



Somerset West  
and Taunton

# Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan

September 2020

Version	Purpose	Date
1	For Senior Management Team	06/05/2020
2	For Climate Member Working Group	13/05/2020
3	For Internal launch	25/08/2020
4	For Publication and Committee Agendas	04/09/2020
5	Minor amendments	22/09/2020

Name of Document: Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan

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Description of content: The Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan (the CNCR Action Plan) has been produced as this Council's own response to declaring a Climate Emergency in February 2019 and inclusion of addressing climate change as the Council's number one priority in the Corporate Strategy. The CNCR Action Plan identifies a total of 345 potential actions to progress over the next ten years based on current understandings, but focuses on a Y1 action plan with Y2+ routemaps, with an intention for the plan to remain iterative and to be reviewed on an annual basis, which will evolve as our understanding of what is necessary and possible improves. The CNCR Action Plan sits alongside the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy as the detail for how this Council proposes to address the specific issues, meet the goals and deliver on the outcomes that the Somerset-wide Strategy identifies

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Date of approval: 04/09/2020

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## Terminology used in this document

People may be familiar with the terminology of "climate change" and "global warming", however, in line with other organisations looking to take a lead in this field, the Council is keen to shift the language used in relation to this topic to reflect the urgency of the situation and need for action now. Therefore this document uses the phrases "**climate emergency**" to refer to the situation that our climate now finds itself, primarily as a result of the "**global heating**" caused and exacerbated by human activity.

**Carbon emissions** Carbon dioxide in our atmosphere is the principle contributor to global heating, however a number of other greenhouse gases contribute including methane, nitrous oxide and f-gases. All greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced. Carbon emissions will be the major focus for action due to their prevalence and the opportunities for reduction that exist, but reducing methane in particular can have much quicker effects due to its shorter lifespan, so this must also be explored.

**Carbon Neutrality** means "*achieving net zero carbon emissions by balancing a measured amount of carbon released with an equivalent amount sequestered or offset*" (UN Environment, 2018). Our primary goal will be to develop solutions to reduce carbon emissions wherever they can be directly mitigated (avoided or reduced). But this will not always be possible or viable and we will need to offset some of our emissions in the short term.

**Climate Resilience** means ensuring that our communities are adapted to cope with the projected impacts of global heating locally.

**Mitigation** essentially refers to actions which will lead to the avoidance or reduction of emissions or will reduce the projected impacts of global heating.

**Adaptation** refers to actions which are necessary to deal with the impacts that cannot be mitigated.

**Offsetting** is a way of compensating for emissions arising in one place, by taking action elsewhere. For instance, it may not be possible, feasible or viable to actually reduce emissions from a particular source any further, so instead money would be diverted to deliver additionality in mitigation/sequestration projects elsewhere to make up for the emissions that will remain.

**Sequestration** is the process of capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and the long-term storage of it in trees, plants, soils, geological formations and the ocean. Though it should be noted that increasing sequestration by oceans leads to harmful acidification.

**Co-benefits** are secondary or ancillary benefits of an action that are also a relevant reason for that action in their own right. Many actions to mitigate and adapt to the climate emergency will have co-benefits such as improving health and wellbeing, improving air quality and building biodiversity.

## Our Climate Emergency Declaration

### *In February 2019, the then shadow Council resolved:*

1. To declare a climate emergency.
2. With partners across the district and region, to start working towards making Somerset West and Taunton carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account emissions from both production and consumption.
3. To call on the UK Government to provide guidance and the powers and resources to make carbon neutrality possible by writing to local MPs, the Secretaries of State for Business Energy & Industrial Strategy, Transport, Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and Housing, Communities & Local Government.
4. To develop a Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan, starting from July 2019, with a cross party working group and the necessary officer support to assist with investigative work, drafting the plan and the delivery of early projects.
5. To report to Full Council before the end of 2019 with costed proposals for projects for the Council to effectively start addressing the climate emergency, which could include:
  - a) Enabling more cycling, walking and use of shared and public transport.
  - b) Providing electric car charging points in car parks and other suitable locations, including for use by council tenants and council vehicles.
  - c) Adopting high energy efficiency standards and providing for the effective use of recycling services in new buildings through the planning system.
  - d) Demonstrating and developing a programme for retrofitting high standards of energy saving and insulation in existing council buildings, including housing, and assets; initially focusing on where the greatest benefits could be gained.
  - e) Promoting waste reduction, reuse and recycling on the go, and supporting community projects.
  - f) Sourcing electricity used by the council from renewable energy suppliers and providing support for smart energy infrastructure, including demand management and storage.

## Introduction

Somerset West and Taunton Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to working towards making the Council and the area as a whole carbon neutral by 2030. We will also prepare our communities, businesses and buildings to ensure they are resilient to the climate change which is already in motion. In preparing a Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan we aim to take a leadership role, starting conversations on how things need to change, taking action where it can, supporting and enabling others to play their part, and lobbying Government and others actors to make changes.

The Plan will sit alongside the county-wide Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy which is being developed between the five Somerset Councils. Rather than each of the Somerset districts and County Council developing their own strategies covering similar issues requiring potentially similar approaches, we feel it is better to consider the overall strategic approach to tackling the climate emergency collectively, enabling us to identify opportunities to achieve things together, share costs, share ideas and learning, and grow our power and influence with Government and others. Whilst this Plan is coming forward ahead of the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy, it has been developed up alongside the Strategy, been influenced by the expert inputs that have fed into the Strategy, and benefited from the consultation feedback and recommendations report of Somerset Climate Action Network in particular. Therefore, this Plan aims to reflect the emerging Strategy, add detail to the approaches that will be identified within it, and deal with risks, issues and opportunities specific to the district.

### ***Why tackling the climate emergency matters***

*"Climate change is moving faster than we are... If we do not change course by 2020, we risk missing the point where we can avoid runaway climate change, with disastrous consequences for people and all the natural systems that sustain us"* (UN Secretary-General António Guterres at the 2018 UN General Assembly)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that human activities have caused approximately 1°C of global heating above pre-industrial levels. Based on current rates, the IPCC conservatively project that this is likely to reach 1.5°C globally somewhere between 2030 and 2052. The IPCC also identifies that *"Without increased and urgent mitigation ambition in the coming years, leading to a sharp decline in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, global warming will surpass 1.5°C in the following decades, leading to irreversible loss of the most fragile ecosystems, and crisis after crisis for the most vulnerable people and societies"* and that limiting global heating to 1.5°C implies reaching global carbon neutrality in around 2050.

Based on current levels of commitments worldwide, we are on track to actually experience in the order of 3°C of heating globally. This will lead to catastrophic changes in global climatic conditions including major sea level rise due to polar ice cap melt. There are significant implications of sea level rise in Somerset West and Taunton, with a vulnerable coastline and particularly low-lying areas of land on the Levels and Moors. Limiting global heating to 1.5°C has been shown by the IPCC report to significantly limit the impacts that will be experienced globally.

Locally, the Met Office projects that global heating will result in sea level rise of around 1.13m by 2100, though that is a conservative estimate and is widely expected to rise (potentially significantly) more beyond this. By 2070, we are also projected to be experiencing winters that are up to 33% wetter with a higher frequency of storms, our summers are expected to be up to 5.8°C hotter, and 57% drier, with the risk of heatwave along the lines of the 2018 experience likely to increase in likelihood to 50% (every other year) by 2050, and 90% (almost every year) by 2100. The sea level rise itself and increased risk of coastal flooding puts our low lying areas at risk. Mapping of mid-range projections using the Climate Central mapping Coastal Risk Screening Tool suggests that within the district: Minehead; Watchet; Hinkley Point; Stolford; Blue Anchor; the Porlock Marshes; Creech St Micheal; Bathpool; Ruishton; and the settlements on the Levels and Moors like East Lyng, Athelney, Curload and Ham will be at particular risk even by 2050, and will likely lead to some settlements and properties in these areas being unviable for continued habitation in the long run. The combination of sea level rise and increased river and surface water flooding (and particularly flash flooding) events that will likely occur could make many more areas unviable in future years.

Flooding along the River Tone is primarily fluvial. However, combinations of high tides and high river levels in the Parrett can lead to a “locking” of the River Tone, which can increase the likelihood of flooding upstream. Rising sea levels and increased rainfall is likely to exacerbate and increase the likelihood of this occurring from “locking” events and breach of sea defences.

The combination of drier summers, sea level rise and increased frequency of storms will drive coastal erosion too. Higher frequency of heatwaves will bring associated health risks and may increase excess deaths particularly from the more vulnerable in our society, and result in greater risks of water



Source: Climate Central Coastal Risk Screening Tool - Sea Level Rise + Annual Flood 2050 assuming "Moderate Cuts" pollution scenario, "Medium" luck, excluding potentially protected areas, and using mid-range projections (Kopp et al 2014) available at <https://coastal.climatecentral.org/map/11/>



shortages and food shortages from crop failure. All of the above may result in destruction of wildlife habitats and stressing of conditions within which our native species can survive as well as increased levels of pest and invasive species. Impacts both here and around the globe may put businesses in the district at risk. These impacts also present a major risk to our historic environment (both designated and non-designated heritage assets including 'at risk'). Unless businesses adapt and grasp the opportunities presented by the need for local mitigation and adaptation, then job securities could be threatened. Impacts elsewhere may also drive higher levels of immigration.

The Committee on Climate Change (the UK Government's independent advisor on climate change) advises that the UK should look to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, explaining that this target would align with the country's commitments under the Paris Agreement (to limit global warming to "well below 2°C" and to aim for no more than 1.5°C) and be capable of being met broadly within the same cost envelope as the previous 80% target. UK Parliament declared a climate emergency in May 2019, and legislated to amend the Climate Change Act 2008 to legally bind the UK to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Somerset West and Taunton Council feel that it is important to strive towards a more ambitious target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. The UK should be a global leader and be amongst the first to achieve carbon neutrality before 2050 and there are considerable co-benefits for human society and the natural world from reducing emissions as soon as possible. We should lead because we were the first to industrialise, so have contributed to emissions longer than others, and because we have one of the largest economies globally and so are better placed to respond. Our 2030 target is therefore a signal of intent, a call to action and a commitment that locally we will do everything that we can to take action within the district and contribute to its achievement within the UK as a whole and lobby others to do so too. We must, however, be clear, that this more ambitious target is *not* informed by detailed evidence of what *can* be achieved locally. Without significant changes in wider society and national Government regulation, policy, funding and action, achieving this target will be near impossible.

Our new Corporate Strategy has put tackling the Climate Emergency at the heart of the Council's agenda going forward. Our number one priority strategic theme is Our Environment and Economy. We are looking to deliver a carbon neutral, clean, green and prosperous district that attracts high quality employment opportunities and encourages healthy lifestyles.

### ***What will be needed to achieve carbon neutrality?***

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) identifies the options on the table for deep decarbonisation in the UK in its *Net Zero* report published last year. These options are divided into Core, Further Ambition, and Speculative – and they can help to prioritise action. The *Net Zero* report admits that "*it is impossible to predict the exact mix of technologies and behaviours that will best meet the challenge*", but recommends a set of scenarios to meet the UK target of carbon neutrality in 2050. This Action Plan takes heed of the direction that the *Net Zero* report recommends the UK takes nationally, but also acknowledges that we don't yet have all the answers. As the Action Plan

evolves and iterates over future years, it will need to continue to reference itself against the latest recommendations of the CCC and others. The scenarios identified for meeting the UK target of carbon neutrality in 2050 as set out in the CCC Net Zero report are (paraphrased):

- **Improvements in resource and energy efficiency** to reduce demand for energy and to minimise the amounts of additional low carbon power and heat, hydrogen and carbon capture and storage (CCS) that will be needed;
- **Changes in societal choices** to lower emissions associated with our activities, e.g. shifting to healthier diets with reduced consumption of beef, lamb and dairy;
- **Significant electrification**, particularly of transport and heating, with all power produced from low carbon sources (compared to 50% today);
- **Increased hydrogen production and combustion** to meet demands for some industrial processes, long-distance land and sea-based logistics, and for electricity and heating in peak periods;
- **Carbon capture and storage (CCS)** as a necessity for industry, bioenergy and very likely for hydrogen and electricity production; and
- **A major shift in farming and land use** that would see a fifth of UK agricultural land used for tree planting, energy crops and peatland restoration to improve carbon sequestration and biomass production.

