

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 23rd January to 20th 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
Appendix C	Delivery Strategy and Action Plan

Contact Officers

Name	Sarah Povall
Direct Dial	01823 219733
Email	s.povall@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk