

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Full Council – 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023

### Connecting our Garden Communities – adoption

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

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

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

- 1.1 Connecting our Garden Communities is a plan for ensuring that modern, futureproofed walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure accompanies the delivery of key developments across Taunton Garden Town. The plan builds on and complements the existing Taunton Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan and other related projects being delivered via the Future High Streets Fund.
- 1.2 The Plan consists of:
  - [Connecting our Garden Communities \(main plan document\)](#)
  - [Appendix A – Route Auditing](#)
  - [Appendix B – Route Summaries](#)
  - [Appendix C – Route Prioritisation Matrix](#)
- 1.3 In addition, this report is supported by:
  - [Consultation Statement](#) – Appendix B to this report
  - [Equalities Impact Assessment](#) – Appendix C to this report
  - [SEA/HRA Screening Report](#) – Appendix D to this report
- 1.4 Public consultation on a draft plan took place between 29<sup>th</sup> July 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Following this, officers have reviewed the 276 responses received alongside comments made in-person during consultation events and amended the plan as considered appropriate. However, amendments have been relatively minor from the consultation draft and the overall plan remains much the same, with changes generally relating to points of detail, some of which have been revised now, others of which are noted for consideration at later stages of route design.
- 1.5 This report now seeks adoption of the final version of the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan.

## 2 Recommendations

That Full Council:

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

## 3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 There are risks associated with the Connecting our Garden Communities project. However, many of these risks are more associated with the delivery of the plan and routes themselves, rather in the decision to approve the plan itself.
- 3.2 The main risks associated with approving the plan itself include:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Explanation and Mitigation</b>
Raising expectations / over promising, under-delivering	The plan includes careful wording to ensure it is clear that it sets out our aspirations, and that each route is subject to detailed design (which may necessitate change) and that it is heavily reliant on developer negotiations and securing external funding in order to deliver. Indicative timescales are identified for when routes should be delivered based on a series of assumptions relating to priority, phasing of development, other plans (e.g. alignment with the Bus Service Improvement Plan) and LCWIP timescales where relevant. It explains that should any of the considerations underpinning these assumptions change then this may change timescales for delivery. It highlights that by identifying the routes, the Council is not bound to deliver any of them and the reliance upon external funding.
Raising anxiety / concern in affected communities / parties	The plan identifies routes only, with some commentary about constraints and opportunities which hints at what the design solution may need to consider. It contains no specific detailed proposals. There will be parts of routes that are more sensitive to change than others and where controversy may arise as detail develops (e.g. removal of on-street parking may turn out to be necessary in places). Whilst this level of detail is not included in the plan, the identification of routes does have potential to 'set hares running' in certain locations. As such, the plan includes a commitment to work with communities to develop more detailed proposals, particularly where more transformational

	<p>change may be required. An indicative hierarchy of walking, wheeling and cycling interventions has been included which helps to communicate what different kinds of interventions might be more relevant in different parts of the network.</p>
<p>Public confusion with other more advanced active travel schemes in the town centre</p>	<p>The plan shows how routes that are more advanced / already referred to in the public domain (such as those funded by the Future High Streets Fund and the Wellington to Taunton route) link with and relate to the routes being proposed by this project. It makes it clear that this is about longer-term vision and aspiration and preparing the pool of projects to work towards delivery of next.</p>
<p>Public confusion with the Taunton LCWIP</p>	<p>The plan clearly states that it builds on and complements the LCWIP. It will influence future iterations of the LCWIP. Text and maps in the final version of the plan provide increased clarity on this point including information about how the plan will become absorbed into the LCWIP and gain greater weight as a supporting document to the emerging new Local Transport Plan. A plan identifying the LCWIP routes overlayed with the Connecting our Garden Communities routes is now included for clarity.</p>
<p>Risk of being seen to overly focus on Taunton</p>	<p>The plan states that it is directly related to the designation of Taunton as a Garden Town, and the capacity and capital funding related to this. It further justifies the focus on Taunton in terms of the scale of opportunity it provides for carbon reduction and health and wellbeing improvements in comparison to other parts of the district. It identifies the aspiration to develop future external linkages to neighbouring settlements. It explains our existing commitments to deliver an LCWIP for Wellington, and within the CNCR Action Plan to further widen work on active travel across the district over time. Furthermore it references that there are wider community aspirations for other routes which are not captured within the plan and that this does not mean these linkages are not important, or that they won't be pursued – we remain open to considering further routes. However, it will be vital that we prioritise route delivery appropriately.</p>
<p>Risk of being seen to overly focus on the Garden Communities over existing communities.</p>	<p>As explained above, this plan is directly related to the designation of Taunton as a Garden Town. This designation is as much the town as a whole as it is about delivering the new communities and knitting them in with the existing. However, the Garden Town capacity funding from which the supporting evidence work has been funded is intended by Homes England for unlocking housing growth and development aspirations in particular, as such this is the primary focus. Furthermore, it is routes to support these new developments which stand greatest chance of being externally funded, and only these routes which we stand a chance of being able to negotiate developer contributions towards. The routes included within the plan do not think of the Garden Community areas in isolation. They bear in</p>