Other publications have also been produced by different bodies and organisations recommending different mixes of options and solutions to achieve similar and more ambitious targets for carbon neutrality. Almost all of these publications refer to the need for the following in different variations of ambition:

- High energy efficiency standards in new buildings;
- Retrofitting of existing buildings;
- Electrifying our reduced energy use;
- Significant expansion of low carbon and renewable energy generation and energy storage including on-shore wind;
- Moving to more plant-based diets;
- Improving agricultural processes and land use;
- Planting trees, restoring peatlands and 're-wilding' areas;
- Reducing how much we travel and changing how we travel to less carbon and energy intensive modes;
- Investing in public and active transport (walking, cycling etc.) infrastructure;
- Reducing the amount that we fly; and
- Reducing waste and recycling more.

Our Action Plan takes account of the above, alongside data on emissions from different sectors locally as well as local issues and opportunities and develops a set of actions which look to deliver on many of these.

### ***What is the role of the Council?***

Our role is as community leader, setting an example, encouraging and influencing others and where we can setting our own policies and plans to effect change. As a large organisation with a considerable carbon footprint, we will get our own house in order with a number of significant changes to how we work to be embedded.

The actions outlined in this CNCR can be broadly categorised as:

- **Delivering** – those actions where the Council can directly deliver a defined outcome
- **Enabling** – those actions where the Council's role is to facilitate delivery of defined outcomes, for instance changes to policy
- **Supporting** – those actions where the Council can support or encourage the delivery of a defined outcome
- **Lobbying** – those actions where the Council's primary role is to promote and push for change, for example, a change to policy, legislation or funding

The Council has only limited powers, responsibilities, resources and finances. Many of the changes that will be required to achieve carbon neutrality and climate resilience must be the responsibility of others including public, private and third sectors and individuals. It is therefore important that the Somerset West and Taunton Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan is widely owned and delivered by residents, businesses and communities within the district, and that it is evidence-based and built upon ground-up engagement with these groups. The Council will work closely with partners in delivery of this Action Plan.



## **Purpose of this Action Plan**

Having declared a Climate Emergency the Council has recognised the need for urgency of action, this has meant we have needed to draw this document together over a relatively short timeframe and to begin to commit resources to taking the action. We do not have all of the answers yet as to what action and activity will be required to take us to Carbon Neutrality and a Climate Resilient future, neither have we fully formed and costed plans identifying how some of the actions set out in Appendix 1 to this Plan will be delivered. We have however provided a framework for change, identified some early priorities and a working long list of short, medium and long-term projects in a timely manner to inform action.

The Plan will be reviewed annually, this will enable us to refine our list of actions and activity. As part of the Council's Annual Report, each year progress will be reported publicly on the actions and activities set out in the document.

## ***Relationship with the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy***

The Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy will set out a high level strategy for tackling the Climate Emergency across Somerset. The emerging Strategy includes three strategic goals:

- 1. To decarbonise the Local Authority and wider Public Sector estates and reduce our carbon footprint;**
- 2. To work towards making Somerset a Carbon Neutral county by 2030;**
- 3. To have a Somerset which is prepared for, and resilient to, the impacts of Climate Change.**

In addition to the strategic goals the Strategy will set strategic outcomes in relation to key issues within identified workstreams/sectors and include a strategic action plan of its own which will need to be delivered by the Somerset districts, County Council and other stakeholders in partnership. Our own SWT Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan transposes some of those emerging actions into district-level actions and sets out more detailed and area-specific actions and activities necessary to deliver carbon neutrality in Somerset West and Taunton. The actions and activities proposed within this Plan relate to the emerging strategic goals of the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy.

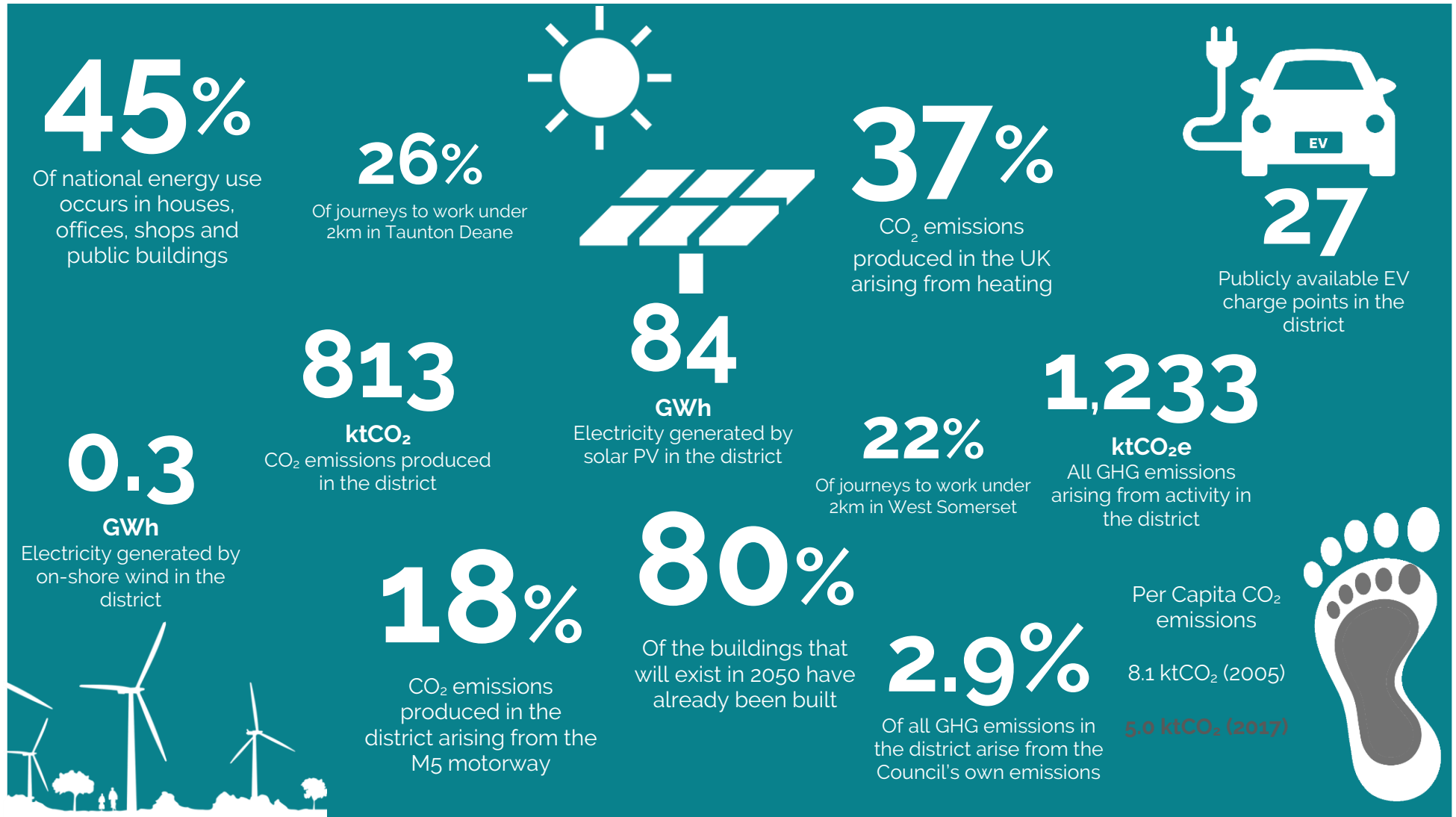


### ***Embedding the Climate Emergency in all that we do***

The Council is committed to leading by example. This means making sure that the Climate Emergency is embedded in everything we do. Having recognised tackling the Climate Emergency as our number one Corporate Priority and prepared this Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan, the next step is to ensure that its actions are embedded throughout the organisation from directorate, to service and team plans as well as in the individual objectives we set for our staff.



## Baseline



## CO<sub>2</sub> and GHG emissions in the district

The Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) annually publishes data on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions produced by local authority area. Data published in 2019 shows that in 2017, Somerset West and Taunton district produced a gross total of 813.4 ktCO<sub>2</sub>. This gross total has reduced by 31% since 2005.

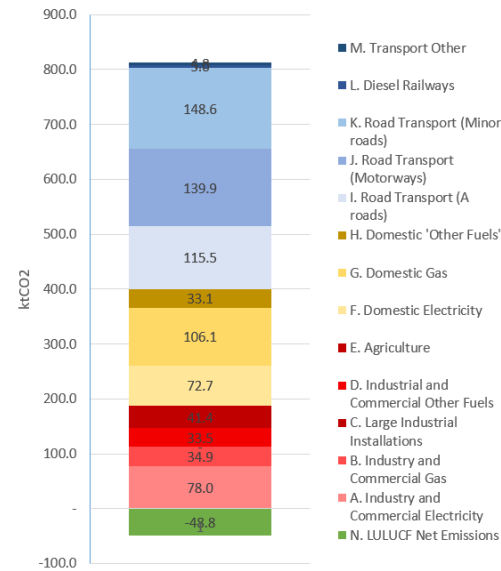
However, solely considering the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions produced in the district does not accurately reflect total Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions arising from activity within the district. Beyond CO<sub>2</sub>, there are a number of other GHGs which, whilst smaller in volume, have much greater Global Warming Potential, with all GHGs measured in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e).<sup>1</sup> Although all GHG emissions affect the rate of climate change, CO<sub>2</sub> is the largest in volume by some way and has a relatively long lifetime making it the principle, though not only important contributor.

In addition to this, the goods and services which we consume here are often produced elsewhere, and *vice versa*. Emissions relating to these supply and value chains are particularly important to recognise as our behaviours drive these emissions even if we don't produce them directly ourselves.

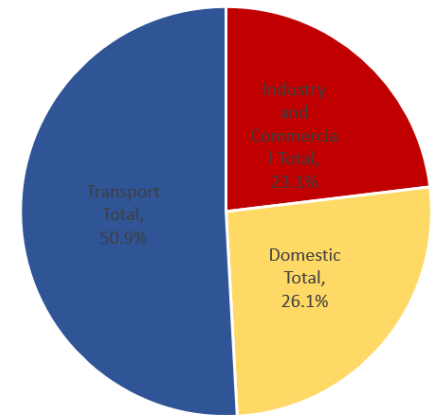
The SCATTER tool enables local authorities to understand estimated total Scope 1 (direct), Scope 2 (energy indirect) and Scope 3 (other indirect) GHG emissions arising from activity within the district in line with The GHG Protocol for Community-Scale GHG Inventories. This estimates that total GHG emissions arising from activities within Somerset West and Taunton in 2017 amounted to 1,232.9 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) has 28 times the GWP of CO<sub>2</sub>, whilst Nitrous Oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) has 265 times the GWP of CO<sub>2</sub> according to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report.

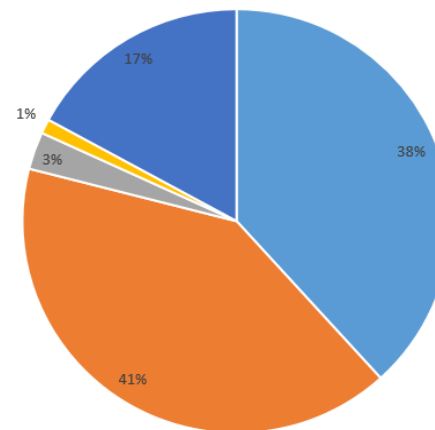
2017 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions estimates for Somerset West and Taunton



2017 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions estimates for Somerset West and Taunton (gross, exc. LULUCF)

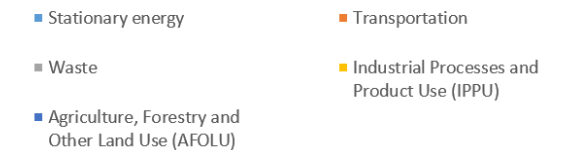


SCATTER Inventory: Direct and Indirect Emissions Summary, tCO<sub>2</sub>e



SCATTER Inventory: District-wide Direct and Indirect GHG Emissions Summary, tCO<sub>2</sub>e:

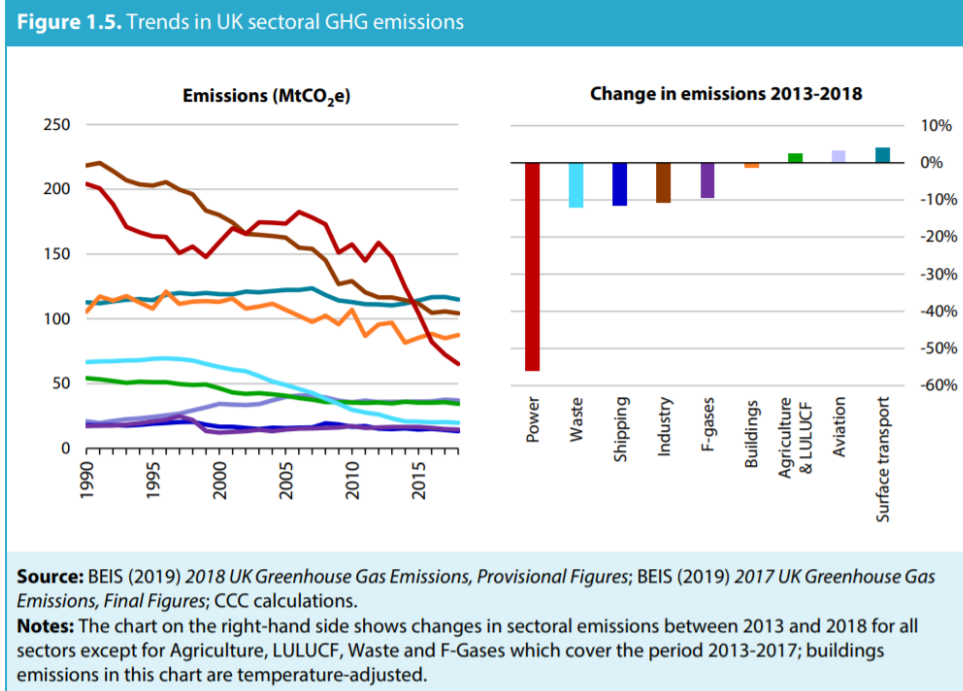
	Scope 1 (direct)	Scope 2 (indirect)	Scope 3 (indirect other)
Stationary energy	237,944.01	204,249.99	78,753.36
Transportation	363,803.27	-	190,483.74
Waste	38,814.73	-	-
IPPU	14,987.91	-	-
AFOLU (livestock emissions only)	232,330.81	-	-
AFOLU (land use sequestration - not shown in graph)	-128,466.81	-	-



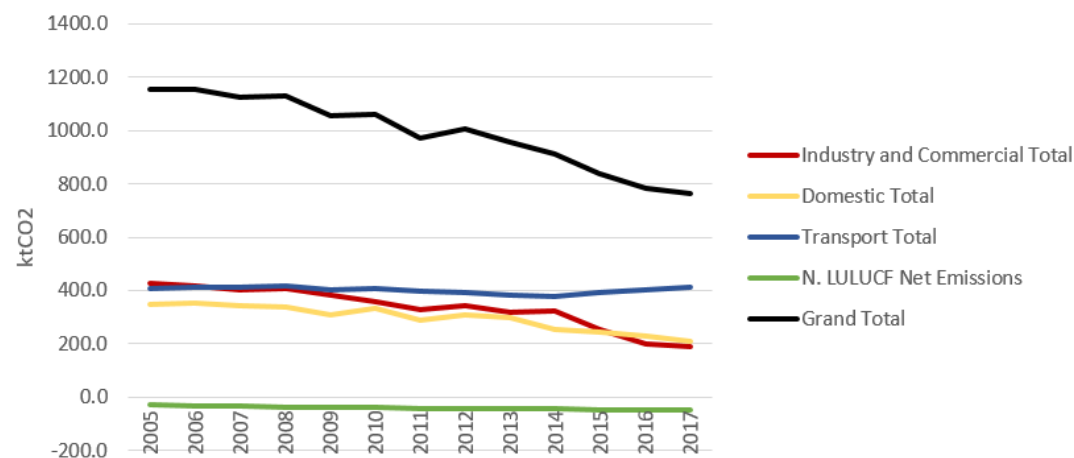
The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) have shown in their 2019 Progress Report that nationally, the majority of GHG emissions reductions in recent years have been delivered by decarbonisation of the national electricity grid and waste management, whilst all other sectors have remained relatively flat or in the case of surface transport and aviation have risen.

This is reflected locally in that both domestic and industry and commercial (I&C) CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have reduced in no small part due to national grid decarbonisation, however transport emissions (which are not currently tied to the grid) have actually risen. Locally, I&C CO<sub>2</sub> emissions saw a major reduction with the closure of the Watchet Paper Mill in 2015 which produced 45.82kt CO<sub>2</sub> alone annually in it's last recorded year.

Locally, our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions produced in the district come primarily from transport (50.9%), followed by domestic (26.1%) and then I&C (23.1%). This reflects the fact that the district is primarily rural in nature (requiring greater travel and personal car usage); contains the M5 motorway (contributing 139 ktCO<sub>2</sub> or 17.2% of the area's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on its own); and has little heavy industry. The district's Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) emissions (-48.8kt CO<sub>2</sub>) show that the district is a net sequesterer of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in this sector. This is likely primarily due to the carbon sequestering peat bogs on the Moors, Exmoor Mires (which have seen over 2,500 ha of peatland restoration carried out over the last 20 years), and saltmarshes at Porlock Marsh as well as the significant carbon sinks formed by natural and plantation woodlands, particularly on Exmoor, (which evidence suggests contributes a net sequestration of 50,230 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per annum), the Blackdown Hills and Quantock Hills, as well as cropland and grassland soils and biomass.



### CO<sub>2</sub> emissions estimates for Somerset West and Taunton (2005-2017) Grand total and by sector





### What does this mean for our action plan?

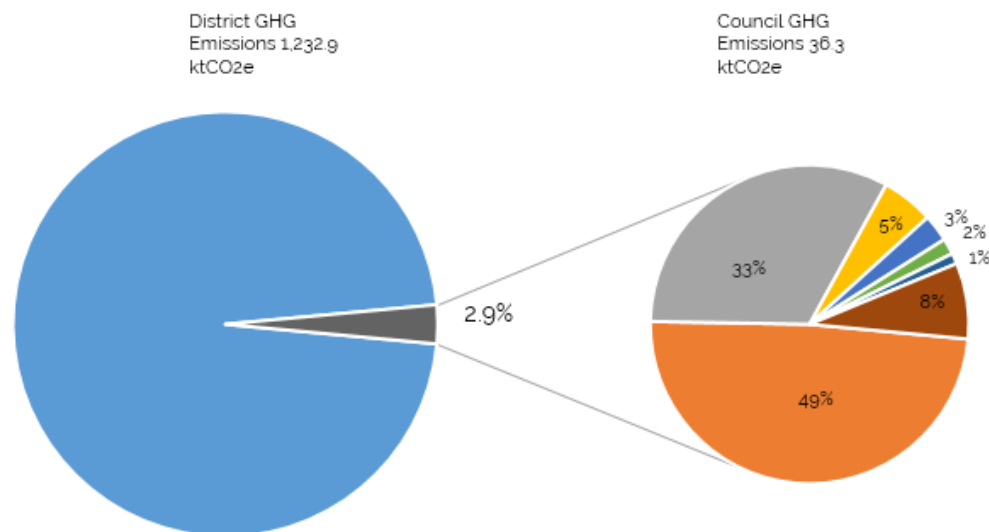
Putting all of this together along with the recommendations from the CCC Net Zero Report highlights the need to focus emissions reductions on the transport and domestic sectors with an emphasis on increasing energy efficiency and electrification; increasing renewable energy generation locally to play our part in the continued decarbonisation of electricity; and enabling and supporting radical behaviour change amongst the population to reduce consumption and GHG emissions arising from their activities and choices.

Increasing sequestration within the district through tree planting and peat bog and saltmarsh restoration will be important and can deliver major co-benefits such as increased biodiversity, access to nature and health and wellbeing improvements. However, it must be acknowledged that these measures take time to realise their full sequestering potential and even doubling the number of trees in the district for instance would make just a small dent in our emissions compared to radical and necessary emissions reductions.

### The Council's GHG Emissions

The Council's own corporate carbon footprint was assessed by the University of Exeter for 2018/19. The assessment shows that the Council's own footprint is approximately 36.3 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e (which equates to around 2.9% of district-wide GHG emissions). The main sources of the Council's emissions are emissions from procured goods and services (49%) and our social housing stock (33%). Energy use in our leisure centres and other buildings both also account for significant levels of emissions. Further to this we offset around 168 tCO<sub>2</sub>e through our installed solar PV exporting electricity to the grid.

## Council GHG Emissions as a part of District-wide GHG Emissions



Emissions Source	GHG Emissions (tCO <sub>2</sub> e)	% of Council GHG Emissions
Procured goods and services (Scope 3)	17,703	49%
Social Housing (Scope 1 and 2)	11,867	33%
Leisure Centres (Scope 1 and 2)	1,917	5%
Other Council buildings (Scope 1 and 2)	1,004	3%
Owned transport and fuelled tools (Scope 1)	588	2%
Staff Commuting (Scope 3)	393	1%
Other emissions (Scope 3)	2,793	8%
<b>TOTAL Council GHG Emissions</b>	<b>36,265</b>	<b>100%</b>

## ***Pathways to Carbon Neutrality***

We have already committed to working towards carbon neutrality for the Council and the district as a whole by 2030. How we get there and when carbon neutrality can actually be achieved depends on the scale and pace of radical action. We are under no illusions that meeting the target of carbon neutrality by 2030 will be difficult and we have to be honest that it relies heavily on action beyond our own control, but it is immensely important that we do everything we can within our power to work towards achieving it.

There is only a limited cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> budget available. Exceeding this cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> budget significantly increases the likelihood of global heating exceeding 1.5°C. As warned by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on 1.5°C, breaching 1.5°C increases the likelihood of triggering runaway heating as major carbon stores around the world are released. The remaining CO<sub>2</sub> budget necessitates early radical action to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions significantly by 2030 on the road to overall *global* carbon neutrality by the second half of the century. The "fair contribution" towards meeting these budgets is different for different countries. The Paris Agreement seeks to limit global heating to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit to 1.5°C. The UK's legally binding commitment to achieving net zero by 2050 is what the Government considers to be the UK's "fair contribution" to achieving this.

