

SWT Full Council

Tuesday, 7th February, 2023,
6.15 pm



Somerset West
and Taunton

The John Meikle Room - The Deane
House

[SWT MEETING WEBCAST LINK](#)

Members: Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair), Richard Lees (Vice-Chair), Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, Dave Durdan, Kelly Durdan, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, Barrie Hall, John Hassall, Nicole Hawkins, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Dawn Johnson, Marcus Kravis, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Andy Milne, Chris Morgan, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Ray Tully, Terry Venner, Sarah Wakefield, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Agenda

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee.

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive and note any declarations of disclosable pecuniary or prejudicial or personal interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The personal interests of Councillors and Clerks of Somerset County Council, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the

(Pages 7 - 16)

minutes.)

4. Public Participation

The Chair to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public who have submitted any questions or statements, please note, a three minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak before Councillors debate the issue.

We are now live webcasting most of our committee meetings and you are welcome to view and listen to the discussion. The link to each webcast will be available on the meeting webpage, but you can also access them on the [Somerset West and Taunton webcasting website](#).

5. To receive any communications or announcements from the Chair of the Council

6. To receive any communications or announcements from the Leader of the Council

7. To receive any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13

8. Somerset West and Taunton Council amended Political Allocation and Councillor Appointments to Committees

(Pages 17 - 24)

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts.

The purpose of this report is to amend the Council's numerical political allocation.

9. Somerset West and Taunton Council amendments to Appointments to Outside Bodies

(Pages 25 - 26)

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts.

The purpose of this report is to amend two appointments to Outside Bodies.

10. Connecting our Garden Communities - adoption

(Pages 27 - 44)

This matter is the responsibility of the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation, Councillor Mike Rigby.

This report seeks adoption of the final version of the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan.

11. Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public - Agenda Item 12, Appendix A ONLY

During discussion of the following item (Agenda Item 12 – Appendix A only) it may be necessary to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 13 13.02(e) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision may be required because consideration of this matter in public may disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. Full Council will need to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Recommend that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business (Agenda Item 12 – Appendix A only) on the ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

12. Commercial Property Investment Update

(Pages 45 - 84)

This matter is the responsibility of the Executive Member for Corporate Resources, Councillor Benet Allen.

The purpose of the report is to update Full Council on the commercial property investment activity and the performance of the portfolio.

13. Re-admittance of the Press and Public

14. To consider reports from Executive Councillors

(Pages 85 - 126)

Part I – To deal with written questions to the Executive.

Part II – To receive reports from the following Members of the Executive:-

- a) Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts – Leader of the Council
- b) Councillor Derek Perry – Deputy Leader & Sports, Parks, Leisure and Phosphates
- c) Councillor Benet Allen – Corporate Resources
- d) Councillor Christopher Booth – Community
- e) Councillor Caroline Ellis – Culture
- f) Councillor Dixie Darch – Climate Change
- g) Councillor Mike Rigby – Economic Development, Planning and Transportation

- h) Councillor Francesca Smith - Housing
- i) Councillor Andy Sully – Environmental Services
- j) Councillor Wakefield – Local Government Reorganisation

An Executive Councillor shall submit a report to an Ordinary Meeting of the Council as to current and future business of their portfolio for the information of and comment from the Council. Such reports are for discussion and comment only and no motion shall be put to the meeting as to any such item other than those closure motions described in Standing Order 5.



ANDREW PRITCHARD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Please note that this meeting will be recorded. At the start of the meeting the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded and webcast. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore unless you are advised otherwise, by entering the Council Chamber and speaking during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact the officer as detailed above.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions. There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions. Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 3 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes and you can only speak to the Committee once. If there are a group of people attending to speak about a particular item then a representative should be chosen to speak on behalf of the group. These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room.

If you would like to ask a question or speak at a meeting, you will need to submit your request to a member of the Governance Team in advance of the meeting. You can request to speak at a Council meeting by emailing your full name, the agenda item and your question to the Governance Team using governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Any requests need to be received by 4pm on the day that provides 1 clear working day before the meeting (excluding the day of the meeting itself). For example, if the meeting is due to take place on a Tuesday, requests need to be received by 4pm on the Friday prior to the meeting.

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The meeting rooms, including the Council Chamber at The Deane House, are on the first floor and are fully accessible. Lift access to The John Meikle Room (Council Chamber), is available from the main ground floor entrance at The Deane House. The Council Chamber at West Somerset House is on the ground floor and is fully accessible via a public entrance door. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available across both locations. An induction loop operates at both The Deane House and West Somerset House to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter.

Full Council, Executive, and Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team via email: governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

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SWT Full Council - 6 December 2022

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Richard Lees, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, John Hassall, Nicole Hawkins, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, Dawn Johnson, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley and Loretta Whetlor

Officers: Chris Brown, Jo Comer, Elisa Day, Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, Andrew Pritchard, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas and Kevin Williams

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

69. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors I Aldridge, M Barr, M Blaker, C Booth, S Buller, A Govier, B Hall, J Hunt, M Kravis, A Milne, C Morgan, S Nicholls, C Palmer, A Pritchard, N Thwaites, T Venner and G Wren.

70. **Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council**

(Minutes of the meetings of Full Council held on 6 September 2022, 29 September 2022 and 25 October 2022 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council held on 6 September 2022, 29 September 2022 and 25 October 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

71. **Declarations of Interest**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr L Baker	All Items	SCC, Cheddon Fitzpaine & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	SCC & West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Charter Trustee		
Cllr D Darch	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Hadley	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Henley	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior- Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Pugsley	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith- Roberts	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Sully	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Wakefield	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr K Wheatley	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

72. Public Participation

Mr Robert Barnes addressed the Council on issues that related to street cleanliness, fly tipping and other concerns on local democracy.

Sigurd Reimers submitted the following statement:-

Last year this Council was rated by Climate Emergency UK (CEUK) as having the highest overall score of all local authorities on its plans for dealing with the climate emergency.

This year local Councils would be rated on how well they were progressing with implementing those plans, and CEUK would have issued their draft methodology for assessing progress on 29th November.

This Council's overall score was very impressive last year. However, in one of the nine dimensions examined by CEUK - diversity and social exclusion – the score was only just over 50%. This was concerning, given that the Council area was listed in 57th place out of 151 Council areas on Indicators of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for barriers to housing and local services by its citizens.

This Council's declaration of a climate emergency in 2019 stressed the importance of Councils providing or promoting measures for mitigation of, and adaptation to, the effects of climate change.

I should like to know how far Somerset West and Taunton Council had put its plans into operation, and particularly within the diversity and social exclusion dimension, given that our most vulnerable citizens would be those who would be (or already were) bearing the brunt of the effects of climate change.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change gave the following response:-

Sigurd was right to point to Indicators of Multiple Deprivation in his question about how we were addressing the issue of Equalities within our Climate emergency strategy. Those issues provided significant social challenges to Somerset as a whole, and not just in how the county supported citizens in the fact of climate change.

For example, according to the 2011 census, 23% of dwellings in Somerset had an EPC rating below 'E', well above the national average of 9%. In West Somerset, the proportion was above 30%.

Those in Somerset who did have central heating were less likely than the average home in England to have gas heating, with a greater dependency on oil. In West Somerset, only 45% of homes had gas central heating, while 22% had oil heating (2011 census), more than five times the national average.

In 2010, the population of Somerset aged 65 was 21%. ONS projections suggested that by 2040 one third of the population in Somerset would be 65 or over.

The average salary within Somerset was 18% less than the UK average, which obviously made retrofitting property and adapting to rising costs difficult.

Meeting the targets of carbon neutrality and climate resilience would require major societal shifts and changes to be made from all sectors of society.

However, protecting the most vulnerable from unreasonable burdens and impacts was important to achieving a just transition to a low carbon economy. This CNCR plan recognised the need for a just transition and that influenced a number of actions in the final action plan including: 84 (Workforce development strategy), 87

(West Somerset Opportunity Area), 162 (affordable flood insurance), 186 (Fuel Poverty), 273 (Access to healthy and climate friendly food) etc.

The Plan outlined who climate change would harm the most. There was an Equalities Impact Assessment for the CNCR plan, which specifically referenced the vulnerability to climate change of those on low incomes and rural isolation. On the ground, the Council had begun to tackle some of the issues raised in the question.

A Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery Plan for the Council's 5700 social houses was approved at Executive last week. The strategy and delivery approach would support customers experiencing or at risk of experiencing fuel poverty in the medium and long term by a fabric first approach aimed at reducing heat demand (fuel usage) by c60%-70%.

With regards to private sector rental accommodation, the Council carried out a stock modelling exercise last year to provide intelligence on the private sector housing stock across our district. The modelling identified the presence of 1,262 dwellings at risk of excess cold, with an estimated 1,693 properties, (equating to 10% in the private rented stock) falling into F & G EPC ratings. We were using the modelling data to prioritise our inspection programme to support the most vulnerable tenants.

We had secured funding from EDF to support the work and were investigating how we could use the modelling data to offer grants to landlords to improve energy efficiency. This was in line with our countywide Climate Emergency Strategy commitment to ensure all Private landlords' properties to be at least EPC C standard by 2030.

Working with partners, the Council had also delivered grant funded retrofit measures across the district via Local authority Delivery Scheme (LADS) and Home Upgrade Grant Scheme (HUGS), using funding from BEIS.

Given the rural nature of large parts of the district, residents were very reliant on the car. Rural isolation was an issue already, and that would only be exacerbated by climate change. Fuel prices would already be impacting how much people would be driving, and there would be a difficult period of transition whilst society waited for the infrastructure to develop and the price of EVs to reduce to an affordable level. But both those things would come, and SWT continued to support the rollout of EVs, installing EVCPs in Dulverton and Porlock, and was working with SCC ahead of the new unitary organisation to explore options to provide better EVCP provision in rural areas via the government LEVI fund. Clearly public transport and good active travel links needed to be better to support this also. The County Council had been successful in achieving funding from Government for its Bus Service Improvement Plan. That had led to bus fares into Taunton being fixed at a £1 for the next two years. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans were now in place for Taunton, with one in progress for Wellington, and a commitment from the Council to provide the match funding for a LCWIP for Minehead, subject to local agreement.

Our open spaces were never more important than during the pandemic for people to exercise, socialise and take time outside, and that had remained. SWT continued to invest in its green spaces, securing 7 Green Flag Awards this year. The Green Flag Awards included specific criteria on community involvement, equal access for all and climate adaptation. Our open spaces also played a key part in commitments within the Council's Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan to ensure good quality access to nature for all.

The question was of course huge and wide, and climate change was only part of what needed to be an integrated approach to dealing with the issues of deprivation and social isolation. But within those challenges there were opportunities to deliver genuine co-benefits for the most vulnerable members of society, such as reducing heating bills and improving health via warmer homes, better active travel and taking advantage of a new green economy. However, those changes required significant resource input from central government. Councils could only do so much, and we would continue to lobby as Somerset West and Taunton, and as the new unitary authority from next year. Finally, we were fully aware that social inequality, both nationally and globally, was a key factor in addressing climate change.

73. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Chair of the Council**

Full Council observed a minute's silence on behalf of the late Councillor Anthony Trollope-Bellew, councillor of Somerset West and Taunton Council and former Leader of West Somerset Council, Beryl Lippiatt, former councillor of Taunton Deane Borough Council and Len Dyke, former councillor of Taunton Deane Borough Council.

The Chair of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Chair advised Council of the resignation of Councillor Danny Wedderkopp.
- The Chair reminded councillors to submit their nominations for the Chair's Awards.
- The Chair advised Council of two upcoming events that they may wish to attend:-
 - Carol Service at St James Church on Thursday 8 December at 6.15pm
 - Carols around the Bandstand on Monday 12 December at 6.30pm

74. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Leader highlighted the resignation of Councillor Danny Wedderkopp and thanked him for all of his hard work over the years and wished him well in his future endeavours.
- The Leader gave thanks to all of the officers and their hard work involved in the opening of the Riverside at the Coal Orchard.

75. **To receive any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13**

No questions were received in relation to Procedure Rule 13.

76. **Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Leader advised councillors of the amended recommendations:- Full Council to agree subject to the Community Governance Review coming into effect and having considered all representations made, the polling districts and polling places for the existing Taunton Deane and Bridgwater and West Somerset constituencies as set out in the attached appendix be approved.
- Councillors raised concerns on a couple of the locations selected for polling stations.
The Elections Specialist explained the process of how locations were selected. She further advised that the next review would have a longer consultation period and that she was always happy to accept feedback on the locations used.
- Councillors suggested that the use of postal votes could be promoted for those that might find it difficult to attend their polling station.
- Councillors highlighted that good use of communications would be required to advise voters on the amendments being brought in by the Elections Act 2022.
- Councillors thanked the officers for all their hard work on the review.

Resolved that Full Council agreed subject to the Community Governance Review coming into effect and having considered all representations made, the polling districts and polling places for the existing Taunton Deane and Bridgwater and West Somerset constituencies as set out in the attached appendix be approved.

77. **Treasury Management Outturn Report 2021/22**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Some councillors still had doubts on the Investment Strategy and that there should be ethical guidance in place.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources thanked them for the comments, however, the Strategy had been approved in 2019.
- Councillors thanked officers for their hard work on ensuring the Council was in a good place ready for vesting day.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 2.1 Noted the Treasury Management activity for the 2021/22 financial year and compliance with the Prudential Indicators.
- 2.2 Endorsed the recommendation made by the Executive Committee on 20 July 2022 for Full Council to approve a reduction of £35m to the Approved Borrowing Limits in the Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23 reflecting a reduction in capital financing requirement for expenditure no longer required (as referred to in paragraphs 6.33 and 6.34 of this report).

78. **Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery Plan**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors were pleased to support the Strategy.
- Councillors who had been on the Working Group advised that tenant engagement had been very good throughout the process.
- Concern was raised on the rural areas of the district, as residents could only use oil and that there was no other alternative option.
- Concern was raised on fuel poverty and that it did not show in the same way in the rural areas of the district.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change echoed her comments made during public question time and suggested that it might need a holistic approach.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- Approved the Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery Plan. The delivery of the strategy would need to be managed within the annual budget setting process, including the Medium-Term Financial Plan and 30-Year Business Plan, to ensure the overall affordability of the schemes being proposed each year.
- The Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Director of Homes and Communities to progress the steps identified in the delivery plan and to promote the approach with Somerset County Council colleagues.

79. **To consider reports from Executive Councillors**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised on the use of the e-scooters at night due to the lack of visibility. Councillors queried whether they could request that users wore high-vis clothing at night.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change agreed with the comments and advised that the lights could not be moved on the e-scooters due to logistics and that the company did encourage users to wear helmets and high-vis clothing.

- Councillors queried the closure of Shop Mobility.
The Leader of the Council advised that the reason for the closure was a dramatic drop in number of people using the service. Since the Covid Pandemic, numbers had reduced by about 90%. It was thought that wider availability and lower costs of mobility scooters had also impacted use to the extent that a very small number of core users were using the service with numbers averaging less than 10 per week between January and August 2022. As a result, the service was running at a considerable loss. The Council had supported the Shopmobility scheme for more than 10 years, with Compass taking over the service for the last 7 years. We would like to place on record our thanks to them for providing this service during that time. Compass had advised the Council that an exceptionally low number of individuals were affected by this closure (5 or less). We would be happy to help signpost any individuals that were affected by the closure to other support available.
- Councillors queried what was happening with the installation of EV charging points in the rural areas of West Somerset.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change advised that officers had wanted to install some EV charging points in Dunster and Blue Anchor, but sadly the funds had not been available. She further advised that as part of the CNCR work, funds had now been allocated to install charging points in Dunster.

- Councillors were pleased to see the work on phosphates moving forward.
- Councillors requested that the phosphates survey results be distributed and asked how the credits would be allocated.

The Portfolio Holder for Parks, Sports, Leisure and Phosphates was happy to circulate the survey responses and advised that the Phosphates Sub-Committee was working on how the credits would be allocated.

- Councillors thanked officers for all their hard work in getting the parks ready for Britain in Bloom.
- Councillors queried whether applicants would need to re-submit their applications due to the amendments made to the phosphates calculator. *The Portfolio Holder for Parks, Sports, Leisure and Phosphates advised that they were not sure as they were still in negotiations with Natural England.*

- Concern was raised on the abolition of youth services within the North Taunton area.

The Leader of the Council agreed and advised that the Unitary Council and the proposed Taunton Town Council would need to work on this in the future.