	<p>mind existing users and communities, which were the key focus of the LCWIP routes, and collectively they will deliver a fairly comprehensive network across the town. Early engagement with ward members and parish councils around the Taunton area was used to identify any local aspirations which the routes could look to respond to in part and where relevant to the Garden Communities. However, there may well be other routes felt to be necessary within and beyond the town, to serve existing communities, but which have no direct relationship with the Garden Communities themselves, in which case these are not picked up.</p>
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3.3 The following risks are relevant, but more in relation to final approval of the final plan and delivery of routes.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Explanation and Mitigation</b>
Public consider their comments have not been listened to	<p>A significant number of comments were made during public consultation. Consultation responses have been taken into account and have been instrumental in influencing route prioritisation in particular. However, many comments related to detailed points about route design, implementation or in some cases suggested alternative routings to specific sections of routes. Rather than seeking to amend the routes as part of the plan, it is proposed to consider these points in more detail as route design evolves. There is a risk that some people may consider this to be ignoring such responses. However, there are some important and valid points which have been made a which would be better considered further as route design evolves beyond what is essentially the overarching vision set out by this plan. The final plan has added a section to the routes in Appendix B (to the plan) noting key comments made in relation to each for consideration at later stages. A Consultation Statement has been produced (see Appendix B to this report) setting out summaries of the comments received and responding to key points raised. This includes a "you said, we did" section.</p>
Not achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 / failure to address climate change	<p>Developing the plan will contribute towards tackling climate change and the transport sector which is the source of most emissions locally. Delivery of new routes against an evidence based plan increases the effectiveness of this action.</p>
Failure to deliver sufficient housing or demonstrate sufficient land supply for housing	<p>The plan identifies infrastructure related to the Garden Community developments around Taunton. All developments generate finite values and therefore have finite viability. Over-burdening costs on new development may risk making development unviable and stymie the delivery of housing. The plan essentially sets out a starting point for developer negotiations at the planning application stage. Planning obligations must be necessary to make a</p>

	<p>development acceptable in planning terms, relevant to the development and fairly related in scale and kind. Planning must balance a wide range of policy requirements and material considerations in order to consider whether development proposals constitute sustainable development. As such, the plan itself does not result in failure to deliver housing / land supply.</p>
<p>Risk of slowing, stalling or pausing of major capital programmes and project delivery</p>	<p>The Firepool development is a key part of the Council's corporate plan (and local planning policy), capital programme and project delivery. As a Garden Community, the plan covers connections associated with the Firepool development which the emerging Masterplan and future planning applications will need to respond to. The same terms referred to in the risk above apply to Firepool as any other development. The Council is currently consulting on a Draft Masterplan for the Firepool site which highlights the viability challenges which development of the site will face. The final Masterplan is expected to be supplemented by further response to the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan and routes.</p>
<p>Risk of stymying wider Council aspirations in relation to Council assets</p>	<p>The Council owns significant land holdings within Taunton as part of its general fund, housing and open spaces functions. The use of any of this land for delivery of walking, wheeling and cycling routes could, in theory stymie wider aspirations that the Council may have for those assets (e.g. disposal, regeneration, tree planting etc.). The starting principle for the design of any of the emerging routes will be to accommodate the route in line with the following hierarchy: 1) Highways land; 2) Other SCC or SWT land; 3) Third party land. Following this hierarchy increases the likelihood and ability to deliver routes, potentially reduces costs, and avoids being overly and unnecessarily constrained solely by existing highway widths. The use of any SWT land will of course need to be subject to appropriate discussion and negotiation with the relevant asset holder within the Council so as to understand long term aspirations for that land and ensure that these would not be compromised. Early engagement has taken place with Housing, Assets and Open Spaces teams to raise awareness of the routes.</p>
<p>Failure to allocate and spend Section 106 funds</p>	<p>The plan provides an evidence based approach against which to secure future planning obligations, making it easier to allocate and spend the funds and increasing the transparency of doing so. It identifies an expectation that applicants utilise a "Vision and Validate" approach to transport assessment and travel planning, which will provide the basis for ensuring any planning obligations meet the NPPF tests.</p>
<p>Failure to act on low physical activity levels</p>	<p>Developing the plan will contribute towards tackling low levels of physical activity. The focus on enabling key journeys to be undertaken by active means increases the</p>

	effectiveness of this action, and focusing on schools in particular drives potential for greater long-term health gains.
Failure to deliver modal shift – congestion, air quality, road capacity improvements – vicious cycle	Continuation of the business as usual approach to assessing and addressing transport needs of new developments drives demand for roads. It is well established that freeing up road capacity encourages people to drive. This plan contributes pro-actively towards tackling these issues by identifying routes and key connections and setting out an expectation that applicants utilise a “Vision and Validate” approach to transport assessment and travel planning rather than the traditional “Predict and Provide” approach. Delivery of the routes themselves will contribute significantly, though needs to be accompanied by wider action (e.g. around behavioural change) to have most impact. Delivery of some routes will likely require the reduction of road/junction capacity in places and as such there may be some shorter-term negative impacts in this regard, to be understood at the detailed design stage for routes. The Plan acknowledges that a level of road congestion may be necessary to facilitate behaviour change, but that moving those who can travel by sustainable modes off of the road, space will be freed up for those who require car travel. The focus on enabling key journeys to be undertaken by active means increases the effectiveness of this action.
Legal issues could arise in detailed design	The plan includes careful wording to ensure that it is clear that the exact routing of routes may change and the detail of provision is not set, to be determined through detailed design. The plan is at a high enough level to avoid triggering any legal issues at this stage. The plan includes text to clarify that routes will wherever possible look to avoid third party land and utilise SCC/SWT land (and in the main highways land).
Potential for equalities impacts on protected groups	An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken which accompanies this report and which should be read for further information (see Appendix C to this report). There are no equalities impacts associated with the production of the plan itself. However, as set out in the EqIA there is potential for delivery and implementation to have negative impacts on protected groups depending on the way the plans are executed and the detailed design of routes. Detailed design is beyond the scope of the plan. The EqIA and plan itself include text to state the relevance and importance of route designs taking an inclusive approach, and the value of following the Government’s Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20 guidance on cycle infrastructure design and Inclusive Mobility guidance as a means to ensuring access for all. Further, detailed EqIA’s will need to be undertaken at the project stage as routes progress through the design process. The final plan now

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

- 4.1 Connecting our Garden Communities is a plan for ensuring that modern, futureproofed walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure accompanies the delivery of key developments across Taunton Garden Town. The intention is to ensure that the Garden Communities of Comeytrove, Staplegrove, Monkton Heathfield, Firepool, Nexus25, Nerrols and Ford Farm:
- link in to the strategic routes identified in the Taunton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP),
  - connect to key services and facilities beyond their site boundaries, and
  - ensure routes address associated links which may have been missed by the LCWIP, whilst delivering against strategic green infrastructure opportunities.
- 4.2 The plan includes an evidence-based network plan of walking, wheeling and cycling routes which builds on the LCWIP and shows the Council's ambition for connecting the garden communities across the town. It identifies a total of 33 "core" routes, which are reasonably specific in terms of their routes. It also identifies 10 more "aspirational", Green Infrastructure-led routes which are less specific, more indicative of the places they might look to connect. It places these routes spatially alongside routes which are already further progressed including those associated with the Future High Streets Fund, East Street, and the Killams route being progressed by SCC.
- 4.3 Further information on the background, intentions and reasons for the plan can be found within the [previous report to Executive Committee from July 2022](#) which sought approval of the draft plan for public consultation.