The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research has produced a resource to help local authorities understand their remaining cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> budget and to develop a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction trajectory that reflects this and the area's "fair contribution" towards achieving the UK's commitments under the Paris Agreement. The Tyndall Centre report for Somerset West and Taunton (see Appendix 4) suggests that there is a remaining cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> budget of 5.2 MtCO<sub>2</sub> for the district. Based on 2017 levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, this budget would be used up by 2027. The report recommends that a "fair contribution" for the district would require reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 13% year on year. This would result in an 84% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030 over 2017 levels, leaving approximately 125.1 ktCO<sub>2</sub> to be offset in 2030, on a pathway to zero/near zero carbon by 2042. Achieving this will require fundamental shifts in the pace and scale of action to cut emissions and change societal behaviours, and for many of these changes to take place in the next few years. It would be impossible for local authority action alone to deliver on this target, and would require major immediate shifts in Government policy, legislation and regulation.

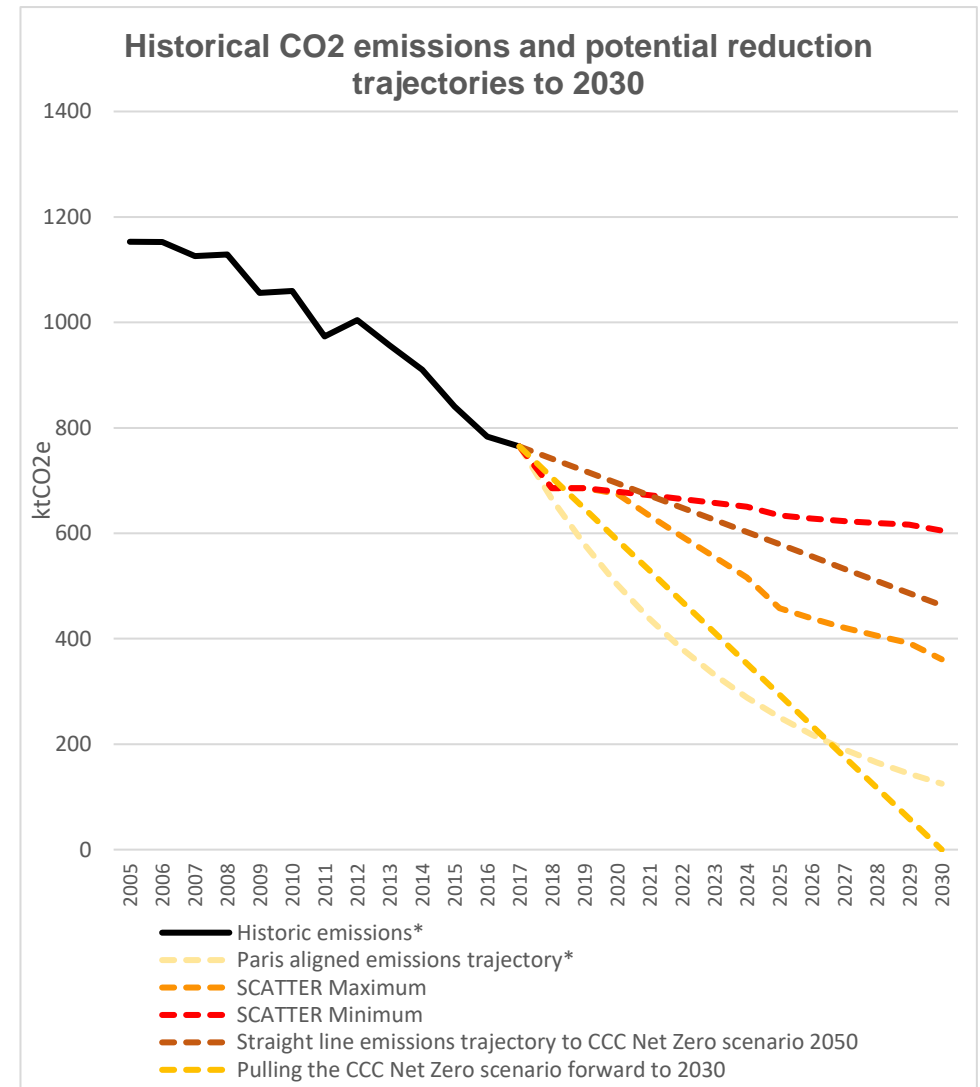
The CCC Net Zero Report explains that nationally, carbon neutrality could be achieved by delivering on all of its "Core" and "Further Ambition" options, and some of its "Speculative" options, which would result in 100% reduction in all GHG emissions by 2050. If a straight line indicative pathway was set for the district following this scenario, this would equate to a 39% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030,

*"We are under no illusions that meeting the target of carbon neutrality by 2030 will be difficult and we have to be honest that it relies heavily on action beyond our own control, but it is immensely important that we do everything we can within our power to work towards achieving it"*

leaving approximately 463.4 ktCO<sub>2</sub> to be offset in 2030. This would likely be an achievable level of emissions reduction, as, whilst not all national policies and plans are yet in place to achieve this, the Government has committed to bringing them forward. It would, however, leave far too high a residual level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2030 to realistically offset in order to achieve carbon neutrality in the district by 2030.

Simply pulling the CCC Net Zero scenario forward to achieve a 100% reduction in emissions by 2030, would, in fact end up with less residual annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2030 than under the Paris-aligned trajectory. But it would require similar levels of fundamental change in society and action to the Paris-aligned trajectory, without complying with the cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> budgets.

The SCATTER tool (developed by Anthesis in partnership with Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Nottingham City Council and The Tyndall Centre), enables local authorities to model pathways to 2050 decarbonisation based on the creation of scenarios of different levels of ambition in relation to key potential actions. It is a relatively crude tool which is based on generic and apportioned data, but it gives a useful guide as to the scale and ambition of actions that might be necessary to achieve different levels of decarbonisation. Indicative "SCATTER Minimum" and "SCATTER Maximum" ambition pathways have been added to the previously discussed pathways in the graph to the right. The SCATTER Minimum pathway takes the lowest level of ambition available through the tool for each intervention, whilst the SCATTER Maximum pathway takes the highest level of ambition available for each.



\* Historic emissions and the Paris aligned trajectory are based on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions only, whereas the SCATTER projections, 2050 Net Zero target and SWT's 2030 target are based on CO<sub>2</sub>e of all Greenhouse Gases (GHG).

As an example, in relation to domestic space heating and hot water retrofit, the Minimum pathway assumes that all existing dwellings remain at a weighted average heat loss, whilst the Maximum pathway assumes 90% of existing dwellings are retrofitted (10% to a "medium level" and 80% "deep retrofit"). In relation to domestic passenger transport, the Minimum pathway assumes a national average modal split by total miles with 74% being by cars vans and motorcycles, whilst the Maximum pathway assumes distance travelled by walking, cycling and bus triples by 2050, rail increases by 50% and car use drops by 40%. More information about the methodology used can be found at <https://scattercities.com/pages/pathways-methodology/>.

### ***Quantifying impacts of action and a pathway for Somerset West and Taunton***

At this stage, the carbon impact of delivering the actions contained within this Action Plan have not been fully quantified. This is a conscious decision to focus on implementation of the plan and delivery of the actions within it. Whilst some of the actions are worked up enough to be able to quantify potential carbon savings, many are not yet at that point, and it would be irresponsible to wait any longer before publishing our plan of action for tackling the climate emergency. Impact modelling is complex and can only ever result in best estimates based on the input assumptions. Quantifying the carbon impacts and detailed financial costs of the actions is in itself a key action of the plan. In the meantime, we can rely on our understanding of emissions sources in the district, the work of others including the CCC, other local authorities and interested parties to develop an informed judgement of the types of actions that will have a major impact on our ability to meet our targets of carbon neutrality and climate resilience. Many of these actions are obvious and so called "least-regret" because there is no doubt that they will help and/or would result in more desirable co-benefit outcomes in relation to health and wellbeing, biodiversity, the local economy, society or education and skills of the population.

For a similar reason, we have chosen to focus on developing the immediate actions into a Year 1 Action Plan and identifying a routemap with slightly less detail for Y2+. We have far more understanding of the potential impacts, costs, and resourcing implications for those immediate actions than some of the other later ones. Through annual review and action plan development, this means we will be able to flex and adapt to changing circumstances and greater understanding of the impacts, costs, risks and opportunities as time goes on, whilst still setting out our current expectations and direction of travel now.

This means that we cannot yet identify the specific pathway that all of the actions contained within this Action Plan would result in. Despite this, we know that the actions being proposed are based on assessment of the issues, opportunities and what the CCC and others deem to be necessary to reach carbon neutrality, and we are frontloading delivery of these actions wherever possible so that we can do everything within our sphere of influence to push us towards the Paris-aligned trajectory and compliance with our cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> budgets. This pushes the Council into unknown territory and to the boundaries of achievability and deliverability, but we are committed to put the resources in place to play our part. To be successful in achieving our targets though, we will require major shifts in behaviour from our residents, which we will aim to encourage and facilitate, and for Government to step up to the plate and deliver on its own commitments and the policy, legislative and regulatory changes that will be necessary.



## Our Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan

We have developed an extensive Action Plan containing some 345 actions which could contribute towards our targets of carbon neutrality, climate resilience or a combination of both. These 345 actions represent our current understanding of the actions that will be required, but the plan is iterative, to be reviewed annually. As such, in future years, actions may be added or removed as our understanding of what is necessary and the best approach to take improves. Our plans within year one and in future years may need to flex and change as our understanding of issues and projects grows and in response to changes in Government policy for instance. The main Plan document focuses on the detail of our Year 1 Action Plan and identifies broad routemaps for key issues. A detailed Indicative Action Plan to 2030 can be found in Appendix 1 and this identifies a long-list of *potential* actions in the pipeline over the next ten years.

Each action can be linked back to one of the three strategic goals, taken from the emerging Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy as well as the Council's Corporate Strategy. The broad likely impacts of actions (or that actions will lead to) on meeting the three strategic goals have been estimated based on our understanding of emissions sources in the district, the work of others including the CCC, other local authorities and interested parties. However, it should be noted that there has been no scientific or detailed consideration of the precise impacts that may arise at this stage, and even those actions identified as having a low overall impact will be worthwhile undertaking as cumulatively they will add up. The broad cost envelope within which actions might sit has been estimated, where low is £0-£20k, medium is £20k-£1M and high is £1M+ cost to the Council. Where there are likely co-benefits of actions, these have also been identified, as has the specific role of the Council (Deliver, Enable, Support, Lobby).

Actions have been defined as immediate, short, medium or long term:

- **Immediate** - These are actions that could be carried out either in whole or may commence within the next 12 months and as such form part of the Year 1 Action Plan;
- **Short term** – those actions that we expect to will be carried out either in whole or at least commence within years 2-3;
- **Medium term** – those actions that we expect to will be carried out either in whole or at least commence within years 4-6; and
- **Long term** – those actions that we expect to will be carried out either in whole or at least commence within years 7-10.

There will continue to be actions that we would expect to be carried out beyond year 10 (2030), but these are considered to be beyond scope. The routemaps included within this document imply the direction of travel beyond 2030 for some of the key issues.

