

## SWT Full Council

Tuesday, 28th March, 2023,  
6.15 pm



Somerset West  
and Taunton

The John Meikle Room - The Deane  
House

### [SWT MEETING WEBCAST LINK](#)

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**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.

(Pages 7 - 14)

**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

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. Wellington Place Plan – Adoption**

(Pages 15 - 62)

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

To view Appendix B of the report, click on:

[Document Wellington Place Plan Appendices - Modern Council \(somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](#)

#### **9. Firepool Masterplan – Adoption**

(Pages 63 - 80)

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

To view the appendices of the report, click on:

[Document Firepool Appendices - Modern Council \(somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](#)

#### **10. Chair's Annual Reports**

(Pages 81 - 92)

Chair's Annual Reports for:-

- Audit and Governance Committee
- Community Scrutiny Committee
- Corporate Scrutiny Committee
- Standards Committee

**11. Minutes from the last meeting of each of the Committees**

(Pages 93 - 126)

To sign off the minutes for the following committees:-

- Audit and Governance Committee 13 March 2023
- Community Scrutiny Committee 22 February 2023
- Corporate Scrutiny Committee 1 March 2023
- Standards Committee 23 February 2023
- Executive 15 March 2023 – to follow
- Licensing Committee 20 March 2023 – to follow

**12. To consider reports from Executive Councillors - For Information Only**

(Pages 127 - 182)

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.

**13. Moments of Reflection**

An opportunity for all the Group Leaders to reflect on their time at Somerset West and Taunton Council.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Pritchard', with a horizontal line underneath.

**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](mailto: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.

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

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**SWT Full Council - 7 February 2023**

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Richard Lees, Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Sue Buller, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, Nicole Hawkins, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Simon Nicholls, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Brenda Weston, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, Andrew Pritchard, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas, Kevin Williams, Graeme Thompson, Joe Wharton and Alison Blom-Cooper

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

80. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors M Barr, M Blaker, C Booth, N Cavill, A Govier, B Hall, J Hassall, D Johnson, D Mansell, C Morgan, C Palmer, N Thwaites and K Wheatley.

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

(Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 6 December 2022 circulated with the agenda)

**Resolved** that the minutes of Full Council held on 6 December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

82. **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 I Aldridge	All Items	Williton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Baker	All Items	SCC, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoked 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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	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 S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton	Personal	Spoke and Voted



		Town		
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	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 T Venner	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Wakefield	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	SCC & Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Councillor N Hawkins further declared a personal interest on agenda item 14, Executive Councillor Reports.

### 83. **Public Participation**

Mr Martin Pakes spoke on the Coal Orchard Development:-

My questions related to Councillor Rigby's Report. They were:

1. What steps were taken to obtain the public's views on Council projects and were petitions considered to be important?
2. Under what circumstances would the Council proceed with appointing contractors before receiving planning consent?

Thank you

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation responded and advised Mr Pakes that he could submit his petition to the Executive meeting due to take place on 15 February 2023.

Mrs Angela Martyn submitted the following questions on the Blenheim Gardens Café:-

Question from Angela Martyn for Chris Hall/Cllr Rigby to be read out at the SWT Full Council meeting on 7 February 2023.

Please confirm if the proposed tenant would be required to operate the café within the current Blenheim Gardens Rules i.e.

- Open only when the Gardens were open
- No alcohol sale or consumption within the cafe' or gardens.
- No dogs (apart from assistance dogs) within the cafe' or gardens.

Assuming those rules applied, how would the Somerset Unitary Authority enforce them?

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation responded and advised of the terms of the lease and what would happen if those were not met by the end of March 2023.

Mr Robert Barnes raised concerns on the cleanliness of Taunton town and that the street cleaning machines that ID Verde used were broken. He also raised concerns on housing and homelessness.

The Leader of the Council responded and advised that she would be happy to meet with Mr Barnes and discuss the issues he had raised.

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

The Chair of Council made the following announcements:-

- The Chair reminded councillors of the Civic Service taking place on 26 March 2023.
- The Chair advised councillors that their Related Party Transaction forms were due to be submitted by 8 March 2023.

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

The Leader of the Council made no announcements.

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

No questions had been received.

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

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- The Leader of the Council advised of some changes to appointments within the Liberal Democrat Party.

**Resolved** that Full Council approved:-

- a) Political allocation as attached (Appendix A)

- b) Councillor appointments to Committees (Appendix B)

88. **Somerset West and Taunton Council amendments to Appointments to Outside Bodies**

**Resolved** that Full Council approved:

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

89. **Connecting our Garden Communities - adoption**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were pleased with the report and were keen to see how the work unfolded.
- Concern was raised on some of the surfaces used for the routes and that they were dangerous for users. Councillors hoped that work was completed to rectify the rough paving in the town centre.  
*The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that they would note the point made on surfaces and agreed that some refurbishment was required to ensure routes were made safe for users.*
- Concern was raised that there was no mention of the Taunton Town Council within the report.  
*The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that the elections for the Taunton Town Council were due to take place in May 2023 and that the new councillors could feed into the work once the council had been established.*
- Councillors queried whether the cycleway within the Orchard Grove development would be funded from Section 106 money.  
*The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that the bus routes would be funded by the Bus Improvement Plan (BIP) by Somerset County Council.*
- Councillors queried whether there were any prioritised routes and funding.
- Councillors were pleased to see that Active Travel had included many different users.
- Councillors welcomed the development.
- Councillors suggested that the routes were advertised to promote usage.
- Councillors were pleased to see the report come forward for adoption by Full Council.
- Councillors suggested the use of timed bus lanes or car share lanes for the Orchard Grove development.
- Concern was raised that the BIP funds were only being used within the Taunton area.  
*The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation advised that the funds needed to be used in a transformative way and if they had spread the funds across the whole county, very little impact would have been felt by users, so they had decided to focus the funds within Taunton.*

- Councillors requested a map to be made available for the public to encourage usage of the new routes.
- Councillors thanked offices for all their hard work on the project.

**Resolved** that Full Council:-

2.1 Adopted 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 Agreed 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.

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

**Resolved** 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 grounds that it involved 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).

91. **Commercial Property Investment Update**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised that officers had not used the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) which could impact on future borrowing for the Unitary Council.  
*The Section 151 Officer explained that the property investment had impacted on PWLB borrowing and it would impact for the next couple of years.*
- Concern was raised on the use of short-term borrowing.
- Councillors highlighted the risks mentioned within the auditor's report.
- Concern was raised on the asset values mentioned within the report.  
*The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources gave reassurance on the asset values and that due diligence had been taken in the investments.*
- Councillors highlighted the items marked in red on the Red, Amber and Green (RAG) Report.  
*The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources advised that this was a performance report for the period April to September 2022, so the most recent report would give a more updated picture.*
- Councillors mentioned that Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) had robust arrangements in place and queried how they would be transitioned into the New Council.

*The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources advised that officers across all five councils had worked on joining up all the portfolios, debt and investments to ensure that the same level of robustness was carried forward into the New Council.*

- Councillors mentioned that the SWT Commercial Investment Strategy (CIS) had proved stronger than some of the other councils and that some investments took time to yield any return.
- The Leader of the Council was pleased to second the report and was proud of what the CIS had achieved. It was a strong portfolio to take forward to the New Council.

**Resolved** that Full Council notes the Commercial Property Investment activity and performance for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022

92. **Re-admittance of the Press and Public**

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

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concerns were raised on the Blenheim Gardens Café lease, which included planning compliance, public space protection orders and petitions.

*The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation advised that the works needed to be compliant and that the café would need to be open for business by end of March 2023 otherwise the tenant would be in breach of their lease.*

- Councillors requested an update on the Dragon Project in Taunton.  
*The Portfolio Holder for Culture advised that it was a great public art project for the town centre and that they were excited for the unveiling event which was due to take place on 11 February 2023.*
- Concern was raised on the overemphasis made that members of the public should be IT literate to access council services.  
*The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources advised that the council would always offer alternative ways of contacting the council to offer support to customers.*
- Councillors queried what digital transformation had taken place.  
*The Leader of the Council would provide a written answer.*

(The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm)



*Report Number: SWT 35/23*

# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

## **Full Council – 28 March 2023**

### **Wellington Place Plan – Adoption**

**This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mike Rigby**

**Report Author: Sarah Povall, Principal Planning Policy Officer**

#### **1 Executive Summary/Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 Once adopted, the Place Plan will be referred to as a material consideration in determining planning applications and considering regeneration and conservation activities to ensure we are protecting and enhancing the quality of place in Wellington.
- 1.3 This process follows a period of public consultation, running for 4 weeks, from 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023. Comments and observations made during the consultation process have been considered in this final publication draft of the Wellington Place Plan and can be seen in further detail in the Consultation Statement (Appendix A). The Place Plan has been updated to have regard to responses received.
- 1.4 The Place Plan work will provide a clear evidence base for the new Somerset-wide Local Plan.

#### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Recommendations are that Full Council resolves to:
  - Adopt the Wellington Place Plan as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the area of the Plan; and that
  - The Portfolio Holder, in consultation with the Assistant Director Strategic Place and Planning, be authorised to make minor amendments to the Place Plan prior to publication.

### **3 Risk Assessment (if appropriate)**

- 3.1 The main risk has been not managing to reach a representative proportion of all groups in Wellington, meaning that these voices may not be heard in this consultation exercise. This has been mitigated through our Consultation Strategy. Further information can be found in the Consultation Statement (Appendix A), which sets out the consultation material and forms of engagement to meet a variety of needs; including those who find it difficult to engage.
- 3.2 There is also a significant risk, given the very tight timetable, that the Place Plan might not get adopted by Full Council by vesting day.

### **4 Background and Full Details of the Report**

- 4.1 Somerset West and Taunton Council are producing a Place Plan for Wellington comprising a Vision and Spatial Framework. This is supported by a Delivery Strategy and Action Plan, which are working documents, kept under periodic review along with timescales for delivery. Allies and Morrison, Avison Young and Land Use Consultants have been commissioned to support the Council in preparing the document. The Place Plan will aid the council in its decisions around the development, regeneration and conservation of Wellington moving forward. The Place Plan will feed into the future Somerset Wide Local Plan evidence base.
- 4.2 Wellington is a town with a rich history, impressive landscape setting and strong retail, leisure and employment offer. The town has a market town function for the Somerset West and Taunton District alongside its extensive offer of independent shops and restaurants. The town is subject to unique challenges such as demands on infrastructure and heritage-at-risk, but is also subject to nation-wide challenges such as climate change and shifting retail patterns.
- 4.3 With the delivery of the new railway station, anticipated in May 2025, and the associated push on development opportunities, Wellington needs a holistic framework to guide future growth to support housing and employment needs.
- 4.4 The Place Plan follows the development of the Baseline Report and Vision Document. The Baseline Report sets out the main characteristics of Wellington, including the main highlights and challenges with reference to the planning, urban design, landscape, economic and social context. This was used to inform the visioning exercise, which took place in October 2022, which in turn sets the context for the Place Plan itself.
- 4.5 The Wellington Place Plan can be found in Appendix B.
- 4.6 **Document summary**



#### **4.6.1 Structure of the document**

- Introduction: setting the scene for the project including engagement activities.
- Issues and opportunities: outlining Wellington's rich context including historical analysis, socio-economic character, connectivity and landscape.
- Vision, priorities, and spatial strategies: identification of a vision for Wellington and six key thematic priorities. In addition, this chapter presents a spatial strategy and defines key projects, guidelines and principles.
- Growth scenarios: definition and initial qualitative evaluation of a number of potential geographic growth scenarios across Wellington.
- Next steps: overview of ongoing activities to progress the thinking in the Place Plan, and develop the new Somerset-wide Local Plan.
- Action Plan (Appendix C): SWT has prepared an Action Plan which distils the key project priorities.

#### **4.6.2 Responding to the context**

As part of the Place Plan, we developed a Baseline Report and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report to help us define an understanding of the key issues and opportunities for Wellington. Key topics include connectivity, landscape and identity, resilience of the town centre and community life, heritage and the environment and sustainability.

#### **4.6.3 Vision and key themes**

The Vision: "Wellington will be a successful, welcoming town, clearly rooted in its landscape setting of the Blackdown Hills, and the proud industrial and commercial heritage at Tonedale Mill and Tone Works". It is supplemented by six thematic priorities:

1. An accessible place
2. A town rooted in its setting
3. Celebrating our industrial and commercial heritage
4. A high bar for sustainability
5. A welcoming town and centre
6. A resilient town

#### **4.6.4 Spatial strategies**

Each of the six thematic priorities has been developed into a spatial strategy. The strategies define spatial priorities, potential projects and guidance in relation to the existing town, and its future growth.

The spatial strategies represent a direction of travel and an initial collation of opportunities. They will need to be progressed and developed via the new Somerset-wide Local Plan, and in partnership with local regeneration and community partners, landowners and developers.

#### **4.6.5 Growth scenarios**

Based on an initial understanding of opportunities and constraints, we have defined a range of potential growth scenarios. These identify a potential range of broad locations and set out some of the key considerations which

will help to shape future conversations and dialogue around place-making. Further assessments and evidence base studies will feed into the new Somerset-wide Local Plan, including a comprehensive site allocations process.

#### **4.6.6 Delivery Strategy and Action Plan**

The indicative Action Plan contains a list of potential actions to realise the vision and objectives set out in the Wellington Place Plan. The Action Plan is a working document, kept under periodic review, along with time-scales for delivery. The Action Plan will progress in alignment with the emerging new Somerset-wide Local Plan.

### **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

5.1 The Wellington Place Plan is an important document which will help articulate and translate the Council's strategic objectives into planning policy. This decision is linked to delivering the following Corporate Strategy themes:

- *“A low-carbon, clean, green and prosperous district that attracts high quality employment opportunities and encourages healthy lifestyles”*
- *“A district which offers a choice of good quality homes for our residents, whatever their age and income, in communities where support is available for those who need it”*

### **6 Finance/Resource Implications**

6.1 The cost associated with developing the Wellington Place Plan is being met through officer time and existing budgets. A contract for the work has already been let and fully accounted for in this financial year, 2022/2023

#### **6.2 Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications**

6.3 There are no ongoing financial resource implications beyond vesting day for the new unitary council.

6.4 There are no considerations outside the scope of S24 Direction, covered by SCC General Consent or require SCC Specific Consent.

### **7 Legal Implications**

7.1 The Council's Constitution describes how Somerset West and Taunton will discharge its responsibilities, including responsibilities for the preparation and adoption of the planning policy and guidance, which must be considered and endorsed by Full Council, prior to adoption.

### **8 Climate and Sustainability Implications**

8.1 The Draft Wellington Place Plan seeks to bring together the CNCR, Ecological Emergency Action Plan and climate positive planning for Wellington; together

with a vision for development, conservation and regeneration of the town.

- 8.2 The climate emergency, and our response to it, is a strong theme running throughout the document. The Plan aims to mitigate the climate emergency and adapt to its effects. It covers issues including reducing carbon emissions through walking, cycling and public transport, the location of development in sustainable locations, the energy efficiency of buildings, renewable energy, biodiversity enhancements, tree planting and flood risk.

## 9 **Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

- 9.1 None identified.

## 10 **Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 None at this stage. In order to comply with the public sector equality duty: an Impact Assessments (IA) will be prepared as part of the plan making process. Further, details of the process are also available from:  
<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/your-council/equality-and-diversity/>

## 11 **Social Value Implications**

- 11.1 This project is intended to have a high social value, by promoting community engagement to embrace a shared vision for the town; as well as aspirations as the town continues to grow.

## 12 **Partnership Implications**

- 12.1 SWT has been working collaboratively with Wellington Town Council and Somerset County Council in the development of this document.

## 13 **Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 13.1 None identified.

## 14 **Asset Management Implications**

- 14.1 None identified

## 15 **Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s)**

- 15.1 None

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny/Audit and Governance Committee – No**
- **Full Council – 28 March 2023**

**Reporting Frequency: Once only**

### List of Appendices (background papers to the report)

Appendix A	Wellington Place Plan – Consultation Statement
Appendix B	Wellington Place Plan
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**Somerset West  
and Taunton**

# WELLINGTON PLACE PLAN

*Consultation Statement*

March 2023

*Wellington Place Plan*  
*Consultation Statement*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Somerset West and Taunton Council commissioned consultants Allies and Morrison, Avison Young, and LUC to prepare the Wellington Place Plan, including: a Vision, Spatial Framework, Delivery Strategy and Action Plan. The Place Plan sets out to inform future decisions about the development, regeneration and conservation of the town; and look at potential options for future growth to support housing and employment needs; retail and commercial function; transport systems; culture and heritage.

This Consultation Statement explains how Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) undertook consultation on the Wellington Place Plan. It sets out how SWT has sought participation from communities and stakeholders across the SWT area and covers:

- Which bodies and persons were invited to make comments;
- How those bodies and persons were invited to make comment;
- The material that was subject to consultation; and
- A summary and analysis of the responses received and any issues raised.

This consultation report complies with SWT's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The SCI outlines that the Council is committed to effective community engagement and seeks to use a wide range of methods for involving the community in the plan-making process. SWT's Statement of Community Involvement was adopted in November 2019.

## **2. LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXT**

The new Somerset West and Taunton Council came into being on Monday 1 April 2019 and combined the former West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council into a brand new District council.

Subsequently, in July 2021, the Secretary of State approved a proposal for a new single unitary council to be formed in Somerset, to replace Somerset's current five councils. The new Somerset Council will come into being on 1 April 2023.

The formation of a unitary council in Somerset will have a significant impact on the way all public services (including planning and the Local Plan) are delivered for years to come. The Local Plan (or its equivalent if changed by central government), will need to be embedded into any new structures and cover the geographical area of the new local authority. The background work and consultation so far on the Local Plan 2040 will inform the new Local Plan for a unitary authority, as will work done on the Wellington Place Plan.

Given these timescales and the numerous stages in Local, Mineral and Waste Plan preparation, the existing councils (including Somerset West and Taunton Council) will therefore no longer be progressing new plans through the statutory process based on their individual geographies. Existing county and district councils are working closely to scope the content and timescales for new Development Plan(s) to be prepared in the future as part the single unitary council. This includes ongoing work to progress and align key evidence base documents. Relevant documents, including an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) for the new Somerset Council will be published in due course as the councils work through the transitional arrangements.

This means that although Somerset West and Taunton Council is no longer pursuing the Local Plan Review 2040, consulted upon in 2020, the information gathered through this consultation and evidence base will inform the Development Plan(s) for the new Somerset Council. The Wellington Place Plan will also inform the evidence base for new policies and allocations in the Development Plan(s) for the new Somerset Council

### 3. CONSULTATION SUMMARY

The Wellington Place Plan consultation ran from 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 20 February 2023 and follows a visioning exercise with the community in October 2022. The consultation followed the methods set out in our Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the minimum requirements for public participation in the preparation of a Local Plan, which are to:

Publicise the consultation on the **Council's website**, with evidence base studies and related information also available to view and download;

Make hard copies of documents available at **inspection points** at the Council's offices; and

**Notify** statutory bodies, stakeholders, relevant groups and other individuals or groups on our consultation database – either by email; or letters if they have specifically requested to be contacted by post.

#### 3.1 Purpose of the consultation

- The purpose of the Wellington Place Plan consultation was to:
- To consult formally for at least 4 weeks on the Wellington Place Plan document;
- To gain an understanding for the issues facing the local area and potential ways in which these could be addressed through the Place Plan; and
- To inform the final document.

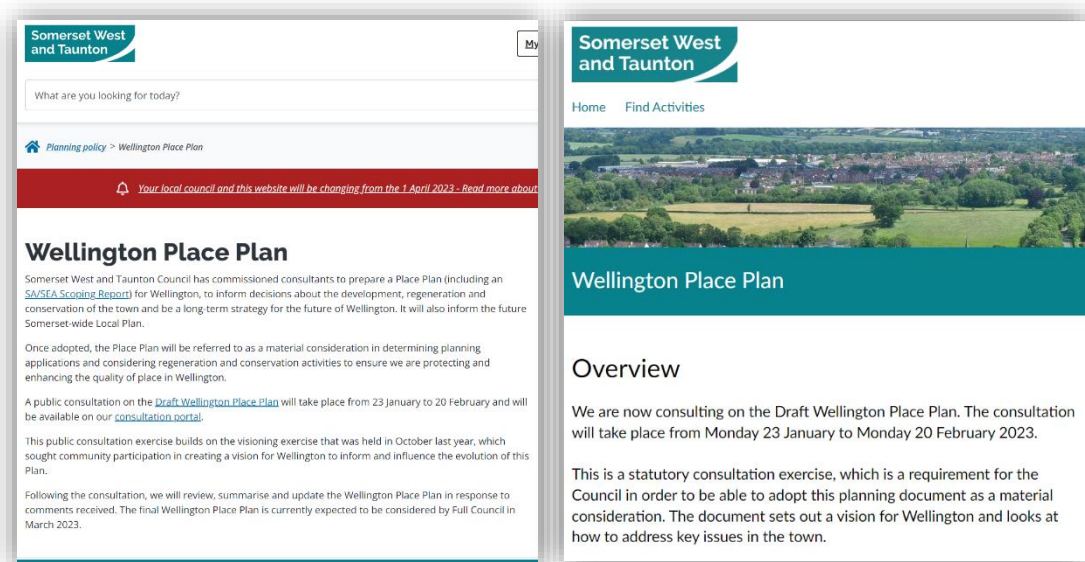


### 3.2 Who was consulted?

- Statutory consultees (defined in the Regulations);
- General public (residents)
- Local businesses
- Parish/town councils
- Special interest groups and organisations
- Community/residents groups, including individuals/groups protected under the Equalities Act
- Consultee database (those who have expressed an interest previously)
- Under-represented groups – in Wellington these have been identified as being residents on low incomes, ethnic minority groups and young people (0-17 years)

### 3.3 Methods

- **Website** On the Planning Policy home page at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/> and on our consultation portal: <https://yoursay.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk>. Baseline Report, Vision Summary, related information and questionnaire available to view and download.



- **Inspection Points** Hard copies of documents and questionnaires available to view at the Wellington Town Council's offices and Wellington Library
- **Email Notifications** sent from the generic email address [strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:strategy@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) to all statutory consultees, stakeholders and relevant groups and other individuals and organisations on our consultation database.

- **Information boards** at Wellington Library.



- **Public exhibitions** Three events at the Pop-Up Shop in Wellington

- Tuesday, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 3pm to 7pm
- Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 3pm to 7pm
- Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> February, 3pm to 7pm



- Social Media



## 4. PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT

The Place Plan has been informed by a diverse programme of engagement activities, which took place alongside our review of the evidence base, feeding into our understanding of opportunities, constraints and key priorities. This has shaped a clear set of thematic principles, projects and plans which respond to the main outcomes from a wide range of conversations with different stakeholders and members of the community.

Engagement activities were held as follows:

- Officers workshop: 11th October 2022 10am-12pm (virtual)
- Members workshop: 18th October 2022 6-8pm (virtual)
- Drop-in event: 20th October 2022 11am-3pm (in-person - Quaker Meeting House)
- Community workshop: 20th October 2022 5.30-7pm (in-person - Wellington Community Centre)
- Survey: 10th-21st October 2022 (virtual and in-person)
- Schools engagement

The big headlines to come out of these engagement sessions centred around five main themes and informed the following vision objectives:

- **Getting around** An accessible place, linking existing and new neighbourhoods with the town centre, prioritising active travel and buses. Making safe and easy connections to the railway station, community facilities, employment areas, surrounding landscape and settlements including Taunton.

- **Landscape and identity** A town respectful of its rural setting, rooted in a productive landscape of growing, craft and industry.
- **Town centre resilience and community life** A welcoming and cared-for centre for all at the heart of Wellington, which meets local needs and draws people in with its charming buildings, social spaces and varied activities and uses. A town which young and old continue to be proud of and where community life grows.
- **Heritage and historic setting** A town proud of its outstanding heritage and Fox Brothers legacy, re-imagining its old buildings and landscapes for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- **Sustainability and environment** A town which sets a high bar for sustainability, drawing on its rich natural resources and local passion for a resilient future.

## 5. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES RECEIVED

SWT received 50 responses to the online consultation and 13 emails or letters from individuals or organisations containing detailed comments. Figure 1, below, is an illustration of what respondents were talking about.



The following summary follows the section format of the draft Wellington Place Plan.

## 5.1 Introduction

### Key points from the consultation

**Content and status of the Plan** Comments in support of the detail and comprehensiveness of the Plan. Greater clarity suggested regarding the status of the Plan and the area in which it covers. Summary of the benefits of the Plan and how they intend to be measured should be provided.

**Sustainable transport approach** Support for improving sustainable links in Wellington to reduce congestion, alongside increasing residential development within the town centre to support businesses. Consideration is needed here as it was felt that implementing traffic blocking policies would decrease trade.

**Facilities and services** Comments related to ensuring Wellington Park is emphasised as an asset to the town in the Plan. Recognition for the convenience offerings of Asda and Lidl. Consideration for the changes to employment and retail pre and post Covid-19 pandemic. Reference to improvements needed to sporting facilities in Wellington.

**Information provided in the Plan** Suggestions for information to be provided regarding employment levels, commuting trends and new/recent housebuilding to balance the historical and social context provided. Reference emerging strategies such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Somerset Tree Strategy.

**Growth areas and promoted sites** The Plan should state clearly that the River Tone forms the northern boundary of development for the North and Tonedale Area. Several development sites shown in North and Tonedale Area should not be included as they are speculative or have been rejected. The Plan should clarify the implications for sites not previously promoted or included in the SHELAA. Several comments suggested additional sites that should be included within the Site Context Plan.

### Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council welcomes support received for the general ambition of the Plan, in particular regarding the detail, comprehensiveness and move to improve sustainable transport links in Wellington. Some helpful comments were received about providing great clarity on the status of the Plan, the area it covers and the position relating to promoted sites.

## 5.2 Issues and opportunities

Out of 42 responses, 83% of respondents supported the main highlights set out for Wellington within the Place Plan and 17% did not agree with the

main highlights. 88% of respondents supported the main challenges set out for Wellington within the Place Plan and 12% did not support the main challenges.

### Key points from the consultation

**Reducing congestion and pollution** Mixed support for reducing emissions in the town centre. Concern that limiting vehicle usage within the town to reduce emissions could cause issue. Parking charges should be low to encourage use of town centre facilities and shops. Majority of comments stated that congestion and pollution are a negative to the town. Car parking should be kept out-of-town. Emphasis should be given to reducing speed limits and providing EV charging points.

**Town centre accessibility** Many comments on the need to provide footways and cycleways. Wider pavements needed, for example, North Street, to enhance use and safety. Roads within the town centre present physical barriers to moving around the shops. Several comments in support of a northern bypass to connect the Station, although adapting the Longforth Road/town centre junction would be required.

**Connectivity to/from Wellington** Many comments received in terms of recognition for connecting Wellington to the wider area. Need for improved link road to Milverton. Cycleway between Wellington and Taunton. Bus services to Tiverton, Wiveliscombe, Exeter, Taunton Station and Wellington Station once opened. Reference potential cycle path between Wellington and Langford Budville. Mention of Grand Western Canal and associated benefits of providing an off-road cycle path.

**Active travel** Strong support for the need for a consistent and clear walking and cycling network across Wellington. Paths should be connected, well-maintained and increased provision of signs and wayfinding. Better accessibility by bike should be a priority.

**Parks and Woodland** Wellington Park should be emphasised more in the Plan. Several comments referred to the need to improve woodland connectivity and that reference should be made to Ancient Woodland.

**Biodiversity and Climate Change** Need to recognise the importance of wildlife corridors and protection of mature habitats that support wildlife diversity. Climate Change challenge should recognise increased rainfall and the need for 'Tree Pits', as part of SuDS to reduce surface water run-off. Several comments on the need for urban greening, particularly in the town centre, for surface water absorption and shade.

## Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council's Climate Emergency declaration has embedded the importance of reducing the need to travel and to use more sustainable and active modes of travel, through a 'Vision and Validate' approach. The Council welcomes the support for improving walking and cycling and the need to facilitate traffic management across the town. In the long-term, removing HGVs is an aspiration and it is a priority to undertake a feasibility study to look at options for a northern relief road. Reference to connectivity to and from Wellington has been noted, such as the Grand Western Canal connection and woodland connectivity. These considerations will be taken into account in the preparation of the final draft.

### 5.3 *Vision and priorities*

"An accessible place" ranked as the highest priority for respondents, followed by "a welcoming town centre" and "a high bar for sustainability"

#### 5.3.1 **An accessible place**

##### **Key points from the consultation**

**Sustainable travel hierarchy** The majority of respondents agreed with the objectives set out for "an accessible place", with particular comments around support for the new railway station, the sustainable travel hierarchy and reducing traffic and congestion in the town centre. It was noted that additional benefit could come from a cycle path to Taunton, a northern relief road and options for traffic calming in the town centre and Chelston roundabout particularly. There were a limited number of responses that didn't agree with the aspiration of reducing car travel.

**Mobility** There were a number of comments around the need to address accessibility and mobility needs, particularly in the context of an ageing population.

**The 5-minute walk** A couple of respondents felt that a 5-minute walk to a bus stop was an unachievable aspiration.

**Railway station and modal hub** Along with support for the new railway station, support was put forward for elements of a multi-modal hub with, for example, secure cycle and motorcycle parking, and that new development should be well related to this.

## Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council is pleased that there is general support for the objectives set out for “an accessible place” and particularly ambitions for a railway station, modal hub and reducing traffic and congestion in the town centre. Work continues on the delivery of the railway station, while the accompanying Action Plan seeks to undertake a Movement and Traffic Study for Wellington. There is need to address accessibility and mobility needs, particularly in the context of an ageing population, and this will be further explored in the Movement and Traffic Study.

The Council’s Climate Emergency declaration has embedded the importance of reducing the need to travel and to use more sustainable and active modes of travel. This is a huge challenge in our predominantly rural area where the public transport network is very limited.

### 5.3.2 A town rooted in its setting

#### Key points from the consultation

**General** The majority of respondents to this question agreed with the objectives set out for “a town rooted in its setting”. Responses received were very positive, including comments such as: “sounds lovely”; “pretty comprehensive”; and “impressed”.

**Green corridor** Particular comments were received supporting the objective of retaining and preserving the green corridors and wildlife edges. References were made to the opportunities surrounding the former Grand Western Canal and river Tone.

**Rural setting** A number of comments were received expressing support for preserving the rural setting and the discrete separate identity of satellite villages. The difficulty of accessing nearby villages with public transport was noted.

**Market town** Further support was given to Wellington maintaining its identity as a market town, as well as encouraging crafts, “makers” and rural agricultural industries.

## Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council welcomes the support received for the objectives set around “a town rooted in its setting”. There were some helpful comments around the rural setting and opportunities around the former Grand Western Canal and the river Tone.



### 5.3.3 Celebrating our industrial and commercial heritage

#### Key points from the consultation

**Existing buildings** Respondents were positive about the objectives set out for this theme, with particular comments about the opportunities this would give to Wellington. Responses also mentioned the need to reuse the existing buildings and explore circular economy opportunities.

**Employment** A number of comments received expressed a desire to celebrate more recent industries in Wellington, for example, Relyon, Pritex and Swallowfield. One commented that these objectives should “hopefully give employment and focus back to the town”.

**History** Mention was made of the narrative surrounding Wellington’s wider history, with views that this should extend beyond industrial and commercial aspects. One respondent mentioned the potential importance of pre-historic history, which extends beyond built heritage. There was also commentary about the former Grand Western Canal, with views put forward that this could be a heritage corridor, as well as a wildlife corridor.

#### Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The majority of respondents agreed with the objective set out for “celebrating our industrial and commercial heritage”. The Council welcomes the positive response to objectives set out, which continue to exist in other businesses and major employers in Wellington today. The Wellington Place Plan will celebrate this heritage as well as create opportunities to support existing employers in Wellington today.

### 5.3.4 A high bar for sustainability

78% of respondents agreed with the objectives set out for “a high bar for sustainability”; while 22% did not.

#### Key points from the consultation

**General support** Strong support for objectives and that recognition for adapting to climate change is crucial and should be a top priority. Concerns around the cost of net zero policies and that they are unachievable in the time frame of 2030, priorities should be on ensuring access to food, energy and housing for all. Further understanding needed as to how they interplay with or support new development and that examples should be provided.

**Sustainable transport** Mixed support for the 15-minute neighbourhood concept and concerns around a zero-tolerance approach to private journeys. Responses also suggested the need for development to incorporate EV charging points.

**Zero carbon homes and energy generation** Strong support for zero carbon homes and local energy generation, however it was felt that more emphasis was needed in the document. Reference to solar panels on commercial and residential development needed. Community energy generation and local energy resilience should be explicit within the Plan. Sites for community energy generation should be considered alongside industrial and residential development. Energy efficiency improvements for existing housing stock should also be recognised within the Plan. Support for the energy potential of the River Tone and that the need outweighs heritage concerns. Some concern over the affordability of zero carbon homes and how older buildings can embrace such measures without being replaced.

**Food production** Support for provision of allotments and community gardens. Consideration needed for investment in farming land rather than use as 'prime' building land.

**Trees** Differing support as some suggested the need to include an increase in tree cover to cool the town during heatwaves, which are increasing from climate change. Others raised that trees in the town won't mitigate climate change and action on a larger scale is needed.

### **Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council**

The Council is pleased that there is general support for the objectives set out within "a high bar for sustainability". The Council has made a commitment to respond to the Climate Emergency and this embedded the importance of reducing the need to travel and to use more sustainable and active modes of travel through a 'Vision and Validate' approach. The Climate Emergency declaration also drives the need to increase tree cover across the town and deliver net zero housing on new and existing housing stock. Further detail on tree cover, community energy generation, allotments and gardens can be found in the spatial priorities for "a high bar for sustainability". Examples of how the objectives will be achieved will be included in an Action Plan.

#### **5.3.5 A welcoming town and centre**

Out of 40 responses to the question, "do you agree with the objectives set out for "a welcoming town and centre", 90% of respondents agreed with the objectives and 10% did not agree with the objectives set out.

## Key points from the consultation

**Centre facilities** Agreement that there is a lack of health and essential facilities within the town. Suggested that there should be more affordable shops for clothing to remove the need to travel to Taunton. Support for events in the town such as markets. Support for encouraging independent shops, with suggestions such as offering cheaper rates and further pop-up shops. Some concern about shopping behaviour post-Covid.

**Social spaces** Suggestions that the town centre needs to be social centre as well as a retail centre. Support for the need to create more of a centre within the town. Suggestions received around public realm enhancements through more tree planting; and considering measures to prevent light and noise pollution.

**Intergenerational sociability** Strong support for creating a town that meets the needs of all ages and to further encourage intergenerational sociability. Several comments received about meeting the needs of a younger population. Suggestions included: community groups; venues; events and a well-maintained skatepark.

**Centre access** Support for improving town centre accessibility and prioritise pedestrians within the sustainable travel hierarchy. Suggestions made about considerations for easing congestion in the town centre.

**Evening economy** Support for Wellington town centre to be livelier in the evening. Mixed support for evening bus service, while some viewed it as positive, others felt it could not improve if they had to rely on buses.

## Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council welcomes the support for the objectives set out for “a welcoming town and centre”. We acknowledge the need for affordable shops and essential services within the town centre to remove the need to travel to Taunton. Investment in the town and prioritising making Wellington a welcoming place will help achieve this. It is a top priority, with further detail shown in the Action Plan. Other suggestions have been considered in the Action Plan including the affordability of accessing the town centre; the need for a traffic study when considering a one-way system; increasing the evening economy and associated activities; and the need for recreational space for young people. The Council welcomes support for sustainable access in the town centre and is committed to a sustainable travel hierarchy.

### 5.3.6 A resilient town

Out of 41 responses to the question, “do you agree with the objectives set out for “a resilient town”, 76% of respondents agreed with the objectives and 24% did not agree with the objectives set out.

#### Key points from the consultation

**Wider economic ecosystem** There was a view that, with many people now working from home, independent shops might not find it sustainable to enter the high street. There were a number of comments around the need to support small and local businesses, over larger industries, and for green and non-green businesses alike.

**Innovation** Comments that innovation is a broad concept that is difficult to measure into the future. Support for small-scale innovation is important.

**Young people** Large support for a high level of education and opportunities for all age groups and opportunities for young people to gain employment in the town. Many stated that accessing skills, training and jobs for young people is a need.

**Transport links** Most people seemed in support for improving bus and bike links within the town to access employment sites, particularly linking the Chelston area. Support for the railway station and the opportunities for young people this brings.

**Housing** Suggestions that resilience currently focuses on employment, but reference should be made to addressing housing and the role it has in supporting a resilient town.

#### Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council welcomes the support for the objectives set for “a resilient town”. We acknowledge the need to recognise housing and the role it plays in supporting a resilient town. These considerations will be taken into account in the preparation of the final draft. The revised Action Plan, which supports the Wellington Place Plan, sets out the top priority of preparing a Town Centre Delivery Strategy, which will set out plans for delivering town centre projects. The Delivery Strategy sets out: how to support small scale innovation; access to skills, jobs and training for young people; and support for small and local businesses.

### 5.3.7 Growth scenarios: North and Tonedale

Out of 43 responses to the question, “do you agree with the constraints, challenges and opportunities set out for the North and Tonedale area”, 79% agreed and 21% disagreed.

#### Key points from the consultation

**Development in North and Tonedale area** Mixed support was received for development in this area. Comment that development north of the railway line would detract from walking routes around the River Tone, harm the landscape setting and be too remote. Suggestions that it should be made clearer that the River Tone forms the northern boundary of development. Other suggestions that the former Great Western Canal forms a natural boundary. Concerns about distance to the town centre and that new homes would require the co-location of new services and facilities.

**Waste water plant** Comments raised that development around the waste water plant should be avoided to protect the existing green areas and avoid congestion. Plan should highlight that the plant be safeguarded in accordance with Policy DM5 of the Somerset Minerals and Waster Core Strategy.

**Wellington recycling centre** Points raised around congestion issues. Development must consider costs of enhancing or providing a new site.

**Heritage-led development** General support for heritage-led development. Some comments that development of heritage areas should be an optional extra and priority should be given to providing attractive business facilities.

**Station-led intensification** General support for station-led intensification with employment opportunities and ability to build at densities to reduce energy loss. Further support due to access to Lidl and links to cycle routes.

**Station accessibility** Suggestions that the railway station needs free bike and motorbike parking. Support for footpath connections to the railway station from all parts of the town. Concerns that parking in North and Tonedale area will be affected by train station users.

**Congestion and active travel** Concern that not everyone can walk or cycle and that cars need to be able to access all areas of Wellington. Further concern that growth to the north will add pressure to roads in and around the town centre and a northern link route is needed. Issues raised regarding capacity of Chelston roundabout. Support for a park and ride to service sports facilities as a solution to car parking issues. Emphasis placed on Sustrans Route 3, which is a leisure rather than commuter route.

**Other site and policy-specific comments** Concern around housing development sites shown in the Tonedale area as they are either speculative or have been previously rejected. Unsupportive of reducing green corridor from its current policy provision.

### **Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council**

The Council welcomes the responses around the constraints, challenges and opportunities set out for the North and Tonedale area. There were some particularly important comments around the location of the development boundary to the north of Wellington in relation to the walking routes and waterways.

### **5.3.8 Growth scenarios: Rockwell Green**

Out of 38 responses to the question, “do you agree with the constraints, challenges and opportunities set out for Rockwell Green area?”, 68% agreed and 22% did not agree.

#### **Key points from the consultation**

**Development in flood zones** Comments agreed that development should not occur on flood risk areas.

**Green wedge and urban sprawl** Many comments in support of maintaining the green wedge between Rockwell Green and Wellington and the need to preserve the Basins. Ribbon development should be avoided and encroachment onto surrounding settlements. Support for integrating sites into existing settlements. Need to prevent urban sprawl.

**Development in Rockwell Green** Some responses expressed the view that Rockwell Green is over-developed and that further could add strain to traffic and local amenities. Concern was raised about the use of Popes Lane as a rat run; the impact on views Blackdown Hills AONB; and distance to employment and public services, promoting car dependency.

**Other Comments** General support for constraints and challenges within the Plan and for development on brownfield land, although several comments weren't supportive of growth in Rockwell Green. Need for recreational space for young people and lighting noted.

### **Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council**

The Council welcomes the responses around the constraints, challenges and opportunities set out for the Rockwell Green area. The Council proposes to extend and protect the 'Green Corridor' including the Basins for biodiversity and to protect the distinctiveness and separateness of Rockwell Green. These considerations will be taken into account in the preparation of the final draft.

### **5.3.9 Growth scenarios: South**

Out of 37 responses to the question, "do you agree with the constraints, challenges and opportunities set out for the South area?", 76% agreed and 24% disagreed.

#### **Key points from the consultation**

**Development south of A38** Widespread agreement that there should be no development south of the A38, which represents a natural boundary, and could exacerbate congestion issues. Land retains a rural setting for Wellington and should be retained for farming. Need to consider impacts on Blackdown Hills AONB. Some comments suggested the challenge with restricting development south of the A38 is that it has already been breached by allocations and development around Chelston. Plan should note the number of residents that identified the A38 as a boundary and the questions they were asked.

**South area** Suggestions that development should be restricted north of the A38. Comments that development in the southern area of Wellington is too far from the town centre and will encourage urban sprawl and car use. Suggestion that the area was an ideal location for a school and playing fields. More mention was needed to Wellington School and its potential contribution to the area. Support for development alongside Westpark.

**Sustainable transport links** Views that the south area has limited bus service, which should be improved to connect to the town centre and settlements outside Wellington. Consider impacts of development on congestion along A38. Improvements needed along school routes of Pyles Thorne Road and Wellesley Park, which are congested and lack pavements. Comments that the existing walking routes in this area should be protected and improved. Need for cycle route to link to the train station.

### **Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council**

The Council welcomes the support shown for the constraints, challenges and opportunities set out for the South area. Some particularly noticeable comments were in relation to support for the statement that: “the area is not considered suitable for development and no growth scenarios have been suggested for this area”.

#### **5.3.10 Growth scenarios: East and Chelston**

Out of 38 responses to the question, “do you agree with the constraints, challenges and opportunities for the East/Chelston area?”, 74% agreed and 26% disagreed.

#### **Key points from the consultation**

**Sustainable transport** Support that local people need good, safe access by bike and bus, which should be prioritised. Support for development around Chelston due to good public transport links. Suggestion that a park and ride serving sports facilities located to the west of Wellington and in the town centre would solve parking and congestion issues. Further concerns around Chelston roundabout not able to cope with extra traffic.

**Development at Chelston** Mixed support for further development at Chelston. Suggestions that diversity of employment is needed for all levels. Views that development should be largely commercial, but some suggestions for mixed-use which would enable growth of the town without additional pressure on the town centre due to links with the A38 and M5. Many comments of support for positive approach taken in the Plan in relation to commercial development and the need to ensure uses do not compete with the town centre. Still some concern that land would move businesses outside the town centre making it unaffordable.



**Sustainability of development** Further discussion needed around carbon footprint of development. Comments around ensuring higher densities for homes to reduce land footprint. Clarity required as to whether energy generation was included in industrial expansion. Further consideration needed on impact of lighting on environmental and light pollution, the need for housing to cater to an ageing population and flood risks in the area.

**General comments** Evidence needed to justify expansions highlighted in the Plan. Poole area brownfield sites ideal for business development. Area around M5 should be kept free from development to avoid J27 mistakes.

### **Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council**

Finally, the Council welcomes the support for the constraints, challenges and opportunities set out for the East/Chelston area within the Plan. The consideration of housing densities is to be dealt with within the new Somerset-wide Local Plan. The Council also recognises the need to protect the town centre offer, however, there needs to be a balance with promoting economic growth through responding to a need for industrial space. These considerations will be taken into account in the preparation of the final draft.

## 5.4 Spatial Strategies

### 5.4.1 An accessible place

#### Key points from the consultation

The majority of respondents agreed with the priorities, projects and guidance set out for making an accessible place. Respondents prioritised the new railway station and bus services improvements, followed closely by an integrated cycling network and investment in footpaths.

**Sustainable travel hierarchy** A significant majority of respondents expressed support for the sustainable travel hierarchy, suggesting that sustainable transport needs to be made the easiest option, moving away from car-centric development. Particular comments were made about the need for investment in cycling infrastructure and public transport, to support this, along with reducing car parking in new developments. There was a view that this would help aid congestion in arterial roads and the town centre. Two respondents expressed the view that private car use should not be discouraged; and one noted the need to feel safe and secure when walking and cycling at night.

**Walking and cycling** The Langford Budville to Wellington cycle route was mentioned, with ongoing discussions with SCC about feasibility and funding. It was noted that Sustrans Route 3 is unsuitable for commuting and that a more direct alternative to Taunton was required to fulfil these purposes. There was wide-spread support for improving walking and cycling infrastructure, with comments particularly related to ensuring integrated provision in new developments. There were a couple of respondents who noted the need to have particular regard for accessibility, with consideration of material used to surface paths and needs of an ageing population. It was also noted that walking, cycling and bus provision needs to be provided to the existing employment area of Chelston.

**Pubic transport** There was a large amount of support for the new railway station. Comments were also received about providing secure motorbike/scooter parking at the station. A number of respondents expressed a desire for a reliable, regular and affordable bus service, while one respondent noted that “a 22B service was trialed in around 2010 by First, covering southern Wellington. It was not sustainable, presumably because of low density, low levels of commuting and high car ownership.” Concern was raised that a Park and Ride would be unsuccessful, given current levels of free or cheap parking in the town centre.

## Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council welcomes the large amount of support that has been given to the priorities, projects and guidance set out for making an accessible place and particularly ambitions for a railway station, modal hub and reducing traffic and congestion in the town centre. The accompanying Action Plan seeks to undertake a Movement and Traffic Study for Wellington, which will look at particular issues to do with walking, cycling and public transport, ensuring integrated provision in new developments.

The County Council's Active Travel Team continue to look at feasibility options for the Wellington-Taunton cycle route and Langford Budville-Wellington route.

### 5.4.2 A town rooted in its setting

#### Key points from the consultation

The majority of respondents agreed with the priorities, projects and guidance set out for "a town rooted in its setting". Respondents prioritised "retaining and enhancing green corridors" and "supporting local food and craft producers"; followed closely by "preserving and enhancing landscape and views" and "identifying spaces to support local food and craft businesses".

**Local setting** Many positive responses were received about the priorities, projects and guidance set out for this theme; and particularly supporting local business, markets and craft stalls. It was also noted that while there is the potential for Poole to be a space for promoting food, arts and crafts, there are a number of different waste sites/businesses in the area that need to be safeguarded.

**Green corridors** All the comments received were supportive of retaining and enhancing green corridors. Two comments received did not want any more expansion or housing development.

## Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The support for the principles, projects and guidance for "a town rooted in its setting" came across very strongly through the responses received. The Council notes that respondents were keen to promote and support local food, arts and crafts, and measures to deliver these priorities will be set out in the Town Centre Delivery Plan, which is a priority under the Action Plan.

### 5.4.3 Celebrating our industrial and commercial heritage

#### Key points from the consultation

The majority of respondents agreed with the projects, principles and guidance set out for “celebrating our industrial and commercial heritage”. Respondents prioritised “preserving and adapting empty town centre buildings” and “Tonedale Mill and Tone Works”; followed by “improving frontages on historic buildings” and “training for local residents in craft skills and conservation”.

The responses received on this section of the document were positive and the priorities supported. There were particular comments around wanting to save the mill, with others articulating a desire to have local workshops on traditional craft skills like spinning and weaving. One respondent questioned how relevant these projects would be to the majority of residents in Wellington.

#### Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council continues to support the restoration of Tonedale Mill and Tone Works, working alongside Heritage England and seeking further opportunities for funding. The Council is pleased to see continued support for these projects.

One element of the Action Plan will be to support the preparation of a *Somerset-wide skill strategy and action plan*, which can consider training in particular skills.

### 5.4.4 A high bar for sustainability

The top three priorities for “a high bar for sustainability” were to protect and enhance ecology and habitats; promote active travel and protect and expand allotments and orchards.

Out of 36 responses to the question, “do you agree with the priorities, projects and guidance set out for setting a high bar for sustainability”, 94% agreed with the priorities, projects and guidance and 6% did not agree with the priorities, projects and guidance.

## Key points from the consultation

**Priority order** General support for the priorities, projects and guidance, but respondents felt that the priority order needs to reflect the protection of our environment rather than development and destruction of it.

**New development** Concerns that Wellington had massively increased in size over the last few years and could not cope in relation to services. Comments suggested EV charging points should be included in new developments and that community energy generation should go beyond hydro sources. Further comments stated that new development must be fully sustainable. Development Plans should consider the carbon impact of infrastructure provision when identifying locations for development.

**Retrofitting existing buildings** Support for retrofitting and reusing existing buildings rather than constructing new. Consideration should be given to space and storage designed in for recycling and waste.

**Biodiversity net gain** While there was support for biodiversity net gain, several comments suggested that 10% net gain will be a legal requirement soon and the Council should be ambitious and pledge 20% or aim higher.

**Young people** Consider young people when regenerating activity areas.

**Carbon neutrality and water pollution** Concern that carbon neutrality will shrink the town and cause poverty, which does not encourage innovation and social coherence. Need for phosphate, sewage and other agricultural pollution of waterways to be urgently addressed.

**15 minute neighbourhoods** Differing support for 15 minute policies.

## Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council is pleased that there is general support for the priorities, projects and guidance set out within the section for “a high bar for sustainability”. Protection of our environment needs to work with development. There is a requirement to support housing and employment need. This must happen in a sustainable way and to protect the environment. Any proposals to be brought forward will be supported by a Sustainability Appraisal to ensure this. Furthermore, the need for development plans to consider the carbon impact of infrastructure provision when identifying development locations will be a consideration for the new Somerset-wide Local Plan. Somerset EV Charging Strategy will influence policy and locations of EV charge points.

### 5.4.5 A welcoming town centre

The top three priorities for a 'welcoming town and centre' were to improve key junctions so they are pedestrian friendly; match uses with vacant buildings; and support and expand the regular market.

Out of 35 responses to the question "do you agree with the priorities, projects and guidance for creating a welcoming town and centre", 86% agreed with the priorities, projects and guidance and 14% did not agree.

#### Key points from the consultation

**Repurposing existing buildings** Widespread support for repurposing the empty Dolphin pub building to use as a youth club. Some suggestion that it should become a community pub again and not be limited to youth, could support youth during the day, but should be enjoyed by all ages. Concern flats upstairs would not contribute to a safe, shared environment and instead could become an escape room or other games venue. Further support for empty pubs and other buildings to be used as public buildings to enhance the towns needs such as a post office, banks and community hubs. Mixed support for using empty buildings for housing with some in favour of making use of empty units and some suggesting conversion to residential would take away from the town's character.

**Sports facilities and activities** Prioritise fun of young people and adults to improve mental wellbeing. Pump track needed for outdoor leisure facilities. Comments in relation to need to update the skate park along with lighting to ensure safety. Concern that the rugby club would expand into the adjacent woodland as implied within the Plan.

**Other concerns** Too many houses being built, and that private car use should not be discouraged. Need for GP surgeries and dentists. Town centre needs an injection of ideas and renovations.

#### Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council

The Council is pleased with the support for the ambition to renovate the former Dolphin pub. Comments regarding ideas for use have been noted and are to be considered within the Action Plan, along with addressing the expressed need for recreational space for young people.

Investment into the town centre is a major priority, which is recognised within the Action Plan.

### 5.4.6 A resilient town

The top three priorities for “a resilient town” were to support the needs of local employers; growth of green economy industries; and the regeneration of Tonedale Mill and Tone Works.

Out of 36 responses to the question, “do you agree with the priorities, projects and guidance set out for a resilient town?”, 83% agreed with the priorities, projects and guidance and 17% did not agree.

#### Key points from the consultation

**Traffic and Tonedale Mill** Variety of points raised in relation to traffic in Wellington. Point that traffic is an issue at Chelston roundabout and can back up along the A38. Mixed support for regenerating Tonedale Mill, particularly in relation to traffic – views expressed that development needs to be in conjunction with a northern link road to manage traffic volumes. Others showed support for converting the Mill into flats and micro-businesses.

**Employment** Support for providing jobs and encouraging employers into the town, as well as training, events and activities, but suggestions that job opportunities should be provided for all levels and there was a need to consider the financial abilities of the residents.

**Town centre** Concerns that inhibiting outside traffic from easy and free access to the town centre is inhibiting the town from being a diverse and specialised trade centre. Support for utilising vacant upper floors in the town centre for residential purposes to ensure people are present in the town at night. Support for encouraging small businesses into ground floors.

**Green industries and waste** Suggestion that reuse and recycling space be provided for green industries and encouragement given to operate circular economy principles.

**Broadband speed** Mixed support for improving gigabit digital connectivity with some suggesting improving internet speed should be the top priority.

**Other document changes** Comments relating to specific planning applications and Wellington Strategic Employment Site under Policy SS5 of the Core Strategy. Further reference should be made to physical activities other than walking or cycling, such as artistic and relaxation activities for youth, schools and higher education establishments. Further detail needed to describe a resilient town and how it is achieved.

### **Initial remarks from Somerset West and Taunton Council**

Support received for the priorities, projects and guidance for “resilient town” is very welcome. The Action Plan sets out particular priorities for the Council going forward, including: a Town Centre Delivery Strategy; a Wellington Traffic and Movement Study; and a Somerset-wide skills strategy and action plan. These actions seek to take forward points raised about traffic; town centre investment; and skills and employment needs. Commentary on the Place Plan will be also be taken into account in the preparation of the final draft.





# WELLINGTON PLACE PLAN

## *Indicative Action Plan*

March 2023

Page 49

Version	Purpose	Date
1	To accompany publication of WPP	15 March 2023
2		

Note:

The Delivery Strategy and Action Plan are working documents, updated periodically in collaboration with partners.

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## PART 1: DELIVERY STRATEGY

At a town-wide scale the delivery programme for the Place Plan will be coordinated and led by the Council. The Council's role will be to establish and lead the governance structure, undertake direct activities and infrastructure projects, and coordinate activities undertaken by the private sector and third sector.

### Funding

At a Programme level the funding could come from a number of sources:

- Government regeneration and transport funding including Levelling Up Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Brownfield Land Release Fund, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Department for Transport (DfT) and Network Rail.
- Regional funding via Head of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HoTSW LEP) – which is not directly accessed by the Council.
- Historic England, Lottery, Arts Council, Environment Agency and other specialist national funders for heritage, cultural and environmental projects.
- Research and Development and innovation funding – funding to business and for infrastructure from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and government research bodies.
- Climate Change and Carbon Reduction – various sources of project funding through government and its agencies.
- Council funding – through revenue and capital programmes including borrowing and recycling land receipts.
- Public Sector asset base - this should be coordinated through the local authority's One Public Estate Programme liaising with the Programme Board to ensure all public sector landowners are using their asset base to meet the objectives of the Place Plan and to create joint service efficiencies – it includes all public sector assets national and local government, national agencies, blue light services, education and NHS.
- Private sector investment including planning contributions. Many private sector growth projects will be viable and there will be a light touch requirement to ensure they are adding value and contributing to the Place Plan. Other projects may have marginal viability and risk which require public interventions to facilitate delivery. Planning contributions from developers including direct works, S106 and CIL should be prioritised in accordance with Place Plan. Private sector investment will cover a wide range of sectors – developers and landowners, funding institutions, infrastructure providers, retailers and occupiers, start-ups SMEs and large companies, and public - private partnerships.

- Short-term projects provide an opportunity to seek funding through grass roots organisations, charities and community initiatives.

### Management capacity and governance

The Council will need the expertise and capacity in-house to lead the project over several years with external support as required. A dedicated governance structure for the project will ensure accountability and transparency, particularly as the Council is committing to strong community involvement in the governance structure.

The Council will require a multi-departmental resource, including: planning, heritage, economic development, transport and climate change.

### Delivery commentary on key themes

#### **Overview**

The Place Plan sets out six key themes and spatial strategies. These provide a clear structure for the various priorities and projects which will drive the implementation of the Place Plan. This section provides an overview of the main delivery considerations relating to each of the themes.

The phasing of key projects is then set out alongside a summary Action Plan. It is envisaged that the Action Plan and projects will be developed further by the Council and their key delivery partners as part of the process of developing the Local Plan.

#### ***An accessible place***

Improving transport infrastructure is at the heart of the Place Plan and it is important to set the tone for the programme by undertaking short term improvements which establish the basis for the prioritisation of larger infrastructure projects in the future.

The Council will develop policies and work closely with delivery partners including house builders and developers to deliver these improvements to infrastructure.

The Council will also seek to establish a high bar of quality to ensure that infrastructure outcomes are in accordance with the guidance set out in the Place Plan.

#### ***A town rooted in its setting***

It is important to strengthen the independent character of Wellington's economy as part of the area's distinct character. Projects and interventions should seek to generate greater critical mass, and, where appropriate, clustering.

The Council will continue to work with the Town Council and partners on town centre enhancements including markets and events.

Other opportunities include the re-purposing of underused buildings for activities such as farm shops, craft, and local workspace uses. Where viability is challenging, the Council will explore to support these activities, such as exploring a small property conversion programme. Developers will be encouraged to provide low cost workspace for these sectors.

Businesses looking to expand in the artisan food and farm shop sectors will be encouraged to raise awareness and liaise with the wider Somerset industry networks for sources of support.

Funding for this theme may also be available as part of larger scale regeneration bids for the town, such as the Levelling Up Fund.

### ***Celebrating our industrial and commercial heritage***

The town is fortunate to have a combination of modern workspace on business parks next to the motorway, and characterful, historic employment areas in the town centre and at Tonedale, therefore appealing to a wide range of occupiers and sectors.

The relocation of major employers Relyon and Swallowfield to a more suitable out of town location remains a long term ambition thereby releasing a key area for high density mixed-use regeneration. Suitable sites should be kept under review for this.

The Council will use its landholding to drive regeneration of the key historic assets at Tonedale and Tone Works. Historic England are a key partner in helping seek investment.

### ***A high bar for sustainability***

New developments must be high quality, sustainable and zero-carbon, aligning with the Council's Climate Positive Planning Guidance and Districtwide Design Guide.

Where possible, the Council will work with partners to access funding to support the private sector to make transformations to more sustainable outcomes. Government funding for climate change initiatives may be available for this in the future.

For community heat/power networks, the Council will explore opportunities for public-private partnership formation.

Develop Local Plan policy requiring all new development to be zero carbon and climate resilient by 2030.

### ***A welcoming town and centre***

The Council will consider opportunities for informal and formal partnership working to drive the regeneration of the town centre. This could include public-private partnerships between the Council and Registered Social Landlords and housebuilders to deliver the affordable homes

The Council will explore opportunities to use investment to facilitate positive development outcomes. For example, this could include land acquisition and risk sharing on pre-construction budgets to pump-prime the market to undertake new and retrofit development for low carbon, affordable homes.

### ***A resilient town***

It is recommended that further assessments are undertaken by the Council's Economic Development team to look at the skills requirements including specialist heritage and craft skills , needs of the major employers, and links to green industrial growth plans across the County.

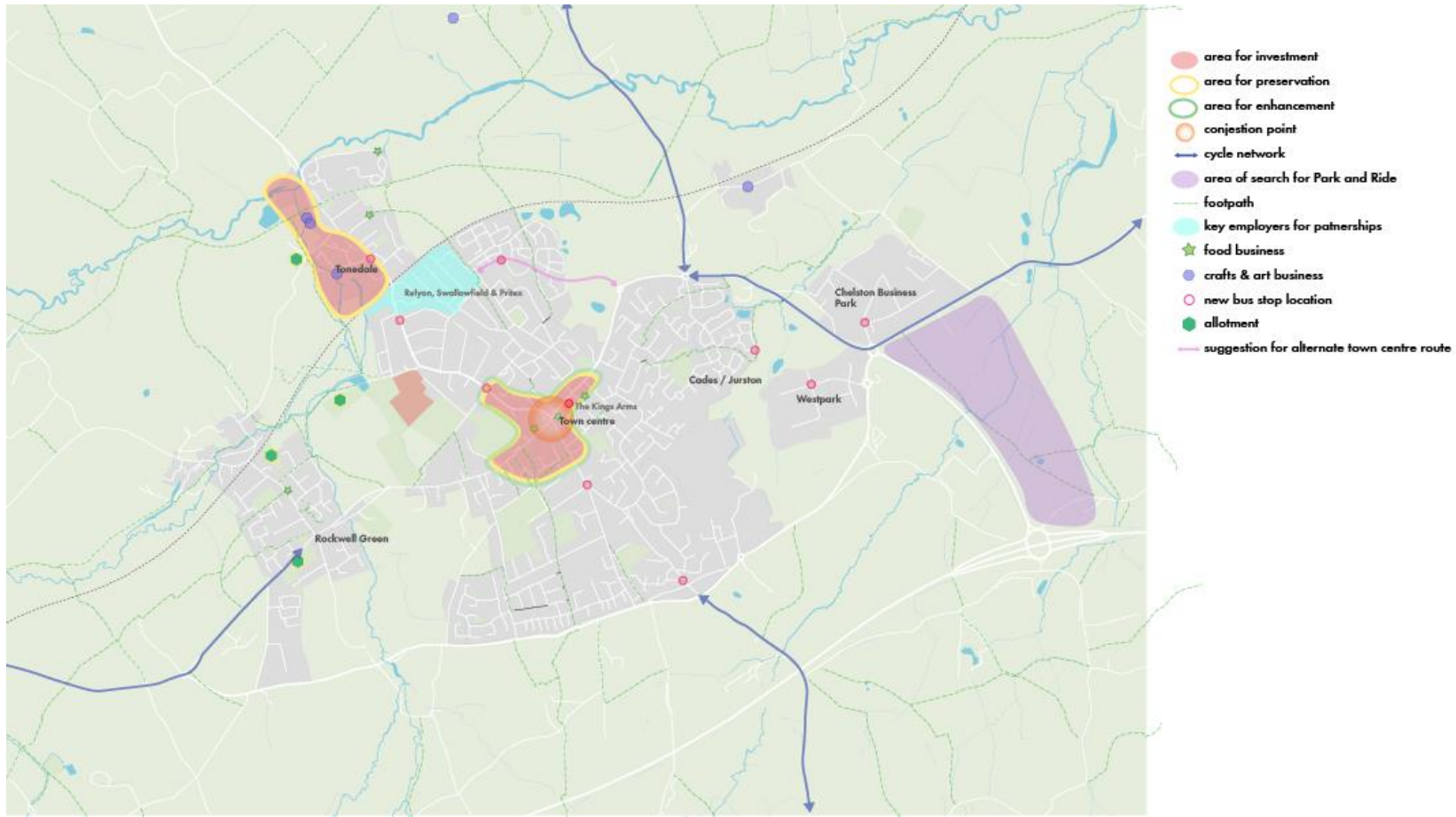
The Council will also consider the preparation of a detailed demand strategy for workspace from start-up and grow-on space to stand alone developments and appropriate mix of heritage buildings like Tonedale and new build at Chelston, and in the strategic growth areas.

As noted in the growth area commentary below, Tonedale/Tone Works is a long term public-private regeneration project which will require multi £m investment including significant public investment. Due to the complexity and timescales of this project, the Council will consider a bespoke public-private governance structure to support the delivery of the project, potentially in the form of a local development company.

Developments in the Chelston area will generally be led by the private sector, with Council influencing the quality and form of developments through the Place Plan and planning policy. For instance it may be a priority to have small units for start-ups, scale-ups and higher value knowledge based sectors rather than distribution sheds, restaurant drive-ins and trade counters. The Council will work with developers to ensure the right balance of sectors.

Wellington's businesses should take advantage of economic growth in Taunton both through the links to sites like Firepool and Nexus 25 business park, and skills and business support programmes. Wellington based knowledge SMEs could benefit from links to this wider supply chain, labour supply, and accessibility between the towns.

The Council will consider the formation of a mechanism to provide dedicated resources and leadership. There is also scope to extend the role of the Community Interest Company and community asset transfer and social enterprise activity in addition to commercially driven development.

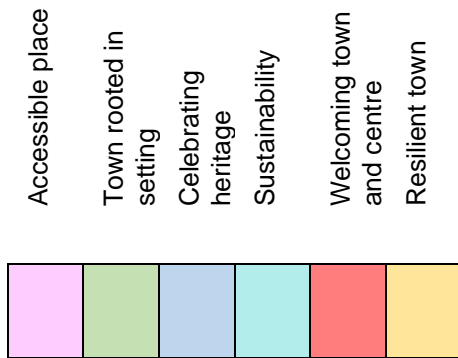




## PART 2: INDICATIVE ACTION PLAN

This Indicative action plan contains a list of 22 potential actions to realise the vision and objectives set out in the Wellington Place Plan. The timescales for delivery will be kept under review and align with the new Somerset-wide Local Plan, once adopted. The impacts and cost implications are as yet only high level in nature and will need to be built on with more detailed work in due course. The Wellington Place Plan document explains the process that has been gone through to produce this indicative action plan. The table below identifies the following for each action:

- The relevant **objective** from the Wellington Place Plan;



- The high-level **impact** either for the district, or corporately for the Council, that an action will have in itself or could lead to;
- Workstream (**B**uilt Environment, **E**nergy, **T**ransport, **I**ndustry Business and Supply Chain, **W**aste, **F**ood and Farming, **N**atural Environment, **W**ater (**Wt**), **E**ducation (**Ed**), **M**iscellaneous);
- **Role** of the Council (**D**eliver, **E**nable, **S**upport, **L**obby);
- Potential high level **cost**; and
- **Priority ranking** (for the top ten).

The Council intends to work with partners to coordinate updates to the Action Plan which has potential to include further information on: delivery partners; roles and responsibilities; options for funding sources; and delivery considerations.

## Actions

Ref	Actions	Objectives	Workstream	Role	Impact	Cost	Priority ranking
1	<p>Prepare a <b>Town Centre Delivery Strategy</b> to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attract investment to the town</li> <li>• identify opportunities to expand the market offer in Wellington</li> <li>• identify opportunities to support SMEs and small-scale innovation</li> <li>• exploit the success of Wellington’s identity as a centre for craft, local food and independent businesses</li> <li>• improve and manage the night time economy</li> <li>• expand the regular market</li> <li>• reduce vacant units through reviewing opportunities for reuse of empty buildings</li> <li>• work with landowners and local businesses to match uses with vacant buildings</li> <li>• promote partnership working across Wellington’s events programme</li> <li>• mapping existing businesses, industries and supply chains</li> <li>• review opportunities for small business and co-working space in the town centre</li> <li>• Identify spaces in the town centre and other strategic locations for local food and craft-based businesses; and small business and co-working space</li> <li>• Identify opportunities to support food production businesses</li> </ul>						

Ref	Actions	Objectives	Workstream	Role	Impact	Cost	Priority ranking
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>work in partnership with major employers</li> </ul>						
2	Undertake a <b>Wellington Movement and Traffic Study</b> , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Options for removing articulated lorries from the town centre</li> <li>Potential to improve key junctions in the TC</li> <li>Reviewing potential for Park and Ride scheme</li> <li>Options for improvement to bus service coverage and bus rapid transport schemes (see CNCR)</li> <li>Opportunities for on-street EV charging points (see CNCR)</li> </ul>		T	D	H	M	2
3	Re-establish a railway station for Wellington as a transport hub		T	L S	H	H	3
4	Prepare a multi-modal hub concept for the new railway station, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>considerations for an integrated cycling network and</li> <li>cycle hubs at key locations</li> </ul>		T	D	H	M	4
5	Actively seek funding for Tonedale Mills and Tone Works		B	L D	H	L	5
6	Support a <b>Public Realm Improvement Plan</b> , to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>design options for enhancement of paving surfaces and street furniture</li> <li>creative adaptive reuse of structures</li> <li>facade and shop front improvements</li> <li>a lighting strategy for the town centre</li> <li>explore the potential to create a public space in front of the former PO building</li> </ul>		B I	S	H	L	6

Ref	Actions	Objectives					Workstream	Role	Impact	Cost	Priority ranking
7	Support Wellington's <b>Green Corridor Advisory Board</b> in managing and protecting green spaces, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Basins</li> <li>Fox's Fields</li> <li>green corridors</li> <li>existing and expanded allotments and orchards</li> </ul>						N	S	H	L	7
8	Invest in walking and cycling infrastructure, including: historic footpaths; cycle connections; and signage (aligning with LCWIP)						T	D	M	M	8
9	Prepare a Strategic Outline Business Case to understand the case for and deliverability of a cycle route between Wellington and Taunton						T	L D	H	M	9
10	Prepare a <b>Somerset-wide skills strategy and action plan</b> to take forward with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and other partners, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>introducing key Wellington employers into the conversation</li> <li>discussing needs with local higher education institutions, including heritage training and education for local residents; and specific training in heritage conservation and craft skills for local school leavers (see <i>SWT Economic Development Strategy 2020 – 2024</i>)</li> </ul>						Ed I	D	M	L	10
11	Build awareness of mechanisms for Wellington Town Council and the community to engage in the development of sports, recreation and open space facilities, through opportunities presented through SASP and development of strategies to support the new Somerset-wide Local Plan						B N	E	L	L	
12	Build awareness and capacity for community projects for:						N	E	H	L	

Ref	Actions	Objectives					Workstream	Role	Impact	Cost	Priority ranking
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tree planting</li> <li>rewilding</li> <li>improving biodiversity</li> <li>renewable energy generation opportunities around and nearby the town</li> </ul>										
13	Undertake a study to explore the potential of the waterways in Wellington						N	D	H	M	
14	Review the potential of the former Dolphin Pub for community uses						B	D	H	L	
15	Deliver the Public Realm Improvement Plan, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the landscape design for new public space in front of the former PO building</li> <li>design options for enhancement of paving surfaces and street furniture</li> </ul>						B	D S	H	M	
16	Establish Gigabit digital connectivity for existing and new homes and workspaces (see CNCR) by supporting operators and following statutory guidance <i>“Infrastructure for electronic communications: Approved Document R”</i> .						E	S	H	L	
17	Build awareness of support for businesses, available through the Council and the LEP.						I	S	L	L	
18	Work in partnership with the LEP to support the growth of green economy industries and identify particular opportunities for Wellington						I	D	L	L	
19	Identify local renewable energy projects to support a <b>Somerset-wide Renewable Energy Strategy</b> , including the early identification of opportunities for new neighbourhoods with ground source heat-pumps, hydro-						E	D	M	L	

Ref	Actions	Objectives						Workstream	Role	Impact	Cost	Priority ranking
	electric power and community heating networks (see CNCR)											
20	Develop affordable homes in the town centre: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new homes on small sites; and</li> <li>• vacant historic properties retrofitted</li> </ul>						B	D E	H	H		
21	Regeneration at Tonedale Mill and Tone Works as a major employment opportunity						B	D	H	H		
22	Establishing workspace and mixed-uses close to the new railway station						B	E	H	L		
23	Undertake a Review of the Wellington Conservation Area Appraisal						B	D	H	L		

Report Number: SWT 36/23

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Full Council – 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023

### Firepool Masterplan – Adoption

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

**Report Author: Graeme Thompson, Principal Planning Policy Officer**

#### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The Firepool Masterplan is intended to guide the development of the Firepool site, a large brownfield site owned by the Council on the edge of Taunton town centre. The Council has two distinct roles in relation to the site: as developer / landowner / asset holder; and as Local Planning Authority (LPA). The successful delivery of sustainable development on Firepool is key for the Council in both roles. This report focusses on planning related matters in connection with the masterplan.
- 1.2 A report was considered by the Council's Executive in November 2022 (report [here](#)) seeking approval of a draft Masterplan for public consultation. This consultation took place over a six week period from 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022 to 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2023. The November report to Executive also set out a series of points to be responded to through further work on the Masterplan and supporting evidence. Following consultation, the Masterplan has been updated and improved in response to comments received, undertaking of identified additional work and further considerations. The final Masterplan can be found in **Appendix A** to this report. A Consultation Statement detailing comments received and how they have been taken into account can be found in **Appendix B** to this report.
- 1.3 Consultation on the Draft Masterplan also included consultation on a draft Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and draft Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report. Comments received to both documents have been taken into account in the production of the final Masterplan and final versions of the HRA and SEA Environmental Report can be found in **Appendices C** and **D** to this report respectively. This report explicitly recommends adoption of the conclusions of the HRA report.
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority (LPA) officers have worked proactively with the Council's developer team to ensure that the Masterplan and supporting evidence address key points identified by officers and via consultation comments and are now satisfied that the Masterplan is sufficiently developed to recommend adoption as a material planning consideration in the preparation of pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes.

- 1.5 In particular, it is the Key Design Principles, Landscape Design Principles, Building Principles and Parameter Plans together with the justifications provided within the Masterplan document which are explicitly proposed to be adopted as material considerations. The Masterplan includes a detailed development schedule of uses and indicative visualisations of a detailed scheme, however, these are provided for information only as examples of how the developer team has interpreted the masterplan principles. For clarity, these elements of the document will hold no planning weight.
- 1.6 LPA officers have identified the need for a further stage of work to take place after masterplan adoption, but in advance of the receipt of detailed planning applications. This further work does not prevent the masterplan being adopted at this stage, but does indicate the need still for a satisfactory resolution of these outstanding issues. These points, detailed later within this report may be resolved through ongoing work and engagement with the LPA and other stakeholders. They could either form a future addendum to the Masterplan, submission in advance of the formal planning application stage or a formal outline/full planning application for the site as a whole.

## **2 Recommendations**

That Full Council:

- 2.1 Adopt the Firepool Masterplan (see **Appendix A**) as a material planning consideration in the preparation of pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes.
- 2.2 Adopt the conclusions of the Habitat Regulations Assessment Report (see **Appendix C**) which state that the Firepool Masterplan will not adversely affect the integrity of Hestercombe House SAC or the Somerset Level and Moors Ramsar site, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects, subject to mitigation identified within.
- 2.3 Agree that the Assistant Director Strategic Place and Planning 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 Firepool Masterplan.

## **3 Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 Delivery of Firepool is a key aspect of the Council's Corporate Strategy. "Major capital programme and project delivery" are identified in the Council's risk register. Firepool is central to these elements, and delivery of this key major project is identified within the Corporate Strategy. Adoption of the Firepool Masterplan is an important and proactive step on the road to bringing forward sustainable development on this site. Adoption of the Masterplan by the LPA is intended to help reduce risk associated with subsequent planning applications, smoothing the path towards delivery. However, it should be noted that the accompanying viability appraisal does clearly identify that delivery of a viable scheme will be challenging.
- 3.2 Working towards carbon neutrality by 2030 is a key aspect of the Corporate Strategy. "Not achieving carbon net zero by 2030" is identified in the Council's risk register. The Masterplan includes certain measures which assist in delivery against the Council's climate targets. The accompanying viability appraisal highlights the difficulties in getting delivery of this site away. The viability evidence assumes delivery will be post 2025 and



therefore compliance with the forthcoming Future Homes Standard is assumed. Whilst the draft viability appraisal recognises that building to higher standards that result in lower running costs does result in higher values, it is a risk that the scheme will not be able to viably achieve higher environmental building standards than this. This does not completely rule out the ability to achieve zero carbon on the site, and detailed understanding of the impact that a heat network for instance may make to whether this can be achieved or not is not yet known. However, it highlights that doing so is one of a number of challenges in bringing forward sustainable development on the site which will need to be balanced. Whilst the failure of a single development site to achieve zero carbon will not in isolation put the ability to reach our area-wide climate targets at risk, as a Council owned site it is potentially more directly relevant to the Council's own corporate emissions and the ability to meet this particular element of the adopted targets. Moreover, the Council's CNCR Action Plan explicitly refers to Firepool as being an exemplar in zero carbon and climate resilient development not only as a means of addressing our own carbon footprint, but also reducing fuel bills and improving health outcomes for tenants, enabling the Council to lead by example and show the local development industry what is possible, show the public what they can demand from private developers, and to build the local skills base and supply chain that will be necessary to see zero carbon building standards delivered across the board. Whilst the decision to adopt the Masterplan will not in itself result in a significant risk on meeting the corporate targets, it is a signpost that the Council is carrying an increased risk here, which needs to be understood.

### 3.3 Risks of adopting the Masterplan

- Raising expectations for development – the accompanying viability appraisal, whilst being for specific purposes, raises some high level concerns about deliverability. It identifies ways in which detailed development proposals and delivery models for the site could improve the situation somewhat, and it is important to recognise that the Council has options available to it that a commercial developer does not. However, it is a signpost that delivery of viable development will be challenging, and if the proposals were to end up being watered down in the future, this could be difficult for the Council. Whilst an element of flexibility will be built into the Masterplan to account for the natural changes in circumstances, there is a risk that future planning applications may need to take a more significantly different course in some cases in order to deliver viable and sustainable development.
- Failure to deliver on key corporate objectives – the accompanying viability appraisal, whilst being for specific purposes and not completely ruling it out, demonstrates that fully policy compliant development is extremely unlikely to be viable on the site. This means that policy requirements such as affordable housing, education contributions, transport contributions, open space contributions etc. would appear at this stage to be very unlikely to be secured. Affordable Housing is a key corporate objective that is failed to be responded to, though there is viability evidence to justify the approach taken.

### 3.4 Risks of not adopting the Masterplan:

- Applications would need to be dealt with as departures to the development plan without an approved policy context.
- There would need to be resolution of fundamental issues in the public domain as part of elongated planning application processes. Whilst a series of site-wide issues are identified as requiring further work, there is considered to be sufficient

evidence and information provided to enable adoption of the Masterplan. The further work requirements can be dealt with as an additional stage of work in advance of the receipt of planning applications. Failure to consider this work ahead of detailed applications could continue to result in elongated planning application processes.

- Choosing to not formally adopt the Masterplan would reduce the weight that could be placed on the Masterplan at the planning application stage.
- A deferral of any decision to the new Somerset Council may introduce uncertainty and delay.

## **4 Background and Full details of the Report**

### Introduction and history

- 4.1 Firepool is a major regeneration area within Taunton town centre, for which there have been development aspirations for many years. Policy Fp1 of the adopted Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP, adopted 2008) allocates the site for an office-led mixed-use development comprising offices, retail and leisure, residential, multi-storey car park, hotel and other uses. Policy Fp2 sets out the transport measures required to accompany the development. A number of circumstances have changed since the site was allocated in the TCAAP, and as such, the planning policy context for the site (primarily the development mix proposed by policy) is considered to be out of date. There is therefore a risk that future applications on Firepool may have to be dealt with as departures from the development plan, and as such (considering the primacy of the development plan), without an approved policy context it may be difficult to approve appropriate development which may better respond to the updated circumstances.
- 4.2 As such, a Masterplan has been prepared in order to:
- a) provide the Council as Local Planning Authority – with an up to date, evidenced and justified planning policy context for regard to be had to as a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications, and
  - b) provide the Council as developer / landowner / asset holder – with greater certainty about what might constitute appropriate development proposals for the site going forward.
- 4.3 For further information on the history of the site, the evolution of its planning and development context and changes in circumstances which have led to this point please refer to the [previous report to Executive in November 2022](#).
- 4.4 The November 2022 report to Executive secured approval to consult on the Draft Masterplan and set out a number of areas where additional work was considered necessary to enable officers to recommend adoption of the final Masterplan.

### Consultation on the Draft Masterplan

- 4.5 Consultation on the Draft Masterplan took place over a six week period from 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022 through to 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2023. During this time, a total of 251 formal responses were received across the consultation hub, email and social media. In addition to this, officers undertook a number of engagement events at which views were gathered including:
- Online public presentation and Q&A session – 28<sup>th</sup> November 2022

- 2x in-person drop-in sessions at Deane House – 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> December 2022
- Online presentation and Q&A session focused for local businesses – 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022.

4.6 A Consultation Statement is included at Appendix B to this report setting out more fully responses received as well as details of how comments received have been responded to in the final Masterplan through a “you said, we did” section. However, key points are detailed below.

4.7 A total of 161 people responded using the [consultation hub](#) via the various consultation ‘tiles’ available, providing 212 comments and a further 37 ‘agreements’ to other people’s comments. Not all respondents responded to every question. Key quantitative results were as follows:

- 49% of 155 respondents ‘loved’ or ‘liked’ the draft proposals for development at Firepool.
- 54% of 154 respondents felt that the proposals ‘absolutely’ or ‘did’ make efficient use of this key town centre site.
- 55% of 152 respondents felt that the proposed mix of uses was appropriate and would improve and futureproof Taunton town centre for years to come.

4.8 A number of positive comments were received about the draft Masterplan proposals including (though not limited to) multiple comments in relation to:

- The green, open and public spaces;
- New community facilities including cinema/venue/leisure facilities close to town centre;
- The focus on walking and cycling provision, particularly along the river and the boulevard connecting to station;
- That the proposals made good use of the riverside / retaining access to the river/canal;
- That progress was being made on the site;
- The mix of uses/businesses;
- The provision of housing, which would lead to more people living in the town centre;
- The emphasis on walkability/public transport; and
- The zero carbon vision / sustainable design intentions.

A number of negative comments were received about the draft Masterplan proposals including (though not limited to) multiple comments in relation to:

- Building design;
- A lack of consideration for users of the river / canoe kayak club;
- Too much residential;
- Insufficient car parking, particularly when events and/or cricket are on, leads to further social issues and antisocial parking;
- Reproviding existing out of date facilities e.g. cinema, bowling;
- Out of character with the area;
- Buildings too high; and
- Too urban with expanses of hard concrete landscaping.

Various other comments and suggestions were made via the consultation hub as to how

the Masterplan might be improved.

- 4.9 A total of 19 emailed responses were received from a mixture of organisations and individuals. These included technical stakeholder responses such as those from the Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England, National Highways, Somerset County Council (in its capacity as Local Highways Authority, Local Transport Authority and Local Lead Flood Authority), SWT Housing Enabling, Inland Waterways Association, Taunton Area Cycling Campaign and Wessex Water as well as non-technical stakeholders including Somerset County Cricket Club, Taunton Canoe Club and the Theatres Trust.
- 4.10 Social media posts by the Council promoting the consultation received 20 comments.
- 4.11 The draft HRA received only one comment from Natural England which agreed with the report's conclusions.
- 4.12 The draft SEA Environmental Report received three comments from the statutory consultees (Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England). Comments from Natural England and the Environment Agency concurred with the conclusions of the draft SEA. Initial comments from Historic England raised concern that the proposals may lead to a significant impact on the historic environment. However, following further discussion and agreement on specific changes to be made to the Masterplan, Historic England were able to confirm that no objection would be raised to the conclusions of the draft SEA.
- 4.13 The Consultation Statement at **Appendix B** sets out a summary of comments received from all sources together with a response to key issues and how they have been taken into account in production of the final plan document.

#### Key changes made to the Masterplan

- 4.14 Following consultation, the Masterplan has been updated and improved in response to comments received, undertaking of additional work, and further considerations. Changes made include the following. Please note this is not an exhaustive list, for a fuller list of changes please see the "You said, we did" section of the Consultation Statement:
- Various changes throughout to reflect this is the final version to be adopted as a material planning consideration subject to identified further work, ensure consistency and up to date references.
  - Expansion of Key Design Principles in chapter 1 to cover a range of issues identified as being appropriate in response to comments received through consultation addressing:
    - high quality, coherent and legible signage;
    - natural surveillance and designing out anti-social behaviour and perceived safety concerns around Firepool Lock;
    - design principles for cycle storage;
    - walking, wheeling and cycling route design to align with Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20 principles and Inclusive Mobility Guidance;
    - streets designed to 20mph and designing out anti-social parking;
    - mix of uses to enhance the town centre;
    - limited nature of retail on the site;
    - flexibility of uses within the overarching "leisure" use;
    - considering opportunities for community uses;

- contemporary and appropriately evidenced building design balanced with character and context and opportunities of the site;
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) focus on river corridor;
- Incorporation of water efficiency measures;
- Updating of context appraisal in chapter 3 to better reflect baseline situation in relation to transport, river ecology, flood risk, heritage and align with updated evidence documents.
- Updating of pedestrian routes, cycling routes, plot uses and heights plans within the Masterplan Principles in chapter 4.
- Inclusion of inset diagrams showing concept visions for external walking and cycling connections developed as part of the Connecting our Garden Communities project which will form the aspiration subject to detailed design, associated modelling and development viability.
- Inclusion of an indicative development schedule of uses.
- Updating of Landscape Principles in chapter 5 to provide overarching visions for play space and for the Lock View area as well as highlighting important considerations relating to space around the signature building (depending on delivery of the energy centre and associated water source heat pump).
- Updating of Building Principles in chapter 6 to include “boundary considerations” for each block identifying relevant considerations around amenity, frontages and surveillance, as well as provide other clarifications.
- Updating of Sustainability Principles in chapter 8 to include other key cycle routes within the sustainability principles plan and further information regarding sustainable cycle and vehicle parking strategy.
- Updating of Parameter Plans in chapter 9 in relation to movement and heights.
- Updating of chapters 10 and 11 to reflect final version of the Masterplan proposals and supporting evidence, reference future work and phasing considerations.

4.15 In addition to changes being made to the Masterplan, the following changes have been made to the suite of supporting evidence documents:

- SEA Environmental Report –updated to include reference to statutory consultee responses and how the Masterplan has taken these into account.
- Equalities Impact Assessment – updated to make improved reference to wider range of uses proposed through the Masterplan and address specific points raised through consultation around importance of surveillance and safety of active travel routes.
- Office and Retail Market Update Report – updated to include further information on demand for Food & Beverage retail in this location.
- Economic Impact Report – quantifies the employment and wider economic benefits that development of Firepool could have for Taunton, and further commits to preparation of a Local Labour Agreement and Employment Skills Plan for the site as a whole to capture these benefits and social value locally.
- Draft Transport Statement and Framework Travel Plan – these documents have been provided in draft form and include an updated parking strategy and cycle assessment. These have been accepted in draft format for the purposes of adoption of the Masterplan subject to further work being completed on these documents post-adoption before detailed planning applications are able to be considered. This is dealt further with in paragraphs 4.27-4.30, below.
- Flood Technical Note – provides further information setting out the intended approach to flood mitigation for the remainder of the site beyond that covered by

planning permission 38/21/0440 (i.e. for Block 1 in particular).

- Developer Statement – provides developer support for the Masterplan and a developer view on a number of issues including the venue, transport strategy, office uses and associated flexibility within the Masterplan, heritage impacts, next steps and delivery options as well as developer responses to selected consultation comments.

### Status of the Masterplan

- 4.16 The Masterplan is recommended for adoption as a material planning consideration in the preparation of pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes. As a material planning consideration it will hold weight in the decision making process. Planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Provided regard is had to all material considerations, it is for the decision maker to decide what weight is to be given to the material considerations in each case. In the case of Firepool where the current planning policies specific to the site have elements (explicitly the development mix) which are now considered out of date, the Masterplan is expected to hold an increased weight.
- 4.17 This status as a material planning consideration is reflective of the fact that the Masterplan deviates – significantly in some areas – from adopted planning policy, and as such cannot be adopted as Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- 4.18 The Masterplan contains a context appraisal, which considers what is important to respond to and relevant about the site itself and its surroundings; design principles which build on the context appraisal and which should guide detailed proposals; and an indicative developed masterplan proposal and supporting visualisations.
- 4.19 In particular, it is the Key Design Principles, Landscape Design Principles, Building Principles and Parameter Plans together with the justifications provided within the Masterplan document which are explicitly proposed to be adopted as material considerations. These elements set out the vision and design principles and parameters which future planning applications will need to respond to. Development proposals will need to detail how they are responding to and as much as possible complying with these principles and parameters as a key part of any future planning applications.
- 4.20 The Masterplan also includes a detailed development schedule of uses and indicative visualisations of a detailed scheme, however, these are provided for information only as examples of how the developer team has interpreted the masterplan principles. For clarity, these elements of the document will hold no planning decision making weight.
- 4.21 Through the adoption of the design principles and explicitly stating that the more detailed proposals included are indicative only and hold no planning weight, this provides an important level of flexibility for the Masterplan. This will allow future development proposals which vary (within reason) from the current indicative proposals to deal with further changes in circumstance yet still respond to and broadly comply with the Masterplan as adopted. This flexibility is of increased importance on this site considering the changes in circumstance which have led to the current point in time and contributed to the stalling of development to date.
- 4.22 However, whilst there is in-built flexibility, future development proposals which depart

*significantly* from the Masterplan will likely need to be supported by a review of the Masterplan and significantly more evidence. Review of the Masterplan may also be triggered by changes in circumstances or the elapsing of five years from adoption (March 2028). At the five year point this would trigger consideration of whether review is warranted in whole or in part, or whether it continues to remain relevant in its current form.

### Habitat Regulations Assessment

- 4.23 This report seeks adoption of the conclusions of the Habitat Regulations Assessment Report (see **Appendix C**) which state that the Firepool Masterplan will not adversely affect the integrity of Hestercombe House SAC or the Somerset Level and Moors Ramsar site, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects, subject to mitigation identified within. However, it should be noted that individual development proposals within the site will likely need to be subject to project level HRA screening and potentially Appropriate Assessment as detail develops.
- 4.24 In line with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 the Council as competent authority must have regard to representations made by Natural England where they have been made within reasonable time. The recommendation to adopt the conclusions of the HRA has had regard to the consultation response by Natural England, which agreed with the Draft HRA conclusions.

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 4.25 The final Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report is included as one of the supported evidence documents at **Appendix D**. The report states that residual effects can be ruled out across the majority of objectives assessed following consideration of mitigation measures. It concludes that the Masterplan would result in a range of positive effects across most objectives, but that there would be residual adverse effects in relation to climate change and water. Several recommendations have been made to potentially enhance the sustainability of the proposals within the Masterplan or to provide further clarity regarding certain issues.
- 4.26 Comments received from Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England have been collated by the developer's consultants Lepus in a comments tracker reviews comments made on the draft SEA Environmental Report and confirms that no amendments were required in response. The recommendation to adopt the Masterplan has taken the comments into account. In line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 the Council as responsible authority must produce an adoption statement which will follow as a further supporting document in **Appendix F**.

### Next steps

- 4.27 Whilst the Masterplan is being recommended for adoption, it should be recognised that a number of site-wide issues remain outstanding. Ideally these would have been dealt with further within the Masterplan and accompanying evidence. However, the timescales available post-consultation have meant that this has not been possible. These issues are considered to be addressed at a high level within the Masterplan design principles to the extent necessary to be able to satisfactorily adopt the Masterplan. However, their high level nature means that further work is required on a site-wide basis before detailed

planning applications for individual parcels can be considered. This is summarised by the flow chart below:



4.28 Importantly, were detailed planning applications to come forward for individual parcels within the site on a piecemeal basis, then LPA officers consider that it would be difficult to understand how these issues could be satisfactorily addressed and resolved in line with the Masterplan principles.

4.29 As such, further post adoption work is required on the following issues:

- Continued iteration of the site-wide transport statement and framework travel plan to take a fully "Vision and Validate" compliant approach (in line with the adopted Connecting our Garden Communities Plan) which identifies truly ambitious mode shift targets split out by different uses and modes, together with quantified impacts of potential measures and an understanding of how these potential measures relate to the different uses proposed across the site. This will enable detailed applications for specific plots to then be considered appropriately in the context of the wider approach and requirements for the site as a whole.
- Agreeing an approach for delivering Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) across the site as a whole. Whilst adopted planning policy does not formally or explicitly require developments to deliver BNG, Climate Positive Planning sets out that the LPA will "seek to secure a 10% net gain in biodiversity from development proposals using a combination of [policy CP8], the NPPF, the declaration of an Ecological Emergency and clear intent from the Environment Act including the incoming upgraded Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act duty for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity". The Masterplan embraces the intention to explore delivery of 10% BNG on-site within the Key Design Principles, but further work is required to understand and agree how this can and will be delivered on-site in the context of individual parcels coming forward for development.
- Identification of building character areas and key groupings.
- Further clarification of how the proposed heat network might be delivered across the site as a whole. Whilst adopted planning policy does not formally or explicitly require developments to connect to a heat network, Climate Positive Planning reiterates the Council's aim for Firepool to be an exemplar for zero carbon and climate resilient development and references heat network potential in this regard. Furthermore, the vast majority of the site is expected to be delivered post implementation of the Government's anticipated Future Homes Standard and Future Buildings Standard which will likely necessitate a no-gas approach. The Masterplan embraces this within the Key Design Principles and developed masterplan proposals, but further work is required to understand how this might be possible and delivery might work with phasing of development.
- Signing up to a Local Labour Agreement incorporating employment and skills plan for the site as a whole. The Council has recently adopted a corporate policy on Local Labour Agreements which references relevant adopted planning policies.



The developer team has positively engaged with the idea of signing up to a Local Labour Agreement and the Masterplan and accompanying Economic Impact Report embrace this. However, it is important to ensure that such an agreement covers the site as a whole to help inform work and opportunities in the site's development from as early a stage as possible. Furthermore, this would avoid any potential issues whereby individual planning applications fail to officially meet the policy threshold, and therefore helps to maximise social value opportunities for the site.

- 4.30 The satisfactory resolution of these outstanding issues may be achieved through ongoing work and engagement with the LPA and other stakeholders. They could either form a future addendum to the Masterplan, submission in advance of the formal planning application stage or a formal outline/full planning application for the site as a whole. The LPA will continue to work proactively with the developer team via the existing Planning Performance Agreement to resolve these site-wide issues and help move the site forward towards delivery.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

- 5.1 The adoption of the Masterplan is a key step on the route to delivering on multiple strands of the Corporate Strategy. Facilitating the development delivery of the residential and commercial parts of Firepool are explicit objectives of the Corporate Strategy. Adoption of the Masterplan by the LPA is intended to help reduce risk associated with subsequent planning applications, smoothing the path towards delivery. However, it should be noted that the accompanying viability appraisal does raise concerns about the deliverability of the specific proposals as currently identified within the Masterplan.
- 5.2 The Masterplan responds to a number of Corporate Strategy objectives under "Our Environment and Economy": working towards carbon neutrality by 2030, shaping and protecting our built and natural environment (including delivery against the Garden Town Vision), providing enhanced public spaces and opportunities to safely walk and cycle, supporting town centres to meet challenges, and supporting enhancement of arts and culture provision. More commentary is included in relation to the carbon neutrality objective in the climate implications section below.
- 5.3 The Masterplan has been prepared following full public consultation and a transparent process within which the roles of LPA and developer have been clearly defined. It responds to the following Corporate Strategy objective under "A Transparent and customer focused Council": delivering effective communications, consultation and engagement which listens to and engages with our residents and stakeholders and is central to the delivery of our services, strategies and plans.
- 5.4 The Masterplan responds to a number of Corporate Strategy objectives under "An Enterprising Council": ensuring our land and property assets support the achievement of the council's objectives (including service delivery, regeneration projects and community initiatives). However, as noted in paragraph 5.6 below, the proposals are extremely likely to fail to respond to the key council objective around provision of affordable and social homes.
- 5.5 The Masterplan sets the scene for a fuller response to a Corporate Strategy objective under "Homes and Communities": supporting delivery of strong sustainable transport infrastructure links. However, as noted above, further work continues to be required to

satisfy the LPA that on how an appropriately ambitious transport strategy will be delivered against by future applications.

- 5.6 A further, key objective under “Homes and Communities” is increasing the number of affordable and social homes, including those built by the Council. The Masterplan proposals are supported by a high level viability appraisal which shows that the delivery of affordable housing is extremely unlikely to be possible on Firepool for viability reasons. In this respect, the indicative developer proposals are not compliant with either adopted planning policy or the corporate strategy. Irrespective of the adoption of the masterplan, any movement away from a policy compliant position on affordable housing or infrastructure prioritisation will still need to be fully explained, justified and supported by evidence at planning application stage. What the high level viability appraisal supporting the Masterplan does is explain that it is extremely unlikely that policy compliant levels will be able to be achieved alongside the range of other planning policy and corporate policy objectives for the site.

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

- 6.1 This report is written by officers of the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and recommends a decision be made by the Council in its role as the LPA.
- 6.2 There are no financial implications to the Local Planning Authority associated with adoption of the Masterplan.
- 6.3 The delivery of the Masterplan proposals will have a financial implication for the Council in its role as landowner / developer / asset holder. The adoption of the Masterplan does not in itself commit the Council to having to deliver the scheme exactly as is proposed within the Masterplan, though public expectations may be raised as such.
- 6.4 From the point of view as LPA, the Council needs to be satisfied that the Masterplan will result in deliverable and sustainable development in planning terms. It is the responsibility of the Council as landowner / developer / asset holder to consider the internal financial implications of this, and this is beyond the scope of this report or the Council’s role as LPA and would be the subject of separate, future decisions.

### **Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications**

- 6.5 Through adoption by SWT Council, the Masterplan will after 1st April 2023, become an adopted document of the new Somerset Council. However, this carries with it no direct financial implications.
- 6.6 It is future decisions over the delivery of development on Firepool which will have financial implications beyond vesting day for the new unitary council.
- 6.7 From the point of view as LPA, the Council needs to be satisfied that the Masterplan will result in deliverable and sustainable development in planning terms. It is the responsibility of the Council as landowner / developer / asset holder to consider the internal financial implications of this, and this is beyond the scope of this report or the Council’s role as LPA.

## 7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 This report seeks adoption of the Firepool Masterplan.
- 7.2 Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended, requires that in determining any planning application regard is to be had to the provisions of the Development Plan, so far as is material to the application and to any other material planning considerations. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 7.3 The intention that the final Masterplan be adopted as a material consideration in the determination of relevant future planning applications on the Firepool site reflects the appropriate status that this document can have. The report identifies that the Masterplan explicitly deviates away from adopted planning policy in a number of places. As such it would not be appropriate for the Masterplan to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan.
- 7.4 Consultation has accorded with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (adopted November 2019). A Consultation Statement has collated representations received and explains how the issues raised have been addressed in the Masterplan proposed for adoption.
- 7.5 The adoption of the Firepool Masterplan as a material consideration for future planning applications will constitute a 'plan' within the meaning of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive as implemented by [Regulation 63\(1\)](#) of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.
- 7.6 As there is a reasonable prospect of a solution or suite of solutions to phosphate deposition being available within the development timescales envisaged in the Masterplan, it would be lawful for the LPA to adopt the same as material consideration. However, any future planning applications flowing from the Masterplan will need to include the provision of an avoidance/mitigation package to address the additional nutrient load imposed on the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar by the Firepool development and to allow the LPA to ascertain on the basis of the best available scientific evidence that such additional nutrient loading will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Ramsar.
- 7.7 The Masterplan is supported by an SEA Environmental Report and HRA Appropriate Assessment. These documents were previously identified as being necessary by the LPA in order to comply with the Council's duties under the European Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive) and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations), EU Habitats Directive and associated Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.
- 7.8 In the interests of transparency and probity, the report is clear that the recommendation of adoption is in the Council's role as LPA, distinct from its role as developer/landowner/asset holder.

## **8 Climate, Ecology and Sustainability Implications**

- 8.1 The decision on whether to adopt the Masterplan does not in itself have any direct climate, ecology or sustainability implications. However, it sets out a series of design principles for future planning applications to respond to which are intended to guide and inform how future detailed development proposals respond to key issues including those of climate, ecology and sustainability.
- 8.2 The Masterplan identifies the Climate and Ecological Emergency as a key part of the context for its development. A number of the proposed key design principles are centred around sustainability and responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency. The Masterplan identifies high level sustainability principles for the site and incorporates space for an energy centre to serve a potential site-wide (or possibly wider town centre) heat network – the subject of ongoing work into broad feasibility. Furthermore, the site’s design around a high quality walking and cycling network within the site, connecting to the station in the north, town centre in the south, and existing national cycle network in the east and west is of key importance to the Masterplan design. The Masterplan identifies a strong transport strategy aligned to a sustainable movement hierarchy. However, as identified, further work is required on the accompanying draft Transport Statement and Framework Travel Plan in order to identify truly ambitious mode shift targets and the specific measures necessary to deliver on these. A number of changes have been made to the Masterplan post-consultation seeking to improve the climate, ecology and sustainability credentials of the development, including improved key design principles, a strategy to focus delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain along the river corridor, and inclusion of vision-led concepts for external walking, wheeling and cycling linkages from the site (subject to detailed design, modelling and viability).
- 8.3 The viability appraisal accompanying the Masterplan highlights the difficulties in getting delivery of this site away. The viability evidence assumes delivery will be post 2025 and therefore that compliance with the forthcoming Future Homes Standard will be required. The viability appraisal recognises that building to higher standards result in lower running costs and higher values. However, there is a risk that the scheme will not be able to achieve higher environmental building standards and be viable. This does not completely rule out the ability to achieve zero carbon on the site, and detailed understanding of the impact that a heat network for instance may make to whether this can be achieved or not is not yet known. However, it highlights that doing so is one of a number of challenges in bringing forward sustainable development on the site which will need to be balanced. The CNCR Action Plan states in relation to the Council’s own developments that “Ensuring that what we build is of the highest standards can not only benefit our own carbon footprint, but also reduce fuel bills and improve health outcomes for our tenants. It also enables us to lead by example and show the local development industry what is possible, show the public what they can demand from private developers, and to build the local skills base and supply chain that will be necessary to see zero carbon building standards delivered across the board”. It also makes explicit reference in action 324 to Firepool being designed as an exemplar for zero carbon and climate resilient development. Whilst the Council cannot insist on higher building standards through adopted planning policy, Climate Positive Planning and the Districtwide Design Guide SPD strongly encourage developers to go above and beyond policy and Building Regulations and set out aspirational zero carbon standards. There are justified viability reasons why the Council may not be able to achieve this in relation to building standards, and other aspects of the Masterplan do respond to the “zero carbon and climate resilient”

mantra. However, this would fail to set a positive precedent for other developers to follow, or to help build the local skills base or supply chain.

## **9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

- 9.1 The decision on whether to adopt the Masterplan does not in itself have any direct safeguarding or community safety implications.
- 9.2 The Masterplan includes a series of design principles including explicitly principles intended to help avoid safety issues such as in relation to natural surveillance of active travel routes and measures to avoid anti-social parking which can lead to poor highway visibility and raised community tensions. The Masterplan proposes a network of high quality public realm interventions within the site designed with community safety in mind and in particular making walking and cycling a more attractive and safe option for more vulnerable groups.

## **10 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 The adoption of the Masterplan does not in itself have any direct equality and diversity implications.
- 10.2 The delivery of development in line with the Masterplan could have equalities and diversity implications. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken by the developer team (see **Appendix E**) and has been informed by consultation and further informed the development of the Masterplan to demonstrate consideration of the Council's duties in regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## **11 Social Value Implications**

- 11.1 The Firepool Masterplan is fundamentally about delivering social value – bringing forward development which can help build town centre resilience which the market alone would unlikely be able to facilitate. The Economic Impact Report provided in support of the Masterplan quantifies the employment and wider economic benefits that development of Firepool could have for Taunton, and further commits to preparation of a Local Labour Agreement and Employment Skills Plan for the site as a whole to capture these benefits and social value locally.

## **12 Partnership Implications**

- 12.1 There are no known partnership implications.

## **13 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 13.1 The decision on whether to adopt the Masterplan does not in itself have any direct health and wellbeing implications.
- 13.2 The Masterplan proposes a network of walking and cycling routes and a low traffic neighbourhood within the site which contribute towards addressing inactivity levels and air quality concerns. Further work is identified as being necessary in relation to the Transport Statement and Framework Travel Plan to help secure and deliver on these opportunities. It further proposes a health hub central to the site with potential to accommodate primary healthcare facilities. The commercial and leisure facilities provide

opportunities for employment and socialisation.

## 14 Asset Management Implications

14.1 The Firepool site is a Council asset. The Masterplan is intended to heavily influence the use of this asset and how development on it might come forward. The Masterplan includes some information with regards to phasing, delivery and stewardship options, however none are explicitly committed to.

## 15 Data Protection Implications

15.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment was undertaken in relation to the consultation exercise and officers with an overview of data protection consulted as part of this. The Consultation Statement sets out a summary of comments received via various methods whilst retaining the anonymity of individual respondents.

## 16 Consultation Implications

16.1 See above sections 4.5 to 4.13.

### Democratic Path:

- **Corporate Scrutiny Committee – Yes, pre-consultation – 02/11/22**
- **Executive – Yes, pre-consultation – 16/11/22**
- **Full Council – 28/03/23**

**Reporting Frequency: Once only**

### List of Appendices (background papers to the report)

Appendix A	Firepool Masterplan
Appendix B	Consultation Statement
Appendix C	HRA Appropriate Assessment
Appendix D	SEA Environmental Report
Appendix E	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix F	Supporting evidence documents including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Viability Appraisal</li><li>• Nutrient Neutrality Assessment and Mitigation Strategy</li><li>• Heritage Assessment</li><li>• Townscape Visual Impact Assessment</li><li>• Draft Transport Statement</li><li>• Draft Framework Travel Plan</li><li>• Ecology Survey</li><li>• Office and Retail Market Update</li><li>• Economic Impact Report</li><li>• Flood Technical Note</li><li>• Developer Statement</li><li>• SEA Adoption Statement – to follow</li></ul>

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# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

## **Audit and Governance Committee Chair's Annual Report for 2022/2023**

**Report Author: Cllr Lee Baker, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee**

### **1. Introduction**

To provide Members of the Council with details of the work carried out by the Audit and Governance Committee (AGC) during the year ended 31 March 2023. The report also details how the AGC has fulfilled its Terms of Reference during this period.

Last year, following a review and report from the Council Governance Arrangements Working Group it was resolved by Full Council at its Annual Council meeting on 4 May 2021 that the Audit Governance and Standards Committee be split into two separate committees. The two committees subsequently formed were the Audit and Governance Committee and the Standards Committee. This report relates to the work of the Audit and Governance Committee only throughout the period 2022/2023.

### **2. Background**

The AGC function is to provide assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and associated control environment; provide scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the Council's exposure to risk and weaknesses in the control environment and oversees the financial reporting processes. The Committee's specific powers are set out the Terms of Reference in the Constitution.

Audit Committees are a key component of a robust Corporate Governance framework and provide an important source of assurance about an organisation's arrangements and practices for managing risks, maintaining an effective control environment, together with reporting on financial and other performance.

In 2018, The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) issued guidance to local authorities to help ensure that AGC's operate effectively. The AGC has adopted the procedures set out in this guidance as best practice. The guidance also recommends that the AGC's report annually on how they have discharged their duties.

### **3. Work Undertaken and Findings**

The AGC have met on five occasions in the year between 1 April 2022 and the date of this report (7 February 2023) and is due to meet again for a final time on 13 March 2023 prior to the ultimate vesting to Somerset Council from 1 April 2023. All meetings of the AGC this year have been face to face

meetings, which I enjoy more and I'm sure all members prefer rather than the virtual meetings that were in place throughout COVID.

Looking forward, as mentioned above, this year will be the last year that the SWT Audit and Governance Committee will sit before handing over to the audit and governance function of the new Unitary Somerset Council.

It has, overall, been a busy and informative year from both a financial and a governance perspective. During this period, the AGC has assessed the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk management controls and monitoring arrangements, together with the associated counter fraud systems.

The AGC has reviewed various governance items including the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance, Risk and Opportunity Management Strategy, the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 Annual Governance Statements and proposed changes to the Council's constitution.

We have regularly received updates on health and safety as well as reviewed Landlord Compliance, as a result of concerns raised by Internal Audit reports. In addition, the committee has monitored that audit recommendations are being actioned by officers, with regular progress reports coming before the AGC. It is good to see that, at last Covid has started to reduce the impact on various aspects of the Council, the auditors and the work of the committee.

In November 2022 the AGC reviewed and approved the audited 2021/2022 Annual Governance Statement and Statement of Accounts for SWT which were compiled and approved before the required deadline, one of only 9% of councils to have made this deadline which is a feat we can all be very proud of. Both internal auditors (SWAP), and external auditors (Grant Thornton) along with I as Chair and the rest of the AGC, have all thoroughly discussed the audit process and all parties are very pleased with progress. A great deal of scrutiny and challenge was put into these topics by the committee, but I am overall very pleased with the resulting outcome. All parties mentioned are satisfied with progress in this regard and deem it a very good result and a reasonably healthy and assured future for moving to unitary with no major high-risk issues to be highlighted at this stage.

I want to thank all the excellent members of the Audit and Governance Committee for their support throughout a challenging year, particularly the Vice-Chair Janet Lloyd who has had to deputise for me on occasions where my work commitments have trumped Committee meetings. I want to thank Paul Fitzgerald, John Dyson and all the finance team. I also want to thank our external auditors Grant Thornton and our internal auditors SWAP, special thanks to Jackson Murray of Grant Thornton and Alastair Woodland of SWAP for joining us at our meetings. I would like to thank the Governance Team for their continued support and our newly appointed and extremely experienced and knowledgeable clerk Amy Tregellas who replaced Jess Kemmish throughout the year and has kept me in tow (and believe me that's not easy!) We were very fortunate as a committee to have secured the services of Amy when Jess moved onto pastures new.

#### **4. Financial Statements**

The 2021/2022 Annual Governance Statement and Statement of Accounts for the Authority were, as I have mentioned above, produced on time. However, the national issue relating to the statutory override for infrastructure assets caused a slight delay in signing the Council's Statement of Accounts. The AGC gave me delegated powers to sign the Statement of Accounts, which was completed on 1 March 2023. The Statement of Accounts received an Auditor's unqualified opinion and in a new Auditor's Annual Report, we have received assurance over value for money arrangements. The management response provided an extensive overview of our risk management arrangements in this regard, but we will keep the action plan under review.

#### **5. External Audit**

During 2022/2023, Grant Thornton's audit plan updates were received regularly throughout the year, including:

- Audit Plan for 2021/2022 Accounts
- Progress reports and Sector Updates
- Risk Assessment 2021/2022 - ISA240 Inquiries of Management
- Audit Findings Report 2021/2022
- Assessment of Going Concern for 2021/2022 Accounts
- External Auditors Annual Report 2021/2022

The 2022/2023 external audit plan was also considered by the Committee in March 2022.

#### **6. Internal Audit**

This function is provided by SWAP. It appears to be very effective. During the year, the AGC has received and considered various items highlighted by SWAP, together with SWAP's schedule of work to be performed over the financial year, including:

- SWAP Internal Audit – Outturn Report for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023
- SWAP Internal Audit – Annual Opinion Report for 2021/22 and 2022/2023
- Internal Audit Plan progress updates (quarterly)
- Baseline Assessment of Maturity in relation to Fraud

I have not listed or catalogued all outstanding risk issues that are under discussions at the AGC, however, members can access the relevant information in the appropriate AGC minutes and agendas in Mod.Gov and either I, the AGC, Governance or the SWT Finance Team will be more than happy to answer any member or public queries if they arise. Suffice to say all relevant parties are in agreement that the SWTs governance process and audit procedures are generally fit for purpose going forward.

## **7. Summary**

This year has still posed many challenges for the Audit and Governance Committee however, now that we have moved past the transformation period and the pandemic is having less of an impact on everyday life, I feel the business of the committee settled into a good rhythm. I hope that this will continue into next year so that we may leave the dealings of the committee in good stead for the new unitary authority.

I am satisfied that SWT's Governance and Audit processes continue to remain good and fit for purpose and am reassured that this opinion is shared by the Internal and External Audit functions.

In my third and final year, due to Vesting to the new Somerset Council, as Chair of the Committee I hope I have managed to interject some humour to the proceedings whilst we effectively conducted the business of the committee.

Councillor Lee Baker  
**Chair Audit and Governance Committee**

**7 February 2023**

## **COMMUNITY SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT – 2022/23**

As we approach the final weeks of Somerset West and Taunton Council, we also inevitably move towards the demise of Community Scrutiny Committee. We've only managed two years of existence, which is a shame, as keen Scrutiny can enhance Council operations, or at least try to ensure that key and sometimes difficult question, can be asked and answered in public. It's called democratic accountability!

Some key topics that have been covered in the last year and of note in two areas: -

- Housing Low Carbon Retrofit Programme
- Climate Neutrality and Resilience Plan / Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

I would like to put on record my particular thanks to Cllr Dave Mansell, Vice Chair of Community Scrutiny, who has led on these two areas – providing support and challenge wherever appropriate. It's also gratifying that the Portfolio Holders in the above areas have been actively engaged in discussions. I would like to thank them for their clear commitment to active scrutiny.

Other issues covered which are internal to SWT operations have included: -

- E-Scooters and their operation
- CCTV Review and Upgrade in Taunton
- Cultural Grants
- Parking Strategy
- Housing and Financial overview and Woolaway Project

One of the most important elements of Scrutiny is our engagement with outside agencies, and in the past year there have been three notable examples: -

- Everyone Active – Sports and Leisure Management
- Somerset Waste Partnership
- Avon and Somerset Police

Anyone with a keen interest in any or all the topics covered by Community Scrutiny can browse back through agendas and papers which are available via the SWT website. These will be available after the Council ceases to exist via the Somerset Council website or by contacting the Governance Team.

The process of Scrutiny could not happen without significant and ongoing input from a wide team of officers across SWT. My huge thanks must go to all of them and particularly the Democratic Services team who literally “keep our show on the road”.

And last, but not least, sincere thanks to all elected members who have participated in our Scrutiny process. Our efforts are often misunderstood and rarely fully appreciated but thank you!

**Cllr Libby Lisgo**  
**SWT Community Scrutiny Chair**  
**2021 - 2023**



# **CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23**

## **1.Introduction**

As Chair of the Committee, I have the pleasure in providing what will be the last Corporate Scrutiny report for Somerset West and Taunton (SWT), as this council draws to a close prior to formation of the new Unitary Council on 1 April 2023.

2022/23 marks the second year of division between the two Scrutiny committees and both committees have worked closely together in identifying which items require scrutiny and which committee takes responsibility to scrutinise a particular item. Both Chairs have worked closely together to ensure a focussed approach in order to ensure active debate, transparency, and accountability. Committee members have actively attempted, and somewhat succeeded in, ensuring their communities' voices have been considered as part of inclusive and democratic decision making.

## **2. 2022/23 Programme**

Unfortunately, the impact of the reorganisation of the five councils which will form the new Unitary council has impacted on the level of work the Committee has had to review. This is on the whole unavoidable, and effectively has provided the Unitary with the breathing space to assess its work in progress even though this might have hindered local initiatives. The shadow Unitary council is well underway in setting the cogs in motion to enable it to organise its finances and establish which projects do in fact progress. As a matter of prudence, the shadow Unitary council also agreed spending limits with individual district councils in order to monitor and agree various projects. These items alone, have impacted on business projects at SWT.

As Chair, I requested that the Committee was provided with a monthly overview of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). This has been implemented as a monthly standing item, either in person or via Zoom and has allowed councillors to question various stages of the LGR. This has also afforded our communities a glimpse of what is happening behind the scenes.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee reviewed the following items during the current year.

- Connecting our Garden Communities
- Flooding Projects
- Garden Town Status Update
- Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan
- Governance for Taunton Garden Town
- Review of Commercial Property Activity
- Planning Performance
- Public Transport Task and Finish Report
- Local Labour Agreements
- Innovation Exchange Update

- Corporate Performance Reports for quarters 1&2. Quarter 3 forms part of the March agenda

The minutes of the various meetings reflect and record the challenges made and questions raised by committee members, together with recommendations made to the executive.

Unfortunately, we had few executive members attend for extended questioning. However, the portfolio holder and senior members of the planning team did attend to answer questions on Garden Town Status update, Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan. The same portfolio holder and members of the planning team were also in attendance to answer members' questions on the Planning Performance Update. Both items being extremely important to our communities. In October, the committee was also provided with a detailed and very helpful update on Flooding Projects by the assistant director of Climate Change. This particular item had been requested by Scrutiny members in July.

### **3. Conclusion**

As a committee, we have taken the view that one of our tasks was to effectively ensure smooth passage of SWT into dry dock and I consider we have achieved that task.

As this sovereign council draws to a close in a few weeks' time, we look forward to seeing how the Unitary evolves and serves our wider communities. Staff in particular are to be applauded as they evolve/ merge into their new roles. This is especially so as many of this same workforce worked hard to bring together the former TDBC and West Somerset councils in just four years, overcoming the many hurdles which were certainly not envisaged or identified at inception. The whole committee wishes them well in the next chapter of their careers.

I would like to personally thank our allocated three Corporate Scrutiny officers for their dedication and flexibility throughout this last year. Even though staff priorities have been stretched, they never failed to deliver a dedicated service.

I am sure the whole committee, will join me in wishing them well in their new Unitary roles.

I would also like to thank my member colleagues for their flexibility, support, and hard work over the last year, actively challenging the various items brought before us. This includes my fellow Community Scrutiny Chair Libby Lisgo, together with the vice chairs who helped enormously to ensure the smooth running of the two committees.

I wish you all well in your new ventures whatever they might be.

**This report is the responsibility of Councillor Sue Buller – Chair of Corporate Scrutiny and has been drafted in collaboration with the Vice Chair, Councillor Nick Thwaites.**



## **Standards Committee Annual Report 2022/2023**

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2022/2023, which provides information about the work carried out by the committee.

### **Membership of the Committee**

At the time of writing this report, the Standards Committee is made up as follows:

- Cllr Mark Lithgow (Chair) (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Lee Baker (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Hugh Davies (Independent)
- Cllr Richard Lees (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Martin Peters (Labour)
- Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Steven Pugsley (Conservative)
- Cllr Ray Tully (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Terry Venner (Independent)

### **Purpose of the Committee**

The Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee set out that the Committee has the following roles and responsibilities:

1. Monitoring and reviewing the operation of the Council's Constitution and making recommendations to Full Council for any amendments that fall outside of the scope of the delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer. Any review of the Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules will be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee.
2. Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and co-opted members.
3. Assisting Councillors and co-opted members to observe the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
4. Advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
5. Monitoring the operation of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
6. Advising, training or arranging to train district, town and parish Councillors and any co-opted members on matters relating to the Councillors' Code of Conduct and wider propriety issues, including issuing guidance where appropriate.
7. Granting dispensations to Councillors and any co-opted members from requirements relating to interests set out in the Councillors' Code of Conduct or delegating such power to a sub-committee, who will be authorised to determine such dispensations based on principles agreed by the Committee.

8. Advise on the management of statutory and other registers of interest and gifts/hospitality received.
9. Advise the Council on possible changes to the Constitution in relation to the key documents and protocols dealing with members' conduct and ethical standards.
10. Determining, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or by way of a hearing, those allegations of misconduct by district, town or parish councillors within Somerset West and Taunton or co-opted members where a formal investigation has found evidence of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and where a local resolution has not been agreed.
11. Determining, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or following a hearing, on action to be taken against any Councillor or co-opted member found to have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct.
12. Making recommendations, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or following a hearing, to any town or parish council in the Council's area on action to be taken against any Councillor or co-opted member of that town or parish council found to have failed to comply with that Council's Code of Conduct.
13. Implementing, monitoring and reviewing the operation of the Code of Conduct for staff.
14. Considering any other matter referred by the Monitoring Officer.

### **Work of the Committee during 2022/2023**

The Committee has met twice in the 2022/2023 Municipal Year – 26 July 2022 and 23 February 2023.

The committee considered the following items:

- An update on the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on the Standards Regime that was written in January 2019. The Committee also considered the response from the Government which was published in March 2022.
- The Committee on Standards in Public Life report titled 'Leading in Practice' and the open letter written by Lord Evans to all public sector leaders.
- Considered the Somerset wide Code of Conduct and procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations, recommending both to Full Council for approval. These documents form part of the Standards arrangements for the new Unitary Council. All Town and Parish Councils falling under Somerset Council were written to and encouraged to sign up to the new Somerset wide Code.
- What the standards arrangements will look like for the new Somerset Unitary Council.

- Updates on Town and Parish Council Register of Interest following the May 2022 elections.
- Updates on ethical awareness training and the ethical newsletter for SWT councillors
- The register of Gifts and Hospitality for 2022/2023 for Members and Officers
- The register of complaints for 2022/2023 relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct for district, town and parish councillors.

In summary, whilst the Standards Committee has only met twice, it has worked to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by district, town and parish councillors.

Cllr Mark Lithgow  
Chair of the Standards Committee



**SWT Audit and Governance Committee - 13 March 2023**

Present: Councillor Janet Lloyd (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Tom Deakin, Dawn Johnson, Libby Lisgo and Steven Pugsley

Officers: Amy Tregellas, Paul Fitzgerald, Jackson Murray, Alastair Woodland, John Dyson, James Barrah, Ian Candlish, Alison North, Sean Papworth and Malcolm Riches. Alison North joined via Zoom.

Also Present: Councillors Benet Allen and Federica Smith-Roberts (via Zoom)

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

Cllr Janet Lloyd said a few words at the start of the meeting:

‘Welcome to the last Audit and Governance Committee meeting of this council. In particular, welcome to a new Committee Member, Cllr Lisgo who is attending her first and last meeting. Thank you to all Members and Officers for their attendance over the last four years. I think that the committee has asked pertinent questions in relation to agenda items and I feel that this has ensured that we have carried out our duties correctly and in line with this council’s constitution. I am sure that we will have further questions to ask tonight although many items do refer to work on the Local Government Reorganisation process.’

128. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Lee Baker and Terry Venner.

Councillors Hugh Davies, Marcus Kravis and Andy Milne were absent.

129. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee**

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes from the Audit and Governance Committee meeting held on 12 December 2022.

(proposed by Cllr Janet Lloyd, seconded by Cllr Dawn Johnson)

130. **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 S Coles	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Taunton Town		
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Pugsley	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

No other declarations of interest were received.

131. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

132. **Audit and Governance Committee Action/Recommendation Tracker**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- The action tracker provides an update on actions outstanding from the last meeting held on 12 December 2023.
- The Statement of Accounts were signed off on 1 March 2023 following the resolution of the statutory override relating to the treatment of infrastructure assets.
- At last meeting members were minded to have an email update on the position in respect of landlord compliance but it has been added to the agenda tonight to provide an update following some work done with Savills.

The Committee **RESOLVED** that the Audit & Governance Committee action tracker be noted.

(proposed by Cllr Janet Lloyd, seconded by Cllr Simon Coles)

133. **External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update**

Jackson Murray from Grant Thornton presented the report:

- Highlights are on Page 26 of the agenda pack.
- 2020/21 financial year - the opinion was issued and work on the value for money conclusion was completed some time ago but the audit certificate was held open. The certificate was issued on 27 February 2023 and that audit year is now fully closed.

- 2021/22 financial year – the audit opinion and final value for money report was issued on 1 March 2023. The certificate was issued at the same time. So that audit year is also fully closed.
- 2022/23 financial year is a couple of weeks away from its conclusion. External Auditors and finance colleagues across the five councils have been discussing the accounts production and audit process for the 2022/23 financial year. Reports for Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) Council will move forward to the Somerset Council Audit Committee.
- Other work Grant Thornton completes for SWT relates to grant certifications. Work on Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim is due to be completed this month.
- The Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) issued guidance late last month relating to the return on the pooling of Housing Capital Receipts, so the work will be concluded once the detail has been worked through.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- Whether the grant certification work would be transferred to the Unitary once the work had been completed. The officer confirmed that whilst Grant Thornton don't have to statutorily report the findings of grant certification work it is included in the regular progress update reports, which will be taken to the Somerset Council Audit Committee.
- Whether liaison would continue with Somerset Council to deal with any questions or comments in the next few months, particularly in respect of the production of the 2022/23 Accounts. The Officer confirmed that Grant Thornton will be the appointed auditor of Somerset Council so there will be ongoing liaison. The operational meeting was to confirm who does that. There will only be one lead going forward, but current leads will take responsibility for the closure of the 2022/23 accounts.

Councillors thanked everyone at Grant Thornton and John Dyson for all their hard work.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the Progress Report and Sector Update received from Grant Thornton.

(proposed by Cllr Janet Lloyd, seconded by Cllr Simon Coles)

#### 134. **SWAP Internal Audit - Outturn Report 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan**

Alastair Woodland, Assistant Director from SWAP presented the report:

- The update report on the 2022/23 audit plan covers progress, highlighting any significant findings to the Committee and flagging any changes to the Plan.
- Page 36 lists the reports that have been issued since the last report in December 2022. There are two follow up audits to draw your attention to - management of material supplies and procurement cards.
- Page 37 shows changes to the audit plan that have been made since the December 2022 report. Those areas of risk will be taken forward and looked at as part of the Somerset Council Audit Plan.

- Pages 41 - 44 provides an overview of the work that has been completed during 2022/23. This includes a section on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) support work.
- The management of material supplies was given limited assurance in 2021/22. This was followed up during 2022/23 and it was found that good progress had been made on all recommendations. All but one recommendation had been completed, with the remaining one being materially complete with an expectation that it would be completed before 31 March 2023.
- There are a few recommendations outstanding in relation to the Procurement cards audit which are highlighted on page 47. There have been some staffing absences in that area which has delayed some of the recommendations. Procurement cards forms part of the risk assessment for the new authority and this will be kept under review during 2023/24 and looked at across the whole authority.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- The churn of staff in the next few months giving concern as to whether there is a process in place for the return of Procurement cards when staff leave.
- How the process will be managed with potentially four different systems currently being used by district councils being managed under the Somerset Council process.
- Whether there is a Somerset Council card set up and ready to be used from 1 April 2023
- How the transition process will be managed and controlled to ensure that transactions don't get lost.
- Officers confirmed that SWAP will be commencing work on 1 April 2023 looking at procurement card transactions and will do this across the year before doing a more in-depth review. New authority will have a new control framework. SWT have clear details as to who currently holds cards and there is a requirement for them to be handed in when they leave the Council. There will be continuity with it moving across to the new council. Where Officer has a card now, they will continue to use this going forward to the new authority to ensure continuity and no disruption to the business. Somerset Council have set up a working group to pick up the work on procurement cards. SWT has done a thorough review of the conditions for issuing the cards which cardholders are required to subscribe to as well as the policy and guidance. All documentation has gone across to the working group to pick up as they see fit. There are currently 3 different modes of operation for procurement cards, but this will move to the point where there is one bank, one card issuer and one way for recording transactions. Responsibility for coordinating and monitoring will be given to an individual or team and the Executive Director for Finance will be keeping this under close review and will ensure that audit actions are picked up by the new authority.
- The number of recommendations listed on page 41 relating to income collection from Deane Helpline (one level 2 priority and two level 3 priority) and health and safety follow up (4 level 3 priority). The Officer confirmed that in respect of the Income Collection for the Deane Helpline, the opinion was reasonable assurance and therefore the details would not have been brought forward to the Committee. However, the Officer confirmed he would circulate



the report for Members to see the recommendations. In respect of the Health and Safety follow up the audit was undertaken in 2021/22 and due to the number of recommendations it was given limited assurance. As per auditing standards a follow up must be completed and when that was undertaken there were 4 recommendations outstanding. That information was reported to the Committee earlier in the year and would also have been reported through the level 1 and 2 audit action tracker reports.

Councillors thanked Alastair Woodland and SWAP Internal Audit Service for the work they have done for SWT over the last 4 years.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note progress made in delivery of the 2022-23 internal audit plan and significant findings since the previous update in December 2022.

(proposed by Cllr Steven Pugsley, seconded by Cllr Dawn Johnson)

### 135. **Internal Audit Annual Audit Opinion Report 2022/23**

Alastair Woodland, Assistant Director from SWAP presented the report:

- The Head of Audit is required to provide an annual opinion on how well governance, risk and internal control is working in the authority.
- Page 54 provides summary of the opinion. Four categories of opinion that can be given – no assurance, limited assurance, reasonable assurance and substantial assurance. The opinion gives reasonable assurance. Over the lifetime of SWT governance, risk and control has generally improved year on year which is a good news story.
- Pages 57 and 58 provide more narrative on the opinion.
- There are certain things that have to be included in the opinion report. Page 59 highlights where SWAP's work has fallen this year against the corporate risks that are in place in the organisation. This highlights the coverage and where the gaps are. The Audit & Governance Committee would want to receive assurance in the areas not being covered by SWAP. For example, there has been regular reporting to the committee on landlord safety checks.
- Page 62 sets out the professional standards that are in place and that SWAP get externally assessed every five years. The last assessment showed that SWAP conformed with the standards and an annual self-assessment shows still conforming to them.
- Pages 63 to 67 sets out the work that has been completed to form the basis of the opinion.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- Page 59 listing cyber security as no coverage in 2022/23 and whether it should be near the top of the list of priorities due to it being a high risk. The Officer confirmed that cyber security is a very high-risk area and has been covered in a lot of detail previously. It was not covered in as much detail in 2022/23 due to LGR and all the domains merging into a single domain. It has also been appreciated that there has been a large pull on IT resources during 2022/23 with IT radically changing for the new authority. Work has been carried out in terms of IT support to try to mitigate or provide assurance on

some of those risks as well as supporting LGR. The Officer confirmed that cyber security is high on the radar for SWAP for 2023/24 and the next few years as the new IT infrastructure evolves in Somerset Council.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the Annual Opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control environment in the delivery of SWT objectives.

(proposed by Cllr Janet Lloyd, seconded by Cllr Steven Pugsley)

### 136. **Summary of Level 1 and 2 Audit Actions Progress**

Malcolm Riches, Business Intelligence and Performance Manager presented the report:

- The report shows the position at the 31 January 2023 which is:
  - 2 audit reports (General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and SWT Regeneration Projects) with all Priority 1 and 2 actions completed since the last report (see Appendix 1).
  - 3 audit actions completed since the last report (see Appendix 2).
  - There are currently no overdue audit actions that are beyond their current target date.
  - 4 audit actions currently open whose due date is after 31 January 2023. These actions are listed along with a Red Amber Green (RAG) status of progress being made in Appendix 2 with all showing as green. 3 of these actions are on schedule to be completed before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, and the 1 remaining action (Records Management) is being incorporated as part of the LGR Information Governance Workstream.

There was no debate on this item.

Councillors thanked Malcolm Riches for preparing the report and providing regular reports to the committee.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the progress being made with audit actions, and that there are currently no overdue audit actions.

(proposed by Cllr Simon Coles, seconded by Cllr Tom Deakin)

### 137. **Fraud Outturn Report 2022/23**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- The report gives an outturn position on the work that has been done on fraud following on from the SWAP fraud maturity reports previously presented to the Committee.
- Page 78 sets out the list of recommendations and actions proposed by SWAP as well as an update on the current status of those actions.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- Whether work has been completed to identify where fraud tends to happen, the high risk areas and what things to be particularly alert for. Officers confirmed that there is a document provided by SWAP which focuses on the high-risk areas where fraud could occur, and this risk increases where there is a change of system or personnel. Fraud is factored into the SWAP annual audit plan. SWAP have been working with the fraud workstream to evaluate the risks fully across the new authority to ensure that it is factored into the corporate and operational risk registers moving forward. There is also a counter fraud programme for the new authority.
- Whether cyber fraud was high on the list of frauds that take place. The officer confirmed that there is a fraud risk assessment being undertaken on the authority which will identify high fraud risk areas. SWAP has a specialist trained team who have an in-depth knowledge of fraud, and work with external specialists to ensure fraud risks are identified and evaluated in a proactive way.
- Whether and stress testing would be carried out for the new Council to ensure that any new systems put in place are working, e.g. that fictitious employees are not being set up and paid on the Payroll system. Officers confirmed that every audit undertaken by SWAP must consider the fraud risks as a requirement of the auditing standards. SWAP are aware of the significant changes that are happening as a result of LGR with services and systems coming together, and it will be a case of making sure that there are appropriate controls in place which are robust in terms of fraud. SWAP are considering priority areas with the Somerset Council Senior Leadership Team and will also have dialogue with Service Directors, once appointed to find out when service changes will take place in order to make sure SWAP are involved when they can be to advise on fraud controls. SWAP have a key role in providing management assurance. The management of risk relies on robust management controls such as budget monitoring arrangements. In terms of the staffing example SWT has monitored staff pay and carried out reconciliations between the finance records and payroll system.
- In respect of 15 items on the report all are complete with the exception of the 4 being carried forward to the new Council.

Councillors thanked Amy Tregellas for bringing forward this report.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the Fraud outturn position report.

(proposed by Cllr Janet Lloyd, seconded by Cllr Simon Coles)

### 138. **Annual Governance Statement 2022/23**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- The Annual Governance Statement is being presented earlier than normal this year so that the committee can review and sign it off before the council is dissolved on 31 March 2023.
- The format follows the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) guidance and framework which hasn't changed in the last few years.

- The Statement starts of Page 93.
- Page 119 sets out the Council’s corporate governance framework.
- Pages 121 to 126 give an outturn position on the actions raised last year and their current status. They have either been completed or superseded by LGR.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- Members expressed disappointment that the SWT equality group ceased to meet some time ago but appreciated that this was due to LGR work.
- The lack of feedback system relating to Members sitting on outside bodies and that feedback rarely happened through the Portfolio Holder reports due to time constraints at Full Council meetings.
- Reporting on the outside bodies needs to be established at Somerset Council due to the amount of work (approximately 100 outside bodies on the list) and the need to keep people updated with what is going on. The officer confirmed that this point would be picked up with colleagues in the Democratic Services team to take forward.
- Whether the key to success with reporting back from outside bodies is to keep it as simple as possible for Members so they engage in that process. A template would be helpful that could be completed electronically.
- Whether the reasonable assurance conclusion is as good as it gets? Officers confirmed that the opinion could be either no assurance, limited assurance, reasonable assurance or substantial assurance. A substantial opinion is the highest opinion, but the threshold is very high and it is unlikely that many authorities would achieve that.
- That Local Community Networks should also be considered in terms of giving feedback so that case studies and best practice is shared around the County.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23 (Appendix A) and notes the outturn position for the 2021/22 Action Plan (Appendix B).

(proposed by Cllr Steven Pugsley, seconded by Cllr Simon Coles)

### 139. **Health and Safety Update**

Sean Papworth, Assistant Director – Corporate presented the report:

- The quarterly report covers performance and the programme that has been running for the last 18 months.
- In terms of the programme every work-stream and project has been completed and the programme will be wrapped up once assurance has been completed in respect of the original audits. A desktop exercise is underway to complete the assurance piece of work and to collate appropriate evidence.
- Lone working continues to be reviewed and additional devices have been rolled out to staff for additional safety. This will continue to be reviewed to ensure that all staff that need devices get them.
- The Health and Safety Team continue to carry out inspections across the work that we do, and this will continue going forward. The focus at the moment is around contractors as the data continues to suggest that’s the area where attention is needed.

- The Health and Safety Team and Human Resources Team are working to ensure that the data around our people is being reviewed to identify any themes or trends, and that they are picked up and dealt with accordingly.
- The performance report on page 138, in 2022/23 there should be a total of 98 accidents listed in the table. The trend is seeing a lot more reporting in terms of near misses. Also seeing a slight increase in accidents but for the most part they are very minor accidents that might have gone unreported in the past. The improvement in reporting allows officers to start picking up any themes in the data.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- What the term fracture (MOP) meant on Page 138. The officer confirmed that MOP means member of the public.
- Where the responsibility lies in terms health and safety in terms of contractors and whether it depends on the type of work that they are doing. Officers confirmed that it varies dependent on the size and duration of the work. The focus has been on the fundamentals to understand as much as possible about our contractors such as whether they have the right health and safety systems in place, do they have documentation to prove they are paying attention to their health and safety and do they have the right insurance in place. This information is then input into our systems to keep track on whether the contractors are keeping their information up to date. A piece of work has been completed on risk assessments to ensure they are thinking ahead and that work isn't starting before risk assessments have been completed. Officers can review and challenge risk assessments from contractors when they are received. Work being carried out on our behalf by contractors is still a risk so inspections will continue to focus on the paperwork and ensuring that what they are doing on the ground matches what they say they are going to do in their paperwork.
- How health and safety arrangements will transition across to the new Somerset Council, particularly the Housing Service. Officers confirmed that there will be a number of new policies for the Council. Housing is one of the key areas of focus, and that work will continue through the work of officers and the Health and Safety Business Partners.
- Whether there was assurance that health and safety will have adequate coverage during the transition stage to ensure that items are passed over and don't fall through the net. Officers confirmed that the good work that has been completed over the last 18 months will not stop because we are getting to vesting day. Work will continue to improve areas such as contractor inspections. Toolbox talks for staff are being rolled out, as well as dynamic risk assessments which can be completed when officers get to a job rather than having to do it beforehand or not completing it. Everything will continue as the same people will be doing the same jobs with broadly the same management in place. Work will carry on with the existing programme, performance and health and safety governance until a new process is in place. Once the new arrangements are in place there will be a further transitional period.
- What the situation would be from a legality perspective if work is happening under Somerset Council but the arrangements are going to be operating under existing SWT arrangements. Officers confirmed that the work will be

undertaken in all respects by the new council. The assets, contracts will be novated, the staff will be employees of, and the legal duties will all fall to the new Somerset Council. What happens on a day to day basis and operationally will be continuing with systems and governance and procedures that allow that work to continue, and continue in a safe fashion. This does not affect the legality as the duty and responsibility falls to the new council and its employees. The processes they work to will continue for a period until new processes are brought to bear.

- The lack of reference to Member in terms of lone working and that Member lone working should be included in the policy, as it is just as important for Members as it is for staff. Officers confirmed that this will be followed up with colleagues in the Democratic Services Team at Somerset Council to ensure appropriate arrangements are put in place for Members. Officers also confirmed that a risk assessment and guidance pack was put together and sent to all members previously as well as information sent out to all Members on 29 March 2022.
- It was highlighted that at a recent SCC Council meeting there was a motion passed on debate not hate which demonstrates that the new council are very aware of the issues faced by Members and the need to ensure that democracy is taken forward without negatively impacting on individuals.

Councillors thanked Sean Papworth and James Barraah for their work on health and safety.

The committee **RESOLVED** to note and endorse:

A) the H & S Performance Scorecard data, together with the observations/recommendations/conclusive summary (appendix A)

B) the HSMS Improvement Programme progress update (detailed in section 4.4)

(proposed by Cllr Janet Lloyd, seconded Cllr Simon Coles)

#### 140. **Landlord Compliance Report**

Ian Candlish, Assistant Director Housing Property presented the report:

- This is an update to landlord safety compliance up to 6 March 2023.
- It covers the key safety areas as outlined in section 1.2 on page 139.
- Comparative performance is set out for each workstream in the tables for each area in section 4 of the report, based on the previous report that came to the committee in December 2022.
- Overall, there is an improvement in compliance activities and particularly we have done a range of procurement activities set out in section 1.6 on page 140.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- Whether the figure of 81% in section 4.2.8 on page 144 was due to accessing tenants properties.
- What was meant by compartmentalisation and tenancy management in section 4.3.8 on page 147. Officers confirmed that if you take a large building such as a block of flats, it is split into different compartments for fire safety.

For example, long corridors would have fire door breaks and in the roof area there would be splits between the different parts of the building with fire break walls. When work is carried out one of the key issues is to ensure that it isn't breached, for example if a hole is drilled to put a cable or pipe through then the appropriate sealing would have to be put in place. The actions come out of the fire risk assessments and remedial actions arise when the assessor has seen an area of concern, or they haven't been into a particular area. SWT has to provide evidence that what in place is appropriate.

- That the tenancy management actions relate to fire safety in terms of talking to tenants about areas that are fire escape routes that might have items in them which could create fire or block an escape route in the event of a fire. The Housing Tenancy team check these on a regular basis and take appropriate action if any issues are found.
- The number of overdue actions for fire safety listed on pages 147 and 148. Officers confirmed that the actions for this area related to two things. Firstly, the communal fire door programme and entrance door fire programme, both of which relate to compartmentalisation. Where work is undertaken to take out the fire door, the whole frame would also have to be taken out and any issues that might be found when taking the frame out would also have to be dealt with. If there is no evidence that this check was completed when the previous door and frame was fitted there is an assumption that it needs to be checked. Secondly, inspections are taking place and a contract is running for any areas where evidence is needed following a fire risk assessment, which couldn't be evidence at the time of the assessment.
- That the overdue actions relating to fire safety are all medium and low risk so all urgent and high-risk actions have been addressed and nearly 10,000 actions arising from fire risk assessments have been completed, and it is an ongoing programme of activity. To give further assurance a formal review of the overdue actions takes place and a quarterly report is presented to the Housing Senior Management Team, who monitoring this very closely.
- Whether SWT was in a high area for Radon and whether there are any results to show that Radon levels are higher than they should desirably be, and what remedial action can be taken if Radon levels are higher than they ought to be. Officers confirmed that there is a UK Radon map which indicates where likely instances of Radon are located. Radon fundamentally comes from the types of rock underneath you and that houses are built on. Monitoring equipment has gone into the properties that were identified from the map. The monitors sit in the property for 90 days plus measuring their Radon levels or potential Radon levels in the property. The monitor is then taken away and analysed by a laboratory. No results have been received yet, so this information is awaited. If results confirm there are instances of Radon in a property, ventilation either some form of natural ventilation or a fan would be the likely remedial works that would be done as part of the programme.

James Barra, Director of Housing, gave the Committee an update on work undertaken by Savills:

- Savills have undertaken a package of work for SWT and Homes in Sedgemoor, which has included the creation of a Building and Resident Safety Strategy which goes before the SCC Executive this week. The Strategy primarily implements the new building safety legislation relating

specifically to high rise properties. Across our combined housing stock there is only one high rise property located in the Homes in Sedgemoor area.

- Savills have also undertaken a range of other audit and assurance work focusing on the criteria of being safe, legal and functioning for the new organisation. This was an opportunity for SWT to measure overall progress with our property safety compliance improvement programme. From previous reports we have had a trajectory of programmes to achieve 100% compliance. Savills completed a desktop exercise based on housing data, including the reports that have been presented to this Committee. Savills confirmed that there are effective systems in place and there are no concerns regarding our compliance records. They recommended that maturity is improved in some activities including demonstrating more internal audit activity on a cyclical basis. This has been agreed with SWAP in terms of a future programme going forward. Savills also recommended that further third party assurance processes is needed for all of the disciplines. This is in place at the moment for gas safety and electrical safety but needs to be in place across all of the other disciplines. Officers are working to ensure that is in place.
- Savills highlighted two key areas of focus which relate to the programmes around air source heat pump servicing and electrical testing which haven't achieved their programme as expected. Both programmes were due to get to 100% compliance by the end March 2023.
- The air source heat pump programme was delayed due to the procurement of a new contract and the Section 24 sign off process which is carried out by the new council. This meant that the mobilisation of the contract has taken longer than expected. The current incumbent contractor is continuing at the current time until the new contract comes into play in April 2023. It is then hoped that the programme will catch up as quickly as possible with the new contractor in place.
- The challenges in relation to the electrical inspections is one previously discussed several times at this committee, and includes a lack of capacity in the marketplace, contractor failure, the inability to recruit to the inhouse team due to the challenging marketplace and the shortage of electrical contractors.
- The other challenge relates to access. The electrical testing programme was the programme most affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic. Due to the public health implications, the work was paused during that pandemic as the nature of electrical testing means that an officer would potentially be in a property for 2 to 3 hours, possibly more with remedial works and would need access to all parts of the property. In comparison servicing a boiler is just going into one room and it's normally 20-30 minutes. In that context, after the Coronavirus Pandemic there was catch up work to do and unfortunately the programme hasn't delivered as hoped. A further challenge is the transition from a ten-year cycle to a five-year cycle which means more properties will come out of date and require electrical safety testing as we move forward.
- To go into the new council with a new start the decision has been made to write to the regulator this week to inform them of our current position. The letter will set out the context, i.e. the work Savills have completed as well as the SWT performance across all areas, giving a mostly a positive picture.
- The Savills work also reviewed and compared all the SWT address list to look for omissions by triangulating information from one data set to another. That has resulted in zero omissions confirming that our data quality is very good.



- The referral to the regulator is purely to confirm that our programmes have not delivered as we hoped for the reasons set out and that we have been reporting progress transparently to this Committee, our Tenants Strategic Group and our Strategic Management Team. Any response or follow up work from the regulator will flow into the new authority. The Chief Executive of the new council has been briefed and informed.

Councillors thank Ian Candlish and James Barrah for their comprehensive report and update.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report and progress being made in relation to landlord property safety compliance.

(proposed by Cllr Dawn Johnson, seconded by Cllr Simon Coles)

141. **Audit and Governance Committee Chair's Annual Report 2022/23 - For Information Only**

There were no questions, comments or discussion on the Chair's Annual Report and it was for information only.

(The Meeting ended at 7.46 pm)



## SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 22 February 2023

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Tom Deakin, Ed Firmin, Roger Habgood, Steve Griffiths, Dawn Johnson, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Pritchard, Ray Tully and Vivienne Stock-Williams

Officers: Paul Fitzgerald, Kerry Prisco, Steve Hughes, Mark Leeman and Chris Hall, Mark Washington and Toni Gaskins from SLM (Everyone Active)

Also Present: Councillors Francesca Smith, Derek Perry, Chris Booth, Loretta Whetlor and Sarah Wakefield. Brenda Weston joined via zoom.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

### 73. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Simon Coles and Andy Milne.

### 74. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on the 25 January 2023, were approved as a true record.

*Prop: Lithgow / Sec: Lloyd (Unanimous)*

### 75. 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 T Deakin	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	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

76. **Public Participation**

There were no questions or comments submitted for public participation.

77. **Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

The Community Scrutiny Committee unanimously accepted the Recommendation and Written Answer Tracker. There were no comments arising.

*Prop: Habgood / Sec: Firmin (Unanimous)*

78. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plans**

The Committee noted the last meetings of the Executive and Full Council. There were no comments arising.

*Prop: Lloyd / Sec: Griffiths (Unanimous)*

79. **Chair's Report**

The Chair, Cllr Libby Lisgo presented her annual report to the Committee. Cllr Dave Mansell thanked her for leading Community Scrutiny over the preceding 2 years, and commented that she had encouraged good scrutiny, had not stifled debate and was fair and inclusive.

Cllr Lisgo responded by saying she was aware that some members who would be travelling into the new Somerset Council, may wish to refer to previous minutes of the Committee, to follow up on outstanding issues. These would be accessible via the new Somerset Council website, or by contacting a member of the Governance team.

80. **Sports and Leisure Management (Everyone Active) Bi-Annual Report**

The Report was introduced by Executive Councillor Derek Perry, Portfolio Holder for Sports, Parks, Leisure and Phosphates, supported by Steve Hughes.

Cllr Perry stated that the biggest challenges that SLM faced was the legacy of COVID19, and now the inflationary issues caused by the Cost-of-Living crisis. Due to this SLM had instigated price increases across their sites, which they were at liberty to implement, This could not be vetoed in any way by the Executive and was an operational procedure. Also as part of the reorganisation, Councillors and SWT staff would no longer be able to make use of discounted fees during off-peak hours.

Steve Hughes stated that the reporting period was from April-September 2022, and he was aware that this seemed a long time ago. In the upcoming

presentation, SLM would be outlining their operations during that time and beyond to show how they were dealing with the current challenges.

Representatives from Everyone Active, Mark Washington and Toni Gaskins presented a series of slides highlighting recent work. These slides can be viewed [here](#).

In response to a question raised at their previous visit in July 2022,  
**Noted in the Minutes of the Community Scrutiny Meeting held on the 27 July 2022.**

Is there any way to analyse users of the leisure facilities via postcode, to get a breakdown of the demographic? In particular in Priorswood concerning Wellsprings which was operating in a very deprived area. - The Chair agreed that this was an answer that could be provided at the next update.

Mark Washington was able to answer that 838 members of Wellsprings Leisure Centre lived within a 2mile radius of the site. This was approximately 50% of the total membership and this was equally split 50/50 between male and female users and covered a broad age range. Further information on the other leisure venues could be provided if required.

Councillors asked if this data could be made available and also a breakdown on usage. (Taken to [Written Answer Tracker](#).) It was also asked if information was forthcoming from the wider West Somerset area, bearing in mind it was unlikely that they would travel so far to use these facilities.

Questions and comments from the Committee included:-

- Good H&S stats especially with regard to RIDDOR and the lack of accidents caused by slips and trips in the water environments. Good management in place. 1.68 per 1,000 visitors is a good industry standard but work will be done to compare this to other operators and set a benchmark.
- H&S and the recording of near misses as well as accidents is one of the strongest aspects of service with SLM. There is a fantastic commitment to training, awareness and record keeping ensuring that the customers get the safest possible experience when using the facilities. There is a policy of sharing information across the Leisure Centres in real time so that staff are constantly updated on any challenges that might be encountered day-to-day. SLM foster a learning culture and it is important that all H&S information is recorded and monitored and the appropriate mitigations are put in place.
- There were some cleanliness issues in the previous reporting period to do with Wellington Sports Centre. These concerns are now being addressed within the existing budget, and a new general manager is keeping on top of ISA Cleaning who are still in place and completing their contract.
- Despite the challenges of competitors pricing strategies, Everyone Active continues to offer a service beyond that of the cheapest Gym operative. They have lost customers to PureGym in Taunton and this is reflected in the memberships, but PureGym do not have the range of leisure facilities that the SLM sites offer. (Pool. Fitness Classes, Spinning, Racquet sports

etc). The Wellington Leisure Centre is managing to retain its membership despite other operators nearby.

- The GP Exercise Referral Scheme membership has been increasing substantially and this has mainly been taken up at Blackbrook and Wellington. Wellsprings has successfully held its membership figures.
- It was asked if prices could be reduced at SWT Leisure Centres to accommodate those members who only wanted to use the gym facilities and be more competitive against PureGym. The response was that it was a risky pricing strategy to adopt, and that PureGym had an aggressive opening offer to encourage take-up of their facilities. After 6 months the membership pricing would be increased, and as such SLM were seeing some of these customers returning to use their facilities. PureGym also aim their product at a completely different demographic to the SLM Leisure centres.
- The GP referrals at present are coming from Musgrove into Wellsprings and are channelled through a specialist leisure assistant.
- A comment was made as to whether the refurbishment of the tennis courts at Vivary Park would adversely affect the memberships at other leisure centres. If the consultation allows for users to approve the pricing policy and money can be drawn down from the Tennis Association to enhance these courts, then it is envisaged that this will be a positive outcome for tennis in Taunton. It will enable more users to access the sport and from there feed into other opportunities.
- GP Referral – Currently 6 referrals have been made at £30 per person. This is to cover an initial 4-week period and introduce them to the facilities. SLM is currently looking at ways this offer could be extended and enhanced to increase users and take-up. This is an area of the business they are looking to expand.
- Cllr Mansell extended thanks for the assistance to Wivey Pool and the community training that was being provided free of charge to the resident lifeguards. This would enable the lifeguards to maintain their level of training through the closed winter months.
- The work towards de-carbonisation of the Leisure Centres was welcomed through recycling and other embedded initiatives. It was suggested that maybe discounts could be awarded to customers who provided their own hot drinking container rather than using a paper cup which was currently costed at 18p. Mark Washington agreed to follow this up, as it was not being offered at present, and would be a quick and easy discount to implement.
- Mark Washington clarified that although a main part of the report focussed on membership take-up this was not the entire business. A key make up of users centred around the “pay to play” aspect which encouraged participation in sport. He agreed to feed this into his next report at a future meeting.
- It was also agreed that going forwards the user data would be presented in a better way, to highlight trends and seasonal changes, and allow for more meaningful analysis.
- SLM do contact their users to get customer feedback, usually via email address. The main reason for people ceasing to use facilities is due to moving away from the area. SLM do undertake “leaver surveys” when they

are notified that someone is ceasing to use their business and this focusses on the level of service offered, safety and cleanliness.

- Corporate memberships are available, where SLM have been invited to attend via the employer. These include blood pressure checks and discussions on what facilities are available to employees. They also hope to expand this into general outreach programmes.
- Questions were asked around the marketing strategies employed, especially around the older age demographic. PureGym's average age user is between 18-26 in general and are young, fit mobile people. The facilities used centre around the free weights and pumping iron and this is the demographic that PureGym concentrate their marketing on. The Chair also offered some user feedback around Blackbrook Leisure Centre, which Mark Washington agreed to take away and address. SLM do use a variety of communications to market their offers, which cover a broad range of targeted user groups. This is everything from the traditional methods such as posters and advertising, to social media engagement and simple word of mouth.
- Somerset Moves is a steering group that has just been set up and is tasked to get users in remote locations to facilities and investigate how this can be achieved. Reports on this will be fed back at future meetings.

The Committee noted the update and the Chair thanked Mark and Toni for attending the meeting.

81. **Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring as at Qtr 3 (31 December 2022)**

Executive Cllr Francesca Smith, PFH for Housing introduced the Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring Report for Qtr 3.

There is a forecasted underspend of £91K which has been achieved mainly by an increase in investment income, as a direct result of reduction in spend on the capital programme and increasing interest rates. These have offset the main financial pressures including depreciation charges, the rising cost of bringing void properties up to a decent standard prior to reletting, the recent pay award and inflation increasing material costs.

Questions and comments from the Committee included: -

- An update on the current position regarding the North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP). The next phase of the contract is out for tender, and interested parties are being invited to price for the work, following the previous contractor stating they would no longer be delivering projects in the Southwest. Tenants have been written to and are being kept up to date. The PFH wants to deliver on this as soon as possible, but the process is being hampered by the rising costs of materials, the reluctance of contractors to price for the work and the demolition being held up until the end of the bird-nesting season.

The delays in completing the phases and going back out to tender will have a budgetary impact on the Council. There is a delay in the cost of borrowing due to waiting on the tender, as interest rates increase and inflation will increase the cost of materials further down the line. There will also be delays in rental income because the properties are not ready for letting. The budget for the next financial year and the MTFP is being adjusted to account for these factors.

- SWT do not currently do 6-monthly inspections of their council housing, to ensure they are maintained to a reasonable standard, although this is something that regularly occurs in the private sector. The PFH stated that inspections usually occurred prior to the tenant vacating when sufficient notice had been given, but this was not always the case. Some properties were left in extremely poor condition and this was costly to put right before re-letting. It would be prudent to instigate this with new tenants going forward, as it would be a good way of spotting issues before they had a chance to escalate.

Chris Hall clarified that although property inspections were not routine, operatives from the compliance safety teams would be undertaking annual checks and any concerns would be reported back as a matter of course. This has been picked up by the Tenants Strategic Board who are hoping to widen the remit to those houses who do not have compliance inspections, and can be booked in for at least an annual check.

- Recruitment – there are national issues on recruitment which are hampering SWT's ability to recruit and retain key staff. It is also difficult to compete with the private sector in terms of salary when this is determined at a national level. SWT is doing all it can to ensure that vacancies are filled, by promoting the extra benefits that come for working for a public sector organisation (such as pension, health schemes etc). If core staff vacancies cannot be recruited then the new unitary will look to employ from agencies or from other parts of the council in Somerset and share key skills.

The Chair acknowledged that the work of scrutinising housing in a wider sense would be absolutely critical in the new council and would fall under Chris Hall's Communities Directorate. She also wished staff well for the future.

The Committee unanimously noted the report recommendations.

## 82. **Health and Wellbeing Board Update**

Executive Cllr Chris Booth, representative on the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board introduced the update.

Mark Leeman, Strategy Specialist presented a series of slides, which can be viewed [here](#).

Questions and comments from the committee included the following: -



- How will Local Community Networks (LCNs) fit in with this complex picture? At the present time this is unknown, but it will emerge as engagement grows between the various organisations. Building community resilience is key in delivering on the strategies especially around homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Where do the Police fit into the Integrated Care Service (ICS)? Avon and Somerset Police Superintendent Dickon Turner is a representative on various parts of the Health and Wellbeing Board, as are the DWP, Probation and other statutory services. It is very much a partnership approach.
- Comment was made that there seems to be a concentrated focus on governance and a top-down approach, rather than looking at the end user, and bottom-up delivery. There should be more emphasis on the individual needs rather than getting lost in the bureaucracy. Mark Leeman said that this was the nature of his presentation and there was some very good work taking place with Housing First which was happening at ground level, and directly connecting in with communities.
- It was recognised that the implementation of the ICS alongside the unitary council coming into being, was a very exciting and interesting time for health care in Somerset, despite the complexity of the issues.
- It was agreed that the best way forward was to get partners around a table to discuss the complex cases and come up with an integrated package to look after people. This rarely happened at present but was the best way to tackle the issues. Co-locating teams and working alongside each other would get the best use of resource and sharing information and resource. The fact that housing would now sit alongside the other former SCC functions, would allow the basic health needs to be addressed, first and foremost. This would in essence address some of the fundamental issues that arise around safety, security and homelessness.
- There are various funding streams and pots of money that can be tapped into from housing budgets and the NHS but the scale of the problem is vast. The partnership working will enable a consistent plan to come forward and galvanise action. Although crisis management will always be there, there needs to be a more preventative and collaborative approach towards commissioning in the long term. The Better Futures Plan is one method of investment to work alongside and support vulnerable people to prevent recurring homelessness. By putting a plan in place to support them in their accommodation, there is more likelihood that they will sustain their tenancy.