- Councillors were pleased to see reduced bus fares being introduced in the area.
- Concern was raised on the logistics of supplying broadband in the area. *The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Economic Development agreed and advised that sadly there were too many companies trying to use the lines which caused issues. He was aware that Somerset County Council had tried to engage with the companies to try and rectify the situation.*
- Councillors queried how much land was being put aside for the phosphates work and asked for clarification on the calculations for homes per Kg.
- Concern was raised on staff sickness and councillors queried how officers were feeling heading into the Unitary Council.

The Leader of the Council agreed that staff were in a state of flux and that the HR Teams were geared up to assist officers through the process. She further thanked all staff for their hard work over the last four years.

Somerset West and Taunton had a very resilient work force who had gone through many different changes and challenges and were still working hard to provide a high level of service to the residents of the district.

- Councillors thanked the officers and Portfolio Holders for their reports.

(The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm)

Report Number: SWT 5/23

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 7 February 2023

Somerset West and Taunton Council amended Political Allocation and Councillor Appointments to Committees

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council

Report Author: Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to amend the Council's numerical political allocation due to:
- a) Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew passing away
 - b) Cllr Danny Wedderkopp resigning from the Council
 - c) Cllr Martin Peters leaving the Liberal Democrat Group and joining the Labour Group

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Council approves the revised:

- a) Political allocation as attached (Appendix A)
- b) Councillor appointments to Committees (Appendix B)

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 There are no risks associated with this report

4. Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 The Council last agreed the political allocation at the Annual Council meeting on the 29 September 2022.
- 4.2 The purpose of this report is to amend the Council's numerical political allocation following the changes set out in section 1.1 of this report.
- 4.3 As the Council will be dissolved on the 1 April 2023 as per The Somerset (Structural Changes) Order 2022, by-elections will not be held for Cllrs Trollope-Bellew and Wedderkopp's seats, and therefore the allocation is based on 57 Councillors rather than 59.
- 4.4 As a result of this the political allocation has changed (attached as Appendix A) and there are some changes to the Councillor appointments to Committee (attached as Appendix B)

5. **Links to Corporate Strategy** – N/A
6. **Finance / Resource Implications** - None
7. **Legal Implications** - None
8. **Climate and Sustainability Implications** - None
9. **Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications** - None
10. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - None
11. **Social Value Implications** - None
12. **Partnership Implications** - None
13. **Health and Wellbeing Implications** - None
14. **Asset Management Implications** - None
15. **Data Protection Implications** - None
16. **Consultation Implications** - None
17. **Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s)** – N/A as this is a Council Report

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees** – No not applicable as Council function only
- **Cabinet/Executive** – No not applicable as Council function only
- **Full Council** – Yes

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	The revised Political Allocation
Appendix B	Councillor appointments to Committee

Contact Officers

Name	Amy Tregellas
Direct Dial	01823 785034
Email	a.tregellas@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

POLITICAL ALLOCATION – 25 January 2023

	Totals	Liberal Democrats (LD) 30	Independent + Green (I+G) 14	Conservative (Con) 9	Labour (Lab) 4	
% based on membership of 57	100	52.63%	24.56%	15.79%	7.01%	
Committee Seats	80	42.10 (42)	19.65 (19)	12.63 (13)	5.61 (6)	
Committee	No on Committee	LD (42)	I+G (19)	Con (13)	Lab (6)	Total
Corporate Scrutiny	15	7.88 (8)	3.56 (4)	2.44 (2)	1.13 (1)	15
Community Scrutiny	15	7.88 (8)	3.56 (4)	2.44 (2)	1.13 (1)	15
Audit and Governance	11	5.78 (6)	2.61 (3)	1.79 (2)	0.83 (1)	12 – need to reduce by 1 seat
Planning	15	7.88 (8)	3.56 (4)	2.44 (2)	1.13 (1)	15
Licensing	15	7.88 (8)	3.56 (4)	2.44 (2)	1.13 (1)	15
Standards	9	4.73 (5)	2.13 (2)	1.46 (1)	0.68 (1)	9
Total	80	43	21	11	6	81
		+1	+2	-2	0	+1

Political Allocation following Group Leader discussion

	Totals	Liberal Democrats (LD) 30	Independent + Green (I+G) 14	Conservative (Con) 9	Labour (Lab) 4	
% based on membership of 57	100	52.63%	24.56%	15.79%	7.01%	
Committee Seats	80	(53) 42.10 (42)	(24) 19.65 (19)	(16) 12.63 (13)	(7) 5.61 (6)	
Committee	No on Committee	LD (42)	I+G (19)	Con (13)	Lab (6)	Total
Corporate Scrutiny	15	7.88 (8)	3.56 (4)	2.44 (2)	1.13 (1)	15
Community Scrutiny	15	7.88 (8)	3.56 (3)	2.44 (3)	1.13 (1)	15
Audit and Governance	11	5.78 (5)	2.61 (3)	1.79 (2)	0.83 (1)	11
Planning	15	7.88 (8)	3.56 (4)	2.44 (2)	1.13 (1)	15
Licensing	15	7.88 (8)	3.56 (3)	2.44 (3)	1.13 (1)	15
Standards	9	4.73 (5)	2.13 (2)	1.46 (1)	0.68 (1)	9
Total	80	42	19	13	6	80
		0	0	0	0	0

Committee Composition updated 13 September 2022

Executive	Portfolio Holder
Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts	Leader of the Council
Councillor Derek Perry	Deputy Leader and Sports, Parks, Leisure & Phosphates
Councillor Benet Allen	Communications and Corporate Resources
Councillor Chris Booth	Community
Councillor Dixie Darch	Climate Change
Councillor Caroline Ellis	Culture
Councillor Mike Rigby	Economic Development, Planning and Transportation (Including Asset Management)
Councillor Francesca Smith	Housing
Councillor Andrew Sully	Environmental Services
Councillor Sarah Wakefield	Local Government Reorganisation (including Community Governance Review)

Corporate Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Simon Coles
Cllr Habib Farbahi
Cllr Ed Firmin
Cllr John Hassall
Cllr Nicola Hawkins
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Simon Nicholls
Cllr Danny Wedderkopp
Cllr Ian Aldridge
Cllr Sue Buller (Chair)
Cllr Loretta Whetlor
Cllr Gwil Wren
Cllr Norman Cavill
Cllr Nick Thwaites
Cllr Libby Lisgo

Community Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Simon Coles
Cllr Thomas Deakin
Cllr Steve Griffiths
Cllr Dawn Johnson
Cllr Richard Lees
Cllr Mark Lithgow
Cllr Martin Peters
Cllr Ray Tully
Cllr Janet Lloyd
Cllr Dave Mansell (Vice-chair)
Cllr Andy Pritchard
Cllr Roger Habgood
Cllr Andy Milne
Cllr Vivienne Stock-Williams
Cllr Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Planning Committee
Cllr Simon Coles (Chair)
Cllr Ed Firmin
Cllr Steve Griffiths
Cllr John Hassall
Cllr Marcia Hill (Vice Chair)
Cllr Mark Lithgow
Cllr Ray Tully
Cllr Keith Wheatley
Cllr Ian Aldridge
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Cllr Mark Lithgow
Cllr Ray Tully
Cllr Danny Wedderkopp
Cllr Keith Wheatley
Cllr Janet Lloyd (Vice Chair)
Cllr Craig Palmer
Cllr Loretta Whetlor
Cllr Marcus Barr
Cllr Andrew Hadley
Cllr Trollope-Bellew
Cllr Brenda Weston

Audit and Governance Committee
Cllr Lee Baker (Chair)
Cllr Simon Coles
Cllr Thomas Deakin
Cllr Ed Firmin
Cllr Dawn Johnson
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Hugh Davies
Cllr Janet Lloyd (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Terry Venner
Cllr Andrew Milne
Cllr Steven Pugsley

Standards Committee
Cllr Lee Baker
Cllr Richard Lees
Cllr Mark Lithgow (Chair)
Cllr Martin Peters (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey
Cllr Hugh Davies
Cllr Terry Venner
Cllr Steven Pugsley
Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew
Independent Member
Independent Member
T&P Council Rep
T&P Council Rep

Committee Composition updated 25 January 2023

Executive	Portfolio Holder
Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts	Leader of the Council
Councillor Derek Perry	Deputy Leader and Sports, Parks, Leisure & Phosphates
Councillor Benet Allen	Communications and Corporate Resources
Councillor Chris Booth	Community
Councillor Dixie Darch	Climate Change
Councillor Caroline Ellis	Culture
Councillor Mike Rigby	Economic Development, Planning and Transportation (Including Asset Management)
Councillor Francesca Smith	Housing
Councillor Andrew Sully	Environmental Services
Councillor Sarah Wakefield	Local Government Reorganisation (including Community Governance Review)

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Vacant
Cllr Ian Aldridge
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Cllr Hugh Davies
Cllr Terry Venner
Cllr Steven Pugsley
Cllr Martin Peters
Independent Member
Independent Member
T&P Council Rep
T&P Council Rep

Report Number: SWT 6/23

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 7 February 2023

Somerset West and Taunton Council amendments to Appointments to Outside Bodies

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council

Report Author: Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to amend two appointments to Outside Bodies following the passing away of Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew and Cllr Chris Booth resigning from the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Council approves that:

- a) Councillor Loretta Whetlor replace Councillor Anthony Trollope-Bellew on the Joint Scrutiny Panel of the Somerset Waste Partnership
- b) Councillor Ross Henley replace Councillor Chris Booth on the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 There are no risks associated with this report

4. Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 The Council last agreed the appointments to Outside Bodies at the Annual Council meeting on the 24 May 2022.
- 4.2 The purpose of this report is to amend two appointments to the Outside Bodies which have meetings prior to the end of March 2023.
- 4.3 Councillor Anthony Trollope-Bellew was one of the Council's two representatives on the Joint Scrutiny Panel of the Somerset Waste Partnership. Councillor Loretta Whetlor has been a substitute, but it is recommended that she becomes the Council's representative for the remaining meeting(s) prior to 31 March 2023.
- 4.4 Councillor Chris Booth is currently the Council representative on the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board but has resign from the Board. The Terms of Reference for the Board confirm that substitutes are not permitted. It is recommended that Councillor Ross Henley replaces

Councillor Chris Booth as the Council's representative on the Board for the remaining meeting(s) prior to 31 March 2023.

5. **Links to Corporate Strategy** – N/A
6. **Finance / Resource Implications** - None
7. **Legal Implications** - None
8. **Climate and Sustainability Implications** - None
9. **Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications** - None
10. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - None
11. **Social Value Implications** - None
12. **Partnership Implications** - None
13. **Health and Wellbeing Implications** - None
14. **Asset Management Implications** - None
15. **Data Protection Implications** - None
16. **Consultation Implications** - None
17. **Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s)** – N/A as this is a Council Report

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees** – No not applicable as Council function only
- **Cabinet/Executive** – No not applicable as Council function only
- **Full Council** – Yes

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

Contact Officers

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Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 7th February 2023

Connecting our Garden Communities – adoption

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

Report Author: Graeme Thompson, Principal Planning Policy Officer and Sophie Jones, Planning Policy Officer

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

1.1 Connecting our Garden Communities is a plan for ensuring that modern, futureproofed walking, wheeling 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 The Plan consists of:

- [Connecting our Garden Communities \(main plan document\)](#)
- [Appendix A – Route Auditing](#)
- [Appendix B – Route Summaries](#)
- [Appendix C – Route Prioritisation Matrix](#)

1.3 In addition, this report is supported by:

- [Consultation Statement](#) – Appendix B to this report
- [Equalities Impact Assessment](#) – Appendix C to this report
- [SEA/HRA Screening Report](#) – Appendix D to this report

1.4 Public consultation on a draft plan took place between 29th July 2022 to 30th September 2022. Following this, officers have reviewed the 276 responses received alongside comments made in-person during consultation events and amended the plan as considered appropriate. However, amendments have been relatively minor from the consultation draft and the overall plan remains much the same, with changes generally relating to points of detail, some of which have been revised now, others of which are noted for consideration at later stages of route design.

1.5 This report now seeks adoption of the final version of the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan.

2 Recommendations

That Full Council:

- 2.1 Adopt the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan:
 - a) as a material planning consideration in the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes across Taunton Garden Town, and
 - b) as corporate policy to inform future policy and project development and funding bids within Taunton Garden Town.
- 2.2 Agree that the Director of Development and Place in consultation with the Economic Development, Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder be authorised to approve and make minor amendments prior to the final publication of the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan.

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 plan itself.
- 3.2 The main risks associated with approving the plan itself include:

Risk	Explanation and Mitigation
Raising expectations / over promising, under-delivering	The plan includes careful wording to ensure it is clear that 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. Indicative timescales are identified for when routes should be delivered based on a series of assumptions relating to priority, phasing of development, other plans (e.g. alignment with the Bus Service Improvement Plan) and LCWIP timescales where relevant. It explains that should any of the considerations underpinning these assumptions change then this may change timescales for delivery. It highlights that by identifying the routes, the Council is not bound to deliver any of them and the reliance upon external funding.
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. An indicative hierarchy of walking, wheeling and cycling interventions has been included which helps to communicate what different kinds of interventions might be more relevant in different parts of the network.
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. Text and maps in the final version of the plan provide increased clarity on this point including information about how the plan will become absorbed into the LCWIP and gain greater weight as a supporting document to the emerging new Local Transport Plan. A plan identifying the LCWIP routes overlaid with the Connecting our Garden Communities routes is now included for clarity.
Risk of being seen to overly focus on Taunton	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.
Risk of being seen to overly focus on the Garden Communities over existing communities.	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 in particular, 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

	<p>mind existing users and communities, which were the key focus of the LCWIP routes, and collectively they will deliver a fairly 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>
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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
Public consider their comments have not been listened to	<p>A significant number of comments were made during public consultation. Consultation responses have been taken into account and have been instrumental in influencing route prioritisation in particular. However, many comments related to detailed points about route design, implementation or in some cases suggested alternative routings to specific sections of routes. Rather than seeking to amend the routes as part of the plan, it is proposed to consider these points in more detail as route design evolves. There is a risk that some people may consider this to be ignoring such responses. However, there are some important and valid points which have been made a which would be better considered further as route design evolves beyond what is essentially the overarching vision set out by this plan. The final plan has added a section to the routes in Appendix B (to the plan) noting key comments made in relation to each for consideration at later stages. A Consultation Statement has been produced (see Appendix B to this report) setting out summaries of the comments received and responding to key points raised. This includes a "you said, we did" section.</p>
Not achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 / failure to address climate change	<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 evidence based plan increases the effectiveness of this action.</p>
Failure to deliver sufficient housing or demonstrate sufficient land supply for housing	<p>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</p>

	<p>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.</p>
<p>Risk of slowing, stalling or pausing of major capital programmes and project delivery</p>	<p>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. The Council is currently consulting on a Draft Masterplan for the Firepool site which highlights the viability challenges which development of the site will face. The final Masterplan is expected to be supplemented by further response to the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan and routes.</p>
<p>Risk of stymying wider Council aspirations in relation to Council assets</p>	<p>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, wheeling 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.</p>
<p>Failure to allocate and spend Section 106 funds</p>	<p>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. It identifies an expectation that applicants utilise a "Vision and Validate" approach to transport assessment and travel planning, which will provide the basis for ensuring any planning obligations meet the NPPF tests.</p>
<p>Failure to act on low physical activity levels</p>	<p>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</p>

	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 assessing and addressing transport needs of new developments drives demand for roads. It is well established that freeing up road capacity encourages people to drive. This plan contributes pro-actively towards tackling these issues by identifying routes and key connections and setting out an expectation that applicants utilise a “Vision and Validate” approach to transport assessment and travel planning rather than the traditional “Predict and Provide” approach. Delivery of the routes themselves will contribute significantly, 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 Plan acknowledges that a level of road congestion may be necessary to facilitate behaviour change, but that moving those who can travel by sustainable modes off of the road, space will be freed up for those who require car travel. 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).
Potential for equalities impacts on protected groups	An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken which accompanies this report and which should be read for further information (see Appendix C to this report). There are no equalities impacts associated with the production of the plan itself. However, as set out in the EqIA there is potential for delivery and implementation to have negative impacts on protected groups depending on the way the plans are executed and the detailed design of routes. Detailed design is beyond the scope of the plan. The EqIA and plan itself include text to state the relevance and importance of route designs taking an inclusive approach, and the value of following the Government’s Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20 guidance on cycle infrastructure design and Inclusive Mobility guidance as a means to ensuring access for all. Further, detailed EqIA’s will need to be undertaken at the project stage as routes progress through the design process. The final plan now

	makes reference to walking, <i>wheeling</i> and cycling throughout as a more inclusive term.
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4 Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 Connecting our Garden Communities is a plan for ensuring that modern, futureproofed walking, wheeling 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 evidence-based network plan of walking, wheeling and cycling routes which builds on the LCWIP and shows the Council's ambition for connecting the garden communities across the town. It 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.
- 4.3 Further information on the background, intentions and reasons for the plan can be found within the [previous report to Executive Committee from July 2022](#) which sought approval of the draft plan for public consultation.