### ***How have actions been identified?***

The actions identified in our Action Plan have been developed through a combination of:

- Consulting the recommendations of the CCC Net Zero Report and other useful evidence bases;
- Developing further the direction of travel and key early tasks and commitments identified in the SWT Framework CNCR Plan;
- Transposing relevant high level actions emerging through the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy to district level;
- Developing the recommendations identified in the Somerset Climate Action Network "*The Somerset 2030 Carbon Neutral Target - Local Authority Actions*" document from July 2019 and "*Towards a Carbon Neutral Somerset*" document from April 2020;
- Analysis of consultation responses and roadshow feedback submitted earlier this year in response to the Somerset and SWT Framework documents (a Consultation Report can be found at Appendix 2);
- Consulting the Ashden / Friends of the Earth "*31 climate actions that councils can take*" publication, other toolkits and climate action plans produced by other local authorities;
- Consulting the recommendations made by the University of Exeter Centre for Energy and the Environment in the Council's "*Assessment of Corporate Emissions and Environmental Impact report*" (2018/29 carbon footprinting) report (see Appendix 3);
- Consolidating existing commitments and proposals previously set out in Council documents such as the "*Taunton: Connecting Our Garden Town*" document; and
- Blue sky thinking by both officers and Members.

### ***How have actions been prioritised?***

Following an initial organisation of actions into the four broad timescales, further consideration was given to the high level impact that might arise from delivery of the action; what further actions might an action lead to; anticipated co-benefits; whether there could likely be deliverable outputs within 12 months; general ability to resource delivery; and the ability to carry out an action in the light of the current COVID-19 crisis. This process gave us the actions aligned to the four timescales as identified in Appendix 1.

We have subsequently further assessed the actions identified as "immediate" in order to develop the prioritised Year 1 Action Plan set out over the following pages of this Plan. These immediate actions were prioritised by scoring actions against a matrix of the broad anticipated impact, relevance to development of and delivery against the COVID Economic Recovery Plan and likely public visibility.

The Council's work will be guided by the "Immediate" actions identified within the Year 1 Action Plan. However, we have to be realistic and understand that with staff and financial resources stretched, we have to prioritise. This may mean that some things identified as

being “Immediate” (and therefore considered possible to be begun within 12 months), could well slip beyond that timeframe. The prioritisation should help ensure that the actions that we do carry out are of the most importance. Beyond this, upon further investigation, some actions may be considered to be unnecessary or not possible. The following pages outline these Year 1 actions in more detail. For Year 2 onwards, we have identified routemaps which identify what we think the general direction of travel is for key issues and which short, medium and long term potential actions identified in Appendix 1 align with. However, the details of these and other actions is less well developed and less certain.





## Focus on District-wide retrofit

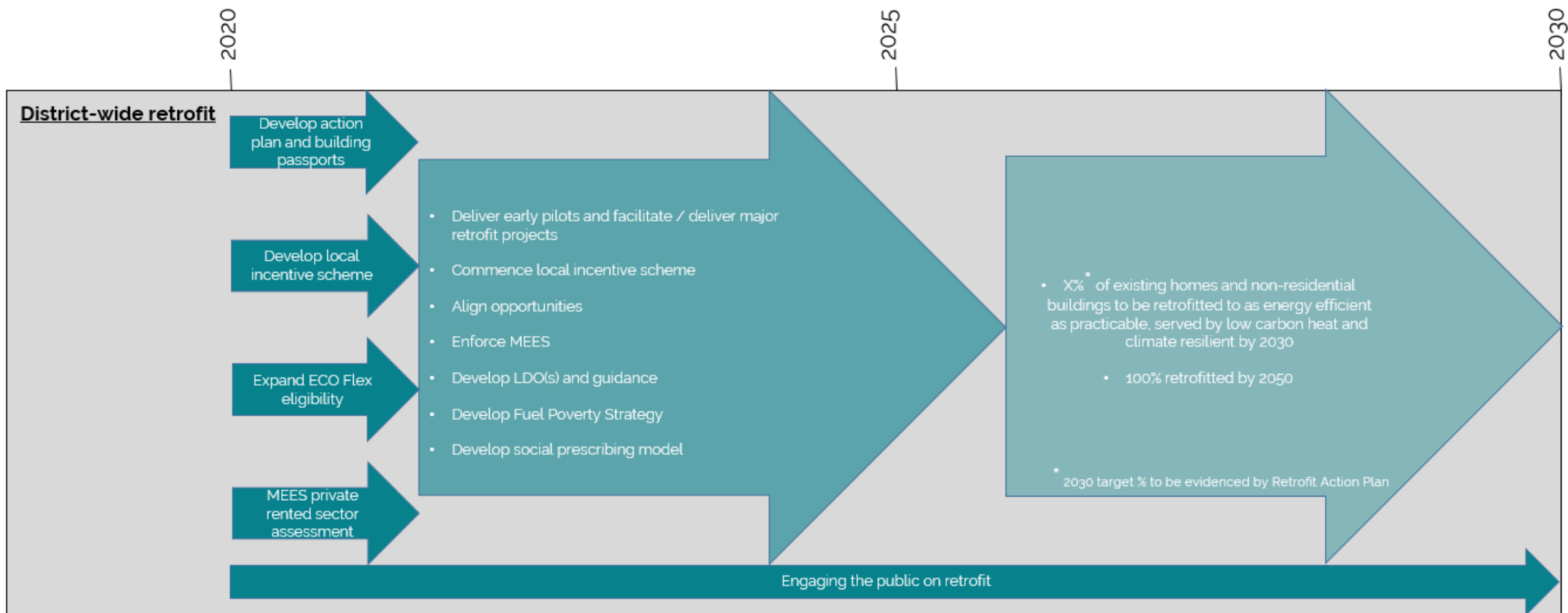
The job to retrofit existing buildings across the district with insulation, energy efficiency improvements and low carbon heat is massive. We know this is going to be one of the biggest actions in terms of impacts, costs and time to deliver. It requires more work to understand the full scale of the issue and how and when we should tackle different buildings in different areas. The district, and Exmoor in particular, has a large number of harder-to-treat traditional and historic buildings and a greater proportion of off-gas properties than the national average which present particular challenges to be overcome, but efforts can be compatible with conservation of our heritage. The retrofit of existing buildings makes use of already embodied carbon. The majority of buildings are in private ownership, and specific solutions to encourage, enable and require building owners to take the necessary action need to be developed.

In year one, the Council will focus on developing a Retrofit Action Plan, which will look to identify how and when different broad building types in different broad locations will be tackled, including through development of costed building decarbonisation “passports” to enable building owners to easily identify the sorts of actions that might be necessary for their building and the likely costs involved. Year one will also include commencing a communications campaign engaging the public in retrofit; lobbying of Government to make retrofit a national infrastructure priority; expanding eligibility criteria for ECO (Energy Company Obligation) funding and developing a local incentive scheme to supplement national schemes like ECO and RHI (Renewable Heat Incentive); and appointing an officer to begin enforcing Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in private rented housing. These will lay the foundations



for more detailed and active delivery of pilots, demonstrator and larger scale actions with greater impacts in future years.

An indicative routemap for beyond Year one has been produced for the issue of district-wide retrofit. This summarises what we think some of the next steps might be as well as the long-term direction of travel. Appendix 1 includes more detail.





## Focus on new build and retrofit of existing Council housing

The Council owns just shy of 5,800 Council homes across the former Taunton Deane area, estimated to account for nearly 12,000 tCO<sub>2</sub>e in 2018/19 or 33% of the Council's own carbon footprint. In recent years we have delivered important retrofit projects including the Wellington Warmer Homes project and committed to major estate renewal projects like the North Taunton Woolaway project. Going forward, we will need to continue this trend and up the scale and ambition. However, data relating to the energy and carbon performance of our stock is poor and so as a first step, in year one, we must improve our understanding of what we have so that we can better plan for how we improve it. This will lead to an interim action plan and enable us to scope out and develop early delivery projects as well as plan for longer-term projects. Year one will also involve the commencement of a two year programme to retrofit 175 Council homes with Air Source Heat Pumps and fabric improvements as part of our successful Warm Homes Fund bid.

The Council is also an active developer, building new council homes and the owner of several major regeneration sites across the district. 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. The Council has recently become a member of the Good Homes Alliance, showing clear signal of intent. Year one will involve the Council delivering the first phase of a Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot; and develop a new zero carbon and climate resilient standard for all new Council Homes going forward.



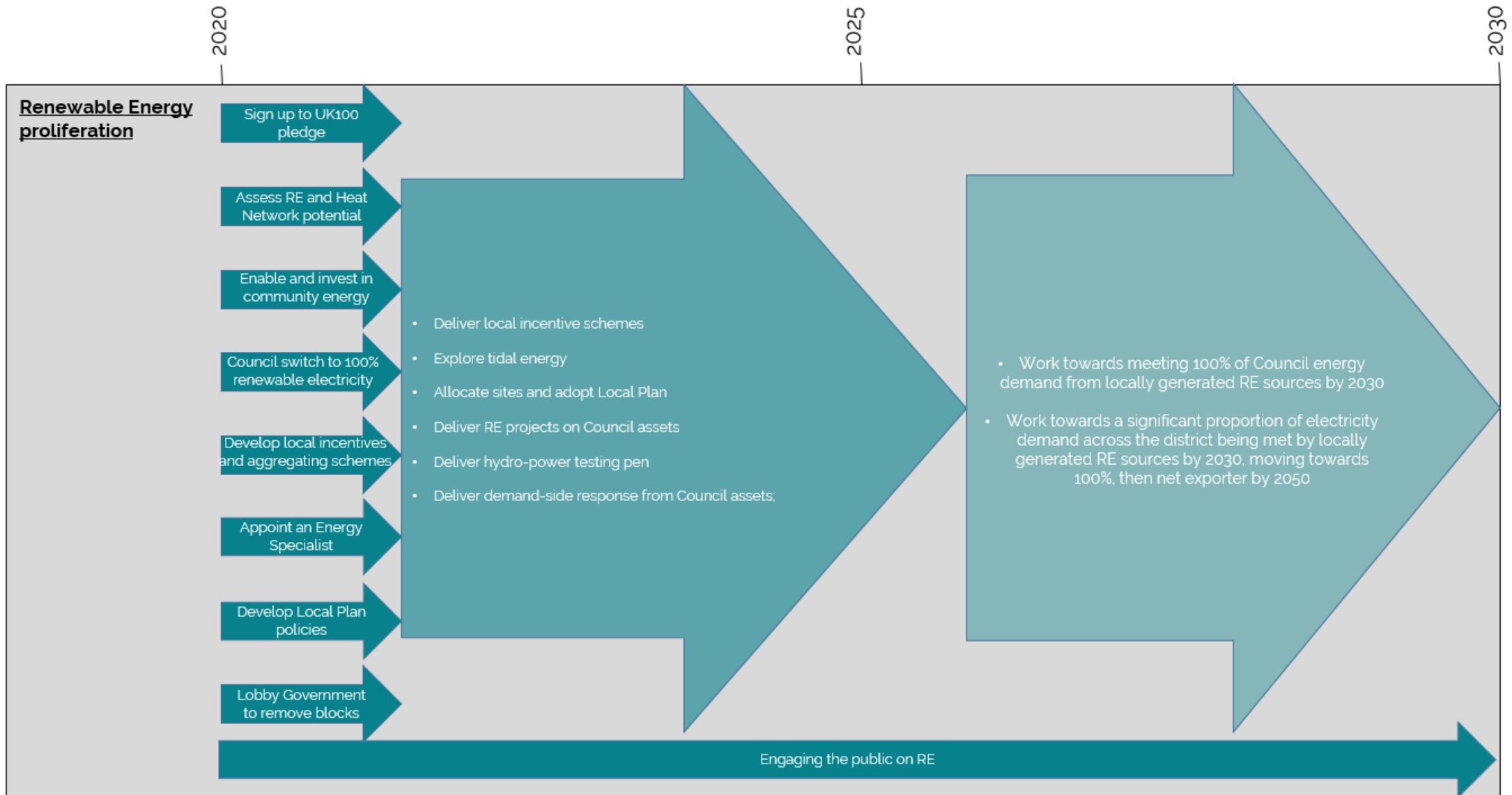
## Focus on renewable energy

In order to deliver a carbon neutral and climate resilient future, we must generate, store and consume energy more smartly in terms of both heat and power. The future will be predominantly (though not entirely) electric and in all future energy scenarios, we will need to generate significantly more electricity. However, we do not have a complete picture of the potential renewable energy resource across the district, and our Local Plans do not allocate sites (though the Exmoor Local Plan does identify suitable areas for small scale renewable energy including wind turbines and solar arrays). Whilst a more proactive approach is required, the significance and sensitivity of our landscapes (particularly protected ones) and settings of our heritage assets do remain important. The main constraints to increasing renewable generation relate to grid capacity and Government planning policy and policy on subsidy and access to competitive markets. Domestic renewable installations and community energy schemes offer the potential to grow local renewables whilst potentially avoiding grid capacity issues, retaining economic benefits within the district and ensuring schemes have local support.