The Chair finished by saying that this was an essential project that absolutely had to be delivered to enable a better future for the most vulnerable in our communities. She thanked Mark Leeman for attending and providing the update.

(The Meeting ended at 8.54 pm)

## SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 1 March 2023

Present: Councillor Sue Buller (Chair)

Councillors Ian Aldridge, Simon Coles, Ed Firmin, John Hassall, Libby Lisgo, Nick Thwaites, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Chris Hall, Sam Murrell, Paul Fitzgerald, Malcolm Riches and Kerry Prisco

Also Present: Councillors Benet Allen and Federica Smith Roberts

(The meeting commenced at 6.16 pm)

### 97. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Habib Farbahi, Simon Nicholls and Sarah Wakefield.

Amy Tregellas and Alison North attended via zoom.

### 98. Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee were approved as a true record.

*Prop: Coles / Sec: Firmin (Unanimous)*

### 99. 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 I Aldridge	All Items	Williton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	SCC & Clerk to	Personal	Spoke and Voted

100. **Public Participation**

There were no items of public participation.

101. **To receive an update on the Local Government Review (LGR) and Community Governance Review (CGR)**

Alison North delivered a final verbal update on the Local Government Reorganisation. The main points are as follows: -

- Tier 3 recruitment is due to start next week, with appointments to be made in the week commencing 23 March. This would mean that the top level of management would then be in place to take the workstreams through to vesting day.
- Several milestones had been reached since the last update with approval of the budget, the constitution and workstream readiness being robustly checked.
- One new phone number had now been implemented so there was a single point of contact into the Authority. This provided more resilience for the customer call-centre teams as they now had worked across the whole of Somerset.
- There was only one ICT migration left to implement which was Mendip. It was testament to the hard work and collaboration of the ICT teams that this had been a relatively smooth process. It was hoped that April 1<sup>st</sup> would be a bit of an anti-climax and the public wouldn't notice any change in the delivery of their services.
- Staff were receiving regular weekly updates on managing the change, including how to obtain their new ID badge, payroll arrangements and where they would be working on Day1.

Councillors commented on the recent ICT changes which had presented some challenges with printing and accessing payslips. Cllr Federica Smith Roberts offered to assist with this outside of the meeting if required.

The Chair thanked Alison for her regular monthly updates to the Committee.

The Committee noted the update.

102. **Corporate Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

The Committee noted the updates to the Recommendation and Written Answer Tracker.

One additional comment was made that the £2 concessionary bus-fare scheme has been extended until June, rather than ending on 31 March as detailed in the tracker.

103. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plan**

The Committee noted the items that were going forward to the final Executive meeting on 15 March.

The Chair had been sighted on the Commercial in Confidence report which was the responsibility of Joe Wharton. This unfortunately had not been written in time to be scrutinised by the committee, but members who wished to comment could attend the Executive meeting. The item would be held in confidential session.

No other comments were forthcoming.

104. **Corporate Scrutiny Chair's Annual Report**

The Chair presented her report to the Committee.

Cllr Loretta Whetlor extended her thanks to the Chair and Vice-Chair for their tenure leading the Committee and wished everyone well in the future.

The Chair thanked officers and councillors for the time they had given to the Committee in the past year.

The Committee unanimously approved the report.

105. **Corporate Performance Monitoring Report - Quarter 3 2022/23**

Cllr Benet Allen introduced the Corporate Performance Monitoring report to Corporate Scrutiny and invited the committee to comment.

Comments and questions included the following:-

- Concern about the red risk areas in particular the number of complaints, call waiting times and gas compliance.
  - With regard to complaints – the targets were aspirational and very tight to achieve. Improvements were being made in the final quarter which should hopefully improve the figure overall.
  - Call waiting times were currently reducing due to an increase in staff and more resilience in the system. The figures in Qtr3 were concerning and this was being addressed. There had been some issues with call abandonment due to the recent technical changes but this was being followed up and the waiting times were coming down.
  - The gas compliance issue related to 1 property not having its annual check within the required time. This issue has now been addressed and the target has been achieved.
- It was questioned whether sickness and staff turnover (currently flagged as Amber) were higher than expected and the reasons for this?
  - Staff sickness is difficult to monitor due to the ongoing Covid situation and working from home. Some members of staff on long-

term sick will also falsely skew the figures. Staff sickness is currently higher than expected hence the Amber status. It was asked if comparative figures from other Somerset authorities could be provided to Cllrs so that they could assess whether this was a county wide issue. Malcolm Riches agreed to email the Committee with the statistics.

- Staff turnover was higher than the KPI, but this was expected in the current climate of uncertainty and reflected across the UK, especially in key roles where recruitment and retention were a challenge.

Corporate Scrutiny noted the report.

106. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public - Appendix F ONLY**

The Committee moved to enter confidential session to discuss Appendix F of the report, and a planning issue raised by Cllr Gwil Wren.

*Prop: Buller / Sec: Coles (Unanimous).*

The Committee then re-opened the meeting to vote on the recommendations in Point 2 of the report.

107. **General Fund Financial Monitoring Report as at Quarter 3 (31 December 2022)**

Cllr Benet Allen introduced the Financial Monitoring Report for Qtr 3 and invited the Committee to comment: -

Paul Fitzgerald responded to a concern that had been raised by the Chair prior to the meeting, in respect of Appendix F and writing off bad debt. Somerset West and Taunton takes a robust approach and pursues every opportunity to recover non-payment of council tax/business rates. SWT only carries collectable debt on its books and toxic bad debt had to be written off the accounts especially if there was no chance of recovery and all avenues of investigation had been exhausted.

Cllr Wren expressed interest in 5.10 of the report and the potential cost of clearance of Muddy Acre. Chris Hall advised that this was a sensitive planning issue and could not be discussed in a public forum.

It was decided to move the Committee into confidential session to further explore Appendix F and have an update on the Qtr3 variance on Planning as defined in Table 2 of paragraph 5.10 of the report.

Corporate Scrutiny reopened the meeting to approve the recommendations to the report en bloc. These were accepted unanimously by the Committee.

Paul Fitzgerald thanked Corporate Scrutiny Committee and the Chair for their work with staff over the last year. This was responded to by the Chair, who wished all staff well in their future endeavours.

(The Meeting ended at 7.27 pm)





## SWT Standards Committee - 23 February 2023

Present: Councillor Mark Lithgow (Chair)  
Councillors Hugh Davies, Martin Peters, Steven Pugsley and Ray Tully

Officers: Amy Tregellas

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

### 13. **Appointment of Vice-chair**

The Committee resolved to elect Councillor Martin Peters as the Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for this remaining meeting of the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

(proposed by Cllr Mark Lithgow, seconded by Cllr Hugh Davies)

### 14. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Terry Venner.

Councillors Lee Baker, Richard Lees and Hazel Prior-Sankey were absent.

### 15. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Standards Committee**

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes from the Standards Committee meeting held on 26 July 2022.

(proposed by Cllr Hugh Davies, seconded by Cllr Martin Peters)

### 16. **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 H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington TC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee, Taunton Shadow Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Council		
Cllr S Pugsley	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

No other declarations of interest were received.

17. **Public participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item of business on the agenda.

18. **Standards Committee Action/Recommendation tracker**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the item relating to the Somerset Wide Members Code of Conduct and procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations, which were both considered by the Committee at its meeting in July 2022. The officer confirmed that both items had been approved by Full Council on 6 September 2022.

19. **Committee on Standards in Public Life Leading in practice report**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- This is the latest report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life
- Useful report for Members to see as it focuses on ethical standards
- The agenda pack includes the report (pages 17-100) and an open letter from Lord Evans to Public Sector Leaders (pages 101-103)
- Lord Evan's letter asked leaders to consider a number of questions to ensure that ethical values and standards are embedded in organisations
- Whilst Somerset West and Taunton Council's days are numbered what is suggested is to write to the Chief Executive Officer, Leader and Chair of Standards of Somerset County Council/Somerset Council to ask them to consider the report and questions set out in Lord Evans letter.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- That the letter to the Chief Executive Officer, Leader and Chair of Standards Committee asks them to bring both the report and Lord Evans letter to the attention of all Members.
- Whether the Committee was agreeing to write to Somerset County Council or Somerset Council. The Officer explained that the letter would be written to the current council but it would ask them to consider it as the new Unitary Council.

The Committee **RESOLVED** that it:

1. Notes the Leading in Practice Report: A review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life
2. Writes to Duncan Sharkey (SCC) Chief Executive Officer, Cllr Bill Revans Leader of SCC and the Chair of the Standards Committee to ask them to consider this report to ensure that ethical values are embedded into the culture and ways of working for Somerset Unitary Council.

(proposed Cllr Steven Pugsley, seconded Cllr Ray Tully)

## 20. **Ethical awareness training update**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- The Report started on Page 105 of the agenda pack.
- The Committee is responsible for promoting high standards of conduct for District, Town and Parish Councillors
- Two editions of the ethical newsletter have been sent to all SWT Councillors and the third edition will be published in the week commencing 27 February 2023
- Ethical newsletters contain information including committee meeting etiquette, promotion of the Somerset wide Members Code of Conduct, Members personal safety, reminders for the registers of interests and gifts and hospitality, and feedback from members of the public and case study examples.
- Ethical training awareness session for District Councillors took place on 11 January 2023
- Two training sessions for Town and Parish Councils had taken place and a third is scheduled for 8 March 2023.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- Poor levels of attendance for the District Councillor ethical awareness training and it likely being due to the Council coming to an end shortly.
- Why the ethical awareness training was not mandatory. The Officer confirmed that whilst officers highlight the importance of the training, we are unable to force Councillors to attend training sessions.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the ethical awareness training update.

(proposed by Cllr Steven Pugsley, seconded by Cllr Martin Peters)

## 21. **Update on Standards arrangements for the new Unitary Council**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- The report starts on page 109 of the agenda pack and provides updates on the Standards arrangements for the Unitary Council
- Having an ethical framework will be a key part of the new Council's governance arrangements

- The Unitary Council's Constitution was approved by Somerset County Council on 25 February 2023, and includes the Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee and Hearing Panels
- The Member Code of Conduct and process for dealing with Standards Allegations is already in place
- Going through the recruitment and selection process for three Independent Persons
- Updating the information held for Town and Parish Council Clerks so that can be loaded onto Modern.gov and be publicly available on the website from 1 April 2023
- The Governance workstream are considering how best to deal with Register of Interest forms and Registers of Gifts and Hospitality

No discussion took place on this item.

(proposed Cllr Steven Pugsley, seconded Cllr Hugh Davies)

22. **Standards Committee Chair's Annual Report 2022/23 - For Information Only**

There were no questions, comments or discussion on the Chair's Annual Report and it was for information only.

23. **Access to information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The Chair read out the wording as set out on the agenda papers.

The Committee decided that it would vote to move into confidential session, if and when the need arose. Until that point, the Monitoring Officer's update would be given in the public domain.

24. **Monitoring Officer Update**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer gave the update report:

- Officer gifts and hospitality register. To date, 4 entries for 2022/23. They included picking up an award, attending a networking event, receiving a box of chocolates and receiving an Amazon voucher for completing a conference. All signed off.
- Members gifts and hospitality. To date, 17 entries for 2022/23. All relate to Chair or Vice Chair of SWT Council or Mayor of Taunton. Hospitality included attending concerts, the theatre and dinners in their civic role.
- Code of conduct complaints register. All complaints related to Town and Parish councils. The Officer gave the Committee a brief overview of each complaint. There are currently 12 complaints listed on the register, with 7 open and 5 closed.
- Of the 7 open complaints – in two cases the Monitoring Officer (MO) is waiting from information from the complainant, one case is going to a Standards Sub-

Committee, one case is due to be closed shortly following discussion with the Independent Person, one case the MO is seeking legal advice as the subject matter is a grey area and two cases are at the initial review/legal jurisdiction test stage and will be discussed with the Independent Person shortly.

- Any complaints still open as at 1 April 2023 will go across to the new Somerset Council.

(The Meeting ended at 6.50 pm)



# Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

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

### Annual Report.

#### Parks and Open Spaces

##### Park Improvements

We have invested in our parks over the past year to ensure these continue to be great places for residents to visit. Works included:

- The fountains in Vivary Park and Wellington Park have been repaired
- Footpath replacement programme was completed at Vivary park, Beech Grove, and Walkers Gate
- Replacement of benches and bins in various parks
- Replace the interpretation boards at Hankridge and Wellington basin
- Implementation of the Grass Management Strategy

##### Britain in Bloom and Green Flag Awards

Our in-house teams continued to show that our parks and open spaces are some of the best with external judging.

Green Flags were awarded to all the parks applied for. These were: French Weir; Victoria Park; Vivary Park and Blenheim Gardens. We were re-awarded a Heritage award for Wellington Park, one of only two in the Southwest. Somerset West and Taunton also received 2 x Community Green Flags for Comeytrove Park, Taunton and Swains Lane Nature Reserve, Wellington. In the Britain in Bloom Awards, Taunton, Minehead and Wellington achieved Silver Gilt across each area improving the award for both Minehead and Wellington from the previous year.

##### Play Area Improvements

Work to complete the Council Play Area's improvement programme for 22/23 has been completed. These works are funded by a mixture of S106 funds and the Council's capital budget totalling £193k in investment. The following locations have had works completed.

Play Area	Investment	Date works completed
Walkers Gate Road, Wellington	£21,596	Oct 2022
Heavitree & Compton Close, Taunton	£57,664	Oct 2022
Greenway Rec, Leslie Avenue, Taunton (Gym Equipment)	£14,485	March 23
Greenway Rec, Lesley Avenue, Taunton (Play Area Equipment)	£34,499	April 23
Crofters Green, Taunton	£23,500	March 23
Humphreys Road, Wellington	£21,500	March 23
Cleeve road	£5,213	March 23
French Weir	£14,544	March 23

## **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 on the Hankridge Business Park. Wellington in particular has seen a strong membership performance.

Swimming lesson numbers remain strong.

The rising cost of utilities remains the largest single challenge facing the industry. It has been widely reported that leisure centres and swimming pools across the UK are closing because of the unprecedented rise in utility costs. Staffing costs are also rising sharply and this is the context in which our leisure partner, SLM, are operating.

Some measures have been taken to mitigate the effect of rising utility costs – including reducing pool water temperatures and increasing temperatures in fitness facilities. The overall impact however is expected to be a cost of more than £250,000 above budget for utilities for 2022/23. This cost must be absorbed by the contractor under the terms of the contract.

The Council has partnered with SLM to instal LED lighting in the tennis centre at Blackbrook and the sports hall at Wellsprings to improve lux levels, reduce utility and maintenance costs and ultimately to reduce emissions. Further similar schemes may be undertaken in 2023.

Vivary golf course has enjoyed a good year in terms of usage, helped by the hot summer. The Council has worked in partnership to erect additional safety netting to prevent balls being struck into nearby properties/roads and has undertaken works to alleviate flooding issues on holes 5 & 6.

### **Leisure Projects**

#### **Tennis Court Refurbishment**

It has been decided to accept a grant of £105,000 from the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) to upgrade the four tennis courts at Vivary Park and Cheddon Road.

The LTA are providing up to 90% of the project costs with SWT providing the remainder.

A contractor has been appointed and the works are expected to start in April 2023. The courts at Cheddon Road will be transferred with the rest of the Taunton Green Playing Field to Taunton Town Council in April 2023.

Both sets of courts will be subject to charges to play because of the works with access via a coded gate. Income will be used to offset future maintenance costs.

#### **Taunton Green Pavilion**

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

The pavilion will be transferred to the new Taunton Town Council to manage from April 2023.

#### **Norton Fitzwarren Playing Field**



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 and more recently snowfall.

The tennis courts, Multi Use Games Area and car park are substantially complete marking the end of Phase 1 of the project. Phase 2 will begin once the weather improves and will result in the creation of a full size football pitch complete with drainage.

It is expected that play will be possible on the new pitch from 2024. The new facilities will be managed by the Parish Council using a commuted sum transferred as part of the S106 agreement.

The project is fully funded by S106 funds from the nearby St Modwen development and is being managed by SWT staff with significant input from Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council and the local Playing Field Association.

## **Phosphates**

### **Strategic Solution for Phosphates**

As Members are aware, details of the Council's SWT Phosphate Credit Scheme were uploaded on the SWT website in December 2022. This is one of the first P-credit schemes in England. At the current time P-credits have been offered to approx. 50 planning applications. The next round of SWT P-credits will depend on the uptake of the current round of P credits and the progress of the Phosphate mitigation projects identified in the Interim Strategy. 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/>.

Further information about the Defra National Nutrient Mitigation Scheme, was received in November 2022 but it is still being developed. The Defra letter can be viewed on the Council's website and at present we understand that the Defra Mitigation Scheme is not in operation in any of the nutrient sensitive catchment areas.

Work with the other Somerset authorities to update the phosphate calculator is ongoing. A new Somerset Council phosphates webpage has been drafted and an officer phosphate guidance note has been prepared to ensure consistency in decision-making for the new Somerset authority. A Somerset wide update on phosphates and planning matters relating to the new Somerset authority was provided to the Agents and Developer Forum on 7th March 2023.

Cllr. Perry



# Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

## Portfolio Holder Report for Community – Cllr Chris Booth.

### Annual Report

I would firstly like to thank the incredible staff I have worked with since 2019. It's been an honour to see how hard they work to ensure the lives of residents in Somerset West and Taunton are better. Thank you also for all the support you have provided me. I truly hope you all go on to do great things at Somerset Council or whatever your next role is. Hopefully you will all know who you are.

I would also like to thank the councillors and members of the Executive for their support and I hope I have been able to keep you informed and updated when you've required so.

**One Teams** - The long-established One Teams across our district have helped to make a vital difference to many residents over the years by bringing together partners in the same room. It's been wonderful to see how many of the teams have grown in that time and taken the lead in improving their respective areas and the lives of local residents. We've also had officers working across different communities where there are no one teams who have also been fantastic in working with local partners and organisations.

**Somerset West Lottery** - This has been a real success in supporting many local community groups and organisations across our area and administered exceptionally by Christine Gale with additional incentives added through the year to encourage the public to take part. In 2022, £22,000 was given to local community organisations, ranging from youth provision to sports clubs. I hope the residents of Sedgemoor and South Somerset will see the benefits of this model being implemented across the county.

**Voluntary Grants** - We undertook a review in 2021 to make sure correct amounts of voluntary grants were being given out to organisations and the correct scrutiny was being undertaken. I believe this means that we set this in good stead going into the new authority. We gave nearly £230,000 in grants this financial year. Many thanks also to Spark Somerset for supporting local voluntary organisations.

**Other Grants** - I am very proud we allocated £50,000 to help residents struggling with bills last year and the year before we allocated £250,000 to support community groups impacted by the pandemic.

**Community Employment** - We have a fantastic team arranging employment hubs and other events across the district to help residents get back in work, into training more into local employers. This often goes under the radar but we should really thank them for the many events arranged over the years to help so many residents.

## **CCTV**

I am happy that we have upgraded the cameras in Taunton and got the cameras working in West Somerset again. Cameras no longer being used in Taunton but still in a good condition will be deployed to Minehead. I hope going forward the CCTV will be equalised for the better across the county. Thanks in particular to Scott Weetch for driving for results and putting up with my constant questions.

**Pantries** - Thank you to Helen Phillips for leading in collaboration with partners to help create the first food pantry in our area at Rowbarton Methodist Church. This has helped inspire others to set up around the district by other organisations, often with Helen's help, in places like Rockwell Green and Minehead. Hopefully the plans for others in other parts of the district will come to fruition.

**Outside Bodies** - I've been truly blessed to have sat on many bodies and encountered some truly inspiring people who work so hard for the betterment of Somerset. There are too many people to name so I will mentioned the bodies I've sat on since 2019:

- Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Panel
- Hinkley Point C Grants Panel
- Somerset Safer Partnership
- Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board
- West Somerset Opportunity Area Fund

# **Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023**

## **Portfolio Holder Report for Climate Change – Cllr Dixie Darch.**

### **Annual Report.**

#### **A brief look back**

Although this report focuses on the last year, I can't help reflecting on the significant progress made in addressing the climate emergency since 2019. Intensive work on developing the CNCR plan took place in the first year of this council, while the last three years have involved implementation of many of the CNCR actions with a great deal of learning on the way. The extent to which this council has put climate change as a key priority is reflected in the way in which its impacts are embedded in every policy decision and the frequency with which it comes up as point of discussion in almost every meeting.

Every elected member and council employee has come on this journey, (as shown in the take up for Carbon Literacy training, for example) and it's been a real privilege to be the Portfolio Holder for the last three years working with that ethos and level of support right across the council. Particular thanks to Shadow Portfolio holder Cllr Dave Mansell whose sustained interest, commitment and expertise has been welcome. I'm not sure I can express my thanks to the staff Climate Change team without getting seriously soppy so suffice it to say they have been simply amazing.

#### **The last year of SWT**

This last year of SWT has brought us closer to the other Somerset councils as we move towards a unitary authority. A Climate and Ecological Emergency workstream has been created as part of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme. This workstream comprises of staff from the 5 Somerset authorities and some of the work undertaken within this workstream is included in the updates in the annual report. This collaborative approach has built on our existing partnership with Sedgemoor District Council, through which we have shared resources and jointly produced the Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan, approved by Full Council in July 2022

The plan is divided into 8 workstreams: built environment, energy, industry, farming and food, natural environment, waste, water, and transport.

Nature recovery actions within the CNCR were moved across to the Council's Ecological Vision and Action Plan but progress on this area is included in this annual report.

Delivery of the CNCR Plan is split into 4 timescales: 'immediate' year one actions, short term year two and three actions, medium term year four to six actions and long-term year seven to ten actions.

Immediate actions were identified as those that could be carried out either in whole or may commence within 12 months of the plan's approval by Council. Short term actions are those that were expected to be carried out either in whole or commence within years 2-3 of the plan. This report concentrates on the Immediate and Short-Term actions only.

A summary of SWT's progress within each of the different workstreams is as follows.

## **Built Environment**

### **Planning Services**

In April 2022, the Council updated its interim planning guidance with regards to consideration for the Climate and Ecological emergencies.

Originally approved and published in February 2021, the *Climate Positive Planning: Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate and Ecological Emergency* supports the Council's CNCR plan and the countywide approved Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy by ensuring that consideration for climate and ecological factors have been applied when submitting and approving development proposals.

Intended as a temporary measure, it seeks to clarify related policies adopted within the Council's existing Local Plans until successive policies can be implemented by the new unitary authority for Somerset, following its formation in April 2023.

SWT were commended at the 2022 RTPi SW Awards for Climate Positive Planning document.

Included in the April 2022 updates was the approval of a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit intended for building professionals and homeowners, which sets out best practice approaches in designing, specifying, constructing, and fitting out a Net Zero compliant new build or retrofit project.

The Toolkit complements Climate Positive Planning and provides additional guidance to help articulate how some of the design processes within the Districtwide Design Guide supplementary planning document (SPD) might be executed in order to deliver Net Zero buildings.

However, it should be noted that this is aspirational and a guidance and communication tool, rather than a planning or corporate policy position. Whilst the Council does not have planning policies which explicitly require zero carbon buildings at present, the Toolkit can provide a useful resource for officers and members in understanding whether development proposals are being ambitious enough in responding to relevant existing planning policy requirements, and in responding to the Climate Emergency as a material consideration.

It is also worth noting that LAs remain bound by the National planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Whilst the National Planning Policy Framework does stipulate standards for sustainability and promote the use of low carbon energy and heat, LAs are also required to ensure that policy requirements do not put the viable

development of the area and the Local Plan at risk, i.e. that sufficient level of housing is planned for and delivered. This is measured through demonstration of a 'five-year housing land supply' and compliance with the Housing Delivery Test.

### **Asset Management**

Building decarbonisation surveys on all main Council building are now complete. This has identified what is required to decarbonise each property, and can be used to inform future years capital programmes and applications to external funding sources such as the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

The Council has been successful in securing £1.5 million from the latest round of PSDS funding to decarbonise Wellington Sports Centre and Alcombe Children's Centre. Officers are working with colleagues at SCC to build these works into next year's programme.

A project to install solar PV panels and battery storage at the Westpark Depot is underway and will be completed by the summer.

### **Social Housing**

The Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery Plan was approved by Full Council in December 2022. The strategy sets out the baseline position of the Council's housing stock and sets targets which will help SWT towards achieving zero carbon for its homes.

The strategy and delivery plan sets out a pathway to achieving EPC by 2030 for all SWT homes, or have an alternative investment option identified, as well as reducing heat demand by 30% by 2040.

The plan also details what is required to replace fossil fuel in SWT homes with electric based heat and power by 2050 at a pace to ensure affordable energy for tenants and in line with available funds.

The delivery plan proposes a number of schemes over the next 10 years, and these are currently contained within the proposed HRAs 10Year Capital Programme and 30 Year Business Plan assumptions from 2022/23. The delivery plan has highlighted a number of grant opportunities 2023-2026 which are as yet unconfirmed and therefore at risk of not being achieved.

The retrofit strategy does not achieve Net Zero until 2050, and successful delivery of this strategy will be highly dependent on additional and external grant funding.

SWT was successful during 2022/23 in securing £385k of funding from the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, as part of a bid with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA). A second bid has been submitted to the latest round of funding, and we await the outcome.

Phase A of SWT's North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) is underway and will deliver 47 of the project's 227 new homes. Each home will be highly energy efficient, with a range of measures being installed to each property including PV panels, triple

glazing and air source heat pumps.

A further ten Woolaway homes in Oake are to be refurbished during 2023. The refurb will include installation of air source heat pumps (ASHP) and photovoltaic panels (PV). These homes will be 2050 zero carbon ready and require no additional retrofit work.

The Council's Seaward Way development in Minehead has also begun and is due to be completed next Autumn. The 54 new homes will be zero carbon and incorporate comprehensive data gathering to benchmark energy and carbon use.

### **Transport**

During 2021/22, SWT secured a government grant worth £136,000 to boost the roll-out of on street Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points in council-owned car parks. This programme of works has now been completed, with 22kW fast EV charge points now installed in Minehead, Porlock, Taunton, Watchet, Wellington, Williton, and Wiveliscombe. A charge point in Dunster was initially deemed prohibitively expensive, but that has been revisited this year and there are now plans to install 2x 22kw chargers at Dunster Steep car park via the ESPO framework.

We relaunched our EVCP Grant Fund scheme for parish and town councils and community groups and received 4 new applications which have been all been approved and are now progressing to the installation stage.

EVCPs were also installed on Council premises at Deane House, the Wellington Depot and at Kilkenny House in readiness for Council's transition to an electric fleet. This has begun with the Council's pool and supervisor fleet with orders placed for a further 23 EVs on top of the two that are already in use. By the end of 2023, all small SWT vehicles will be EVs.

Previously, technological limitations have prevented vans and towing vehicles being replaced with EV equivalents, but now the technology is advancing SWT will explore the available options.

SWT has extended its existing e-scooter trials until 31 May 2024, to enable the Department for Transport (DfT) to gather further evidence where gaps are identified and to build on the findings of the current evaluation. The trials have been running since 2020, and we are now beginning to see good returns on data.

Since launching in October 2020, Taunton's e-scooter trial has seen 134,397 rides by over 15,650 riders travelling over 246,180 miles, removing an estimated 35.2 tonnes of atmospheric carbon compared with fossil fuel powered vehicles. Minehead's trial has seen over 31,700 rides by over 13,000 riders travelling over 45,000 miles, removing an equivalent 6.4 tonnes of carbon since launching in June 2021

SWT provided match for funding the Taunton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which has now been completed by Somerset County Council. SWT has also provided match funding for a LCWIP in Wellington which is now underway and has committed the same funding for a LCWIP in Minehead.



SWT is delivering elements of the 'Red' route, identified within the Taunton LCWIP, from the railway station to Vivary Park, as part of the Future High Streets Fund. Schemes to be delivered in summer 2023 include a new cycle and pedestrian bridge over the River Tone, cycle hubs, and two town centre crossings to enable safer cycling, walking, and wheeling.

SWT was awarded £15,900 from the SCC public health fund specifically for Active Travel projects, and we are using this money for the installation of additional cycle parking within Taunton.

Steam Coast Trail projects continue to move forward, with two new connections in varying stages of discussion with landowners and key stakeholders.

£50k has been allocated from SCC's Public Health Fund for Active Travel to produce a Strategic Outline Business Case for sustainable transport options between Wellington and Taunton, required to evidence a case for investment. This work will be carried out in the first half of 2023.

The Connecting our Garden Communities (CoGCs) Plan has taken consideration of LCWIP routes and supplemented with additional routes designed to meet the needs of the Garden Community developments in Taunton. The majority of routes included in CoGCs have been subject to audit and scoping out of potential interventions, with some progressed to initial concept planning.

SWT facilitated the DfT Connected and Automated Vehicle trial in Taunton working with Britain Thinks, an independent research agency in partnership with University College London and Aurrigo. We hope to be involved in future DfT trials.



### **Natural Environment**

The Council approved the adoption of an Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan in July 2022. This was a joint piece of work developed with the SWT and Sedgemoor District Council. The Vision sets out our ambitions to address the ecological deterioration within our districts and to lessen our global impact on the natural world. It is accompanied by a comprehensive action plan that provides the practical steps to deliver ecological recovery. It builds on previous work to address the Climate Emergency, but with a specific focus on wildlife and habitats.

The EEVAP includes a number of actions from the CNCR Plan and is the Council's direct response to its Ecological Emergency declaration from September 2020. The plan includes 21 high level actions, a number of which are already being implemented.

These include the Council's new grassland management strategy, produced by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. The strategy seeks to support wildlife and habitat within its existing open spaces, whilst ensuring continued amenity access for all. Officers estimate that the grass cutting teams are now cutting 25% less grass than before the Ecological Emergency declaration.

SWT have also funded a new Treescapes Officer in partnership with Exmoor National Park Authority. The post will work directly with landowners including the ENPA themselves to create large scale woodland projects within the boundaries of ENP and SWT. ENPA currently have approximately 110ha of planting on course to be completed this winter and next.

The Treescapes Officer has also produced planting plans for SWT's open spaces, using right-tree-right-place principles. 500 trees have been planted on SWT open



spaces this season.

SWT supported national tree planting week again this year by offering free trees, this was our third consecutive year and most successful with 580 trees provided to 27 parish and town councils and community groups.

## Energy

Working in partnership with the other Somerset authorities, a tender for a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) was published in December 2022. 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.

SWT has also been investigating potential heat networks within Taunton following a successful grant application to the Government's Heat Network Delivery Unit. The project looks at energy demands, heat supply opportunities, energy centre locations, and initial techno-economic feasibility and has identified potential for an energy centre within Firepool. This has been included in the Draft Firepool Masterplan identifying potential for an energy centre within the site and we await a final report from consultants.