Public consultation

- 4.4 Public consultation on the draft plan took place with key technical and community stakeholders as well as the general public, for a nine-week period from 29th July 2022 to 30th September 2022. During this time, a total of 276 formal responses were received across the consultation hub, email, social media and in comments on news articles. In addition to this, officers undertook a number of engagement events at which views were gathered including:
- a workshop with Somerset Youth Parliament,
 - attending a meeting of Taunton Area Cycling Campaign,
 - presenting to the Council's Agents Forum,
 - presenting to relevant parish councils, chartered trustees and ward members,
 - presenting to Blackbrook Green Forum, and
 - attending the Richard Huish College bike day.
- 4.5 A total of 145 people responded using the consultation hub either via the main survey or the heatmap (where respondents could "drop a pin" and answer a short survey about the specific location).
- 4.6 Below is a brief summary of consultation responses received, together with key changes being made between the consultation draft and final draft plan. For a full summary of the

comments received and how they have been taken into account in production of the final plan document please see the Consultation Statement at Appendix B to this report.

General

- 67% of people dropping a pin on the heatmap were identifying locations where they felt either unhappy or dissatisfied about walking, wheeling or cycling in Taunton. This, together with the reasons and the design solutions people suggested, support the need for effective improvements to be made within the routes identified.
- Responses to the main survey highlighted the low levels of walking and cycling currently being made by respondents. However, 54% of respondents said that if the routes identified were delivered then they would “definitely” be more likely to make walking and cycling trips, with a further 22% saying they would be “likely to”.
- The routes identified were generally well supported, with 51% being “satisfied” with the routes and a further 27% being “happy”.

Potential Alternative Routes

- A number of potential alternative routes were raised from the consultation. However, it was not considered necessary to make any changes to the Final Plan network map. Instead, a number of routes may ‘be considered as studies progress and route design evolves’; some could be included in future iterations of the Taunton LCWIP; and a number of others were not considered relevant for inclusion.

Additional Design Issues & Constraints

- Several walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure issues were raised in the consultation responses alongside the need to recognise the constraints, conflicting corridor priorities and opportunities. These have been added to Appendix B where relevant according to each route for consideration at later stages of studies and designs.

Prioritisation of Route Destinations & Delivery

- The consultation identified the key priorities among route destinations and delivery factor. The Plan recognises these factors, and they have, therefore, informed the prioritisation of the routes in the Final Plan and beyond. Chapter 9 and Appendix C introduce a matrix approach which accounts for the key priority factors identified to list the highest priority routes. This is supplemented with indicative delivery timescales based on identified assumptions. Where assumptions underpinning the timescale justifications change, the Plan acknowledges that this may impact these timescales. Delivery to timescales is also acknowledged as being highly dependent upon securing necessary external funding.

Missing Connections

- A number of missing connections were raised through suggestions within the consultation responses. However, the network map of proposed routes already connected to many of the connections suggested and several were not considered relevant to the project. As a result, no changes were made to the Final Plan.

Walking, wheeling & Cycling Infrastructure Design

- The consultation responses identified the importance of establishing an equitable and inclusive walking, wheeling and cycling network, suitable for all users. Currently, the potential for trip-chaining has been captured in Appendix B 'onwards connections'. Lighting has also been added to the hierarchy of interventions set out in Chapter 10 and reference made to the Government's Inclusive Mobility guidance.

Integration with other plans and modes

- The consultation raised the need for additional information regarding secured funding sources. Chapter 10 now includes some additional clarification about funding sources for the LCWIP and the distinction with Connecting our Garden Communities (CoGC). To further align with the LCWIP, Chapter 8 includes a combined map of the LCWIP and CoGC routes and Chapter 6 includes the prioritised destinations in relation to each garden community.
- The need to fit CoGC within the Local Transport Plan and consider active travel as part of sustainable transport as a whole was also raised. Chapter 10 now sets out the increased weight the Local Transport Plan will give CoGC in decision-making and the ability for the Plan to help mediate conflicting priorities for space. The Plan already included text on the importance of integration with bikes, e-bikes and e-scooters, but further text on the integration with public transport, considering Taunton's ageing demographic, has been added.

Scope of the document

- The document now recognises that assessing highway capacity will be a significant part of future work in Chapter 7 and how it could be secured in Chapter 10. Furthermore, estimations of demand will need to be provided. The Plan is a vision document and as such, some text has been included regarding likely access to the prioritised destinations in Chapter 6, but no further detail is given.
- The need for a new highway link between Bossington Drive and Lyngford Lane/ Cheddon Road was questioned by the developers of the Lyngford Lane site (part of Nerrols Garden Community, a current planning application). While the draft plan set out that Policy SS2 states a requirement for a new highway link in this location, the Council has already published further guidance on this subject in light of the Climate Emergency within Climate Positive Planning which suggests that "*the expectation will be that this connection has filtered permeability for active travel modes, and potentially public transport only*". Further policy context has been added in Chapter 5 in order to reflect this.
- A number of comments were received about ensuring sustainable modes are genuinely prioritised over the car. The Draft Plan set out 'retaining and creating constraints' in Chapter 10, the approach for prioritising sustainable modes over the car. However, the approach has been strengthened by explicitly stating the role of reduced road space and capacity in behaviour change. Furthermore, the 'vision and validate' approach has been explained further in Chapter 10, setting out the expected approach to addressing transport impacts of new development. This also helps to clarify the concerns raised about a potential reduction in road space.
- Another important clarification raised in the responses was to identify that different types of infrastructure may be required on different parts of the network. While the Draft Plan recognised this in Chapter 2, Chapter 10 now

- includes an indicative infrastructure hierarchy of different types of cycling infrastructure that may be suitable from busy corridors to residential areas.
- The co-benefits of access to green space and nature have also been emphasised in the Final Plan. While open space is recognised as a key destination to prioritise connections, local policy context has been incorporated from the GI Opportunities Update (2017), which sets out the mental and physical health benefits. In addition, potential opportunities have been added to Appendix B where previously absent.
- Several concerns were raised about the need to consider potential heritage, biodiversity, flood risk and landscape impacts and opportunities, particularly in relation to the canal path. The final plan includes explicit wording to explain the need to consider wider constraints and opportunities associated with routes as they progress through the design stages. In relation to the canal path in particular, the plan recognises the constraints, sensitivities and range of users it needs to accommodate, yet also recognises it is well used for walking, wheeling and cycling already. As such the route is included (with caveats) but necessary alternatives are identified to reduce reliance upon it. Potential impacts and opportunities have been added to Appendix B where previously absent.

Developer contributions and weight of document

- Finally, clarification was needed around the weight of the document and how developments would contribute towards the proposals. The Final Plan now states in Chapter 10 that (in line with national legislation and policy) the Development Plan takes precedence in decision-making, though the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan will be an important material consideration. It introduces a ‘roof tax’ approach as a starting point for negotiation of developer contributions where the three planning obligation tests are met, and that a ‘vision and validate’ approach to addressing transport impacts of new development should be taken by applicants.

4.7 Further minor changes have been made in order to ensure the Plan is as up to date as possible in relation to the planning status of each Garden Community and to reflect the fact that this is the final version of the plan. In summary the changes are as follows:

- Summarising the public consultation process and outputs – more detail available in the accompanying Consultation Statement (see Appendix B to this report).
- Inclusion of prioritised routes including methodology, list of top 10 routes, and table showing the routes in priority order, which Garden Communities they are relevant to and an indicative timescale for delivery justified against LCWIP timescales, current publicly available information on phasing of developments and other plans e.g. BSIP. This responds directly to comments made.
- Inclusion of an indicative hierarchy of walking and cycling interventions for different parts of the network – making it clear that it’s not a one size fits all situation.
- Referring to walking, *wheeling* and cycling – more inclusive.
- Setting out a clear expectation that applicants take a “Vision and Validate” approach to transport assessment and travel planning. The meaning of “Vision and Validate” is clarified in chapter 10 (pages 143-144) of the main plan document. Essentially it is a shift from the traditional “Predict and Provide” approach to transport planning, which would have rolled forward unsustainable

past trends resulting in ever increasing highway capacity improvements. Instead, “Vision and Validate” requires the setting of a vision (across all modes, but aligned to Connecting our Garden Communities in terms of ambitious modal shift targets and the importance of specific connections and routes) and the identification of the proportionate transport measures which will be needed to achieve this vision for a development.

- Clarification on the intended status of the Plan for development management purposes as an important and up to date material planning consideration, whilst recognising the primacy of the development plan.
- Clarifying the Plan will be incorporated into the LCWIP and then into the new Local Transport Plan which will increase the weight that can be placed upon it, and inclusion of a plan overlaying LCWIP and CoGCs routes.
- Clarifying that things have moved on since policies were adopted and the Connecting our Garden Town (draft transport strategy for Taunton) was published, and the move away from traditional highways infrastructure aimed at increasing road capacity.
- Inclusion of plans identifying existing cycling infrastructure nearby each Garden Community.
- Updated assessment of planning status of each Garden Community to most up to date.
- Inclusion of priority destinations for each Garden Community informed by consultation responses (mainly these are schools/colleges plus Musgrove).
- Clarifying that some of the more external, aspirational routes will struggle to secure major contribution through S106 and so they are even more likely to be reliant upon alternative funding sources.
- Including reference to other national policy context inc. Manual for Streets, Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2, Inclusive Mobility guidance.
- Improved reference to multi-benefits and importance of GI linkages.
- Clarifying that a level of road congestion may be necessary to facilitate behaviour change.
- General updates to reflect this is the final version of the plan.

Next steps and future delivery

- 4.8 This report recommends that the CoGCs Plan is now adopted both as a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications, and as corporate policy to inform future policy and project development and funding bids.
- 4.9 From the Council’s perspective as Local Planning Authority, this means that following adoption, the CoGCs Plan will be able to be given reasonable weight in decision making as a material consideration. Planning decisions should be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Plan includes useful context about each of the Garden Communities to help identify how much of an influence the document is likely to be able to have on future planning applications (considering that each of the Garden Communities is at a slightly different stage in terms of planning status). The Plan does not set policy, this is already set by adopted development plan documents (for development in Taunton these are the Core Strategy, Town Centre Area Action Plan and Site Allocations and Development Management Plan and Neighbourhood Plans). However, planning applicants/developers will need to set out how they are responding to adopted policies relating to active travel and the CoGCs Plan, and then this should be considered in the planning balance.

- 4.10 Where appropriate and where the three planning obligation tests (necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development) are met, then the LPA will seek contribution towards the delivery of relevant routes via Section 106 Agreement.
- 4.11 The Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement sets out how receipts of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) (charged only in the former Taunton Deane area) will be used to deliver on infrastructure priorities. This identifies that a proportion of CIL receipts should be spent on cycle and pedestrian improvements. The CoGCs plan may influence how these moneys will be allocated and spent.
- 4.12 Officers from the Council's planning, major projects and climate teams are already engaging in project work informed by the CoGCs Plan, and it will continue to inform project work as resources and opportunities allow. This includes preparing funding bids and business cases ready for when opportunities arise.
- 4.13 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.
- 4.14 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. The CoGCs Plan is directly informing Somerset County Council's bid to Active Travel Fund 4 and spend of existing Garden Town funding. Being ready for further funding opportunities as they arise will be essential to successful delivery.
- 4.15 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.
- 4.16 The final Plan prioritises routes based on a transparent scoring matrix available in Appendix C to the Plan, with full explanation in Chapter 9 of the Plan itself. This will help to focus efforts for funding bids, and associated business case development. The route prioritisation and indicative delivery timescales in the plan will influence this work programme alongside availability of resources, funding and opportunities.
- 4.17 SWT and SCC officers agree that in time, this Plan will be incorporated into the next

iteration of the Taunton LCWIP. The project is actively recognised as a key interdependency with delivery of the County Council’s Bus Service Improvement Plan. The next Local Transport Plan is required to be completed by April 2024 and must be underpinned by a series of other plans and strategies including the LCWIP and BSIP. Taken together, and incorporating the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan, these will hold significant weight in decision making and help to ensure that a holistic approach is taken in consideration of all sustainable transport modes.

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. A Consultation Statement is included at Appendix B to this report – this 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, 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, wheeling and cycling routes. There is no explicit request for funding, or expectation that the routes will be funded by the Council.
- 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 identifies key off-site walking, wheeling and cycling links relating to the Firepool development, there may 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 Plan as a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications or as corporate policy to inform future policy and project development and funding bids. The Plan and this report both rightly point out the planning decisions should be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 7.2 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, wheeling 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, wheeling 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, wheeling 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.

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 as there are no equalities impacts associated with the production of the plan itself or approving of the draft plan for public consultation. However, as set out in the EqIA there is potential for delivery and implementation to have negative impacts on protected groups depending on the way the plans are executed and the detailed design of routes. Detailed design is beyond the scope of the plan and this consultation. The EqIA and plan itself include text to state the relevance and importance of route designs taking an inclusive approach, and the value of following the Government's Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20 guidance on cycle infrastructure design and Inclusive Mobility guidance as a means to ensuring access for all. Further, detailed EqIA's will need to be undertaken at the project stage as routes progress through the design process. The final plan now makes reference to walking, *wheeling* and cycling throughout as a more inclusive term.

11 Social Value Implications

- 11.1 The delivery of walking, wheeling 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, wheeling and cycling that delivery of the right infrastructure in the right places can help to realise.

12 Partnership Implications

- 12.1 Whilst this project has been 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, wheeling 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 Plan 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, wheeling 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 was undertaken in relation to the consultation exercise. Officers with an overview of data protection were consulted as part of this. This highlighted a number of measures which were taken forward as part of the consultation to ensure compliance with GDPR and reduce risks. The Consultation Statement attached at Appendix B summarises comments received without reference to any personally identifiable information or being able to identify any personal special category data.

16 Consultation Implications

- 16.1 See above sections 4.4-4.6.

Democratic Path:

- **Executive – Yes (21st December 2022)**
- **Full Council – Yes (7th February 2023)**

Reporting Frequency: Once only

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Connecting our Garden Communities (main plan and associated appendices A , B and C)
Appendix B	Consultation Statement
Appendix C	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix D	SEA/HRA Screening Report

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Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 7 February 2023

Commercial Property Investment Update

This matter is the responsibility of Cllr Bennet Allen, Executive Member for Corporate Resources

Report Author: Chris Hall, Director of Development and Place

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report.

- 1.1 The Commercial Property Investment Strategy (CPIS) was approved in December 2019 and refreshed in December 2020 and 2021. A requirement of the strategy (Clause 11.5) is that a report is brought to full Council every six months to report on the commercial property investment activity and the performance of the portfolio. These will report the position as of 30 September and 31 March each year.
- 1.2 Members are reminded that the purpose of the strategy is to deliver additional annual income to General Fund over a long period to provide funding for priority local services. The Council has acquired 12 properties between August 2020 and December 2021 providing an asset portfolio with prudent spread between property sector, location, occupation, and size. The total capital investment cost is £98.965m. No further acquisitions are planned, with the focus on ongoing effective management of the portfolio.
- 1.3 Most of the initial capital investment was funded through borrowing, which is reducing through Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) payments. The current residual balance of borrowing after MRP this year is £91.563m representing 92.5% of the initial investment. During the investment period to date borrowing costs have remained low and therefore the Council's treasury team have continued to apply a notional average borrowing cost for 2022/23 of 0.75% to the investment portfolio. It is recognised that bank base rates have increased in recent months and may increase further this year as the Bank of England implements measures seeking to control high inflation. However, our overall need to borrow has reduced and our combined use of internal borrowing from cash reserves and already-arranged low-cost loans significantly reduces the risk of volatility in 2022/23.
- 1.4 The forecast Net Income for 2022/23 is currently £4.049m, which is a surplus of £19k (0.5%) compared to the budget estimate.
- 1.5 Despite the challenging economic conditions facing UK businesses and the economy the performance of the portfolio has been very strong. To date there have been no rental defaults.
- 1.6 Risk factors to property investment continue to be monitored, however with the portfolio

complete including long leases / break dates alongside strong covenants and diverse sectors, the likelihood of market factors creating issues are somewhat reduced although risk remains as with any property investment. A large number of investors continue to act in UK property market with demand increasing for secure income investment which has in turn been forcing up capital values. Occupier performance and covenant strengths will continue to be monitored to identify any tenants that may be affected by the current market restrictions. In general, it is not considered that the level of risk has changed materially since our last report in June 2022.