### Public consultation

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

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

### *General*

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

### *Potential Alternative Routes*

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

### *Additional Design Issues & Constraints*

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

### *Prioritisation of Route Destinations & Delivery*

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

### *Missing Connections*

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



### *Walking, wheeling & Cycling Infrastructure Design*

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

### *Integration with other plans and modes*

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

### *Scope of the document*

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

includes an indicative infrastructure hierarchy of different types of cycling infrastructure that may be suitable from busy corridors to residential areas.

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

#### *Developer contributions and weight of document*

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

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

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

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

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

#### Next steps and future delivery

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

- 4.10 Where appropriate and where the three planning obligation tests (necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development) are met, then the LPA will seek contribution towards the delivery of relevant routes via Section 106 Agreement.
- 4.11 The Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement sets out how receipts of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) (charged only in the former Taunton Deane area) will be used to deliver on infrastructure priorities. This identifies that a proportion of CIL receipts should be spent on cycle and pedestrian improvements. The CoGCs plan may influence how these moneys will be allocated and spent.
- 4.12 Officers from the Council's planning, major projects and climate teams are already engaging in project work informed by the CoGCs Plan, and it will continue to inform project work as resources and opportunities allow. This includes preparing funding bids and business cases ready for when opportunities arise.
- 4.13 Going forward, all routes will need to go through concept planning, business case development and detailed design stages ahead of delivery. As routes progress through this design path, it may be that some routes fall away as infeasible once more detailed issues are understood, or need tweaking to overcome such issues. The plan is clear that by identifying the routes, the Council is not bound to deliver any of them, and delivery will be heavily reliant upon successful negotiation with developers, and securing of other external funding. A principal purpose of the plan is to enable negotiation with developers in order to secure developer contributions towards scheme delivery, and to inform business case development and funding bids to secure other external funding sources.
- 4.14 The Government has had a step change in its approach to walking and cycling over the last few years and committed to significant funding being made available towards delivery of active travel infrastructure. The Department for Transport's new executive agency, Active Travel England has been set up to ensure that this, and wider transport investment, is well spent, and to help raise the standard of cycling and walking infrastructure to align with Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20 as far as at all possible. Having proposals sufficiently developed and ready to go is essential for making the best of these funding opportunities when they are announced, often with short timescales to submit bids. The CoGCs Plan is directly informing Somerset County Council's bid to Active Travel Fund 4 and spend of existing Garden Town funding. Being ready for further funding opportunities as they arise will be essential to successful delivery.
- 4.15 The overall network of routes has an aspirational element to it. It sets out the extent of routes which are likely needed to meet our Climate Emergency commitments and Garden Town Vision, both of which realistically necessitate transformational change. However, the overall cost associated with delivering all of the "core" routes only is likely in the region of £124-£150 million. As such, delivery of the plan as a whole is heavily reliant upon external funding and developer negotiations.
- 4.16 The final Plan prioritises routes based on a transparent scoring matrix available in Appendix C to the Plan, with full explanation in Chapter 9 of the Plan itself. This will help to focus efforts for funding bids, and associated business case development. The route prioritisation and indicative delivery timescales in the plan will influence this work programme alongside availability of resources, funding and opportunities.
- 4.17 SWT and SCC officers agree that in time, this Plan will be incorporated into the next

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

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

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

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

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

stage. This process is beginning now, in relation to the emerging Masterplan.

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

## **7 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 There are anticipated to be no legal implications of approving the Plan as a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications or as corporate policy to inform future policy and project development and funding bids. The Plan and this report both rightly point out the planning decisions should be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 7.2 The Plan includes careful wording to ensure that it is clear that the exact routing of routes may change and the detail of provision is not set, to be determined through detailed design. The plan is at a high enough level to avoid triggering any legal issues at this stage. The plan includes text to clarify that routes will wherever possible look to avoid third party land and utilise SCC/SWT land (and in the main highways land).