In Year one, the Council will focus on understanding renewable potential and playing a more proactive role in investing in corporate, local and community energy schemes. Year one will also involve signing up to the long-term UK100 goal to meet at least 100% of the district's energy demand from clean energy sources by 2050, developing local incentive schemes and a programme to enable aggregated purchasing of renewable energy for communities; lobbying Government to remove barriers; and preparing evidence to inform proactive policy in the new Local Plan.



An indicative routemap for beyond Year one has been produced for the issue of renewable energy. This summarises what we think some of the next steps might be as well as the long-term direction of travel. Appendix 1 includes more detail.





## Focus on Electric Vehicles

The transition away from fossil-fuelled vehicles to battery electric vehicles (EVs) stands to offer a route to major and fast emissions reductions, particularly in a predominantly rural area like ours. But, in order to harness this revolution, EV charging infrastructure across the district and wider county needs to scale up significantly to dispel concerns about range anxiety and incentivise individuals and businesses to make the shift. Despite this, there are concerns that the electricity grid may struggle to accommodate appropriate charging infrastructure unless it is smartly planned and delivered. Careful thought needs to be put into how, where and when residents in areas with no off-street parking access charging infrastructure. In Year one, the Council will focus on developing an EV Charging Strategy with partners across the county to ensure a joined-up approach to infrastructure provision and ensure deliverability considering grid constraints and highways risks. Year one will involve the Council delivering charge points at Deane House and the Coal Orchard development site in Taunton, preparing a plan for delivery in other Council car parks and enabling delivery across the district through its Community Charge Point Fund. In a game-changing Western Power Distribution trial, Taunton will also host a UK-first, innovative electric vehicle charging project, called DC Share. This trial will use smart technology to unlock spare electrical capacity from substations and linking them to power 15 rapid EV chargers in central Taunton, including five chargers which are intended to fully recharge the average electric vehicle in around 30 minutes. As part of this project, the Council will also begin to progress the transitioning its own vehicle fleet. The Council also intends to begin incentivising its staff to switch to EV whilst supporting and promoting community EV car clubs like "Watchet Drives".



An indicative routemap for beyond Year one has been produced for the issue of EVs. This summarises what we think some of the next steps might be as well as the long-term direction of travel. Appendix 1 includes more detail.

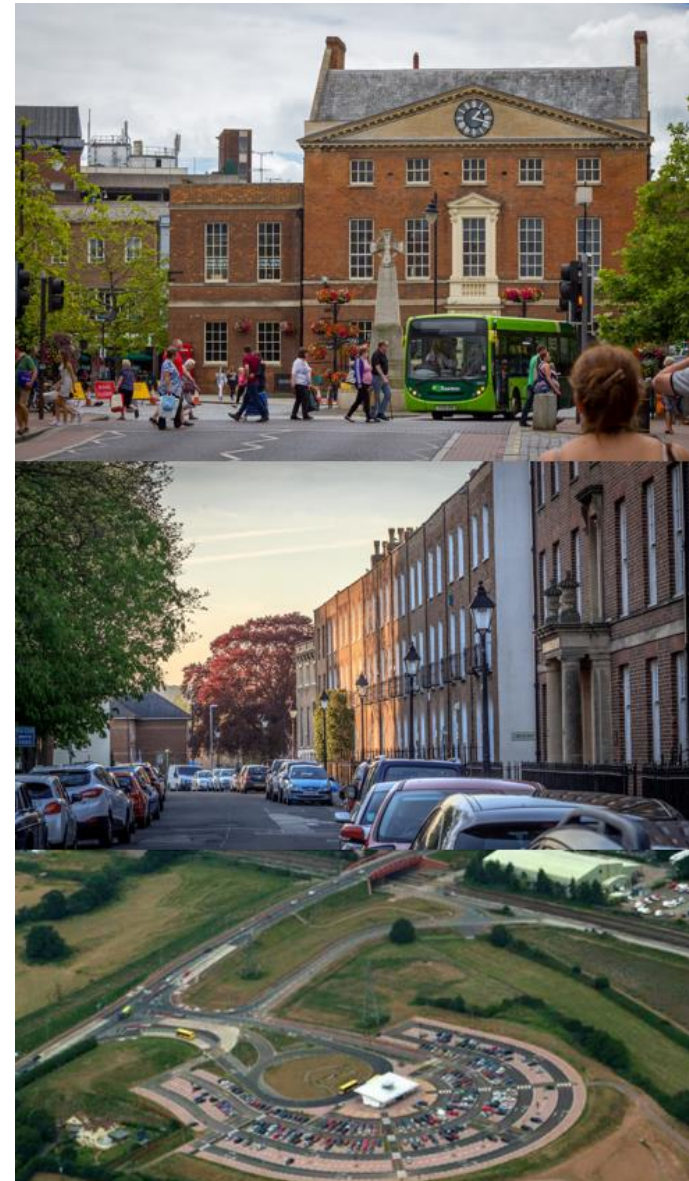




## Focus on Taunton Park & Ride and town centre parking

As the largest town in the district, Taunton has greater levels of transport movement into and around it than any other settlement in the district. Whilst walking and cycling levels are better than the national average, the vast majority of movements are by private car. The existing Park & Ride (P&R) service offers a major opportunity to shift commuters and leisure visitors away from reliance on the private car. But patronage of the service is not high enough and the Council has subsidised the service in recent years in order to keep it running. Letting the P&R service fail is simply not an option. In Year one, the Council will continue developing proposals to place the P&R service on a long term financially sustainable footing; will re-tender the service with appropriate clauses to ensure that the service moves towards an alternative fuel / electric bus fleet; and will explore ways to incentivise use of the service amongst the public at large and the Council's own staff.

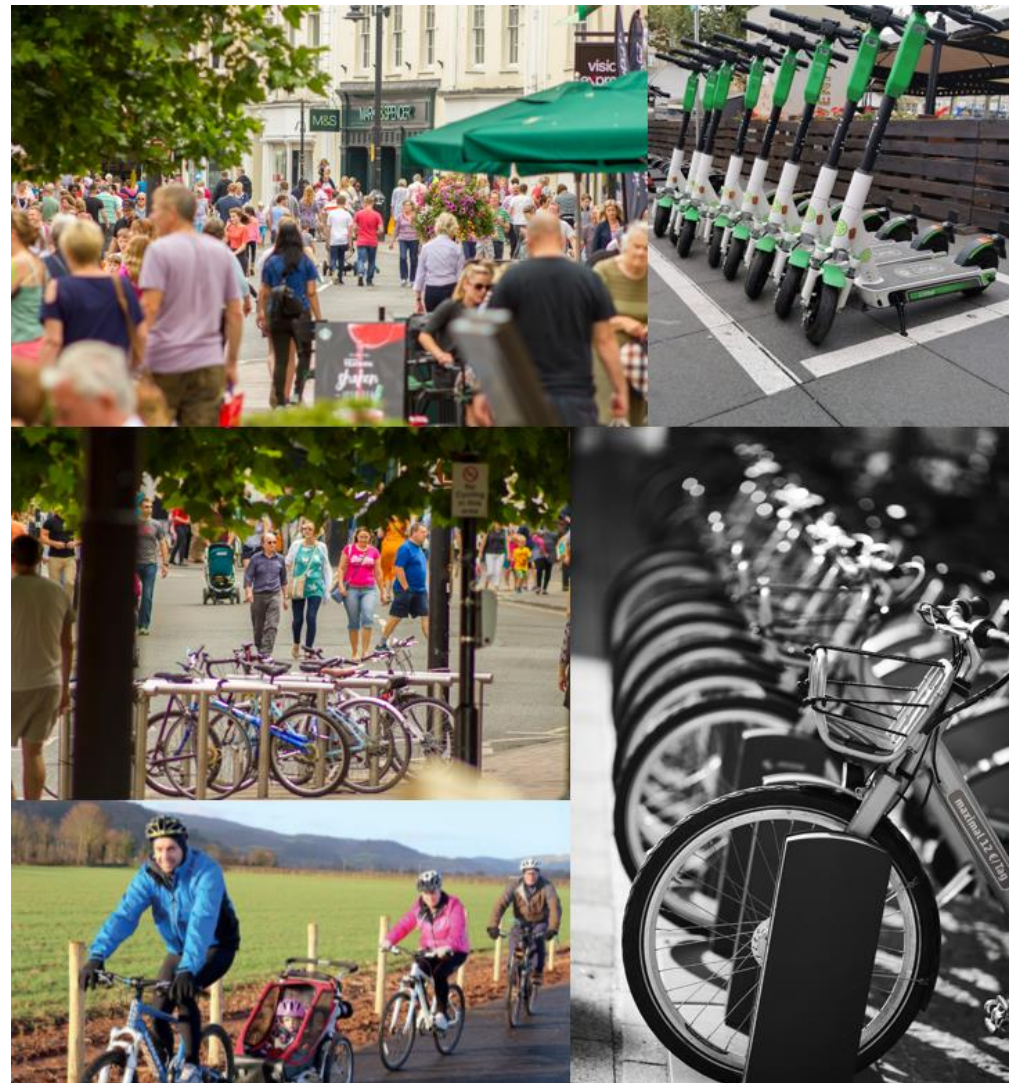
But the above actions alone will not deliver the fundamental shift in mode that is really required to reduce congestion and tackle emissions associated with movements into and within Taunton. There must also be initiatives to encourage behaviour change including the pedestrianisation of key town centre routes and development of alternatives to driving. The Council has recently raised parking charges by 10% across the district and the Taunton Parking Strategy will be reviewed over coming years with a view to enabling drivers to use more sustainable modes including the P&R, and freeing up land for sustainable regeneration and development opportunities in the town centre, reducing the need for greenfield development.



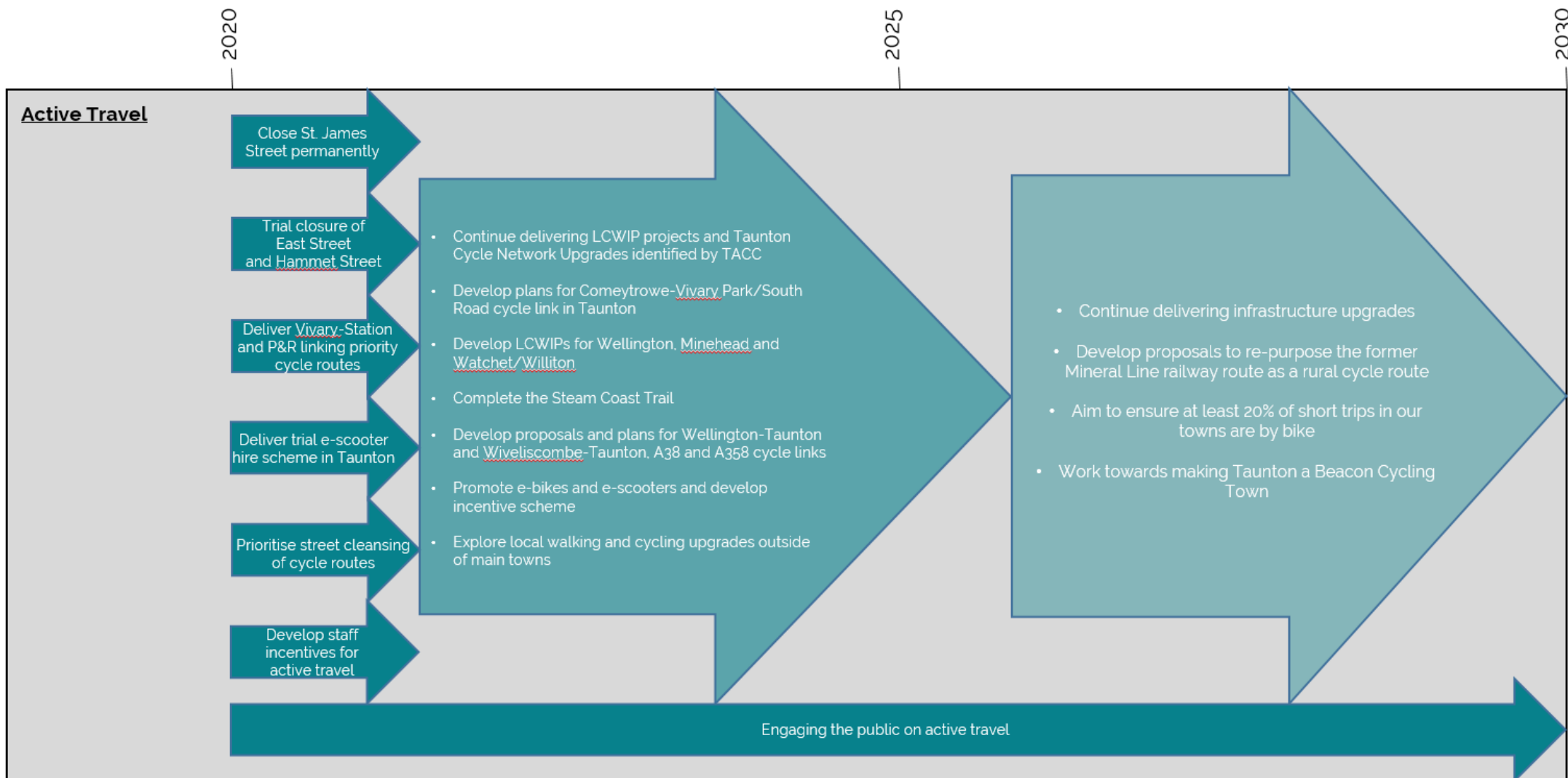
## Focus on active travel

Active travel (walking and cycling etc.) offers the opportunity to minimise emissions associated with transport, but is only really an option for the majority of people over shorter distances. It is unlikely to realise significant levels of emissions reductions, but is considered an important priority focus because it has major co-benefits in relation to health and wellbeing, air quality, reducing congestion, protecting and enhancing our historic environment and creating more attractive and investible environments. Combining active travel with local employment and services in more self-contained settlements and neighbourhoods can reduce the need to travel and provide people with a real alternative to the private car. Active travel can provide a way for people to ditch the car, so long as safe, suitable and attractive routes are provided. Combining this infrastructure with e-bikes and e-scooters can potentially enable greater reach beyond just short journeys and realise greater emissions reductions. With the completed Taunton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to work from, early delivery is likely to be quite Taunton-centric, before extending to other parts of the district in future years.

In Year one, the Council will work with the County Council to make the closure of St James Street in Taunton town centre permanent, and trial closure of East Street and Hammet Street to private vehicles; deliver the priority LCWIP cycle routes linking Vivary Park to Taunton Station, and linking the Gateway and Silk Mills P&R sites via the town centre; and submit a bid to Government to trial an e-scooter hire scheme in Taunton as a means to enable convenient, clean, inexpensive, socially distanced travel in the town.



An indicative routemap for beyond Year one has been produced for the issue of active travel. This summarises what we think some of the next steps might be as well as the long-term direction of travel. Appendix 1 includes more detail.

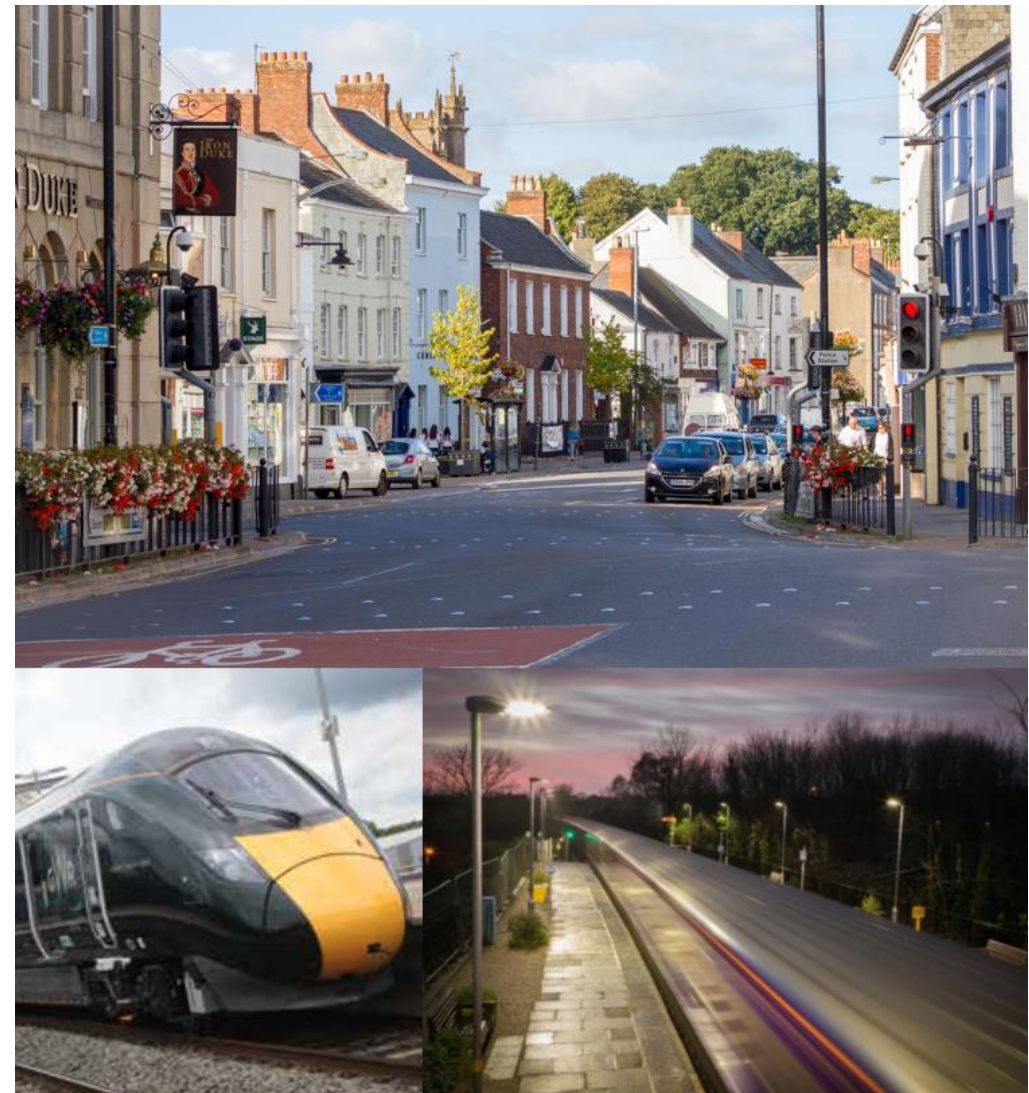




## Focus on re-opening Wellington Station

The Council has a long-standing aspiration to restore rail access to Wellington by re-opening the station. With significant housing growth and regeneration activity planned for the town through the existing development plan, delivery of a station is seen as a vital to enabling sustainable travel to and from the town as well as a major opportunity to drive wider investment and economic and heritage 'at risk' regeneration within the town. The Council is working in partnership with Mid Devon District Council (who are simultaneously seeking to re-open the station at Cullompton) to progress the evidence, lobby Government and move the project forward. A number of studies have been undertaken already to support the development of the project, and these have led to the agreement of formal governance arrangements to oversee and manage the project and the securing of grant funding from the Department for Transport's (DfT) "Restoring Your Railways Fund" towards evidence progression. In order to progress, a strategic outline business case must be produced and agreed by Government and Network Rail as part of the DfT's Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline.

In Year one, the Council will focus on developing this strategic outline business case with partners and lobbying Government to support the project alongside wider rail enhancements. Getting to this stage is a really positive step, but the project will only be able to progress along the pipeline following agreement, and then must go through further stages of business case development before Government will commit to delivering the station. It is hoped that the re-opening of the station can begin contributing towards our carbon neutral target from the late 2020s.



## Working with SCC on transport projects

As the authority responsible for highways and transport, this Council must rely on Somerset County Council (SCC), to deliver on many of the actions and aspirations relating to transport. This Action Plan has been developed alongside the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy so that it is informed by its emerging strategic direction and actions. SCC have been kept abreast of this Action Plan and its contents, but have not been involved in its detailed development and have not adopted it as their own policy. The Council will work closely with SCC to ensure the transport elements of this Action Plan are delivered.

## Focus on digital connectivity

Digital connectivity will underpin many aspects of a carbon neutral future and play a key part in making our transport and energy systems smarter and more efficient. As seen in the current COVID-19 crisis, digital connectivity can enable large sections of society to work from home, access services remotely and “meet” online, reducing the need to travel and associated emissions drastically as well as encouraging inward investment in new local employment and jobs and helping to tackle loneliness and isolation. However, to retain gains made during the COVID-19 crisis and for this to become as successful as possible, far higher levels of both urban and rural populations need to be covered by better quality fixed and mobile connectivity. In Year one, the Council will focus on developing a Digital Strategy that will identify how high speed, high quality and resilient gigabit digital connectivity can be delivered throughout the district; and ensuring that emerging Local Plan policies align with the strategy outputs as well as building on plans for a digital innovation centre in Taunton.