- 1.7 The report contains commentary on the potential impact of interest rate rises in 2023-24.
- 1.8 This report also responds to a specific Scrutiny committee request for income information of other assets held outside of the commercial investment portfolio or strategy. It was agreed that this would be provided in table form in appendix B, this report does not make any further comment on these assets.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Full Council notes the Commercial Property Investment activity and performance for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022.

3 Background and Full details of the Report

- 3.1 The Commercial Property Investment Strategy (CPIS) was approved by Full Council on the 17 December 2019 and an updated version approved in February 2022.
- 3.2 As part of the Financial Strategy agreed in 2019 the Executive set a net income target of £2m+ per year through commercial property investment. Current low in year financing costs have enabled the Council to set a net income budget of £4.030m for 2022/23 thus exceeding the strategy target at this stage. Whilst we remain on track to meet budget for 2022/23 it is likely that borrowing costs will be higher in 2023/24 thus reducing net income to support the funding of services.
- 3.3 The Commercial Property Investment Strategy sets out the governance framework and parameters for investment which ensures a balanced, diversified portfolio is established which will generate long term sustainable income contributing towards sustaining the Council's front-line services for many years to come.

Summary of Acquisitions and Disposals

- 3.4 Set out below is a summary of the completed acquisitions and the annual rental due from these properties in the portfolio.

Date	Sector	Location	Total Purchase Costs £000	Forecast Annual Rental Income £000
28/08/20	Office	Offices, 730 Waterside Drive, Aztec West, Almondsbury, BS32 4UE	9,573	690.5
11/09/20	Retail Warehouse	The Range, Pellon Lane, West Yorkshire, HX1 5QE	5,781	418.5

Date	Sector	Location	Total Purchase Costs £000	Forecast Annual Rental Income £000
11/11/20	Retail Warehouse	B&Q Sanquhar Farm Rd, Ayr KA8 9TB	6,998	520.0
18/12/20	Retail Warehouse	Wickes Extra Aldridge Road Tameside Business Park, Perry Barr B42 2ET	9,816	733.3
05/03/21	Other	Jaguar Land Rover, Concord Way, Preston Farm Industrial Estate, Stockton On Tees	6,130	458.7
31/03/21	Office	One Quinton Business Park, Birmingham B32 1AF	5,765	372.5
09/04/21	Retail Warehouse	North Shields Retail Park, North Shields NE29 7UJ	12,585	980.6
11/05/21	Office	Fenick House, 1 Lister Way, Hamilton International Technology Park, G72 0FT	4,783	364.3
24/05/21	Other	Cardiff Audi, Cardiff Gate Bus Park, CF23 8RT	7,195	519.9
15/12/21	Industrial	Reflex Labels, 29 Moat Way, Barwell, LE9 8EY	5,433	327.0
15/12/21	Industrial	Reflex Labels, Smith Way, Ossett, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF5 9JZ	2,635	164.8
17/12/21	Industrial	Steelite International Limited, Newcastle Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 3RB	22,272	1,342.7
		Total forecast full year 2022/23	98,965	6,892.8

3.5 There have been no disposals and there are no disposals pending.

Portfolio investment performance and performance against budget target

3.6 As summarised above the total capital expenditure on property acquisitions during 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years is £98.9m. The projected performance against the 2022/23 budget estimates for net income is summarised as follows:

Net Investment Income 2022/23

	2022/23 Budget £000	2022/23 Forecast £000	2022/23 Variance £000
Rent Income	(6,930.0)	(6,892.8)	37.2
Direct management and abortive costs	150.0	150.0	0.0
Sub-total – Gross Income Less Direct Costs	(6,780.0)	(6,742.8)	37.2
Financing – Notional Interest	750.0	694.0	(56.0)
Financing – Debt Repayment (MRP)*	2000.0	2,000.0	0.0
Transfer to/from investment risk reserve	0	18.8	18.8
Net Income to Revenue Account	(4,030.0)	(4,030.0)	0.0

3.7 The Council holds funds in an Investment Risk Reserve to protect the annual budget from investment income volatility and an Investment Asset Management Reserve for asset management purposes. These reserves have been 'front-loaded' to provide immediate resilience during the initial phase of growing the portfolio as well as for ongoing risk management. The biggest financial risk is from tenants defaulting and the costs and unanticipated capital expenditure which may be incurred as a result. This reserve mitigates that risk. The current reserve balances are:

- £4.1m in Investment Risk Reserve
- £0.7m in Sinking Fund reserve.

Risk assessments with updates on material changes to risks on individual assets

3.8 The follow schedule summarises the risks identified with individual assets in the portfolio:

Risk	Description	Mitigation	Status
Rising borrowing costs	Potential for increased costs of re-financing in 2023/24 and later years to reduce net income from property investment. With rising interest rates, the cost of PWLB lending has increased. The cost of inter-authority loans remains lower than PWLB but has also increased.	SWT borrowing needs for 2022/23 secured at beginning of year. Additional financing through revenue contributions and extra MRP has reduced overall refinancing requirement. Somerset S151s agreed interim treasury approach for 2022/23 and SCC has engaged Arlingclose to advise on consolidated treasury strategy for the unitary. LGR workstreams on investments and treasury management are working together to consider prudent approach to investment and borrowing in future years. Revised estimates for the unitary MTFP being prepared.	Red
Economic downturn	Potential to cause business failure and increased rental voids	Monthly financial due diligence on lower covenant tenants. Monthly rent payment where assistance is required to ease cashflow. Increase communication with tenants	Amber
Utility price increases	Potential to cause tenants financial difficulty	Liaise with Managing Agents to ensure optimum timing for contract renewal of utilities to hedge prices.	Amber
Insurance costs higher than anticipated by tenants		Re compete portfolio insurance April 2023 with view to reduce premiums for tenants.	Amber

Individual Property risk register

Property	Risk	Mitigation	RAG Status	Lease Expiry
730 Waterside Drive, Aztec West,	Vacant 5,504ft ² suite – does not let	Joint Agents appointed, refreshed marketing	Amber	2027 – 29 across the Units

Property	Risk	Mitigation	RAG Status	Lease Expiry
Almondsbury. BS32 4UE		brochures, placed new boards. Installation of EV Charging points to serve vacant accommodation.		
730 Waterside Drive, Aztec West, Almondsbury. BS32 4UE	1 x tenant break clause may be activated	Commence "soft marketing campaign "during remainder of term to find new tenant and minimise void.	Amber	
The Range, Pellon Lane, West Yorkshire, HX1 5QE	No identifiable risks	None currently required.	Green	2034
B&Q Sanguhar Farm Rd, Ayr KA8 9TB	No identifiable risks	None currently required	Green	2030
Wickes Extra, Birmingham	At lease expiry 2027 it is likely the tenant will want to reduce their footprint by 50%	Consider regear of lease so the unit can be split – will involve capital expenditure, Discussions ongoing with Agent & Lidl / Aldi with a view to present scheme to Board post Unitary amalgamation. Viability report to be compiled 23/24 Regular communications with tenant.	Green	2027
Jaguar Land Rover, Stockton-On-Tees	No identifiable risks	None currently required.	Green	2031
1 Quinton Business Park, Birmingham	No identifiable risks	None currently required.	Green	2029
North Shields Retail Park, North Shields NE29 7UJ	No identifiable risks	None currently required	Green	2024 – 2029 across the units
Fenick House, 1 Lister Way, Hamilton International Technology	No identifiable risks	None currently required	Green	2031

Property	Risk	Mitigation	RAG Status	Lease Expiry
Park, G72 0FT				
Cardiff Audi, Cardiff Gate Bus Park, CF23 8RT	Lease has 3 years 7 months remaining,	2 options presented to Tenant for 10-year lease extension. Knight Frank instructed.	Green	2025
Reflex Labels, 29 Moat Way, Barwell, LE9 8EY	No identifiable risks	None currently required	Green	2041
Reflex Labels, Smith Way, Ossett, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF5 9JZ	No identifiable risks	None currently required	Green	2036
Steelite International Limited, Newcastle Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 3RB	Utilities costs increases may affect operational viability. Insurance costs remain higher than anticipated and may strain relations with tenant	SWT Commercial Investment property specialist met Group Finance Director to start building working relationship with company Compete insurance renewal on open market renewal in April 2023 and communicate with the tenant	Amber	2036

3.9 The following table provides an update on general investment risks for the strategy and the portfolio.

Risk Identified	Mitigation	Commentary	RAG Status
COVID 19	The structure of the CPIS is designed to protect against market volatility and to gain exposure to the property market as a whole. This is achieved through diversification across regions, sectors, and the safeguards which are in place of lot size and	We did not enter the market until after the initial lockdown period had been implemented and therefore, we have always been aware of the risk that Covid poses. During 2020 we were able to take advantage of the limited number of purchasers in the market and secured a number of good properties.	Green

Risk Identified	Mitigation	Commentary	RAG Status
	single tenant exposure.		
General Economic Outlook for the UK	We employ: proactive asset management and proactive tenant communication	The UK economy is facing challenging times ahead, post pandemic , the conflict in Ukraine and effects on utility costs and inflation. However, to date there has been little effect on our portfolio as the properties have been selected for their resilience to the risk factors identified, the secure income profile of the investments and the underlying property metrics. No defaults have been experienced to date.	Green
Insurance premiums available to SWT are not equivalent to open market premiums	We are exploring specific commercial property insurance as part of the 2022 renewal to secure the best product for both landlord and tenants	Insurance is a pass-through cost; however, some tenants have challenged their premium renewals costs which have increased with the properties being purchased by SWT.	Amber

Any other relevant information

- 3.10 The Council's investment properties are revalued annually on 31 March. All assets in this portfolio were independently revalued by Wilks Head & Eve as at 31/03/2022, reporting a gross value of £96.8m. WHE has also provided a net value after deducting costs and SDLT which is £90.4m. The current borrowing requirement in respect of these assets is £91.6m, which is expected to reduce each year as further annual MRP charges are made for debt repayment.

4 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 4.1 The Council's Corporate Strategy under the Enterprising Council Theme states that we will become a financially self-sufficient Council which has expanded its commercial activity and generated more income to support service provision.

Objectives

1. Pursue commercial investment opportunities that generate additional income that can be reinvested in service delivery to protect or enhance services on which our communities rely. Supported by a Commercial Property Investment Strategy
2. Meet the challenge of Government completely withdrawing the Council's grant funding.
3. Ensure our land and property assets support the achievement of the Council's objectives (including service delivery, regeneration projects and community initiatives).

5 Finance / Resource Implications

- 5.1 The investment in property continues to deliver a key element of the wider financial strategy and budget plan for SWT, as well as diversifying the Council's income streams, in the face of reductions and significant volatility/uncertainty in income through

government funding and business rates.

- 5.2 The strategy has to date delivered significant additional income over and above expectations. Our budget estimates have proven to be prudent and reliable despite uncertainties, and risk reserve balances have been maintained and increased. The income generated from investment is imperative to contribute to the financial resources necessary to maintain and improve services as set out in the Council's Corporate Strategy and Budget.
- 5.3 Financial risks are mitigated through robust due diligence, effective portfolio management, use of reasonable estimates for budget purposes, prudent debt repayment, and prudent maintenance of reserves to mitigate investment asset costs and income volatility.
- 5.4 Investment assets are subject to annual valuation with positive revaluation values credited to the Revaluation Reserve. Valuation deficits will be written off first against any credit balance in the Revaluation Reserve and then to the Capital Adjustment Account within unusable reserves. Valuation changes are only crystallised and therefore only affect the Council's usable resources upon disposal of the asset.
- 5.5 Investment budget and performance information is included earlier in this report, with actual performance against budget providing an estimated surplus of £19k.
- 5.6 In the Annual Auditor's Report 2020/21 presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in December 2021, a key recommendation was made by our external auditor in respect of the risks related to the Council's investment in property for yield and the related borrowing requirements. A full update on the Council's response to the recommendation was reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on the 7 November 2022. The report highlights the range of measures already in place and working effectively, as well as a summary of additional steps that have been taken to further reduce risk including:
- Using £3.5m of revenue funds towards financing of investment asset purchases, reducing the overall need to borrow.
 - Accelerating debt repayment through additional MRP charges of £1.1m, reducing the quantum of borrowing needed and reducing refinancing risk as well as reducing future MRP and interest cost exposures.
 - Increasing the balance of funds held in the Investment Risk Reserve by £1m and Investment Assets Sinking Fund by £0.2m, increasing resilience if actual results are adverse compared to budget.
 - Proactive treasury management to secure necessary borrowing early in the year, which has proven timely given the recent rise in interest rates.
- 5.7 The borrowing requirement has been reduced by over £4.6m due to accelerated financing of the up-front spend since the auditor's recommendation. The total amount of debt repayment (MRP) plus revenue financing is planned to be £7.402m by 31 March 2023 leaving a borrowing requirement balance of £91.563m with 7.5% of the upfront investment having been fully financed. The acceleration of financing reduces debt costs

and refinancing risks.

Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications

- 5.8 There are no specific decisions related to entering contracts for expenditure or disposal of land within this report therefore no implications regarding S24 Direction. The report provides a retrospective summary of performance against the strategy therefore no direct implications for the new unitary council. All held investment assets will transfer to the unitary on 1 April 2023. SWT officers are involved in LGR workstreams in both Assets and Finance to help inform the approach to Commercial Property Investment in the new Authority.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Section 12 of the Local Government Act 2003 specifically provides the Council with the power to invest for any purpose relevant to its functions, and for the purpose of prudent management of its financial affairs.

7 Climate and Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 There are no implications that follow from this update report.

8 Social Value Implications

- 8.1 Currently no opportunities which offer any direct additional social value benefits have come forward since the beginning of this reporting period. However, the income generated from the investment programme will in part be used to support the Council's front line services.

9 Asset Management Implications

- 9.1 The portfolio is managed by a dedicated officer reporting into the Assets Manager, utilising external managing agents where appropriate. The current management structure remains, with the process as outlined in the CI Strategy governing decision-making routes and authority. The Director Development and Place & S151 Officer attend Investment Panel, making recommendations into Commercial Investment Board. Board frequencies have been reduced following the completion of the portfolio, but still meet regularly for quarterly reviews at a minimum.

10 Scrutiny Comments

- 10.1 The 6-monthly investment performance report was presented to Corporate Scrutiny on 4 January 2023. The committee noted the report and asked for clarification on the funding of the debt repayments made to date.
- 10.2 The S151 Officer clarified that £7.4m of the initial total investment of £99m has been fully financed, leaving a residual capital financing requirement (borrowing balance) of £91.56m. Members of the committee have been provided with the following additional information: The debt position can be summarised as follows:

	£000
Total capital investment	98,965

Less: Amount financed using revenue funds	-3,520
Equals: Amount financed using borrowing	95,445
Less: Borrowing repaid in 2021/22 and 2022/23 (known as MRP)	-3,882
Current balance of residual borrowing (92.5% of total initial investment)	91,563

The £7.4m repaid has been financed as follows:

£1.805m	From investment income
£2.597m	From Business Rates Risk reserve surplus and Pooling gains
£2.000m	From Budget Risk Reserve surplus
<u>£1.000m</u>	From General Reserves
£7.402m	

Democratic Path:

- Corporate Scrutiny Committee – Yes (4 January 2023)
- Executive – No
- Full Council – Yes (7 February 2023)

Reporting Frequency: Six monthly

Appendices

A	Approved Strategy 2022 (Confidential)
B	SWT Rental Income

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

Appendix B: SWT Rental Income (in addition to Commercial Investment Portfolio)

Property		Rent Per Annum £
Legacy Properties with Investment Classification		
Gaumont Theatre / Bingo Hall	Leisure	162,014
Site for 51/52 High Street	Commercial	960
Site for Victoria Gate Surgery adj. Victoria Gate Car Park, Taunton	Medical	5,600
37 South Street	Retail	12,750
1a Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	16,000
1B Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	6,780
1c Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	
1d Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	8,000
1e Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	6,875
1f Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	6,000
1g Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	6,000
2 Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	15,000
3 Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	15,000
4 Blackdown Business Park	Industrial / commercial	17,000
Exmoor House Caravan Park	Leisure	7,500
1a Barnsclose Industrial Site	Industrial / commercial	3,500
1b Barnsclose Industrial Site	Industrial / commercial	3,500
1c Barnsclose Industrial Site	Industrial / commercial	6,000
1d Barnsclose Industrial Site	Industrial / commercial	4,500
Former Acorns Site, 6 Brunel Way	Industrial / commercial	5,880
The Arkade	Leisure	21,000
Jubilee Gardens Café	Food/Beverage	20,000
Former Visitor Information Centre	Leisure	13,075
Access road end of Stephenson Road (Minehead Sawmills)	Misc	547
1-2 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	7,250
3 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	4,000
4, 5, 6 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	11,806
7 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	4,000
8 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	4,000
9 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	4,500
10 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	20,000

11, 12 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	24,409
13, 14, 15 Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	41,000
Land at Roughmoor Enterprise Centre	Industrial / commercial	25
	Total	484,488

Property	Use	Rent Per Annum £
PPE Properties with Incidental Rental Income		
Deane House GF	Office	84,000
Deane House GF	Office	68,075
Deane House GF	Office	21,450
Deane House 2F	Office	54,575
West Somerset House part GF	Office	20,000
Brunel Way Depot (part)	Industrial/commercial	3,300
Brunel Way Depot (part yard)	Industrial/commercial	2,250
28-30 Fore Street, Wellington	Office	4,000
Unit 1 Rainbow Way	Industrial/commercial	125,504
Unit 2 Rainbow Way	Industrial/commercial	37,500
Unit 1b Taunton Technology Park	Industrial/commercial	67,597
Unit 2 Taunton Technology Park	Industrial/commercial	140,000
Unit 3 Taunton Technology Park	Industrial/commercial	184,142
Compound Taunton Technology Park	Industrial/commercial	15,000
Market House GF	Food/Beverage	110,000
Market House Dance Studios	Commercial	10,000
Market House 1F	Commercial	3,000
Flook House (various rooms)	Office	18,650
Flook House E12 and E17	Office	5,700
Flook House E11 and E18	Office	3,780
Flook House R04	Office	1,500
Flook House R06 and R07	Office	1,000
Site for Youth Centre	Leisure	1,000
Former Cheese Store Dulverton	Leisure	500
Alcombe Children's Centre	Education	7,650
Alcombe Children's Centre	Education	4,755
Alcombe Children's Centre	Misc	1,200
Spaces at Victoria Gate Car Park	Parking	13,000
Spaces at Victoria Gate Car Park	Parking	6,000
Spaces at Whirligig Car Park	Parking	6,450
Access Whirligig Car Park	Access	600
Paul St Car Park Mast site	Misc	3,250

Access Summerland Road Car Park	Access	4,500
Spaces Guildhall Car Park Dulverton	Parking	1,800
Access Doverhay Car Park	Access	700
Land at Exmoor House Car Park	EV charging	540
Land at Alexandra Road Car Park	EV charging	540
Unit 1 The Crematorium	Misc	6,000
Unit 2 The Crematorium	Misc	0
Blackbrook Sports Centre Land	Leisure	14,750
Blackbrook Sports Centre Land	EV charging	1,240
Ash Meadows Field	Leisure	1,120
Site at Vivary Park	Food/Beverage	13,000
The Coffee Station Vivary Park	Food/Beverage	7,500
Land at Vivary Park (Bowling Club)	Leisure	3,750
Land at Vivary Park for Golf Clubhouse	Leisure	1,450
Wellington Playing Field Courts	Leisure	1,870
Wellington Playing Field Land for Clubhouse	Leisure	1,483
Wellington Playing Field Pavlion	Leisure	1,689
The Shed at Goodlands Gardens	Food/Beverage	9,000
Seating at The Shed	Food/Beverage	3,000
Bath Place Courtyard	Office	11,000
Seating at Cider Press Gardens	Food/Beverage	6,000
Seating at Cider Press Gardens	Food/Beverage	5,000
Seating at Castle Green	Food/Beverage	1,800
Seating at Watchet Esplanade	Misc	550
East Wharf and Office	Commercial	3,577
Watchet Marina Office	Office	1,650
Warren Road Kiosk Minehead	Food/Beverage	12,000
Fishing Tackle Kiosk Minehead Harbour	Retail	2,100
Land at Quay West Minehead	Misc	1,500
Upper Boat Store, Quay West	Misc	1,203
Jubilee Kiosk Minehead Esplanade	Food/Beverage	500
Former Bus Station	Health	36,000
Coal Orchard 2F Block A	Residential	90,000
84 Priory Bridge Road	Retail	9,300
	Total	1,281,541

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for the Leader of the Council – Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts.

LGR

We are now less than 2 months out from vesting day and the reorganisation into Somerset Council. It has been a busy two months since our last Full Council and I am in awe as to how we are putting all of our energies into creating a council that is safe and legal from 1 April but also running business as usual and completing our aims for Somerset West and Taunton residents in the final few months.

The LGR programme is working at pace and the implementation board has met on 20 December and will meet on 30 January. The programme is RAG rated as Amber at present, a full overview can be found here as to how the programme is progressing

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=454&MId=1697&Ver=4>

SWT has now undertaken our transfer over to the single council IT system. This has been a mammoth task and my thanks goes to all the team involved in this as due to their hard work and planning, it has been pretty seamless.

Taunton Theatre AGM

It was great to attend the TTA AGM recently and see how they continue to adapt and rise to the challenges that Covid and now the Cost of Living crisis is having on the culture industry. The plans that they have for the forthcoming year, including their Christmas production, will look to benefit the wider area and enrich the lives of many people. Cllr Caroline Ellis has more on the great work they are doing and it is a positive relationship that we hold with them and the exciting collaborations that they have throughout the year.

Titan Arcardia

After the last SWT Full Council I had the pleasure, along with many of my fellow councillors, to visit the wonderful exhibition in our Coal Orchard development.

It was great to see such talented local artists on display and to get up close to such beautiful pieces of sculpture. I am excited to see the further collaboration we have with Matt Crabbe through the public art piece being installed in February.

Digital Innovation Centre Board

Recently I was shown around the Digital Innovation Centre which is due to open in late spring. It was great to see how the SCC project is progressing which is sited on our land at Firepool.

The Centres Board is made up of a variety of partners looking to oversee the opening of the Centre and attract small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and new start-ups within the data and digital industries into the facility. Its location, both within the Firepool development and such close proximity to the Railway Station, looks to be a strong positive for the area.

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Sports, Parks, Leisure and Phosphates – Cllr Derek Perry.

Parks and Open Spaces

Parks and Open Spaces

Work to improve the following Council Play Area's has been tendered and programmed for completion by March 2023. These works are funded by a mixture of S106 funds and the Councils capital budget.

Play Area	Completion Date	Funding	Update on works
Walkers Gate Road, Wellington	Complete	S106	Completed
Heavitree & Compton Close, Taunton	Complete	S106	Completed
Greenway Rec, Leslie Avenue (Gym Equipment)	March 23	S106	Contract awarded
Crofters Green, Taunton	March 23	Capital budget	Contract being awarded in January
Humphreys Road, Wellington	March 23	Capital budget	Contract being awarded in January
Cleeve road	March 23	Capital budget	Contract awarded
French Weir	Feb 23	Capital budget	Contract awarded
Victoria, Viridor, Hawthorn Park	March 23	Capital budget	Contract awarded

Leisure

Leisure Centres (Everyone Active)

SLM continues to perform well in delivering the operation of our leisure facilities. Membership numbers have generally been maintained for health and fitness in spite of new 'budget' facilities being opened in the town. Wellington in particular has seen a strong membership performance.

Swimming lesson numbers remain strong in all pools.

The rising costs of utilities remains the largest single challenge facing the industry and our centres and some measures have been taken to mitigate the effect but the overall impact is expected to be a cost of more than £250,000 above budget for utilities.

The Council has partnered with SLM to instal LED lighting in the tennis centre at Blackbrook and the sports hall at Wellsprings to both reduce costs and reduce emissions. Further such schemes may be undertaken in 2023.

We have opted not to increase the rates for electricity generated by the solar panels in order to further support SLM (who utilise all electricity generated in this way)

Vivary golf course has enjoyed a good year in terms of usage. The Council has worked in partnership to erect additional safety netting to prevent balls being struck into nearby properties/roads and is exploring ongoing flooding issues on holes 5 & 6.

The wet start to January has no been helpful and the course has been closed for several days due to waterlogged areas.

Leisure Projects

Tennis Court Refurbishment – discussions continue to be held with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) regarding the project to upgrade the four tennis courts at Vivary Park and Cheddon Road.

Taunton Green Pavilion – refurbishment and compliance work at the Taunton Green Pavilion on Cheddon Road are well advanced and once complete the Baseball Club will move from Victoria Park to Taunton Green and make the latter their 'home ground'.

Norton Fitzwarren Playing Field – the work to create a new playing field with a football pitch, tennis court, car parking area and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Norton Fitzwarren has progressed significantly despite the cold weather in December and the usual winter rainfall.

The stone subbase and base levels of the car park, tennis court and MUGA have been installed alongside required kerbing and drainage.

It is expected that top layers will be installed as soon as weather permits.

Work to create a full-sized football pitch will take place in spring 2023.

Phosphates

Strategic Solution for Phosphates

As Members are aware, on 5 October 2021, Full Council approved an Interim Strategy of mitigation measures. The Planning Phosphates Sub-Committee is overseeing this programme. This Sub Committee has considered a number of officer reports on various matters and updates on the interim programme.

The Council circulated a survey to all affected applicants in October 2022, to gauge the level of demand for the P credits generated by the Council's phosphate mitigation projects and to understand the extent to which impacted applicants were pursuing their own phosphate mitigation measures. A summary of October's survey results were presented to the agents/developer forum meeting of the 29 November 2022. The meeting provided an opportunity for officers to outline the process for P Credit Allocation and for affected applicants to ask questions.

In December 2022, details of the Council's SWT Phosphate Credit Scheme were uploaded on the SWT website. Further details, including the provisional list of planning applications eligible for the first round of SWT P credits is available at

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning/phosphates-on-the-somerset-levels-and-moors/>

An initial offer letter for SWT P Credits was sent out in December 2022 and a final offer letter based upon P calculations is now being sent out to applicant(s) with details to complete the S106 agreement so that these applications can be determined. It is anticipated that a small number will need to be determined by the planning committee and it is likely that this will require an additional meeting of the Committee in February.

Further information about the Defra National Nutrient Mitigation Scheme, were received in November 2022 but it is still being developed. The Defra letter can be viewed on the Council's website.

Work with the other Somerset authorities to update the phosphate calculator is nearing completion. A meeting has been arranged with Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Wessex Water - to agree technical amendments / sign off the use of the Somerset P calculator for local use in January. This meeting involves policy and DM leads within all the Councils, including Dorset Council.

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Community – Cllr Chris Booth

Community Employment Support

- Micro providers virtual event via Eventbrite: Two events to be held on 7th Feb 2023 1st at 11:30am – 12:30pm and second at 6:30pm – 7:30pm.
- HPC drop ins are currently happening at the hubs in Taunton/Wellington, Minehead and Williton -advertised on Facebook and through normal forums. .
- Jobs Fair: Somerset Cricket Ground 23rd February 2023 10:30 – 3:30pm in the Colin Atkinson pavilion over 50 exhibitors.
- Minehead jobs Fair and cost of living combined event: MINEHEAD Eye 23rd March 2023 10am – 1;30pm.

CCTV

The Taunton town centre cameras are currently being replaced and will be finished by mid-February.

One Team Reports Back

Wellington - Wacky Wednesday took place at Wellington Sports Centre and was aimed at 0-5s and their parents as it took place during Term time.

It was very well attended with numerous agencies involved with lots of Xmas related activities available. We are in the process of planning our Wacky Wednesday programme for 2023 with events planned for Easter, May bank holiday, 2 in the Summer, October half term and of course Xmas. Further details will be available once dates and venues have been finalised.

North Taunton

- Whilst youth issues are ongoing in consultation with myself and taking onboard a couple of comments the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) have decided to install one knife amnesty box outside the police station at Deane House in the town centre and not install one in Priorswood at this time, as originally planned.
- The main contractor delivering the NTWP continues to deliver on their community value targets which directly benefit the area. During March they will be delivering Health & Safety Talks in our 3 primary schools again and Selworthy Special School.

- Green Days Day Care Centre continue to support our estate walkabouts by bringing their service users and carers to litter pick. We have the next one planned for January. The North Taunton Development Group has themed meetings which are well supported now by a range of partners, recently they have discussed C&YP and The Cost of Living Crisis.
- Children living in tenanted or temporary accommodation affected by the NTWP received Xmas gifts thanks to The Sparkle Charity and delivered by SWT staff.
- Priorswood Community Centre ran a successful Xmas Market.
- Aware that one of our primary schools is noticing an increase in pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), for example in their current Reception Year (aged 4-5yrs) 54% have EAL.

Beneficiaries of Somerset West Lottery Funding for 2022

Case examples:

- The Watchet Phoenix Centre provide meals and social activities for the elderly and those rurally isolated, who are often referred by GPs. The Somerset West Lottery funding provided additional dining & kitchen equipment to enable facilities for increased numbers. The service has been running for 17 years.
- The Somerset West Lottery enabled Open Door to provide 150 meals per week for homeless people in Taunton. Volunteers prepared and served 15 breakfast meals and 15 lunches per day making a total of 7,800 meals over a 12-month period.

Somerset West Lottery Local Community Fund 2022 List:

- Somerset Playing Fields Association: Community parks advice - £1,000.00
- Metal Heads WS: Reuse of waste materials - £1,000.00
- NTP-Priorswood CC: Health & WB sessions - £1,000.00
- Minehead Eye: Youth provision - £1,000.00
- Taunton Area Debt Advice: Core funding - £1,000.00
- North Curry Sport: Maintenance equipment - £1,000.00
- Homestart West Somerset: SEND sessions £ 1,000.00
- YMCA Taunton: Youth provision - £1,000.00
- Crafty Crocs WS: Outreach work in West Somerset - £ 1,000.00
- Watchet Phoenix: Dining equipment and activities - £1,000.00
- Secret World: SWT Volunteer training - £1,000.00
- Fuse: Youth provision - £1,000.00
- Open Door: Meals for the homeless - £1,000.00
- Wellington Counselling: Family counselling - £1,000.00
- Escape Support group: Special needs support - £1,000.00

- Somerset Sight: Staff & volunteer training - £1,000.00
- Engage WS: IT equip replacement - £1,000.00
- Wiveliscombe AP:Contrib adapted car - £1,000.00
- Reminiscence Learning: Dementia awareness core - £ 1,000.00
- Conquest: Contrib subsidised family support - £1000.00
- Escapeline: Drug/exploitation awareness - £1000.00

Total
21,000.00

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Climate Change – Cllr Dixie Darch.

Electric vehicle charge point infrastructure

Increased usage of electric vehicles

Recent Department for Transport figures show there was a 19% increase in the number of electric vehicles registered in Somerset. Since July 2022, this has risen from 4,344 to a total of 5,173 vehicles.

Between October and December, Somerset West and Taunton district has seen an increase of 8.69% to 1,238 electric vehicles registered in the district.

Crescent car park refurbishment to include electric vehicle charging points and a secure cycle shelter

As part of Taunton's Crescent car park upgrade there will be 19 electric vehicle charging points to encourage uptake of electric vehicles. It will also provide a secure cycle shelter to promote cycling as a sustainable means of transport, supporting healthy lifestyles and environmental improvements with trees being introduced.

Trees

Somerset Tree Strategy

The Somerset Tree Strategy is a collaborative project involving all 5 councils, the Quantock, Blackdown and Mendip AONBs, Exmoor National Park, Somerset Wildlife Trust, the Forestry Commission, the Environment Agency and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. With feedback from the public survey on the tree strategy now complete, the consultants, *Evolving Forests*, have issued the first draft of the strategy for stakeholder feedback. This is a really exciting project which will ensure a joined up approach to the future of Somerset's treescapes.

Urban tree challenge

We are keen to make a bid to the next round of the Urban Tree Challenge, which supports the establishment of trees in urban areas in England.

Areas that qualify for funding within the SWT district are Taunton, Wellington, Williton and Minehead. We have reached out to stakeholders in those areas to discuss a joint bid.

The fund has criteria which need to be met, including proximity to schools, healthcare and areas where deprivation indices and air pollution is high.

We are being supported on the bid via our Exmoor National Park Authority partnership

Built environment

We are starting to see decarbonisation projects come to fruition following completion of decarbonisation surveys on all our main buildings last year. We now have a full set of surveys which provide a costed pathway to decarbonising our assets, and these will be fed into the LGR Asset Optimisation work.