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

- 8.1 Transport is the dominant source of carbon emissions in Somerset, making up 46% of carbon dioxide emissions in 2018, compared with just 28% as the UK average. For Somerset West and Taunton the figure is higher still at 51%. This is indicative of the rural nature and low density population of the area and the lack of realistic alternatives to the personal motorised vehicle in many cases, as well as the fact that the M5 motorway runs through the district. Replacing vehicular journeys with active travel modes (walking, wheeling and cycling) is identified as central to the success of reducing emissions from transport. Taunton represents the greatest opportunity in the district (and county) for securing higher levels of walking, wheeling and cycling, and new developments are a key catalyst and opportunity for moving forward delivery of the necessary infrastructure. This plan is intended to lead to modal shift of movements from/to the Garden Communities to more sustainable and zero emission, active travel modes. Delivery of the routes will also enable improved modal shift for existing communities.
- 8.2 The delivery of routes will, wherever possible look to retain existing vegetation, particularly where there is an important ecological benefit to doing so. However, there may be places along the routes where a balance needs to be found between delivering high quality, compliant infrastructure and retention of existing vegetation. Climate change poses a significant risk to our ecology, and the delivery of walking, wheeling and cycling routes can help to mitigate this risk. However, the loss of biodiversity is also of significant concern and the right balance needs to be struck. A holistic view will be taken in developing more detailed proposals for route delivery, with a view to creating opportunities to enhance the green infrastructure along the route corridors. Wherever possible, route designs will look to make use of and enhance/improve existing infrastructure, improving the sustainability of proposals in terms of resource use. However, in some cases, new infrastructure will be necessary/more appropriate. Water management will need to be considered in detailed design. However, all of the above relates to project delivery and not the approval of the plan for public consultation.

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

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

## **10 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken – this is included at Appendix C. Officers within the Council with an overview of the Equalities function, who have experience of identifying impacts on those with protected characteristics have been consulted for this initial identification of potential impacts. Overall the plan is anticipated to have a positive impact across all protected groups as there are no equalities impacts associated with the production of the plan itself or approving of the draft plan for public consultation. However, as set out in the EqIA there is potential for delivery and implementation to have negative impacts on protected groups depending on the way the plans are executed and the detailed design of routes. Detailed design is beyond the scope of the plan and this consultation. The EqIA and plan itself include text to state the relevance and importance of route designs taking an inclusive approach, and the value of following the Government's Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20 guidance on cycle infrastructure design and Inclusive Mobility guidance as a means to ensuring access for all. Further, detailed EqIA's will need to be undertaken at the project stage as routes progress through the design process. The final plan now makes reference to walking, *wheeling* and cycling throughout as a more inclusive term.

## **11 Social Value Implications**

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

## **12 Partnership Implications**

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

## **13 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 13.1 Health and wellbeing are central to this plan. The routes directly consider this in their connection to the places people need to go for essential services and facilities. The prioritisation of routes connecting to schools is key. Enabling children to develop a habit

of walking, wheeling and cycling to school can set them up for more active lifestyles for the rest of their lives.

- 13.2 Some of the routes quite deliberately link to or through some of the most deprived wards in the district. This ensures that the routes not only benefit the new Garden Communities, but also enable these existing communities to access the opportunities that these linkages and the Garden Communities themselves provide.

## **14 Asset Management Implications**

- 14.1 This report makes no recommendations or requirements in relation to specific SWT assets. At this stage, the Plan discusses routes in general, rather than the specifics of route design and land holdings required.

- 14.2 The Council owns significant land holdings within Taunton as part of its general fund, housing and open spaces functions. The use of any of this land for delivery of walking, wheeling and cycling routes could, in theory stymie wider aspirations that the Council may have for those assets (e.g. disposal, regeneration, tree planting etc.). The starting principle for the design of any of the emerging routes will be to accommodate the route in line with the following hierarchy: 1) Highways land; 2) Other SCC or SWT land; 3) Third party land. Following this hierarchy increases the likelihood and ability to deliver routes, potentially reduces costs, and avoids being overly and unnecessarily constrained solely by existing highway widths. The use of any SWT land will of course need to be subject to appropriate discussion and negotiation with the relevant asset holder within the Council so as to understand long term aspirations for that land and ensure that these would not be compromised. Early engagement has taken place with Housing, Assets and Open Spaces teams to raise awareness of the routes.

## **15 Data Protection Implications**

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

## **16 Consultation Implications**

- 16.1 See above sections 4.4-4.6.

### **Democratic Path:**

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

**Reporting Frequency: Once only**

### **List of Appendices**



Appendix A	<a href="#">Connecting our Garden Communities</a> (main plan and associated appendices <a href="#">A</a> , <a href="#">B</a> and <a href="#">C</a> )
Appendix B	<a href="#">Consultation Statement</a>
Appendix C	<a href="#">Equalities Impact Assessment</a>
Appendix D	<a href="#">SEA/HRA Screening Report</a>

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