### **Water**

SWT continues to progress 3 key flood alleviation schemes within Taunton, following the Council making £6 million available from a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund in February 2020.

The raising levels of the lockgates at Firepool (TTC10) will prevent flows entering the canal and reduces flood risk for Priorswood and Crown Industrial Estates and Bathpool. This remains on course for completion in 2023/24.

A combination of repair, replacement or new flood defences between Frieze Hill and Town Bridge (TTC5) will provide reduced flood risk to key transport routes including the A3027 bridge street, A3027 Staplegrove road and the A3087 station road, and the North Town and Firepool areas of Taunton. This also remains on course for 2023/24 completion.

Optimisation of the existing flood storage area at Longrun Meadow (LRM) aims to reduce flood risk in Taunton town centre and further downstream including areas of North Town, Firepool, Priorswood and Crown Industrial Estates, Bathpool. This has been in the SWT project pipeline but has now been assigned a project manager and is in the project initiation stages.

This scheme focusses more on soft infrastructure and natural flood management and offers wider environmental benefits. We are working with key stakeholders such as Friends of Longrun to try and achieve this.

Working with Wessex Water all three of our water refill stations (Taunton, Wellington and Minehead) have gone live during the last 12 months.

## Waste

The CNCR plan includes several actions to help facilitate the ease with which people can recycle. This includes supporting the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) with the implementation of the Recycle More programme, which was successfully rolled out in West Somerset in February. This completed the implementation across the SWT district.

SWT also implemented the Recycling on-the-Go pilot, installing 130 combined public litter and recycling bins across the district. The configuration of the new bins enables plastic bottles and aluminium or tin cans to be deposited separately, making recycling easier when out in rural and urban public spaces. The roll out coincided with a competition for schools to design posters to promote the scheme.



## Challenges in Progressing CNCR Actions

The CNCR is an ambitious plan in that it targets a Net Zero transition for the whole of the district, rather than focussing purely on the Council's operations. Therefore, there are areas in which the Council has limited influence or is reliant on other organisations to deliver. Of the outcomes within the plan, only around 50% are within the Council's direct control.

This is a particular challenge within the Food and Farming and Industry workstreams, where opportunities around land use and circular economies are outside of the Council's usual remit. These are the workstreams where the least progress has been made against CNCR actions.

Small steps can be taken to support these sectors, such as the Council's new grant scheme in partnership with Sedgemoor District Council to help small and micro businesses become greener as part of their commitment to reaching net zero emissions by 2030. Using funds from the Hinkley Point C developer contributions,



carbon cutting grants worth up to £2,500 have been made available to businesses with up to nine employees to help fund energy reduction and net-zero transition projects.

Many of the shifts required for the county to meet its Net Zero target also require significant Government policy intervention. This is

happening, with examples including the Environment Act, and the phasing out of new internal combustion engine (ICE) cars by 2030 and gas boiler installations in new build homes by 2025, but clearly these are huge changes where SWT's only influence is that of lobbying together with other organisations.

Funding transition to Net Zero is also a significant challenge. The CNCR remains un-costed, but work is now underway via the Climate LGR workstream to integrate all district climate plans into the countywide Climate Emergency Strategy and produce a refreshed, costed plan for the new Somerset Council. This will likely equate to hundreds of millions in Somerset alone, and although the transition will be made over a number of years, there will be heavy reliance on external funding. The Council has proven itself excellent at producing high-quality bids to external funds, and the new Council will need to be sufficiently resourced to continue this in an increasingly competitive environment.

Partnership working will clearly be vital in Somerset's journey to Net Zero, especially given that so many of the CNCR outcomes require the support and cooperation of others. SWT recognises the importance of partnership working and has actively worked with the other authorities within Somerset this year, as well as organisations such as Exmoor National Park Authority, the Somerset Wildlife Trust, Zipp Mobility and the Environment Agency.

### **SWT/SDC Partnership**

Following a successful first year working in partnership with SDC, we have extended the agreement taking us up to vesting day of the new council.

The main successes of the partnership have been the installation of EVCPs at the Northgate Development in Bridgwater, the development and subsequent approval the joint EEVAP and working together across both authorities to the gather the data required to calculate our carbon emissions for 2020/21, preparing the technical report and infographic for publication. Prior to this SWT contracted Exeter University to do this work on our behalf.

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

The Climate and Water LGR workstream has brought the five authorities much closer together than before on climate, and this has resulted in some significant progress on key outcomes.

As well as the Local Area Energy Plan, joint activities such as producing a carbon baseline for the new authority by bringing together emissions data from the five existing Councils, and the development of a countywide tree strategy have been big steps forward.

A new carbon baseline is the foundation for understanding the carbon footprint for the new authority, where our efforts are best focussed, and building pathways to Net Zero in each area of operations.

The tree strategy has been funded by the five authorities and is being developed with partners from Exmoor National Park Authority, the Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills AONB services, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group,

Woodland Trust, Forestry England and others. It has been the foundation of a successful bid worth £300k to the DEFRA Woodland Accelerator Fund to help deliver the strategy.

Other areas of focus for the Climate and Water workstream include merging existing district activities into the countywide Climate Emergency Strategy, producing a comms plan for climate change within the new authority, creating a carbon impact assessment tool for Council decisions and projects and designing and implementing a new governance structure for the climate and nature recovery work.

Despite the challenges, SWT continues to recognise the role of leadership on Climate Change. Following the Council's success in ranking first nationally in the Climate Emergency UK council scorecard last year, SWT was awarded a score of A- (Leadership) for its 2022 disclosure to the Climate Disclosure Project (CDP).

CDP is a not-for-profit charity that runs a global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states, and regions to manage their environmental impacts. Achieving a score of A (Leadership) is a CNCR outcome to be delivered by 2023.

## **Conclusion**

I am delighted that the opportunities for addressing climate change through LGR have been taken up through the collaborative approach of the 5 councils. We can be proud of what SWT has achieved but we know also that the challenges remain enormous and there is a very long way to go in the journey to Net Zero. We simply can't do it alone and I believe that the collaboration and partnership working that comes with a Somerset wide approach is the way forward.

*Cllr Dixie Darch, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change*

# Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

## Portfolio Holder Report for Culture – Cllr Caroline Ellis.





### Annual Report.

**Introduction:** The Cultural Development Team was created in November 2021 with the key objective to deliver the SWT Cultural Strategy as adopted by full Council on 7 September 2021.

The team are incredibly proud to have made a real difference to our communities in a short period of time with a small budget (£70,000) and a team of just three officers. The team have raised the profile of Culture and Arts and the importance of how the service enriches all aspects of our lives which in turn has had started a positive movement in our district and reflects SWT’s commitment to Culture.

### Reflections: Our achievements, future opportunities and aspirations and proven results.




From “The Somerset Dragon” to the Titan Arcadia Gallery, to Cultural Forums (stakeholder engagement), business support and budgeting to support and enable cultural events and ideas to flourish, this has all been made possible by our Cultural Strategy.

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES	ASPIRATIONS	RESULTS
 <p>Excellent team dynamic – having staff with internal and external knowledge.</p> <p>Having a customer-focused, approachable and supportive team has been key in making strong partner relationships.</p>	 <p>Somerset Wide Cultural Strategy – this is a huge opportunity for Somerset and the team have aided development with the other 4 Local Authorities.</p>	 <p>Continuing with impact data collection for future funding and grants</p>	 <p>For every £1 spent by the Cultural Development £5.41 was generated in the local economy (from a £200,000 budget).</p>
<p>Strong Cultural Forum network has created a "listening council" reputation and enabled partnership working.</p>	<p>Potential partner funding and investment opportunities i.e. partnering on various projects enabled due to partner engagement and development.</p>	<p>Improved grant application process</p>	<p>Successfully encouraging grantees to seek match funding "double your money".</p> <p>Organisations that SWT funded have generated £949,692 in income or match funding.</p>

Passionate, committed, and supportive Executive Members who understand the importance of Culture and Art has been vital.	Opportunities to grow partnerships and explore synergies with new directorate services i.e., sports and leisure and Taunton Town Council.	"Keeping it local" - continuing to use local providers.	For every £1 generated by the arts and culture industry an additional £1.14 of GVA is supported in the wider economy meaning that an additional £1,082,648 was generated in SWT district.
Strong partnerships with internal teams i.e. Garden Town, Planning, Regeneration, Heritage, One Teams, Economic Development.	Public Art Projects – appetite has grown for such projects and there is a real opportunity here to improve place, public realm and our environment.	Continuing with strong stakeholder development and engagement i.e. Cultural Forums/communications	Collecting impact data proven to be essential.
Impact focused – data to evidence impacts (Cultural Impact Assessment).	Building on Cultural Forum and networks as we become one council.	Making Somerset a Cultural Destination	Having an externally facing member of the team has been invaluable.
	Events and boosting local economy – SWT supported events saw over 182,131 (as of March 2023) attending and visiting our district just for Culture and Art related activities.		Boosting visitor economy – events supported and hosted by SWT brought in over 182,131 people to the local area.  995 events created by SWT funded organisations
			9,395 children have got involved in arts and culture activities in just twelve months with 78 school projects being undertaken.



## Key Achievements 2022 – 2023:

PUBLIC ART	EVENTS	PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND ENGAGEMENT
		
<p><b>The Somerset Dragon</b> (unveiled on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023 – attended by 26,000 people in the High Street with 74,000 impressions in the town centre on that Saturday alone).</p>	<p>SWT have supported events and activities that have boosted the local economy bringing in over 182,131 people to the area for Arts and Culture related activities.</p>	<p>Creation and facilitation successful Cultural Forums/specialist Sub-Groups in both Taunton and West Somerset which now have over 150 members.</p>
<p><b>Staplegrove Bridge Mural</b> (currently in progress, due to be completed March 2023)</p>	<p><b>The Big Jubilee Lunch</b> (June 2022 – attended by 4000 people)</p>	<p>Cultural Forum Newsletters and mailing list</p>
<p><b>Cotford St Luke Public Art Project</b> (Over £30,000 in S106 funds were allocated to the provision of Public Art for Cotford St Luke. Artists are now at a design stage in designing this which is due to be completed in September 2023. More information can be found here: <a href="https://www.denmangould.com/our-work/cotfordstluke">https://www.denmangould.com/our-work/cotfordstluke</a>)</p>	<p><b>Museum of the Moon</b> (March 2022 – attended by 21,000)</p>	<p>Arts Hub at Flook House (in partnership with CICCIC).  With just a £10,000 one-off grant awarded by SWT, the Arts Hub have re-invigorated Flook House which creates an annual income of £18,650 for SWT.</p>
<p><b>Castle Green Public Art Project</b> (SWT have supported research and development for a piece of Public Art for Castle Green. Project is being led by Arts Taunton. An artist has been commissioned - Emma Smith and a timeline is due to be drawn up shortly.</p>	<p><b>Coal Orchard Launch</b> (5<sup>th</sup> November 2022)</p>	<p>Titan Arcadia Gallery at Coal Orchard (in partnership with Matthew Crabb and Regeneration Team )has made effective use of a vacant premises and has generated interest and boosted the local economy in this part of the town centre.</p>
<p><b>Taunton High Street Benches</b> (SWT have commissioned local partners – Go Create in conjunction with Rights Action Groups to re-invigorate the benches in Taunton High Street</p>	<p><b>Titan Arcadia Gallery Launch</b> (6<sup>th</sup> December 2022)</p>	<p>Ongoing business support and signposting to stakeholders.</p>

with public artwork following a “don’t sit on it” climate change theme. Work is due to start in March/April2023)		
	<b>The Somerset Dragon Launch</b> (11 <sup>th</sup> February 2023 - attended by 26,000 people)	The Creative People Project in partnership with CICCIC and other local partners to create a digital hub for young people to access art and creative information and activities is currently in progress. This also includes access to various creative workshops at the Arts Hub. If successful we hope this will be rolled out further afield.
	<b>Sound of the Streets</b> (September 2022 – attended by 6000 people)	Successful administration of Cultural Development Budget and securing of funding for 2023/24 (protection of Taunton Brewhouse).
	<b>Taunton Live and Pride</b> (July 2022 – attended by 9000 people)	Development of Somerset Wide Cultural Strategy (in partnership with the 4 other Somerset Local Authorities).
	<b>Wellington Film Festival</b> (October 2022 – attended by 1500 people)	
	<b>Cultural Forum Open Days in Taunton and West Somerset</b> (September 2022 and February 2023 with quarterly meetings throughout the year – currently 150+ Cultural Forum members)	

### Cultural Impact Assessment Sept 2021 - 2022:

The team are pleased to present the annual Cultural Impact Assessment report from September 2021 – September 2022 which evidences how far the team and strategy have come in just one year: [SWT Cultural Strategy 2021 - 2022](#). The report also includes important data on how our Cultural Development team have benefited the local economy, our communities and the cultural sector.

## Future readiness:

- **Developed new SWT Cultural Strategy and working together on a Somerset wide cultural strategy** - supporting the development of the cultural sector and cultural themes founded on knowledge, culture, and business; a Somerset cultural strategy is now in development.
- **Cultural Forums to continue** – Business as usual as of 1<sup>st</sup> April. Next forum to be held in April 2023.
- **Collaboration and partnerships already formed with Taunton Town Council officers.**
- **Budget safeguarded for 2023/2024 and grant proposals allocated.**
- **Cultural Services Director recruitment due to be completed in the next month.**

## Culture Portfolio - Cllr Caroline Ellis Portfolio Holder Activities

I want to pay tribute to the huge dedication, skill and flair of the Cultural Development Team and colleagues in Economic Development in achieving so much alongside our culture partners to put SWT on the map for arts and culture and enabling so many opportunities for our residents, communities and businesses. Having such strong support from elected members of all parties and of none for the Cultural Strategy has been absolutely invaluable – we can all be proud to have been part of this.

The team has provided an excellent summary of achievements over the past year. Since my last report I wanted to highlight a couple of things.

I am thrilled and relieved that the future of the wonderful public artwork dedicated to Derek the Female Goose in Watchet is now secured. Hurrah!

The Somerset Dragon launch on 11 Feb was an amazing event and the crowning achievement of local chainsaw artist Matt Crabb's career so far. So many businesses and creatives joined forces to provide amazing activities including fire performances by Fuse, live music by Wodwo, crafts by Go Create and Sam Gaden, dragon doughnuts by Dough Bros, dragon wings by the Handmade Boutique (Tissot now sports a pair!) and the awesome AR dragon hunter trail by CICCIC. Points West ran a piece highlighting the benefits of the dragon to our town centre.



Bravo to Taunton Thespians on their brilliant production of Flying Feathers at Tacchi Morris which I caught this week along with a host of other councillors – bravo to Cllr John Hunt for your work supporting and promoting the Thesps! Bravo too to the Bluebirds Theatre and Go Create Taunton for their Knickerline launch on International Women's day – I can't wait to check the exhibition out at Taunton Brewhouse.





We had a brilliant meeting of West Somerset culture providers and creative practitioners in Minehead in mid Feb. We were hosted by The Regal Theatre - great vibe there, wonderful venue and such a great team. Creatives and event organisers from Dulverton, Dunster, Minehead, Porlock and Watchet and further afield (e.g. Sound Foundation Somerset and Trish Caller who is a force across Somerset as a whole!) discussed how we boost participation, opportunities to build audiences ( Mike Rigby's night buses will help hugely!!) and how we address deficits in arts

and creative opportunities in formal education. It will be incredibly important to sustain and develop West Somerset networking. Minehead and Coastal Development Trust are also keen to be a voice for arts and culture within their LCN which is brilliant.

The Arts Hub Taunton's monthly weekend markets have really taken off and Titan Arcadia has instigated weekend open studios where local artists rock up and create pieces to raise money for Somerset Youth Theatre who do incredible work enabling young people from so many different backgrounds to express themselves. I was lucky enough to have artist/illustrator Neil Whitehead create this before my eyes in literally minutes!



Last summer I saw the most amazing performance (up in Holford village hall in the Quantocks) by Porlock based youth theatre group, Stacked Wonky. The kids devised it themselves with just a bit of help from adults! Take Art snapped it up for their rural touring programme which I think is a first. They asked us if they could come and perform at Deane House as their piece is inspired by 'meetings' and is designed to be performed in town and parish halls. And so team Wonky took over the top floor of Deane House at the end of January and wowed an audience of Councillors and culture

impresarios here in Deane House. "We Come Before You" received a well-earned standing ovation and there was a brilliant discussion with Sarah Shorten, Wonky's Director and the young performers afterwards. It meant a huge amount to them to have this recognition.

The Fitzwarren Musicians led by the multi talented Jeanette Owens joined forces with the inimitable Luís Martelo last month for a special concert at The Sangha House involving ALL original compositions by Jeanette and colleagues, with lyrics for the second half 'Views of Exmoor' by the talented Philippa Johnson. The audience was blown away by an amazing solo violin performance by a nearly 13 year old Matilda White who can also turn her hand to percussion.



This month a group of students and young film-makers from Bridgwater and Taunton College took over a floor of my house for two days as part of the shoot for their new short film 'What was lost' (dealing with themes of grief, isolation and loneliness), which they funded via a 'Go Fund me'. They told me I would get to see it later 'after they've taken it to all the festivals!' 'Apex Inspired' are definitely ones to watch, they have a 'je ne sais quoi' – check out their YouTube channel here: <https://www.youtube.com/@apexinspired>. (Photo – Apex Inspired celebrating end of filming)



For the future we owe it to the Wonkies, to the film students, the Matildas and all the kids who go out on a limb and express their creativity to create the best possible opportunities for them to thrive here in their creative careers.

Oh and finally as SWT's parting cultural gift, we hope everyone will enjoy and be inspired by the amazing 'Gaia' coming to Taunton Minster from 14 April - 1 May.





# Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

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

### Annual Report.

#### Planning

##### Taunton Garden Town

Over the past year work connected with Taunton Garden Town has achieved significant progress.

- A governance structure was agreed by the Executive on 16 November 2022 and following the appointment of an Independent Chair, the first meeting of the Delivery Board took place on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023 with arrangements now being made for Forum meetings in April.
- Taunton Garden Town – Delivering Our Vision, the Planning Context document is being finalised and sets out the current planning context for the Garden Town in one place, together with 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.
- Reports have been commissioned and delivered on future options for stewardship of community assets and future infrastructure needs via a Garden Town Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). These will inform future work areas. Stewardship has been raised in the context of the establishment of Taunton Town Council and the creation of new community assets via the Shadow Town Council. Other options identified through the study will also be considered further before a future Council decision. The IDP assesses the infrastructure requirements of new development at planning application stage and will form part of the evidence base to inform the Somerset wide Local Plan.
- Significant work has also taken place on active travel. The Connecting our Garden Communities – Active Travel Infrastructure for Taunton Garden Town Plan was adopted at Full Council on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023 as a material consideration in the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes across Taunton Garden Town, and as corporate policy to inform future policy and project development and funding bids. The Plan is already informing the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice and planning applications, and has directly informed and influenced the Taunton element of the recently submitted Active Travel Fund 4 funding bid led by Somerset County Council. In line with comments made at Full Council, officers are due to meet with stakeholders in the next few weeks to further discuss route prioritisation and the process for delivery.
- The development of strategy and network approach to mobility hubs for Taunton Garden Town has been prepared. The initial phase of work considers 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 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 Bus sites at strategic sites in Taunton Garden Town.
- The Taunton Garden Town garden community sites have also progressed with further planning permissions granted for residential phases and primary school at Comeytrove coupled with the grant of planning permission for an offsite phosphates solution at Staplegrove in connection with the western part of the site and the grant of an initial reserved matters planning permission for certain essential elements. A revised masterplanning

exercise is underway in connection with a live planning application at Monkton Heathfield phase 2. As of the end of November 2022, housing completions at Garden Town sites included Comeytrove (115), Monkton Heathfield (1,199) and Nerrols (362). The Coal Orchard site in the town centre has also been completed with 42 completions (also see update below).

- During 22/23 £650,000 Garden Town funding was successfully bid for and secured, supporting work commissions and feasibility studies as well as ensuring core staff are in place to oversee the project, maintain momentum and input the necessary green infrastructure and transport expertise.
- Firepool - The Firepool Masterplan is being recommended for adoption as a material planning consideration in the preparation of pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes as part of this same meeting of Full Council. For further details please see this agenda item.

## **Neighbourhood Planning**

There are five parishes in the District currently progressing Neighbourhood Plans. In the past year the West Monkton & Cheddon Fitzpaine Revised Neighbourhood Plan was Made, this was the first Revised NP in the SWT area.

## **Wellington Railway 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.

## **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.

A consultation on the Draft Wellington Place Plan was held 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 in considering regeneration activities to ensure we are creating a quality place in Wellington.

## **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 moves the submission date into 2023, but it is not yet possible to be certain about the exact timing.

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 coordinating



required responses and the two district authorities affected by the proposal (SWT & SSSDC) 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 Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 4 January 2023. This report, together with a series of tables within the accompanying presentation <https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/documents/s20936/PlanningPerformancePresentationfor4123.pdf> set out information on casework levels and performance in the determination of planning applications, appeals and enforcement cases as well as the issues facing the service including the challenges arising from the need to provide phosphate mitigation in order to allow development in much of the former Taunton Deane area. It also provided an update on the 5-year housing land supply, most recently calculated as 7.04 years in the former West Somerset area (March 2022) and 5.06 years in the former Taunton Deane area (November 2022).

Phosphates continues to impact planning applications, with approximately 167 planning applications/discharge of conditions held up (equating to approximately 3,200 homes). However, with the roll out of one of the first P-credit schemes in England, P-credits have at the current time been offered to approximately 50 planning applications and where possible some applicants are progressing their own phosphate mitigation measures. Meaningful progress has therefore been made over the past year to start to address the application backlog resulting from phosphates.

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**

The team have had another very busy year, with significant progress made across all areas, and a further pipeline of activity that will continue into the new Council. Many project and programme teams within SWT already work effectively across district and county departments, so the changes to Somerset Council will serve to further breakdown barriers to delivery. The team are back up to full strength, with a full complement of staff looking forward to getting to site and delivering the benefits of the projects listed below.

## **Active Travel Projects**

### **Future High Street Fund (FHSF) Cycling and Walking Schemes**

#### **Bridge over the Tone**

Following an options appraisal and early design work, and subsequent submission of the planning application, the team are working through issues raised via the EA and other stakeholders, including a petition that was heard at Executive in February. This additional work will look to provide assurance that any bridge proposal that is taken forward is the appropriate balance of form, function, cost, whilst minimising any environmental and ecological impacts.

#### **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 – have progressed from concept to technical review and are on course for delivery in 23-24.

#### **The Design and Implementation of Cycle Hubs**

Providing secure, weather-proof locations for bike parking, have moved on with delivery imminent in the Crescent Car Park (alongside the car park refurbishment work). The team have identified several exemplar projects across the country that will translate well into Taunton as pilot schemes, that could subsequently be rolled out across the County if successful. The hubs will provide Taunton's first such facilities, providing sheltered cycle parking with public cycle repair stands and tyre pumps, with St James Street bike park as a target location, and other sites in the town centre being assessed (including the renewed provision of a mobility hub at the old bus station site)

### **Feasibility Work - Cycling Schemes**

The respective schemes linking Wellington and Bishops Lydeard to Taunton have been subject to significant stakeholder engagement over the last year. Following identification of funding, the work to develop a strategic outline business case for sustainable travel and cycling options is now underway.

#### **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. Stakeholder engagement with officers from both SCC and SWT continues.

#### **Heritage at Risk**

The Heritage at Risk programme goes from strength to strength. Whilst the benefits are often specific to individual buildings or sites, the incremental improvement, and the engagement with national funding partners such as Historic England, is raising the profile of this work and its regeneration potential. The work often draws in many other fields of expertise, such as flood mitigation, renewable energy, art, culture and manufacturing that far exceed the core remit of removing these priority sites from the heritage at risk register and back into meaningful use. The team are also working successfully across district boundaries in many instances.

#### **Tonedale Mill**

Discussions continue with the owners regarding the urgent works and the long-term regeneration plans for the site. As of January 2023 these discussions have been 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 LPA.

## **Toneworks**

Phase 3 of repairs are currently underway 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. A full programme of access/opening to the public is planned for Summer 2023. Discussions continue with possible futures of the site for the long-term sustainable use of the site and for future phases of fundraising to secure the rest of the site for the future.

## **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 planning discussions continue over the future conversion of the mansion house. Over the past year 7 units have been completed and are now occupied.

## **Regen Programme**

### **Coal Orchard**

Following the project stalling temporarily in Feb '22, the team were able to restart and ultimately complete the construction of the Coal Orchard mixed use in scheme in November '22. At time of writing, all but two of the residential units were occupied, including all of the discounted open market units that were subject to strict criteria relating to income and local connections.

A new commercial agent is now in place, with ongoing negotiations on several commercial units continuing. Two of the eight units are close to agreement.

Complex 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. This pilot is another that will be used as a case study to potentially expand beyond Taunton into the wider County.

### **Bus Station & Changing Places Facility**

The team have been working with SCC colleagues on potential layout designs for a renewed mobility hub at the old bus station site. This will incorporate the Bus Service Improvement Plan funding, to provide a safe, accessible transport hub that delivers many more elements than bus stops and layover space, potentially including EV charging, e-bikes and e-scooters, secure bike parking, waiting facilities and a changing places facility. The wider benefits of this facility will be subject to public consultation when design has developed further.

## **Firepool**

Works on the key infrastructure is now well underway at Firepool, whilst the masterplan work with LPA colleagues has progressed in parallel (see agenda for 28<sup>th</sup> March Full Council meeting on the masterplan). This work has engaged with statutory, community and public stakeholders, with several well attended events online and in person over the last twelve months. This is in addition to engagement with quality review panels and tendering for contractors.

Now work has started on site, the team are looking to engage with developers and end users to ensure that once the infrastructure and public realm works are completed, meaningful development can continue.

## **Digital Innovation Centre**

SWT are continuing to work in collaboration with SCC on delivery of a 2400m<sup>2</sup> 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.

## **Northern and Southern Boulevard Construction**

Following grant of planning permission in 2022, the tender process is now open for the Boulevard public realm work on the conclusion of the Drainage and Levels infrastructure contract. Award of a contract is expected in Summer '23.

## **Heat Network Mapping, Masterplanning and Early Feasibility**

The final heat network feasibility report has now been received. Officers are working internally, with the commissioned consultants Sustainable Energy Ltd, and with representatives from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to plot out next steps ahead of organising a member and senior officer briefing on the report and opportunities identified.

## **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**

Taking place in September 2022, this event showcased local innovation, skills development opportunities, facilitated business-to-business contacts and acted as a positive investment message for Taunton. It attracted 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. A series of further events has been arranged under the Somerset Innovation Exchange umbrella, including business workshops on topics such as digital adoption, sustainability and finance, as well as support for the Digital Somerset network and for the Tech South-West summit.

## **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. This is a three-year innovation service to be delivered by Business West and with an innovation advisor in each of the three physical innovation centres across Somerset. 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.

## **Innovation District and Innovation Leadership Group (ILG)**

- 1. Infrastructure** – a digital innovation centre of Firepool due to be completed in summer 2023, the private sector led Collar factory next to the Cricket ground which supports a range of businesses linked to the cultural and creative sector and the former Rutherford diagnostics centre now having been taken over by Alliance Health as a Joint Venture with the Somerset

NHS Trust. A new and exciting addition to the infrastructure and healthcare innovation activity is the successful £20m joint levelling up bid for the health and training centre for social care with Sedgemoor and SWT, involving redevelopment of the former Bridgwater Hospital, a physical presence in Minehead of an outreach centre to deploy innovative use of remote healthcare technologies.

- 2. Innovation conference and events** – the first ever successful innovation conference with 180 delegates and representatives from national and local innovation bodies and sectors that showcased future innovation and technology market opportunities across a range of markets including renewable and zero carbon energy; digital, AI and Big data; agritech; healthtech and advanced manufacturing – subsequent events are being held under the promotional umbrella of Somerset Innovation Exchange.
- 3. Innovation support services** – a three-year innovation support service has been commissioned for Business West to deliver innovation services and have the advice of innovation advisors based at the three physical innovation centres of iAero, Digital Innovation Centre and the Somerset energy innovation centres
- 4. Cluster development and networking** – Digital Somerset, Somerset Arts and Business Cultural Alliance and the cultural forum are further developing their cluster activity and development as well as sub-regional joining up of healthcare cluster networks such as the Academic Health Science Network and Medilink South West. As all district officers were in support of a hub and spoke innovation community across Somerset following the ethos of the Connected Places Catapult report, it will be for the new Unitary executive to consider this report and future Governance and operational structures.

### **Shared Prosperity Fund**

SWT were closely involved with other LAs in shaping the prospectus for funding which was approved by Government shortly before Xmas 2022. Since then, County have been leading as the accountable body for the funds.

There is £7.2m available and a commissioning plan will be produced in April 2023, showing specific investment themes and indicative budget allocations and then running a series of processes (procurements, calls for proposals or in-house) to make investments against those themes.

### **Emergency High Street Recovery Fund (ETCRF): SWT Council Extension**

Extra Funds were provided to the town Centre Groups established during the Covid Recovery Period. Post April the 1st 2022 when the original ETCRF finished, reports were provided, and it was agreed that we would continue for a year with unspent allocated funds. These funds we divided up amongst the town in proportion with the Town Centre Retail size.

Final Reports have been requested for April 2023 when the fund completes on the 31st of March 2023.

Quarterly Meeting with Town Centre Projects Teams were held providing project updates. This will continue in 2023 to maintain good local connections and two-way community communications.

### **Welcome Back Fund (European Regional Development Fund Covid Recovery Projects)**

All funds that were Purchased by Somerset West and Taunton Council for the Welcome Back Fund's Town Projects were successfully recovered with the European Regional Development Fund.

Over 134 Procurement Transactions to the value of £328,390.89 were made and towards the town Centre projects for 2022.

Quarterly Meeting with Town Centre Projects Teams were held providing project updates.

## **Somerset Futures Scenarios 2050**

SWT have been closely involved in the development of this strategy which has been finalised in Jan/Feb 2023. This will help inform the approach to developing a new Somerset Council economic development strategy under the new Unitary.

## **Local Labour Agreements**

A proposal went 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. This was adopted and we are working closely with colleagues to develop a Process and Communication plan and ensure the benefits of this begin to come into play with new developments received.

## **Co-development of the Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision**

[Exmoor - Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision \(exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk\)](http://exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk) - setting out a vision and objectives for the next 10 years on Exmoor taking advantage of its natural capital and entrepreneurial spirit. A business directory has recently been published and other workstreams are progressing which could potentially be funded through the Rural Shared Prosperity Fund, for which there is £3m until the end of 2025.

## **Facilitation of the Minehead Plan – Inspiring People and Place**

A refreshed strategy for the economic development priorities for Minehead and its community has been published. Minehead People and Place partnership has been formed and key stakeholders are working on delivering key actions from the plan.

## **Employment Land Study**

Secured the completion of an initial feasibility study for the potential development of Council-owned employment sites in West Somerset. This was in response to the need in that area with 6 companies requiring expansion space and action required to retain and support businesses. Proposals would require acquisition of land, therefore further work to progress proposals would require a decision by the new Unitary Authority.