Wellington Depot solar panels and battery storage

Installation of solar PV and battery storage is scheduled for the Wellington Depot at Chelston Business Park. The decarb survey suggested a 117% reduction in grid electricity usage by installing PV. This project has been funded by the CNCR budget.

Successful funding bid for decarbonisation of Wellington Sports Centre and Alcombe Children's Centre

SWT's application to Phase 3b of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) through SALIX Finance has secured £1.5 million towards the decarbonisation programme of both Wellington Sports Centre and the Alcombe Children's Centre in Minehead. This is an increasingly competitive funding process and we are delighted to have been successful.

Both projects include the replacement of end-of-life gas heating and water systems, together with a range of 'fabric first' measures to ensure energy efficiency, greater thermal warmth and an improvement in energy costs. ASHP will be installed to replace gas boilers, solar PV panels will be installed on both buildings, LED lighting for the ACC and Glazing for WSC. The Wellington Sports Centre project also includes the replacement of the air handling units and roof materials within the building and the systems for heating the swimming pool water and installation of underfloor electric heating in the sports hall.

CNCR Plan Progress Review to Community Scrutiny

SWT's Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan will come before Community Scrutiny on 25 January 2022, providing a second update on progress on our climate change actions.

Moving towards Unitary

Officers across all five councils continue to work together to bring individual climate action plans together in preparation for vesting day. Officers are continuing to work on our carbon emissions baseline for the new authority.

All councils have contributed financially to preparatory work for a **Local Energy Plan**, exploring options for renewable energy sites and heat network zones across Somerset. This is a key piece of work for the county to meet renewable energy generation targets within the CNCR.

The plan will include a high-level assessment of renewable energy generation opportunities, identifying suitable sites to support the development of the new Somerset wide Local Plan and outlining how to work alongside community energy organisations, the private sector and various other stakeholders to invest and grow

renewable energy generation in Somerset. This will ensure the necessary evidence is in place to allow the new Somerset Council to take opportunities forward directly or in partnership, and have the evidence available to bid for potential future funding.

Technologies assessed will focus on Solar PV and thermal, wind, run of river hydro, heat pumps, geothermal, heat recovery, storage batteries, hydrogen and anaerobic digestion. A general overview of tidal & wave and the potential overlap this may have with terrestrial land use and planning is included.

Although this work will provide a planning evidence base, it will also enable the proliferation of renewable energy in Somerset more generally. The energy system in the county requires holistic consideration to facilitate electrification of transport and heat. Although beyond the traditional remit of local authorities, it is important that we act as an enabler for bringing the different bodies together to meet renewable energy targets.

Cllr Dixie Darch, Executive Member for Climate Change

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation – Cllr Mike Rigby.

Planning

Taunton Garden Town – Governance arrangements

Proposals for a governance structure for the Garden Town were agreed by the Executive on 16 November 2022. The proposed structure seeks to ensure collaborative working and effective decision-making among public and private sector partners and stakeholders. Terms of reference are being drafted and arrangements are now being put in place to hold the initial Delivery Board and Forum meetings in February /March 2023.

Taunton Garden Town – Delivering Our Vision, the Planning Context

Ahead of LGR it has been agreed to produce a document which will set out the current planning context for the Garden Town in one place. A report is due to be considered at the February meeting of the Executive Committee which seeks to agree its scope and the drafting of the document has commenced. In addition, green infrastructure guidance and a check list has been prepared. This will provide advice to planning applicants/ agents, and a reference point for residents/local groups and prompt the scheme to set out how the proposals respond to a series of key issues. The intent is to aid the delivery of high quality, attractive and sustainable development through the planning process that also takes a holistic approach to green infrastructure.

Connecting our Garden Communities – active travel infrastructure for Taunton Garden Town

At the meeting in December 2022, the Executive approved the Connecting Our Garden Communities Plan for adoption as a material planning consideration (preparing masterplans, pre-application advice and assessing planning applications) and as corporate policy to inform future policy, project development and funding bids. The final plan is due for adoption by Full Council on 7 February 2023. Consultation on the draft plan took place between 29 July to 30 September 2022 and resulted in 276 responses together with comments made at in-person consultation events. The plan for adoption takes account of comments received and is already influencing developer negotiations and funding bid preparation.

Mobility hubs – Taunton Garden Town

An initial phase of work is underway to consider how the Council can support the development of mobility hubs at key locations to facilitate active and sustainable travel across the Garden Town. The commission includes consideration of a network approach, typical components together with potential financial and delivery models. This complements work taking place on the Taunton bus station site and is intended to consider opportunities on a range of sites including the allocated Park and Ride sites at strategic sites in Taunton Garden Town. These initial phases of work are expected to be completed by the end of March 2023.

Taunton Garden Town Infrastructure Delivery Plan and future stewardship arrangements

An Infrastructure Delivery Plan for Taunton Garden Town has been produced and will be used to help assess the infrastructure requirements of new development at planning application stage and will also form part of the evidence base to inform the Somerset wide Local Plan. Further discussions with infrastructure providers will continue to refine requirements. Work to identify future stewardship

opportunities for new community assets is being finalised with further discussions required in the context of the establishment of Taunton Town Council and the proposed transfer of existing assets. Other options identified through the study will also be considered further before a future Council decision. The long term stewardship of community assets is a key principle to realise the Council's vision for the Garden Town.

Neighbourhood Planning

We have five parishes in the District currently progressing Neighbourhood Plans.

Wellington Station

The promoters, Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) and Mid Devon District Council (MDDC), continue to work with Network Rail, GWR and other stakeholders through the Working Group, Steering Group and Senior Stakeholder Forum.

The current programme for delivery of the station sets out the Final Business Case to be complete by December 2023 and the station up and running by May 2025. Recent work commissioned by Network Rail has confirmed the precise location of the station at Longforth Farm.

Wellington Place Plan

Somerset West and Taunton Council has commissioned consultants to prepare a Place Plan (including an SA/SEA Scoping Report) for Wellington, encompassing a Vision, Spatial Framework and Infrastructure and Implementation Plan. The Place Plan will inform decisions about the development, regeneration and conservation of the town and be a long-term strategy for the future of Wellington that will inform the future Somerset-wide Local Plan.

The Draft Wellington Place Plan was approved for public consultation by Executive Committee on 21 December 2022. The consultation is scheduled to run from 23 January to 20 February 2023.

Following the consultation and any necessary revisions, the Place Plan is scheduled to go to Full Council in March 2023, for adoption as a material planning consideration. Once adopted, the document will be given weight in the determination of planning applications and considering regeneration activities to ensure we are creating a quality place in Wellington.

Firepool

Consultation on the Draft Masterplan concluded on 2 January 2023. LPA officers are in the process of reviewing and summarising consultation responses and clarifying changes and updates necessary to the Masterplan and supporting evidence in response to comments made. The final Masterplan is currently expected to be considered by Full Council for adoption on 28 March 2023.

Transportation

Development Consent Order (DCO) application for the A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme.

National Highways (N.H.) are proposing to submit an application to the Secretary of State for a Development Consent Order to dual the A358 between Ilminster and junction 25 of the M5. They had intended to make the formal submission before Christmas, but with the support of the Government, they have taken the decision to pause the Development Consent Order application whilst they undertake a review into the appropriateness of the environmental mitigations proposed for the project. The effect of this will be to move the submission date into 2023, now expected to be later in January.

As a highways scheme, the Highway Authority at the County Council are taking the lead. This means that until Vesting Day, the County (both their Highways and Planning teams) will be co-

ordinating required responses and the two district authorities affected by the proposal (SWaT & SSDC) will feed into the processes.

Following formal submission the Councils will need to produce an 'Adequacy of Consultation' report. This will be based on the facts of the performance of National Highways during the various consultation phases over the last few years

Work has also commenced on the required Local Impact Report (L.I.R.), as the fixed timelines for documentation submission at the various stages of an examination process are defined and very tight. Most of the work on this will not be possible until National Highways have formally submitted their application, when we will be able to see what the exact proposal is and gauge how it will impact.

Development Management Update

Performance

A report on Development Management performance was provided for Scrutiny Committee on 4 January 2023. Workloads remain high due to the volume of applications, pre-application enquiries and managing the applications held in abeyance due to the advice from Natural England and the need to provide phosphate mitigation. There are ongoing vacancies and absences due to personal circumstances, resignations and some long term sickness and reduced hours across the team. Performance is also affected by delays in receiving responses from consultees in particular from the Somerset Ecology Service, the Lead Local Flood Authority and highways.

Recruitment

The service has a number of agency staff covering posts in development management as a result of a poor response to national advertisements for planning officer posts. This reflects the national shortage and is no doubt also affected by uncertainty of positions in the new unitary authority.

Major and Special Projects

Active Travel Projects

Future High Street Fund (FHSF) cycling and walking schemes

Bridge over the Tone

There have been 25 representations to date, both positive and negative and discussion continue with the LPA prior to a decision being made. The team is seeking to appoint a contractor to develop the Technical designs and manage construction works. Bids have been received and are being reviewed with an appointment due in Feb 2023. The Design and construction phases will each take about 6 months each, subject to planning permission.

The two crossings – a cycle and pedestrian-priority crossing at St James St on National Cycle Network Route 3 and a new Toucan crossing over Upper High St – are still with SCC for technical review and are scheduled to be delivered in summer 2023.

The Crescent Car Park's cycle parking 'hub' is also progressing well with delivery scheduled for March 2023. Work will soon commence on additional cycling hubs in the town centre, with the former St James Bike Park the most likely next location. The hubs will provide Taunton's first such facilities, providing sheltered cycle parking with public cycle repair stands and tyre pumps.

The previous project resource has moved to a new position, with the job now advertised externally to seek the appropriate candidate to deliver these priority schemes. It is hoped that a new Project

Manager will join the team in Feb-23. This change will not impact on the overall programme of works for the FHSF route.

Feasibility work - Cycling schemes

Work has just begun with consultants on developing a strategic outline business case for sustainable travel and cycling options on the Wellington and separately Bishops Lydeard cycle links to Taunton. Work is expected to take 8-9 months, during which time stakeholders will be involved in assessing options.

Steam Coast Trail

Designs and options are being explored with landowners at Blue Anchor and in Washford, which could potentially lead to new improved sections of the trail, and ambitions to connect communities along West Somerset's coastline.

Heritage at Risk

Tonedale Mill

Discussions continue with the owners regarding the urgent works and the long-term plans for the site. As of January 2023 these discussions will be with a new team appointed by Mancraft. SWT are also recovering funds for works carried out in default in a S54 Urgent works Notice when the owners failed to complete the protective works to the listed buildings in Summer 2022. A certificate of lawful use has been received and is currently being determined by the Planning Department.

Toneworks

Phase 2 works were completed in November 2022. SWT were successful at receiving a further £185k funding from Historic England and Phase 3 is currently in train and due for completion in May 2023. The HAR team ran a successful event in November which celebrated the work to date and allowed the first tranche of public access into the site.

Sandhill Park

SWT continues to work with the new owners of Sandhill Park towards the necessary urgent works and long-term plans for the building's future. The Emergency works package is underway and initial planning discussions have started over the future conversion of the mansion house.

Regen Programme

Coal Orchard

Construction works are now completed. A new commercial agent is now in place, with ongoing negotiations on several commercial units continuing.

Lease agreements for the Car Club proposal are drawing to a conclusion, after which lining, signage and charging head units can be installed ready for go live as soon as practicable.

Bus Station

A plan is emerging that will see the bus station site developed in phases. The first priority will be to put in place the Changing Places facility by Spring '23. The procurement process to engage a contractor for this work has begun for building 2 (the admin block to the west of the site). In parallel, designs are being developed ready for consultation and planning for re-developing Building 1 and the rest of the site, to deliver on the SCC led Bus Service Improvement Plan for a new transport hub in the Town Centre to incorporate a reopened bus station together with wider mobility components.

Firepool

GWR Building / Cycle Path

The GWR Building continues to be used as a site office by the Innovation Centre contractor Wilmott Dixon. The temporary cycle path has now closed due to overlapping construction works and will remain closed until it can be safely opened again, likely to be 2023.

Digital Innovation Centre

SWT are continuing to work in collaboration with SCC on delivery of a 2400m² Digital Innovation centre on the Firepool site, with construction activity now in progress. Civil and decontamination works started in October 2021, with a delivery programme of circa 18 months. Construction is due to complete in the Spring '23.

Infrastructure, Utilities and Flood Work

Infrastructure work (Drainage and Levels) commenced on 7 November 2022, with a build programme of approximately 6 months. Work is progressing well with the main drainage excavation work underway.

Phase 1 of flood defence design work at Firepool Lock has been completed, in collaboration with the Environment Agency and Canals and Rivers Trust. Responses from the public consultation in late summer have been fed into the next stage of the design process, along with further discussions with stakeholders. Design

Northern and Southern Boulevard Construction

Following grant of planning permission in 2022, tender documentation is being prepared with a view to starting construction works on the Boulevard public realm work on the conclusion of the Drainage and Levels infrastructure contract.

Heat Network Mapping, Masterplanning and Early Feasibility

In December 2020 the Council applied to the Government's Heat Network Delivery Unit for funding towards a mapping, masterplanning and early feasibility study to consider potential for heat network development in Taunton. In June 2021, the Council received confirmation that it had been successful in its bid. Since June 2022, the Council has been working with consultants Sustainable Energy Ltd to undertake this project looking into potential heat networks. The project looks at energy demands, heat supply opportunities, energy centre locations, and initial techno-economic feasibility. The project has involved close co-operation between officers from the major projects team and planning policy and engagement with the County Council and other potential stakeholders in order to understand constraints and opportunities. Emerging work has resulted in the Draft Firepool Masterplan identifying potential for an energy centre within the site. The consultant's draft final report was submitted in December 2022 and officers provided comment on the report in early January 2023. The final version is due in the next few weeks at which point the findings will be reported to Members alongside any appropriate recommendations.

Heritage Assets

Wellington Green Space & Fox's Field

The purchase of the Green Space in Wellington was approved at Full Council in July 2022 and is currently awaiting the S24 decision to proceed. It is intended to hand the site over (alongside Fox's Field) to Wellington Town Council for long-term lease and management working closely with the community.

Economic Development

Somerset Innovation Exchange

The event took place in September 2022. It showcased local innovation, and skills development opportunities facilitated business-to-business contacts and acted as a positive investment message for Taunton, attracting 180 delegates and over 60 speakers, session leads and exhibitors. Work continues with the local network leads to shape the provision of future innovation support activity.

Innovation Support

SWT has supported the commissioning of a county-wide innovation support service that will work with individual businesses to understand the support needed to grow innovation in the county. The service will deliver events and webinars with the aim to address issues and barriers such as access to finance and developing talent pools; support delivery within the Innovation Centres across the County; and develop the ecosystem needed to ensure the County is a growth hotspot for innovation.

Inward Investment

Work continues on the promotion of SWT as an inward investment 'growth hotspot'. Much of the content from this work is scheduled to transfer in Spring 2023 into an 'Invest Somerset' website to promote Somerset as a key place to grow and invest.

Town Centre Regeneration

SWT is leading the development of a Town Centre Strategic Framework for Somerset as part of the LGR work programme. The last vacancy count shows that Taunton has a vacancy rate of 10.08% which is expected to be below the national vacant unit rate. Minehead's vacancy rate is also expected to be below national rates (to be confirmed in February). Work continues to link up enquiries with letting agents and shopping centres. A Ukrainian pop-up shop will be opening in the Orchard Centre in Taunton in the next month and a craft workshop will open in support of Taunton's new piece of public art arriving in February. The economic development team and partners are working on the delivery of a district wide Town Centre Event programme for 2023 including plans for a Coronation celebration in Castle Green along with community and commercial events throughout 2023.

The Economic Development Team have facilitated a number of events in Council owned Parks and Open spaces across the District over the last 3 months, these events have an impact on the vibrancy of and attract footfall into our Town Centres.

