considered a strategic report. Finance comments will be made for the individual projects as they develop, and approval is sought for the associated costs and funding. It should be noted that there are currently two capital projects already approved in relation to active travel:
- CIL funded cycle and pedestrian improvements - The Infrastructure Funding Statement allocated CIL money towards cycle and pedestrian improvements, which may well contribute some towards delivery of certain routes emerging from this project. However, this report does not seek allocation of any of this funding at present.
 - XX169G – Future High Streets Fund active travel improvements – The routes funded by the FHSF project are related to, but not directly part of this project. The routes within this project will complement and add to those being delivered with the FHSF moneys.
- 6.4 Firepool is one of the Garden Communities considered by the plan. As the Council is also developer for this site, and the plan will identify key off-site walking and cycling

infrastructure relating to the Firepool development, there will be an indirect financial impact on the Council in this regard, subject to developer negotiations at the planning stage. This process is beginning now, in relation to the emerging Masterplan.

- 6.5 The above points relate as much to the new unitary council as they do to Somerset West and Taunton Council.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are anticipated to be no legal implications of approving the draft plan for public consultation. The plan includes careful wording to ensure that it is clear that the exact routing of routes may change and the detail of provision is not set, to be determined through detailed design. The plan is at a high enough level to avoid triggering any legal issues at this stage. The plan includes text to clarify that routes will wherever possible look to avoid third party land and utilise SCC/SWT land (and in the main highways land).

8 Climate, Ecology and Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 Transport is the dominant source of carbon emissions in Somerset, making up 46% of carbon dioxide emissions in 2018, compared with just 28% as the UK average. For Somerset West and Taunton the figure is higher still at 51%. This is indicative of the rural nature and low density population of the area and the lack of realistic alternatives to the personal motorised vehicle in many cases, as well as the fact that the M5 motorway runs through the district. Replacing vehicular journeys with active travel modes (walking and cycling) is identified as central to the success of reducing emissions from transport. Taunton represents the greatest opportunity in the district (and county) for securing higher levels of walking and cycling, and new developments are a key catalyst and opportunity for moving forward delivery of the necessary infrastructure. This plan is intended to lead to modal shift of movements from/to the Garden Communities to more sustainable and zero emission, active travel modes. Delivery of the routes will also enable improved modal shift for existing communities.
- 8.2 The delivery of routes will, wherever possible look to retain existing vegetation, particularly where there is an important ecological benefit to doing so. However, there may be places along the routes where a balance needs to be found between delivering high quality, compliant infrastructure and retention of existing vegetation. Climate change poses a significant risk to our ecology, and the delivery of walking and cycling routes can help to mitigate this risk. However, the loss of biodiversity is also of significant concern and the right balance needs to be struck. A holistic view will be taken in developing more detailed proposals for route delivery, with a view to creating opportunities to enhance the green infrastructure along the route corridors. Wherever possible, route designs will look to make use of and enhance/improve existing infrastructure, improving the sustainability of proposals in terms of resource use. However, in some cases, new infrastructure will be necessary/more appropriate. Water management will need to be considered in detailed design. However, all of the above relates to project delivery and not the approval of the plan for public consultation.
- 8.3 The public consultation is being hosted online, as such this saves physical resources such as paper used for copies of the document or consultation materials. Otherwise, there are no direct climate, ecological or sustainability implications of approving the plan for consultation.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 A key objective of the project is to work towards the delivery of modern and futureproofed infrastructure, which would be usable by all. The routes have directly considered the need to accommodate the safe movement of children to schools, and the need to ensure routes are safe, attractive, overlooked and with a reduced fear of crime. Further consideration will be needed as routes progress through concept and detailed design.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken – this is included at Appendix C. Officers within the Council with an overview of the Equalities function, who have experience of identifying impacts on those with protected characteristics have been consulted for this initial identification of potential impacts. Overall, the plan is anticipated to have a positive impact across all protected groups. Alignment with the Government's LTN1/20 standards for cycle infrastructure design is identified as a key aspect to help ensure positive impacts are realised and negative impacts are avoided.

11 Social Value Implications

- 11.1 The delivery of walking and cycling routes can bring added social value to the town through the contribution to placemaking and the power this has to create environments that people are proud of, want to spend time and invest in. Furthermore, there are significant health benefits of walking and cycling that delivery of the right infrastructure in the right places can help to realise.

12 Partnership Implications

- 12.1 Whilst this project is being led by SWT, it relates to transport policy and highways which are functions of Somerset County Council. As such officers from these departments have been closely involved in the plan's development. Continued close partnership working will be necessary in relation to consideration of planning applications, funding bids and transport planning for the town.
- 12.2 The project has benefited greatly from close, transparent and trusted working with TACC. The delivery of any routes included within the plan will require ownership and drive from the community and the continuation of this positive relationship is key to this.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 13.1 Health and wellbeing are central to this plan. The routes directly consider this in their connection to the places people need to go for essential services and facilities. The prioritisation of routes connecting to schools is key. Enabling children to develop a habit of walking and cycling to school can set them up for more active lifestyles for the rest of their lives.
- 13.2 Some of the routes quite deliberately link to or through some of the most deprived wards in the district. This ensures that the routes not only benefit the new Garden Communities, but also enable these existing communities to access the opportunities that these linkages and the Garden Communities themselves provide.

14 Asset Management Implications

- 14.1 This report makes no recommendations or requirements in relation to specific SWT assets. At this stage, the consultation document discusses routes in general, rather than the specifics of route design and land holdings required.
- 14.2 The Council owns significant land holdings within Taunton as part of its general fund, housing and open spaces functions. The use of any of this land for delivery of walking and cycling routes could, in theory stymie wider aspirations that the Council may have for those assets (e.g. disposal, regeneration, tree planting etc.). The starting principle for the design of any of the emerging routes will be to accommodate the route in line with the following hierarchy: 1) Highways land; 2) Other SCC or SWT land; 3) Third party land. Following this hierarchy increases the likelihood and ability to deliver routes, potentially reduces costs, and avoids being overly and unnecessarily constrained solely by existing highway widths. The use of any SWT land will of course need to be subject to appropriate discussion and negotiation with the relevant asset holder within the Council so as to understand long term aspirations for that land and ensure that these would not be compromised. Early engagement has taken place with Housing, Assets and Open Spaces teams to raise awareness of the routes.

15 Data Protection Implications

- 15.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment has been undertaken in relation to the consultation exercise. Officers with an overview of data protection have been consulted as part of this. The assessment highlights a number of measures to be taken forward as part of the consultation to ensure compliance with GDPR and reduce risks. An associated Privacy Notice will be published as part of consultation hub.

16 Consultation Implications

- 16.1 See above sections 4.14-4.21 and 4.26-4.29.

Democratic Path:

- **Corporate Scrutiny Committee – Yes (6th July 2022)**
- **Executive – Yes (20th July 2022)**

Reporting Frequency: Once only

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Draft network plan
Appendix B	Connecting our Garden Communities (main draft plan and associated appendices A and B)
Appendix C	Equalities Impact Assessment

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