## **Company, Industry and Town Centre Data (HUQ, mnAI Systems)**

- MnAI: A Company and Industry database license was purchased for 2022. This has provided data to back up reports and for backbone to proposals and wider Economic Development Work. and we have negotiated an extension into 2023/24 which will allow the licence to cover the Unitary authority area.

- HUQ Industries: Were commissioned to provide a report with the following aims:

Using Huq's mobility data, we are measuring data from Community Vision designed to show us our town centre footfall levels and provide us with supporting data to best understand our visitors.

This report covers the modules you have subscribed to and a summary of key initial findings:

- How are our town centres recovering?
- How has visitor behaviour changed year on year?
- How have events impacted footfall for each town centre?

## **Inward Investment**

Work took place in the early part of 2022 on the promotion of SWT as an inward investment 'growth hotspot'. In early 2023 the content from this work has been transferred 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. An audit is progressing on approaches to operational support and management of key settlements across the County and this will inform work to be taken forward by Somerset Council.

The last vacancy count shows that Taunton has a vacancy rate of 10.08% which is just below the national rate of 10.2%. Minehead's vacancy rate is 4%. 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 soon.

The Economic Development Team and Cultural Team are working on plans for a Coronation celebration in Castle Green.

The Economic Development Team have facilitated a number of events in Council owned Parks and Open spaces across the District over the year – more information can be found within the Culture Portfolio report (Cllr Ellis). These events continue to have a positive impact on our town's vibrancy and attract increased footfall into our Town Centres.

### **Visitor Economy and Tourism Sector Support**

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, planning approval was granted in February for two esplanade shelters. The shelters are planned to be installed later this year.

An agreement between SWT Assets Team and Minehead and Coast Development will be put in place for the maintenance and upkeep of the shelters.

The Minehead Bay Festival planning is underway for September this year, event planners are looking at sustainable options for the event to continue beyond the funding.

SWT are working very closely with EDF, SDC and SCC on a marketing/PR tender and a destination marketing delivery tender. The Marketing and PR packages are to support the tourism industry through regional and national marketing during EDF's occupation of Pontins for 3 years. The tourism contribution is aimed at increasing economic productivity and sustainability of activity, taking advantage of the opportunities, and mitigating any challenges as a result of a significant number of bedspaces being lost and the visitor landscape changing.

### **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 'Meet the Buyer' event was held in February 2023 - including the opportunity to book onto workshops- food photography, procurement and, allergens and labelling, one-to-one intellectual property sessions were also offered. All places offered on each were fully taken up. We are now working in partnership with SCC on a farming and food conference due to be held later this year.

## **B3191 Road Closure (Cleeve Hill, Watchet)**

We are working closely with SCC and local stakeholder groups to understand the issues and real impacts as result of the road closure

## **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. Round 2 of the Energy Efficiency Grant scheme has been launched, this phase is due to close at the end of March.

## **General business support**

A 'Business resilience' event was held in partnership with The Growth Hub and Taunton Chamber of Commerce. A well-received event with over 40 businesses benefitting from a full day's event.

Involvement in the Flooding response to ensure business needs are identified, recorded and represented in assessing both the recent impact and future support.

## **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) 21st March 2023, 10 am – 12:30 pm, 19 exhibitors.
- Recruit West Somerset/ Cost of Living Support Event 23rd March at The Minehead Eye, Minehead 10am – 1:30pm 35 employers and 13 support organisations/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 28th March 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
- Landscape management and skills programme for NEETS and the unemployed, delivered by AONB - To provide training in rural skills to local communities providing opportunities for re-training or upskilling. Including skills for agriculture, forestry, heathland and conservation and a traditional skills scheme involving funding for anyone to learn traditional skills to manage the landscape including hedge-laying, coppicing, pollarding, ditching, pond building and restoration, fencing, species identification and using associated tools and machinery.
- Successful Jobs Fair: Somerset Cricket Ground 23rd Feb 2023, 10:30 – 3:30 pm in the Colin Atkinson Pavilion, 55 exhibitors 655 people attended the highest number at this venue and event thus far.

SWT Community Employment Hubs continue to operate in Wellington/Taunton/Minehead/Williton/Stogursey to support people towards work, days and times and venues of operation are here: [Community employment hubs \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) Community Employment Hub engagement is increasing. Two new members of staff are now in post for 12mths until Jan 2024; a hub support officer and a hub volunteer recruitment and training officer.

In light of the new council, the SWT employment and support lead is hosting/chairing Employment Support Group (ESG) meetings for the whole of Somerset to ensure we are sharing critical updates/information to support employment and skills across the whole County on a fortnightly basis with key strategic partners and organisations.



## **External Operations & Assets**

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

The Council has agreed to dispose of the gravel car park and unused toilet block next to the West Somerset Railway Station in Bishops Lydeard for £50,000.

Purchaser's title investigations are now complete but there have been a series of frustrating delays with this arrangement. The latest delay in this somewhat protracted process is clarification regarding access for those using the station over a footpath owned by Wessex Water. We are working to clarify this matter by acquiring the required easement from Wessex Water but this will not be resolved before 31/3/23.

Once completed the Council 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 at the end of November following a routine inspection which found significant structural weakness in the bridge joists.

A further inspection took place and the full structural report confirms the bridge is 'end of life' and not viable to repair.

Given that the bridge cannot be repaired we are planning to have it removed. This requires certain consents - notably from the Environment Agency. There are pedestrian and vehicular crossing points within 150m both upstream and downstream. We are seeking costs to replace the bridge in order that Councillors can decide whether to replace – at this stage it should be anticipated that any replacement would cost at least £400,000.

### **Northern Gardens Taunton**

The wall which bounds the millstream alongside the Taunton Museum is the responsibility of the Council. 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 Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS). Following a structural assessment the wall is considered to be in danger of collapse due to considerable vegetation and small trees growing out of the stonework.

This wall forms an edge protection for the watercourse and provides a retaining function for the ground at higher level outside the Museum.

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 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.

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 the recent rebuild of Stogursey Church wall)

### **Flook House External Area**

A scheme to provide metal gates and limited fencing to the rear of Flook House to prevent unwanted access to doors and windows will be completed before the end of March 2023.

### **U3 Blackdown Business Park, Sylvan Road, Wellington.**

The Council has agreed to dispose of Unit 3 of the Blackdown Business Park and 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 of the Blenheim Gardens Café in Minehead has made good recent progress with refurbishment of the dilapidated building with an intention to reopen it as a café on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

Those elements that require planning permission (notably a new deck area and accessible ramp) are the subject of an application which will be heard by the Planning Committee in late March.

New windows and a new entry door have already been fitted, repairs to the roof are complete and a new kitchen is being installed in the café.

The project has not been without complications, but significant progress is now being made and we are confident that the gardens will have a café in April 2023.

### **Former Mount Street Nursery**

There have been people living in a 'tented encampment' in and around the Old Nursery site at the end of Mount Street for approximately 5 years.

The Council's rough sleeper unit has consistently offered support and accommodation to those who are local and support to resettle to those who have arrived from outside the area – such offers have been rejected.

We have explored the option of implementing a 'closure order' but due to cost this is no longer our preferred option (or that of the police).

Officers have sent all required information to Shape (our legal service providers) in order that they can progress the matter under trespass legislation. This process is taking longer than anyone would like.

At the same time we are 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, Environment and Sustainability Team in the new Council.

### **Other Assets Works in 2022/23**

Works to replace the entire electrical systems at the Crematorium have been completed in year and without requiring the crematorium to be closed. This was a major achievement and ensures that we have a compliant electrical system at the crematorium for the foreseeable future.

Necessary underpinning works have been completed to prevent the further deterioration of the bandstand in Vivary Park. This was achieved with minimal disruption to park users. Decoration works have started and will be completed to the bandstand in spring 2023.

The church wall at Stogursey has been rebuilt using traditional methods. Despite a challenging environment this has been achieved on time and on budget.

The famous lighthouse at Watchet was repainted in the autumn on 2022. This is always a complicated project given the weather and the need to ensure that no paint makes its way into the marine environment.

## **General**

The assets team continue to engage with the Technology Forge project team to audit and load full SWT property data onto the new database in readiness for the new Council – this has been a truly monumental task alongside the normal busy works programme.

## **Commercial Services**

### **Parking**

We have invested back into our car parks during the past year with the completion of essential works to the two multi storeys and the resurfacing and relining of many of the car parks. Other works include:

#### **New Parking Machines in West Somerset Area**

We have completed the installation of 25 new parking terminals within the West Somerset Area of the district, which have allowed customers to pay for parking sessions using contactless card payments as well as cash. The old machines were old and prone to breakdowns. The new machines also give much better information on usage to base future decisions on.

#### **Electric Charging Spaces**

Working in partnership with our electric vehicle charge point supplier, we have been expanding electric vehicle charging network in our car parks. We now have 28 charging points with more planned to be installed in the next 12 months.

#### **Crescent Car Park Improvement Project**

Works have commenced and are due to be completed in May for the revamp of this car park. 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 car park.



# Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

## Portfolio Holder Report for Housing – Cllr Fran Smith.

### Annual Report.

#### 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. 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.
- 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 award of the fund will be known in March.
- SWT has completed the first two new build SWT low carbon homes at North Taunton. These dwellings are the first of 49 low carbon homes delivered in the next 6 months at North Taunton (NTWP). The council is reprocurring a contractor for phase B&C due to the main contractor pulling out of new contracts in the South West.
- A consultation event at Rainbow Way, Minehead was held in January. The scheme is progressing well with brick work, using large porotherm blocks, allowing a speedy build to first floor level. The 54 units at Rainbow Way off Seaward Way will provide a variety of property types and be zero carbon.
- 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.
- Despite the volatility of the housing market the district has seen a higher-than-average number of affordable homes 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 others 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 April 2025.
- The Housing Strategy Team continue to work hard with partners to improve the services for vulnerable adults. The team are helping influence the integrated care system through the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Integrated Care Partnership. Working with Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) the team are identifying better ways for health, care and housing services to work together for the benefit of customers.

## **Housing Property Team**

### **Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs**

Emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs are being undertaken, largely within our defined timescales.

- We are continuing to monitor performance levels for responsive repair requests (now being taken by a cohort of specialist repair call-handlers within the Corporate Customer Service team) and have now introduced an 'overflow' of calls process to repairs schedulers when available. Nevertheless, this remains an area of challenge to ensure calls are answered within the corporate SLA.
- We continue to develop and implement activities within our Repairs Service Improvement Plan (RSIP). However, progress to improving ICT systems (e.g. job diagnosis and appointments, trades scheduling, contractor portal, etc.) and further review of available reporting functionality is still being delayed by a corporate 'change freeze' to existing IT systems prior to LGR Vesting Day on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.
- We continue to undertake void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard and have commenced a new procurement exercise for external contractor support.
- We have completed an update on the Materials Supplies Audit previously undertaken, including implementing an updated imprest van stock.
- 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, lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works, and radon monitoring.

- We have recently procured an independent specialist consultant (Savills) to undertake an overall desktop Property Safety Compliance Audit. This will act as a key opportunity to measure our progress as we approach Vesting Day into Somerset Council. They have indicated we have effective systems in place and, following their undertaking a detailed review of our data sources, have confirmed they have found no areas of concern relating to our compliance records. However, their audit has reaffirmed our need to ensure we continue to focus on Electrical Inspections (Electrical Inspection Condition Reports – EICRs) and Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) servicing. We are undertaking a range of activities to achieve this as a key priority.
- We are using our new iAuditor software to undertake 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.
- We have undertaken a review and update of our compliance policies and procedures.
- Additional procurement has taken place to deliver compliance programmes, including emergency exit release switches to door entry systems on communal doors, fire alarm systems to extra-care schemes, and an extension to the third-party independent audit process for certification of gas systems and electrical inspections.
- We have produced a Building and Resident Health and Safety Strategy (as required by the new Building Safety Act).
- 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 date 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.

### **Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered)**

- Bi-monthly estates and compliance checks continue, and we are working with colleagues to ensure that bin stores and any scooter parking is located in the safest locations possible. Most communal hallways are clear when inspected, but staff regularly remind some tenants to remove their personal items/arrange for items to be removed.
- The team continues to have several very complex and time intensive cases running including cases related to County Lines, self-neglect, hoarding and significant mental health where we are working hard to support the tenant. Unfortunately, some of our tenants with complex needs are not easily persuaded to engage with the appropriate support and services and this can take some 'hand holding' by our staff to introduce and persuade them to engage with these services.
- The team are liaising well with the mental health teams that are supporting tenants who have had severe issues and need to be accommodated within their wards due to significant mental illness. We meet with them to support them to return home, when and where appropriate and support them to end their tenancy where they will be moving to a more specialist provision. This engagement and support is often challenging and upsetting both for the tenants and staff.
- We have completed the paperwork for a 'Domestic Homicide Review', which will begin in the next few weeks, regarding one of our tenants who died.
- We regularly have deaths where there are no known next of kin, which can make ending the tenancy challenging and time-consuming. We have to ensure that tenants rights and property are protected until the necessary processes are in place for us to take back possession of the property. Our officers make enquiries with tenants during their annual review about next of kin to ensure this information is up to date for when it is required.
- We continue focussing on compliance work and are arranging for all the communal lofts to be emptied and secured/kept empty.
- We are liaising with Deane Helpline to be prepared for digital switchover in 2025 to ensure that all tenants have working equipment after this date.
- The team have been referring tenants who have damp and mould to have the areas treated and to provide advice and support.
- Business as usual continues day-to-day; sign ups, leaving wells, completing annual reviews, estates and block checks, ad-hoc calls and emergencies, referrals to specialist help and support, Deane Help Line Rota etc. The team has struggled with capacity in the past few weeks due to some sickness



## **Lettings**

- Customer satisfaction remains very high with both the Lettable standard of the property and the process of lettings the properties. The satisfaction surveys via QR did not gain much traction the uptake was low. A manual system is now back in operation which affords a further opportunity to engage with tenants and gain valuable feedback.
- A further 34 properties have been let since the date of the last report.
- Average turnaround times per void is currently 37 days.
- Relet for a Minor void is 30 days against a target of 31 days.
- Relet for a Major void is 56 days against a target of 44 days.
- Since October 2022 478 properties have been let through HFS of which 153 were SWT properties accounting for 32%
- SWT have 3,815 applicants registered on HFS.
- An SWT 2-bed house will attract an average of 205 bids.
- HMP project remains ahead of target.

## **Income**

- Due to staff absence within the Debt and Benefit service, we are running at half capacity for at least 6 weeks. We will therefore be prioritising those tenants who are already in rent arrears and those new tenants who need support at the start of the tenancy to prevent them falling into arrears. We will then be prioritising other work in accordance to need and making referrals to CA and other support agencies, as necessary.
- The rent recovery officers continue to support tenants to reduce their rent arrears in accordance with the Lean Recovery process.
- We are working with a number of tenants who have very complex needs, these cases can be very time intensive.
- The team will continue to sign post to any grant funding which may be available for tenants to help with their rent arrears and also to help with the cost of living.

## **Tenancy/Estates & ASB**

- The Estates Team have now introduced a new Tenants Handbook. We are really pleased with the new handbook and hope that it will be of interest and useful to all our new tenants. We are also preparing a new version in preparation for vesting day.
- We are pleased that we have also been able to recruit a temporary Tenancy/Estates Case Manager, so we are back to having a full team. We will be looking to recruit for a permanent member of staff in April.
- We are now reporting that during the last few weeks we have experienced some serious anti-social behaviour. Resulting in two tenants being remanded in custody and another being sectioned. These extreme cases are

becoming more frequent; as well as the concern for our other customers this is impacting on our staff and how they go about conducting the day-to-day work.

- We have also had to prepare two reviews from the Domestic Homicide safeguarding team.

## **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 but there is some evidence that no-fault evictions from the private rented sector is increasing

- Whilst the main cause of homelessness remains eviction by family; is anticipated that this will increase as families struggle with the costs of accommodating extended families during the current cost of living crisis
- The high turnover of staff has continued this quarter; partly attributed to uncertainty surrounding LGR and 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. In February, four temporary staff and two permanent staff left the team resulting in significant capacity issues. As a result, the ability to undertake proactive, preventative work, has been limited

## **Temporary accommodation**

The recent focus on improving pathways into and out of temporary accommodation continues but has been limited by capacity due to staff turnover.

- The number of households in temporary accommodation decreased by circa 25% from 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 service area moving forwards will be in retaining a positive relationship with commercial B&B providers who, historically, have implemented a policy of not accepting booking from the current County Council. This has been highlighted as a risk post 1 April 2023 and is on the radar of the Housing 2 workstream.

## **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 have successfully recruited a new Senior Technical Officer who started with the grant team on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023. Their work will mainly focus on disabled adaptations.
- SIP have successfully recruited a new Community Retrofit Project Officer. Their primary role to project manage the £12 million retrofit programme through the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) schemes from the Department for Energy.
- SIP will have successfully retrofitted 72 homes as part of the HUGS 1 scheme spending £1 million providing insulation and heating measures. Some of the measures include external wall insulation, new windows and doors, loft insulation and air source heat pumps.
- SIP have secured £8 million in HUGS 2 funding from the Department for Energy for retrofitting insulation and heating measures. The scheme will assist 400 households over a five-year period.
- 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.
- SIP have received over 7,500 enquires this year, a record 1/3 again on last year.
- SIP as the lead for private sector renewal as part of the LGR preparations has drafted a new Private Sector Renewal Policy for the new Somerset Council which will be going to the Somerset Council Executive on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023 for approval. The policy sets out the grant provisions to assist disabled, vulnerable and low-income households with access to grants for disabled adaptations, essential repairs, insulation and heating upgrades.
- SIP will be in the Communities Directorate in the new Council under the Service Director for Housing

### **Housing Performance Team Housing Performance Team (Shari Hallett)**

- It has been and continues to be an incredibly busy time for the team working on our governance, risk, tenant engagement, complaints and preparing for TSM surveys becoming mandatory in April 2023.
- Our tenant engagement work continues with our core groups namely Tenants Strategic Group and Tenants' Action Group. We also started the joint tenant steering group with Homes in Sedgemoor, specifically to engage tenants on LGR. Alongside these core groups sub groups for low carbon, voids, mystery shopper, damp and mould have also taken place.

- During the year a number of our engaged tenants have attended the TPAS (tenant participation) conference to network, attended training, as well as visiting our newly built properties. They have also reviewed our tenant portal and provided feedback for us to use developing this in future.
- We have continued to communicate with our tenants through four printed and posted newsletters. From April we are researching how to reduce the postage costs for those tenants with electronic and web access.
- Although we will remain a separate legal entity to Homes in Sedgemoor, we are collectively working with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams.
- We continue to strive for improvement in our complaint handling and have been able to maintain an average of 83% of stage 1 complaint investigations completed and responded to within standard since the beginning of October 2022. The Housing Ombudsman has not investigated any complaint made against us in this financial year to date, although they have advised landlords that they are currently around six months behind in their own workloads and investigations.
- Open Housing the new housing management software went live 27th July 2022. We are now finalising the texting (SMS) option, the tenant portal which we hope to be live in a few months time 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.
- This year we concluded the policy review work with the HQN (Housing Quality Network) and consulted with our Tenant Strategic Group as policies were created.
- We commissioned and undertook a Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) two pilot surveys in readiness for the mandatory survey in April 2023. The results are a key source of information and steer for our focus.

**I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the officers and members of staff at SWT who have helped shape and deliver the work that has taken place over the lifetime of this council and who worked for the district previously within Housing.**

**I am very proud of the achievements whilst being the Portfolio Holder for Housing since 2019, I would like to highlight the very difficult time working through the pandemic and how our amazing staff went above and beyond to continue to provide the service for our tenants and residents as well as the work carried out by our Homelessness team in relation to Canonsgrove.**

**For the future, I hope the completion of the housing development that we started at SWT will leave a legacy of new homes for local residents and that Somerset Council will continue with development of much needed more homes for the wider area of Somerset, whilst also maintaining and managing our existing ones.**





# Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

## Portfolio Holder Report for Environmental Services – Cllr Andy Sully.

### Annual Report

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

- street Scene and Open Spaces

#### Litter Bin Replacement Programme

The roll out of the new litter bin infrastructure with recycling compartments has continued with the next 75 bins installed during the year taking the total to over 200 around the district. This has helped increased the amount of litter that is recycled and replaced many bins which were in a poor condition.

#### Environmental Improvement Team

The two person team was introduced in 2022 have been working on the following projects over the 12 months:

- Tree planting

The team have assisted with the planting of over 447 new trees in Councils parks and open spaces during 2022/23.

- Spring Clean

During April and May, the team attended 50 Open Space locations across the district, collecting approximately 3 tonnes of litter and fly tipped items. They assisted with the collection of litter from volunteer groups who organised litter picking events.

- Weeding

The team undertook weeding in Council car parks and sites to improve the look of these areas. Locations across the district including Taunton Town Centre, Watchet Esplanade and Minehead Quay

- Town Centre pressure washing

The team completed the second year of town centre pavement washing to help provide a more pleasant environment for visitors.

- Watering

The annual watering of flower beds and hanging baskets was completed by the new inhouse team. This allowed for additional watering during the summer drought conditions and saved money from using a contractor.



### Litter enforcement trial

In April as part of the Council's newly adopted litter strategy a trial was commenced on litter enforcement in partnership with East Hants Council. The trial has now completed and issued just over 1,200 penalty notices during the year to individuals disposing of litter incorrectly.

The trial included education as well as enforcement. The education which was provided through face-to-face interaction, press releases, social media and interacting with key stakeholders such as Neighbourhood Police, the Superintendent of Avon and Somerset Police, local businesses within and outside of the town's centres, National Highways and Town and Parish Councils. In addition to this the team purchased 500 portable ash trays which officers gave out to individuals who were caught disposing of cigarettes inappropriately. The information gathered during the trial will now be used to consider options for the new authority for enforcement in all areas.

- Fleet

The Council has taken delivery its next batch of electric vehicles as part of its scheduled replacement programme. This batch of small vans and pool cars will bring the total number of electric vehicles on the fleet to 23 with a further 22 on order due for replacement next year.

- Refuse and Recycling (Somerset Waste Partnership)

In the final year of the partnership the delivery of its business plan has continued. The waste services will become a department of the new council after vesting day.

### Recycle More

Following the roll out of the new scheme to households in 21/22 the completion of the rollout for communal properties and schools were completed during 22/23. The scheme has seen increases in recycling and savings to the collection contract as anticipated when the scheme was agreed.

### Collection Service

The collection service continues to have disruptions and a review of the contract is planned for 23/24. SWP have continued working hard with their contractor, SUEZ, in order to reduce repeated collection failures. There were several collection issues



through September and October. These were generally down to staffing issues which caused rounds to be dropped.

### **Environmental Health**

The Environmental Health service have continued to work incredibly hard, ensuring a smooth LGR transition despite no let up in BAU. This doesn't just include cases and workload, but also working on streamlining processes ready to bring teams together as easily as possible.

The Public Health Team have been dealing with increased enforcement activity regarding illegally imported food, imminent risk situations and ongoing non-compliance in food businesses which are leading to prosecutions – all of which are reducing the risk of food borne illness or long term health effects to people living, working or staying in the district. A lot of this is reflective of the economic situation within the country, as businesses struggle to make ends meet. Where we are issuing poor hygiene ratings, we are meeting our commitment to return and rescore within 3 months to minimise reputational impact for businesses.

Our goal for 22/23 within Environmental Protection and Private Sector Housing goal has been to reduce the back log of inspections and visits created from the covid-pandemic. New staff has allowed us to do this. Our water sampling program has been a particular success, completing 128 samples in the month of February and putting us in a good position to complete scheduled program by the end of the financial year and not take any backlog into the new authority.

The year for Private Sector Housing has been especially challenging with the amount of complex cases we have had to investigate and take enforcement action on. The team dealt has seen an increase of customer contacts requesting advice and assistance with regards to damp and mould, following the media coverage on the issue at the end of the year.

The team are preparing for the first prosecution the authority has ever undertaken under the Housing Act 2004, for failure to licence Houses in Multiple Occupation. This has been made possible by the new, more contemporary Enforcement Policy which the team developed this year for Somerset West and Taunton, and has also been approved within SCC as the policy for the new Somerset Council.

We responded to requests for support from the taxi trade to increase the Hackney Carriage Fare in response to rising fuel prices. This is the second time in the past 12 months that we have done this.

The Licensing Team also reviewed Street Trader Policy, working closely with members via a officer/member working group. The new policy is much clearer, giving transparency to our customers on how we make decision, and setting out what we expect from customers in return.

Again, this policy is expected to be adopted by the new authority.

Some figures to give an idea of the volume of work the teams are undertaking, up to end of Feb 2023.

### **Licensing**

no. applications – 1498  
no. of service requests - 224

### **Environmental Protection**

no. applications – 1498  
no. of service requests – 643  
no. private water supply visits - 128

### **Food**

no. inspections – 627  
no. of service requests - 677

### **Blue Anchor Coastal Defence**

The cliffs at Blue Anchor are continuing to erode. The emergency works completed in partnership with the Environment Agency in 2020 are performing well and have prevented any more substantial loss.

The Council is delivering a scheme to protect the B3191 in this area, funded by SCC as the Highways Agency. Vessels have now been definitively secured to deliver the required rock armour from Glensanda Quarry in western Scotland to be delivered to Blue Anchor in late April and May 2023.

13,500 tonnes of rock will be collected from a quarry in Western Scotland and transported by sea going vessels to Blue Anchor before being 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. During the same process the upper cliffs (largely consisting of degraded Mercia Mudstone) will be re-profiled to a 'stable angle of repose' and then 'hydro seeded' to promote vegetation growth to further aid stabilisation.

It is anticipated that final planning approval will be secured in late March 2023.

All other permissions are in place and the scheme is ready to be delivered

### **North Hill - Minehead**

WSP were 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 a report which outlines the preferred design solution.

Work is now underway to design a linear 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.

A drone survey was completed in March 2023 to check final levels and the design is expected to be completed in late 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**

Work to clear sand from the blocked drainage gullies on the seafront at Minehead began was completed in February 2023

Sand was 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 significant movement of the cliffs to the west of Watchet. The allotment site in Watchet belonging to the Watchet TC 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 and on the western access to the beach at Blue Anchor.

### **Harbours**

The annual dredging programme was completed in the outer harbour in November 2022. 7,200m<sup>3</sup> of mud and silt was removed from the Harbour using water injection dredging, the work being carried out by the Marine Group

Electrical compliance work was completed to the East Quay and to the Marina pontoons in the summer of 2022. This work included new electrical feeds to the boatyard, the sill gate at the entrance to the Marina and to the pontoons. This work followed on from the installation of a new Quay wall on the East Quay

The mooring income from Minehead Harbour exceeded the budget predications and is the highest ever recorded at Minehead at a little over £15,000. All available berths were full.

I would like to give my personal thanks to all the officers in the various teams that have helped me in the last couple of years in my portfolio, who have always delivered exceptional services in these challenging times.

**Councillor Andy Sully**

# Full Council Meeting – 28 March 2023

## Portfolio Holder Report for Local Government Re-organisation and Community Governance Review – Cllr Sarah Wakefield.

I would like to say first that during this last year I have very much enjoyed working on and following the progress of both aspects of my portfolio. I have attended meetings of the LGR Board, (several times as substitute for our Leader), and of the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee together with attending meetings of the CGR working group and latterly the Shadow Taunton Town Council and have also met regularly with officers and consultants involved with these matters. Officers at SWT have been both assiduous in carrying out their work and very helpful to me. This is despite having to cope with all of the additional activity involved in the move to LGR and the setting up of the new Taunton Parish Council. My grateful thanks are due to them all - they know who they are.

### Local Government Re-organisation

Vesting Day of 31 March 2023 is now almost here and I am very pleased to report that officers assure me and I am confident that we here at SWT are ready for the launch of the new unitary Somerset Council. Since the announcement of the formation of the unitary council it has been remarkable how the four districts and the county council have formed a programme and worked together in such a collaborative spirit so quickly and so well. This is testament to the willingness and enthusiasm of the employees of all the Somerset councils to take on this project and to make it work.

SWT has played its full part from the outset both in releasing and providing staff to work additionally in the many LGR workstreams together also with satisfying the requirement to protect the services which SWT currently delivers to our residents from vesting day. This has all been done whilst ensuring the continued smooth running of the council and delivering business as usual. I would like also to put on record and celebrate here the hard work and professionalism of our SWT employees not directly involved in the LGR programme but who have taken on and dealt with additional work on behalf of colleagues released to take part in the LGR workstreams.

The LGR programme has been (and still is) very large and extremely complex and at the beginning I certainly wondered how everything could be achieved in the restricted time available but I am pleased to report that services and operations are well prepared for vesting day for our customers, systems and our staff. Day One readiness has been rolled out and staff know what they will be doing and where and how they will be doing it. There are still plenty of further changes to be made after vesting day in terms of management structure and culture change too but we will set out from a strong position. I am reassured too that our financial closedown should happen successfully with plans in place for the essential work on that post vesting day.

### Community Governance Review

The journey this year to reach the point we have reached - with the shadow town council meeting regularly since before Christmas, the new Clerk appointed and the process for the elections being held on 4 May well under way - has been long and at times arduous. There have been threats of legal challenges (which has not entirely diminished) and differences

over issues such as assets transfer and the boundary of the new parish - all of which have required careful thought and action. More recently, and with the appointment of the Clerk, we have moved into the implementation phase. The meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> January provided a comprehensive update on the first year budget for the Town Council and the implementation budget, on the process for covering civic activity up until the election of a new mayor and a briefing on the Garden Town. Then at the next meeting held on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023 the following items were covered:

- A presentation from Officers and the Lead Member for LGR (Cllr V Keitch) on the emerging Taunton LCN and the broader LCN work going on. To be clear Taunton will be part of a larger LCN and will have one member and one vote on it as will all other town and parish councils in their allocated LCN across Somerset.
- Judicial Review Update with nothing new to note.
- Elections Update – timetable of key dates and an overview of the new Voter ID rules. Strenuous efforts will be made including a redesigned poll card to ensure voters know and understand the new ID requirement.
- Key policies and procedures for Day 1 – e.g. Standing Orders, Financial procedures and a Scheme of delegation were discussed and supported.
- HR Update – on those staff affected in the new Parish and some at SWT.
- Implementation Plan Progress Update – Progress on Tranche 2 actions going well, particularly with IT systems procured and the new website ready to be in place for Day 1.

Prior to the meeting we held a meet and greet for all Shadow Town Councillors to meet the new Town Clerk in the new office space for the Town Council on the ground floor at Deane House. This will be their home for at least the next 12 months.

There has also been a 'Becoming a Councillor' Event held at Deane House on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023, which was well attended. It focused on the practicalities of being a councillor and gave an opportunity for the public to discover exactly what that entails and pick up nomination packs. The recording can be watched back at this link;

[https://somerwestandtaunton.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast\\_interactive/750195](https://somerwestandtaunton.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/750195)

Whilst it is with some sadness that I write this final report - and here I mean sadness at the short life and early demise of Somerset and Taunton Council - I do so in the knowledge that all the hard work I have referred to has provided the environment for a safe transition of our services which will continue to be delivered by our committed and professional staff at the new unitary council and the safe and legal setting up of the new Taunton Town Council. I do of course sincerely wish Taunton Town Council and its new Councillors, once elected, prosperity and success in their endeavours for our town and I also wish the new Somerset Council every success going forwards and am personally delighted that I myself will be part of that new unitary council. To those officers and Councillors who are moving on to new challenges, my very best wishes and thanks for your invaluable contributions.