Day	Date	Event	Venue / location
Sunday	02 October 2022	Minehead Triathlon	Minehead Esplanade
Sunday	02 October 2022	Wellington Film Festival	Wellington Park
Sunday	09 October 2022	Taunton Independent Market	Castle Green, Taunton
Saturday	15 October 2022	Classic Car Display - in collaboration with Taunton Carnival	Castle Green, Taunton
Saturday	22 October 2022	Poppy Appeal Launch	Taunton town centre - various locations including Fore Street and Market House

Monday	24 October 2022	West Country Cloverleaf Car Rally (1 of 2)	Castle Green, Taunton
Wednesday	26 October 2022	Wacky Wednesday	Wellington Park
Thursday	27 October 2022	West Country Cloverleaf Car Rally (2 of 2)	Castle Green, Taunton
Saturday	29 October 2022	Moonlit Meadow Run	French Weir and Longrun Meadow, Taunton
Sunday	13 November 2022	SWT Remembrance Service	Taunton town centre and Vivary Park
Sunday	13 November 2022	Taunton Independent Market	Castle Green, Taunton
Sunday	20 November 2022	Winterfest Taunton	Taunton town centre and Castle Green
Thursday	24 November 2022	Firewalk for Children's Hospice South West	Castle Green, Taunton
Saturday	10 December 2022	Taunton Independent Market	Castle Green, Taunton
Sunday	11 December 2022	Taunton Independent Market	Castle Green, Taunton

Visitor Economy and Tourism Sector Support

A South West tourism research project and Somerset-wide visitor survey is underway and due for completion in May 2023. The research aims to inform future support needs for the sector and to understand visitor needs and behaviour to ensure Somerset provides a relevant tourism offer. The West Coast 360 programme, which supports excellence in the hospitality, leisure and tourism sectors in West Somerset will be refreshed and relaunched in Spring 2023. Public realm improvement works continue in Minehead along the seafront, the Gabion artwork competition has been completed and the artwork has been refreshed and a planning application has been submitted for new shelters on the seafront. The Minehead Coast Development Trust is undertaking a consultation on the design and the shelters are planned for installation in 2023.

Food and Drink Sector Support

The SWT Economic Development Team developed and launched a grant scheme to build capacity in the sector and support business growth in December 2022. There was a strong response from the sector and applications are now closed. A programme of sector support events will be delivered in February 2023 including 'Meet the Buyer' and 'Business resilience' events and training workshops on public sector procurement, allergens and labelling, food photography, and 1-1 sessions on intellectual property.

Supporting Businesses to Net Zero

An Energy Efficiency Grant Scheme was launched in December 2022 to support businesses at the start of their journey to net zero. Applications are now closed with awards to be made in February. The grants also help local businesses to reduce energy costs during the current energy crisis.

Local Labour Agreements

A proposal will be coming forward to the Executive in February to introduce obligations on developers to deliver targets and activities that ensure local labour is used, and training and apprenticeships are offered to local people during the construction and operational phases of new developments across the District.

Skills and Employment

A range of events will be delivered to support people into work and training across the district including:

- Jobs Fair: Taunton Glass Box (Taunton Library) 19th Jan 2023, 10 am – 12:30 pm, 17 exhibitors.
- Micro providers virtual events. Two events are to be held to offer support to existing and new micro providers in the care sector on 7th Feb 2023, 11:30 am – 12:30 pm and 6:30 pm – 7:30 pm.
- HPC employment and skills drop-ins will be held at the Community Employment Hubs in Taunton, Wellington, Minehead and Williton
- Jobs Fair: Somerset Cricket Ground 23rd Feb 2023, 10:30 – 3:30 pm in the Colin Atkinson Pavilion, 50 exhibitors

External Operations & Assets

West Somerset Railway: Disposal of car park and toilets, off Station Road Bishops Lydeard.

Update

Purchaser's title investigations are now complete, and we anticipate that the transfer will take place before 31/3/2023. The latest hold up in this somewhat protracted process is that there has been a change of Directors at WSR and this has delayed the signing of the agreement.

Once completed SWT will receive £50,000 and transfer maintenance responsibilities for the free to use gravel car park and WC block to West Somerset Railway

Pedestrian Bridge – Goodlands Gardens

The pedestrian bridge over the River Tone to/from Goodlands Gardens was closed following a routine inspection which found significant structural weakness in the bridge joists.

A further inspection has taken place and we have now received the full structural report which confirms the bridge is not viable to repair. We are compiling a report giving options for discussion with Councillors and Senior Officers.

Northern Gardens Taunton

Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS) contacted us with a complaint that the wall alongside the Mill Leat, opposite the Museum entrance, is in danger of collapse with considerable vegetation and small trees growing out of the stonework.

The Leat is between Goodlands Gardens and Northern Gardens and the gardens around the Museum are the responsibility of the Council under a lease from SANHS. This wall prevents the public from falling into the watercourse and provides a retaining function for the ground at higher level outside the Museum.

We have carried out initial clearance and are now awaiting reports from both structural engineers and heritage experts before proceeding further.

Our experience with repair and rebuild of heritage walls shows that significant sums of money are likely to be required. We are unable to accurately estimate costs at this time, but they are likely to be in the region of £150,000 - £200,000 at a minimum (based on Stogursey Church wall for example)

The Heritage advisor has indicated that approval for works is likely to be a lengthy process. We have instructed a structural survey to be carried out now, with the ambition of being able to create a specification for works, obtain external and internal approvals and go to tender during 2023. We anticipate expenditure to be during 2023/24 financial year and will flag as a budget requirement for capital expenditure.

Flook House External Area

A meeting between representatives of SWT CICCIC (the Community Arts Lead Tenant) and Councillors Sully and Ellis took place on 18 November identify a safeguarding solution and to mitigate the impact of Anti-Social Behaviour in this area.

A reduced project scope to provide gates at the rear of the building is being funded by the ELIF fund.

U3 Blackdown Business Park

Sylvan Road, Wellington.

The sale of this unit has been approved by the relevant S151 Officer and is now with legal.

Once complete the purchaser will transfer £230,000 to SWT and become responsible for the required update works and any future upkeep and maintenance.

It is anticipated that the sale will proceed to completion prior to 31/3/2023.

Lease of Blenheim Gardens Café, Minehead

The tenant had previously been advised that refurbishment can continue on a like for like basis and that any major changes would need planning consent. Our planning team have requested confirmation of details of the new windows to confirm they are like for like. Other minor refurbishment is continuing with the intention that the café opens by the end of March.

Parks Walk WC's, Minehead.

Due to the recent flooding, the applicant has withdrawn. We are assessing a further enquiry. If use cannot be found for the building, removal may be considered.

Former Mount Street Nursery

We are continuing to explore the best way to remove 'tent dwellers' in liaison with the police and Shape legal.

We are also progressing a lease with the adjacent Taunton Deane Cricket Club to permit car parking for the club on a small area of the site (pending planning permission). Draft heads of terms have been issued to the club.

Before assessing options for the remainder of the site an ecological survey would be required – the area may be a possible area for additional tree planting – this would be led by the Climate Change Team.

Minor Works

Works to the electrical systems at the Crematorium, the bandstand in Vivary Park and repairs to Stogursey Church wall have all been completed.

General

The team continue to engage with the Technology Forge project team to audit and load full SWT property data onto the new database.

Commercial Services

Crescent Car Park Improvement Project

Work on phase one of the Crescent car park commenced on Monday 6th January and will continue until March 2023. Phase 2 will start straight after and due to finish in June.

The project will see the delivery of 19 electric vehicle charging units, solar powered ticket machines, additional accessible parking spaces , new LED lighting, a new cycle shelter. The site will be enhanced with additional trees sited around the carpark.

EV Charging

EV Charging infrastructure has been installed within the below car parks, between August and January. The 16 new charge points have provided the following totals for public usage.

782 charging Sessions, 12,554.37 kWh, 7.1 CO2 saving: EV Miles: 36,784

Card Payments

During 2022/23 the % of car park income which is cashless has increased from 57.3% to 63.5%. The increase is in part a result of the 25 parking machines replaced within the West Somerset area in April 2022. Offering this is both popular with customers and saves on cash collections.

Remedial Works

Orchard Centre

A contract has been awarded to carry out remedial works to the Orchard Centre car park. The works commenced on 3rd January 2023 and are planned to be completed by the end of March.

High Street Rebuild Wall Works

A contract to carry out the rebuilding of the wall to the side of the High Street car park, the area which backs onto Mendip house. The works started in November and should be completed by February.

This work is part of the essential reinvestment in the Councils parking assets and is completed while keeping the car parks operational.

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Housing – Cllr Fran Smith.

Housing Development and Regeneration Team Housing Development and Regeneration Team

HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling

- The service is progressing at pace a low carbon retrofit Strategy and Delivery plan. Members approved the Strategy and Delivery Plan in December. The Strategy seeks to place tenants at the heart of zero carbon retrofit and this has commenced with tenants influencing the strategy. A tenant low carbon retrofit group continues to meet and is focusing on the theme of timely communication with tenants during retrofit and capital investment programmes.
- SWT has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with E-ON which pledges £20m of energy company obligation for SWTs ECO4 Neighbourhood Fuel Efficiency Project. This fund will see some of the worst energy performing council homes and some private home, where owners qualify, improved by two EPC bands which will see a significant reduction in fuel usage to keep their homes warm. The project is timetabled to start in February and run for four years. A single contractor is delivering works funded by E-On.
- SWT has been awarded SHDF (Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund) Wave 1 funds and has made a substantial bid for Wave 2 funds. SWT will be informed if it has been successful in being awarded wave two funding in February. The funding will run for two years.
- SWT will let the first two new build SWT low carbon homes zero carbon at North Taunton in February. These dwellings are the first of 49 low carbon homes delivered in the next 12 months at Phase a North taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP). The council remain close to signing a contract for Phase B and Ci contract which will deliver 51 new low carbon affordable homes.
- Brick work at Seaward/Rainbow Way in Minehead is commencing and a consultation event for local people was held in January. The brick work is using large porotherm blocks which will allow a speedy build to first floor level. The porotherm bricks are a honeycomb construction often used in very low carbon passivhaus construction. The 54 units at Rainbow Way off Seaward Way will provide a variety of property types and be zero carbon. The scheme will complete in 2024.
- Unfortunately, inflation and market conditions continue to create challenges for building and retrofitting homes. We recognise that the increased cost of building homes is no longer a risk but a reality and the HRA is addressing these challenges as it reviews its 30-year business plan.
- Our Enabling Development team works with housing partners and our own development teams and through this we see an increasing challenge in meeting affordable housing need in the district and specialist accommodation. These challenges are significant to the impact of phosphates, the volatility in the market and although the district has experienced significant house price

inflation these matters ultimately have an impact on scheme viability making them unable to support affordable housing provision.

- Despite the volatility of the housing market in the district has seen a higher-than-average number of properties completed this financial year. The pipeline of new units is currently at its strongest in the west of the district, which is unaffected by the phosphate mitigation planning requirements.
- The council was awarded £750k through the government Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme to accelerate the new provision round three including the purchase of six homes and refurbishment of six other for the Housing First model of accommodation. Eight of the twelve units have been completed and let.
- The service continues to deliver the Hinkley Point C Housing Programme, working with partners to drive forward 11 key areas of work. This programme is providing new bed spaces in the district and support to vulnerable customers affected by the change in the housing market because of the uplift of workforce at HPC. The service has received circa £440k to start new projects and extend the delivery of some existing projects up to December 2023.

Housing Property Team

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- Emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs are being undertaken.
- All emergency jobs are being delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging).
- Performance levels for responsive repair requests (now being taken by a cohort of specialist repair call-handlers within the Corporate Customer Service team) has recently been challenged by maternity leave and sick leave within that team. This has led to a reduction in the previously improved performance levels reported, albeit there still remain less abandoned calls, faster answering, and more accurate detailed work orders being raised than was being achieved prior to the change in approach. We are reviewing this position carefully, including evaluation of required staffing levels, and introducing 'overflow' of calls to repairs schedulers when available.
- Our Repairs Service Improvement Plan (RSIP) has been further developed and many activities are being progressed. However, progress to improving ICT systems (e.g. job diagnosis and appointments, trades scheduling, contractor portal, etc.) and further review of available reporting functionality have been hampered by a corporate 'change freeze' to existing IT systems prior to LGR Vesting Day on 1st April 2023.
- We continue to undertake void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard and are seeking to streamline external contractor support to meet property performance turnaround targets.
- Following an external Materials Supplies Audit, we have progressed with implementing an updated imprest van stock and have also undertaken a stocktake of our stores.
- We are progressing with implementation of an improved materials supply chain process, although again this has been affected by the current corporate 'change freeze' to existing IT systems.

Property Safety Compliance

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken. These include gas safety checks (LGSR's), water risk assessments and remedial works, electrical inspections (EICR's), asbestos surveys and re-inspections, fire risk assessment and remedial works, fire safety checks, and lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works.
- The new contract to undertake outstanding electrical inspections (EICR's) and associated remedial works is progressing well. We have streamlined the process to make appointments and have increased focus on 'hard to access' properties.
- We have implemented new iAuditor software to assist with compliance data collection for emergency lighting visual inspections, fire door inspection, fire safety housekeeping 'sterile communal area' checks (flat block inspections), water risk assessments in dwellings and fire risk assessments.
- Additional procurement has taken place, including air source heat pump (ASHP) servicing, and extension of our stair-lift contract.
- We have mobilised a new radon monitoring contract.
- A street lighting safety assessment survey programme has been undertaken.
- Installation of alarms as required under the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022 has been completed.
- We have appointed Savills to undertake an independent review of our compliance activities, together with helping us develop a Building and Resident Health and Safety Strategy for the new Council.
- Weekly compliance meetings continue to carefully monitor and manage all of these safety critical areas, and an update report has recently been presented to the Audit Committee.

Capital Programmes

- A range of capital work programmes continues on-site; including kitchen and bathroom replacements, fire safety works (replacement fire doors, fire safety flooring and emergency lighting), roofing, replacement gutters and fascias, and door entry systems. As previously noted however, available contractor resource remains a challenge and accordingly some programmes will not be completed by the end of this financial year – the balance of any outstanding works will be completed during the 2023/24 financial year.
- Procurement activities also continue, including review of required capital programme works needed to meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS), incorporating our Retrofit aspiration.

Asset Management

- The service has identified pathways to Zero Carbon for 12 of the Council's 14 main archetypes. The service is working to integrate low carbon retrofit investment with the decent homes and capital investment programme
- New energy surveys are complementing programmes of EPC, Stock Condition and validation surveys. This data will continue to enrich the services knowledge of its stock.

- Post 'go-live' work on the Open Assets module of our Capita software system is now underway, following the Open Housing implementation.
- The service is working with colleagues to refine the start to finish capital investment process from business planning through to delivery to updating data following investment. This work has particular focus on the tenant's journey.

Housing and Communities Team

Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered)

- The officer team has 1 staff member off sick who will hopefully return to work in January 2023.
- The team continue to complete the fire/evacuation compliance checks and risk assessments for tenants who might struggle to evacuate themselves. We have several tenants identified needing to be moved, and they are receiving support with this.
- Bi-monthly estates and compliance checks continue. Unfortunately, staff have identified some tenants complying with the sterile building's expectations on the day the checks are completed, then putting mats etc. back out, once the checks are completed. This is being challenged and in the new year tenants will have details of the week the checks will take place, rather than the day and time.
- Compliance work is ongoing to relocate bin stores and scooter charging points in a safer location for tenants.
- The team have had several very complex and time intensive cases running. This has included; a tenant who needed to be sectioned due to the threat they were posing to others and themselves; a tenant with significant health and support needs discharged from hospital with no daily Carer support available for a week (no Carer was available); a property where there are concerns for possible drugs dealing/County Lines involvement; long-standing noise issues affecting neighbours sleep and quality of life and tenants with significant self-neglect.
- The team have also had to respond to several floods. In some cases, tenants haven't had anyone to stay with and we have had to accommodate them elsewhere, which has involved sourcing furniture, kitchen items etc. to enable them to have some 'normality' whilst the works are completed (usually takes 3-5 weeks).
- Fire doors – several tenants have reported challenges with the newly fitted fire doors (too heavy and difficult to open and very fast closing, a result). These are being adjusted to meet the tenants needs, but also enable them to live independently.
- Within sheltered housing and extra care, we have a regular turnover of tenants. We often have problems ending tenancies where the tenant has no next of kin. This can result in us having to take legal steps to take possession of the property, which takes additional time and finance, and delays to the voids work and re-letting. We are keen to develop some agreements where Adult Social Care are involved, for them to be able to end tenancies.

- Staff have been receiving training for the new IT systems, as part of the move to Unitary.
- Our Capital Works team have been able to complete some low-level shower tray installations for several tenants, which has resulted in tenants having better and safer access to their shower facilities. Unfortunately, tenants requiring a change to a wet room are still being affected by the Somerset Independence Project covid backlog and delays.
- A fire drill has been held with staff at Kilkenny Court. Deane Helpline staff are based there too and took part. Plans are continuing for another drill, to involve tenants.
- The national Carer recruitment issue is affecting Carer services within Somerset and within our extra care schemes. Staff numbers are limited, and the Care Provider has also had to bring in agency staff to cover shifts. This is a concern, now and in the longer term, which we have raised with the Commissioners of the service.
- The national Social Worker recruitment issue is also affecting services within Somerset. We have made referrals to Adult Social Care, and whilst they have acknowledged that the tenant reaches the threshold for help and support, there can be a 8-12 week wait for people to be seen. This has resulted in the team being under strain having to respond to ongoing issues and concerns for the tenant(s) concerned. We have raised our concerns about this work being above and beyond a usual Landlord role and responsibility, but staff are doing what they can to try and keep people safe.

Lettings

- Customer satisfaction remains very high Year to date average of 93% Tenants Action Group (TAG) visited properties to be returned to tenants after Voids works completed. They commented positively on the standard of the properties being returned and will feed this back to tenants.
- Team is now back to full strength after some staff time off through family bereavements.
- 3 tenants remain at Wordsworth Drive flats. Regular meetings with project team to move this forward.
- Home Moves Plus project is ahead of target.
- Local Lettings plan being written for North Taunton regeneration project and Seaward Way. Still work in progress.
- Lettings policy in progress additional work required on the above two items. Still work in progress.
- 22 properties let in December. YTD figure of 179 which give a monthly average of 22.3.
- Average relet days of 26 days for a Minor Void set against a target of 31 days.
- Average relet days of 41 for a Major void set against a target of 44 days

Income

- The Rent Recovery Officers are working through our Lean Process for those tenants who failed to make payments over the Christmas period to ensure those tenants make up the missed payments.
- Court applications for Rent Recovery case which are now being applied for are not going to be heard until dates in March, so there is a delay on these with the court.
- The team are continuing to look at all options for tenants who are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. This includes applying for DHP's, any grant funding available, referrals to CA and to the Debt and Benefit Officers

Tenancy/Estates & ASB

- Unfortunately, we have not been successful in shortlisting any candidates for the role of Tenancy and Estates Case Manager. Although we had 7 applicants, we felt that they did not meet the desired level to interview. We will readvertise this position in the next two weeks. We will continue using the temporary member of staff that we have in post until we can successfully recruit.
- The team are still dealing with high volume of enquiries.
- The team prior to Christmas were dealing with several staff absences due to colds/flu and this did have a knock-on effect with managing workloads
- Last month we reported on the Suspended Possession Order obtained against a tenant; we have now received further complaints about similar anti-social behaviour and are now pursuing an eviction warrant against the tenant.

Housing Options

The Housing Options service remains busy with an average of 120 approaches from customers who need housing advice or at risk of losing their accommodation each month. The main cause of homelessness in the district remains family evictions.

- The team's renewed focus on early intervention and prevention continues with 56% of prevention cases having been closed successfully between April and October 2022. This is against a backdrop of increased service pressures caused by the current cost of living crisis.
- The main cause of homelessness remains eviction by family; is anticipated that this will continue to increase as families struggle with the costs of accommodating extended families
- There has been a high turnover of staff in recent months which is partly attributed to uncertainty surrounding LGR and also to a renewed focus on performance management. Long standing vacancies are proving difficult to fill; this is reflected across the other districts and not specific to SWT.

Temporary accommodation

- The recent focus on improving pathways into and out of temporary accommodation continues.
- Staff resource in this team has been increased by repurposing a vacant post from the wider structure. This has provided the capacity to provide an enhanced

service to those households in temporary accommodation including regular property and welfare checks as well as building relationships with accommodation providers.

- The number of households in temporary accommodation has reduced by circa 25% since April 2022, this is due to the continual focus on improving performance and ensuring a through flow of customers in temporary accommodation.
- The biggest challenge in this area of the service moving forwards will be the availability and cost of accommodation over the festive period. Increased numbers of placements are currently having to be made out of district due to accommodation providers capping the number of placements they will accept from the Council.

Homefinder Somerset

- On average, 300 new households apply to join Homefinder Somerset in the Somerset West and Taunton area each month. This is anticipated to continue to rise as a result of the current cost of living crisis and a lack of affordable properties in the Private Rented Sector (less than 5% are available at Local Housing Allowance rates or below).
- The team continue to support customers to bid on appropriate properties, this work continues to provide positive outcomes and is closely linked to ensuring that customers move on efficiently from temporary accommodation.

Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)

- SIP are in the process of recruiting two new Senior Technical Officers to work in the grants team following Management approval. Recruitment into the posts is planned to be completed pre vesting day of the new Council
- SIP are also recruiting two new Community Retrofit Project Officers as part of the expansion plans for the retrofit arm of the business.
- 84 applicants have applied for Home Energy Upgrades as part of the HUGs funding from Central Government. The funding totals £1.4 million for residents in Somerset. Any further applications have been put on hold to prevent over committing.
- SIP have been successful in securing a further £2 million in HUGs funding as part of the round two process. The scheme will commence in April 2023 and have similar eligibility criteria for households.
- The Somerset Independent Living Centres are open in Wellington and Shepton Mallet by appointment only. <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/equipment-to-help-you/>
- The grant team will have completed over 600 Disabled Facilities Grants in Somerset by the end of March 2023. A significant milestone.
- The Independent Living Officers who assist clients with acute mental health issues to reduce hoarding and undertake home safety checks have completed over 800 Ukrainian sponsor visits, the purpose to ensure that the home is safe for the Ukrainian refugees to move to. The team have also eliminated their backlog of hoarding and home safety checks which occurred when the team

were managing the massive influx of Ukrainian home safety checks. The backlog was over 150 cases.

Housing Performance Team Housing Performance Team (Shari Hallett)

- It continues to be an incredibly busy time for the team, staff absences due to illness and workload demands are being juggled every day.
- We continue to support the work of the Tenants Strategic Group and Tenants' Action Group. On the 24th November 2022 we held third joint tenant meeting with Homes in Sedgemoor, specifically to engage tenants on LGR. The next meeting is planned for the 28th February 2023.
- The damp and mould group for tenants continues to meet and has agreed a set of actions. The group has produced a new webpage which has been published. A report on the actions of the group will be produced after the next meeting.
- The Low Carbon Working group for tenants had their first meeting in July and has had meetings each month. The agreed outcomes agreed for the group have been achieved but the group has continued to meet with a new focus on communication.
- A group of involved tenants has started a mystery shopper exercise.
- The tenants' Christmas newsletter has been posted and we are researching new ways to produce the newsletter from April 2023. Work will need to begin now if changes are to be made in April 2023.
- We are collectively working with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams.
- Our performance in managing complaints continues to improve. Response times on stage 1 complaints has increased from an average of 54% between April and July, to over 85% every month since. The team are working hard to thoroughly investigate complaints, to provide our tenants with great quality and comprehensive replies within the prescribed ten working days.
- The policy review work with the HQN (Housing Quality Network) continues and TSG (Tenants' Strategic Group) members will receive revised policy documents for comment prior to publication. The Somerset Council Complaints Policy was shared in December 2022. The policy will proceed to Executive in January 2023 for approval.
- Our Tenant Satisfaction Survey report from November 2022 and the comments have been received and we will report to TSG in January 2023. Alongside the report we also received 260 comments which are being individually analysed and responded to where requested including 66 call backs.
- Open Housing the new housing management software went live 27th July 2022. We are now finalising the tenant portal which we hope to be live in February subject to any ICT freeze or restrictions imposed as a result of moving over ICT platforms to the new council. The portal will give tenants direct access to rent balances, tenancy and personal details, repair history, view communication, view housing officers. It will also give links to make payments and raise repairs and other communications.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the staff in the Housing team for their hard work and commitment to our tenants and residents in the SWT area, and wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Environmental Services – Cllr Andrew Sully.

It gives me great pleasure to present my report to Full Council on the varied activities of the Environmental Services Portfolio.

Street Scene

- Environmental Improvement Team

In January the team have taken delivery of 441 trees and planting them in various parks and open spaces across the district. They will then be completing the street washing programme in the town centres.

- Litter Strategy
 - Litter Bin Labels

Bin identification numbered labels have been purchased and will be placed on all litter and dog bins which include a QR code to enable the public to scan and report broken/overflowing bins using a smartphone. This will provide accurate recording of the bin issues reported and enable the service to monitor emptying schedules and vandalism.

- Environmental Enforcement Trial:

Between April 2022 – Dec 2022 a total of 1062 FPN's have been issued to individuals disposing of litter incorrectly through the trial.

The team have been working closely with local business to improve litter around their premises and engaged with stakeholders and provided education and guidance. This has included:

- Town and parish councils
- Butlins
- First Bus
- Avon and Somerset Police
- Arc
- National Highways

To support the Somerset West and Taunton litter strategy in regard to changing behaviour, the Council purchased 500 stubby pouches (portable ashtrays) which will be handed to individuals caught throwing cigarette litter on the ground and are available for individuals to collect from the Deane House Council offices. This scheme started in December 2022.

Parks and Open Spaces

The teams are working through the winter works programme to improve areas with additional pruning of shrubs and hedges, replanting and vegetation clearance.

Work on the 2023 Green Flag submissions have been undertaken for the January deadline.

The next phase of the Grassland Management Strategy and mapping has been completed for 2023. The work builds on previous year's successes and lessons learnt. This will increase the number of re-wilding areas which will also be signed so the public are informed.

The ELIF Budget has funded improvement works such as the new path in Vivary and Walkers Gate this has made a significant improvement to the users.

Bereavement Services

Essential electrical rewiring works were completed to Crematorium building between October and December. Being a listed and operational building did make this a difficult project to deliver but was completed to time with as little impact on our customers as possible.

Refuse and Recycling (Somerset Waste Partnership)

- Collection Service

Minor disruption to collections in December and January as a result of icy conditions and access, affected parts of Exmoor and then flooding. Overall, collection day changes due to bank holiday planned worked smoothly.

Williton depot works continued and are due to be completed in February. Opportunity taken to carry out some general repairs and maintenance work on site.

- Recycling sites

Preparation for the new regulations surrounding the handling of 'upholstered household seating' (sofas, upholstered chairs etc) were completed. New skips are available at all sites ready for 1 Jan, with temporary signage (longer term signage being developed by WRAP). This is to reduce the environmental risk that could be posed by possible presence of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in the fire retardants historically used on such items

Environmental Health & Licensing

Street Trading Policy

Licensing has opened a consultation on a proposed new street trading licensing policy.

SWT is proposing to replace the two existing policies for West Somerset and Taunton Deane respectively with one policy for the Somerset West and Taunton area, which would remain in force until such time as Somerset Council adopts a

policy of its own. It is not yet known when how soon that might be, so it is important that our area has a policy that is fit for purpose until then.

The Council is carrying out a public consultation on the proposed policy which will run for 8 weeks, closing on the 7th of March. Our preference is that responses to the consultation are submitted online at www.somersersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/consultations.

A working group consisting of Council Officers and Elected Members (Councillors) has been created. Once the consultation has finished, the working group will consider any responses, before preparing a final draft of the policy, which will then be recommended to the Council's Licensing Committee at its meeting on the 20th of March.

- **Blue Anchor Coastal Defence**

I am pleased to report that vessels have now been definitively secured to deliver the required rock armour from Glensanda Quarry in western Scotland.

It is proposed that 13,500 tonnes of rock will be delivered in late April/early May 2023 and transported by sea going vessels to Blue Anchor and transferred at sea to a barge to land the rock on the beach. The rock will then be placed against the cliffs to prevent wave undercutting.

Planning permission has been deferred as we are undertaking a re-design process for the upper slope works. Early indications are that this will be a positive decision as there have been no adverse comments to date. It is now anticipated that final documents will be provided by 10th February with determination planned by 24th March 2023.

It is now considered that the scheme to protect the B3191 will begin to be delivered from April 2023.

- **North Hill - Minehead**

WSP have been appointed (following a tender process) to carry out a design scheme for the slope stabilisation at North Hill, Minehead. The initial cost is £62k. The majority of the hill is owned by SWT.

Initial investigations – using abseiling techniques given the severity of the slope – have led to an initial report which outlines the preferred design solution.

Work is now underway to design a high tensile steel fence that will be erected along the base of the cliff above the houses along Quay Street. This fence will be designed to 'catch' any falling debris such as soil, stones and rocks. This is deemed to be the most effective solution given the difficulty of working on a cliff face that is near vertical in places.

The design is expected to be completed in March 2023 with tender works following shortly afterwards should finances be available to deliver the scheme which is expected to cost between £750,000 and £1m.

- **Minehead Seafront Drains clearance**

The work to clear sand from the blocked drainage gullies on the seafront at Minehead began on 9/01/2023

Sand will be removed and taken from site allowing water to flow off the promenade into the drains. This is not a permanent solution to the issue as the drains are blocked by sand from their outlet side (on the beach) and this cannot be easily or cheaply remedied.

- **Coastal Defence General**

There continues to be movement of the cliffs to the west of Watchet. The allotment site in Watchet belonging to Watchet Town Council has been closed due to land slippage and this area continues to erode through wave action and through inherent instability of the ground which is worsened through heavy rainfall

The cliffs in this area will continue to erode, the Council has provided warning signs on the West Street slipway.

Ultimately we will work with the new Council and the Environment Agency to consider a project to realign the B3191 in the area and at the same time to protect the cliffs.

I would like to give my personal thanks to all the officers in the various teams that make up the portfolio who are delivering exceptional services in challenging times.

Councillor Andy Sully

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Local Government Reorganisation and Community Governance Review - Cllr Sarah Wakefield.

As previously, and since my last report in December, I have continued to attend meetings of the LGR Implementation Board, the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee, the Shadow Taunton Town Council and meetings with various officers of SWT on a regular basis.

Local Government Reorganisation:

I am pleased to report that in general transition for Vesting Day (1st April 2023) is going well and according to plan as follows:

1. Technology – a successful cutover of our IT services took place over the weekend of the 20-23 January with many staff working into the small hours over that period to provide solutions as the data transfer took place to ensure as smooth a resumption as possible the following week. For Councillors and staff this means that we are all now on one system and are ready to use our new Somerset Council email addresses.
2. Staff – recruitment for the Senior leadership team is on track. Tier 2 is now complete and Tier 3 recruitment will be complete by Vesting Day. Recruitment of Tier 4 and finalising of teams structure and shape will follow Vesting Day.
3. TUPE - the transfer of all staff to become employees of Somerset Council is also on track to happen on Vesting Day. Staff will be continuously employed on their existing terms and conditions, sometimes enhanced if terms for Somerset Council are more beneficial. If and where redundancies are indicated this will happen after Vesting Day and on local government agreed terms.
4. Payroll - SWT payroll has been successfully set up on the SCC system and staff paid have been paid under this and on time. Councillors should have noticed the changeover in payment of their allowances too.
5. Services - each service continue to work through their readiness checklists which are tracked by the LGR workstream programme fortnightly.
6. Branding - has now been agreed for the Somerset Council and it is now being deployed ready for day one so that templates,

letters and key information is correctly branded to operate lawfully from Vesting Day.

7. ID Badges - these are being changed to the new council. They are in the process of being set up and will be distributed to staff and members in March.

Many of our SWT staff have worked closely and in co-operation with other districts and county staff in their LGR workstreams. The success of the programme to date is testament to all their hard work. Our staff have, of course, not only been involved directly in the LGR programme but are also fully employed in ensuring our services for our residents remain stable and delivered. This achievement is truly monumental in view of the tight timescale set by the LGR programme. A peer review of the LGR programme has also recently been carried out which has reported positively on its success and readiness for Vesting Day.

Community Governance Review - the setting up of (what will surely be known as) Taunton Town Council.

1. This matter is generally progressing well and according to plan. Any legal challenge is now being dealt with by SCC and its legal team and not by SWT.
2. Key milestones needed as soon as practicable have been achieved. An office on the ground floor of Deane House has been secured (under a one year lease at first) for use by the Clerk and any staff. The intention is to use the JMR Council Chamber for meetings of the new Council.
3. Appointment of the Town Clerk. After a competitive process a very well qualified Town Clerk has been recruited and will be starting in post from 30th January. I am sure you will all look forward to welcoming her to her post, getting to know her and working together over the next few months. This appointment will enable shadow town council meetings to be arranged and minuted and the process of engaging further staff and managing the provision of services - some of which may be shared with Somerset Council - to be set in motion. As the asset transfer referred to in the motion passed by Full Council will also take

place on Vesting Day arrangements need to be in place to review, manage and repair them.

4. Briefings for the Shadow Town Council have taken place on the emerging Assets and Services Devolution thinking for the new unitary council too.
5. The procedure for the election of councillors to the new council is also under preparation although the elections themselves will be managed by Somerset Council.

I am grateful to the SWT governance officers in particular who have and are facilitating this process.