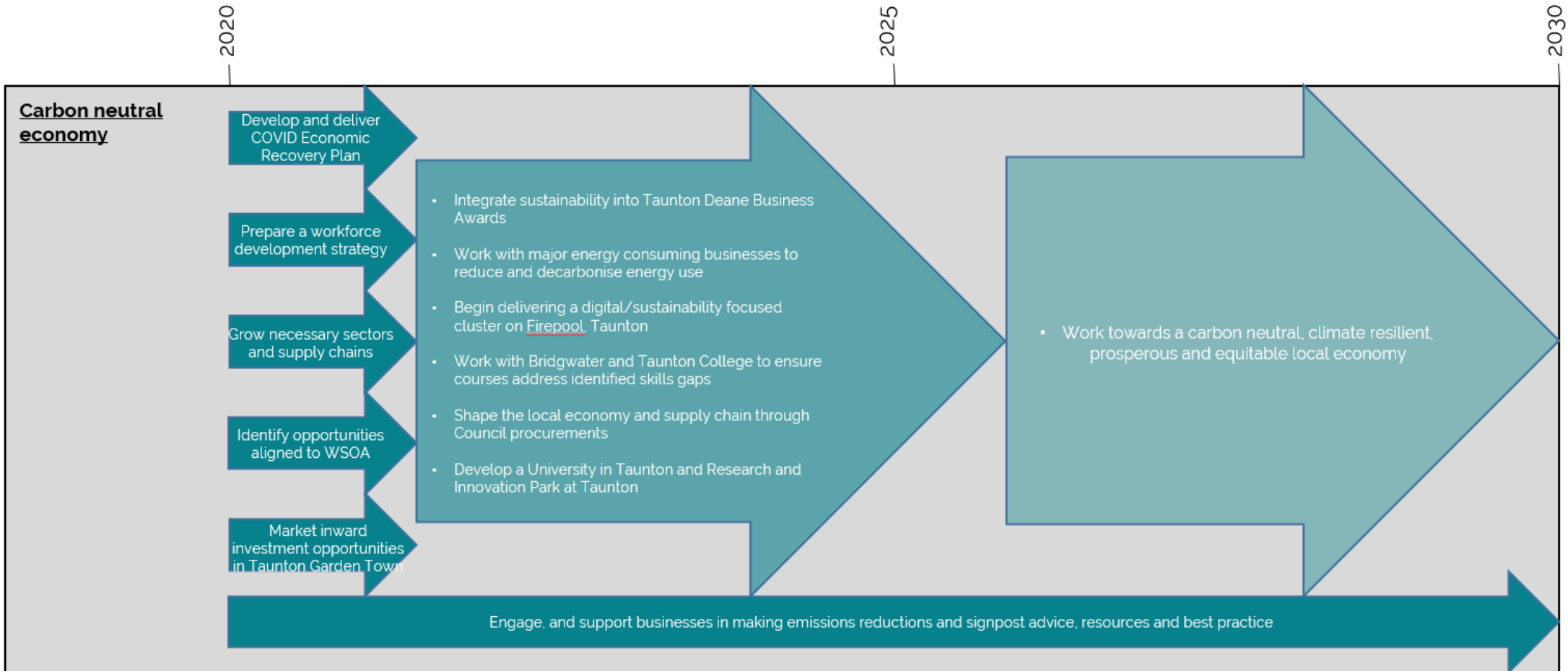
## Focus on growing a carbon neutral local economy

A carbon neutral economy is not just an economy focusing on growth within so-called “green” sectors, but an economy where all sectors are low in carbon emissions and compliant with a carbon neutral future. This means that existing businesses reduce their carbon footprints by reducing consumption, improving energy and resource efficiency and meeting energy demands through renewables, but also by improving their supply chains and embracing circular processes. It is also about creating an economy resilient to the changing climate and supporting those workers and businesses in sectors unlikely to be needed in or compliant with a carbon neutral future to transition to alternative sectors where we anticipate supply chains and skills need to grow. Following the COVID-19 crisis and accompanying recession, there will be an opportunity to refocus the economy through expected public investment for business support and market rebuilding.

In Year one, the Council will focus on developing and delivering upon a COVID Economic Recovery Plan, with climate action integral to its vision and objectives. Year one will also involve preparation of a workforce development strategy; work to grow sectors and supply chains for key products and technologies that will be required to deliver carbon neutrality (including heat pumps and renewables in particular); identification of opportunities for education, skills and jobs growth within the West Somerset Opportunity Area; marketing of economic inward investment opportunities particularly around Taunton Garden Town; and supporting our existing small businesses to reduce direct emissions.



An indicative routemap for beyond Year one has been produced for the issue of the carbon neutral economy. This summarises what we think some of the next steps might be as well as the long-term direction of travel. Appendix 1 includes more detail.



## Focus on Green and Blue Infrastructure

Green and blue infrastructure (GBI) refers to strategically planned natural green space and water linkages which can deliver multiple ecosystem services (benefits to humans provided by the natural environment). Key ecosystem services that GBI can deliver are carbon sequestration; combating the urban heat island effect and air quality issues; providing natural flood management to slow the flow of water in reaching river channels at risk of flooding; providing attractive corridors for active travel and biodiversity; bringing physical and mental health benefits and re-connecting us to and educating us in our landscapes and nature. Through the Garden Town proposals, the Council has already committed to significantly improving GBI around Taunton, but that commitment needs to be delivered on and rolled out to influence the rest of the district. Good GBI builds on and strengthens existing ecosystems and habitats, it plants the right trees in the right places for the right reasons, it enables regenerative practices to re-wild areas and maximises the benefits to both humans and the natural world. The Council is a partner in the newly reformed Local Nature Partnership (LNP). Going forwards, the LNP will be a key forum for co-ordinating and delivering actions in line with the proposed Nature Recovery Network (NRN) Strategy.

In Year one, the Council will focus on contributing to the NRN Strategy and developing its own district-wide GBI Strategy; and delivering tree planting and other relevant projects on Council owned land holdings including as part of delivery of the Maidenbrook Country Park between Monkton Heathfield and Nerrols in Taunton. It will also work with partners to establish a Peat Partnership aiming to restore peatlands in Somerset; and develop an Ash Die Back Action Plan.





## Focus on tree planting

Specifically in relation to tree planting, the Council will work with partners including Exmoor National Park to plant the right trees in the right places across the district. We have already set a target to raise tree canopy cover in Taunton Garden Town to 20%. As important an action as tree planting is, the wider benefits of thinking holistically and taking a more naturally regenerative approach must also be recognised. In year one, the Council will promote a “free tree giveaway” project for town and parish councils to apply to and plant out trees in their local area; increase capacity at its Stoke Road nursery to pilot growing 2,000 whips (small trees) for use in Council tree planting projects; will adopt a corporate policy to replace any removed tree with three new saplings; and will develop a corporate policy to enable all Council officers additional paid leave annually to volunteer in local climate action projects including tree planting. A long term 2030 tree planting target will be evidenced and set through the GBI Strategy work.

## Focus on wildflower meadows and open space management

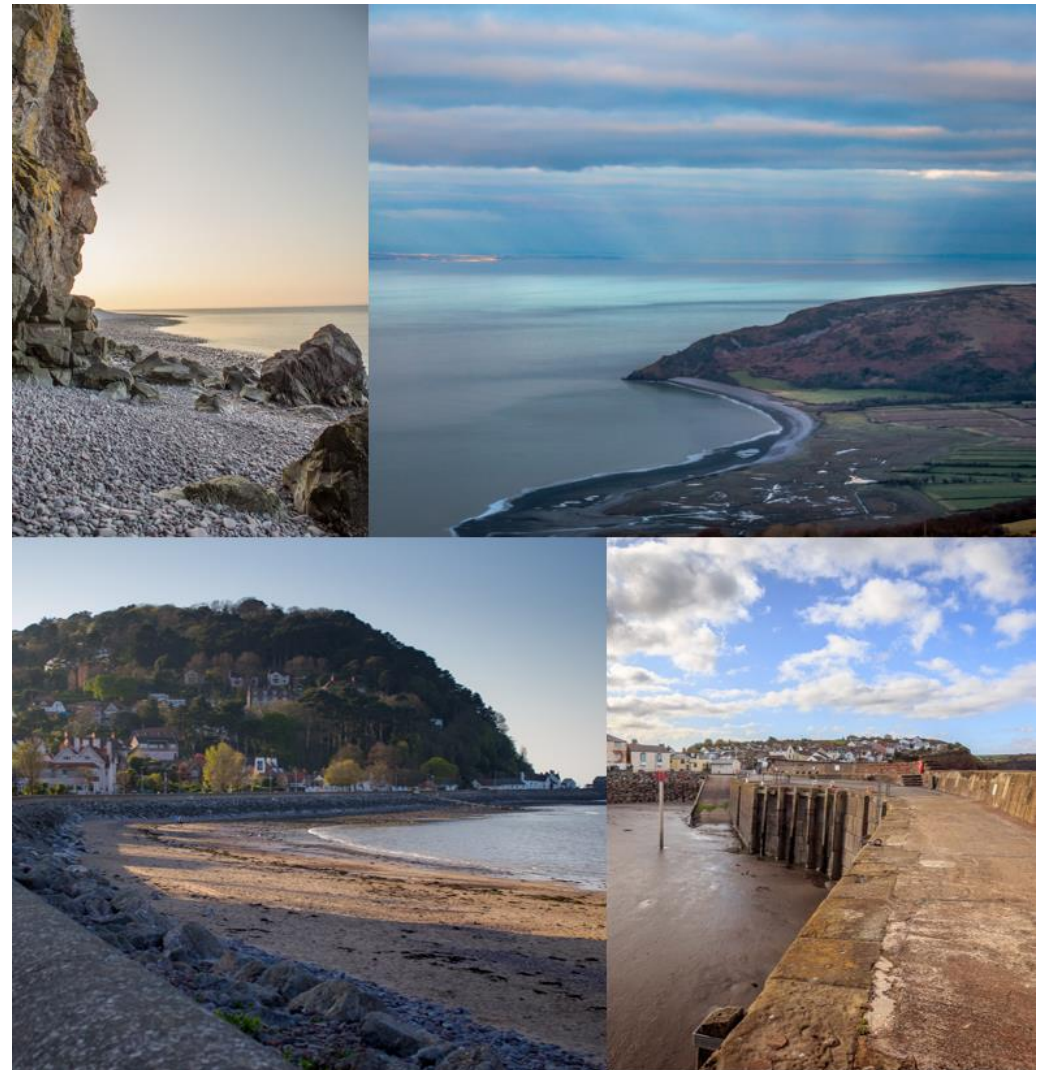
The Council is in the process of establishing wildflower meadow pilots on Council-owned land at Grange Drive, Leycroft Grove and Moorfields (Taunton); Gay Street, (Wellington); and at Seaward Way, and Culvercliffe (Minehead). It is also rolling out new management plans for a number of Council-owned open spaces, prepared by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. In Year one, the focus will be on delivering and monitoring success of these pilots.



## Focus on coastal change management

Parts of the West Somerset coast is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, be that through rising sea levels or greater frequency of more extreme weather events. The collapse of the harbour wall at Watchet earlier this year is a minor indication of the power of the sea and the damage that could be done on a larger and more regular basis going forwards due to the impacts of climate change. The 2018 Met Office UK Climate Projections suggest that sea level in the Bristol Channel may rise by up to 1.13m by 2100, though monitoring suggests that globally sea level rise may be running ahead of that projection curve – suggesting that sea level rise may exceed this within that timeframe. Beyond this, we know that it is possible that many more metres of sea level rise *may* already be “locked in” beyond the current century. The future for the communities along the West Somerset coast is unequivocally linked to the impacts of climate change.

In Year one, the Council will focus on working with key partners including the Environment Agency to develop a holistic Coastal Communities Strategy. This strategy will set out a 30 year plan for what the coast and coastal communities will be in 2050, taking account of both issues and opportunities relating to coastal erosion; flooding; housing; economy; renewables; highways; nature; culture; heritage; leisure; deprivation and regeneration. It will actively explore issues such as managed retreat, coastal defences and how they might impact wider spatial responses for the area. In the context of recovery from the COVID crisis and accompanying recession, this strategy will enable us to embed skills and jobs improvement and growth in the area within a strategic response to the very real risks posed by the climate emergency in West Somerset.





## Focus on Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme

Like many historic settlements, Taunton is situated on a river with extensive parts of the town built upon the floodplain. As the most populated town in Somerset and also the primary economic, cultural and administrative centre for the County, it is vital that the town and its many heritage assets are protected from the risk that flooding of the River Tone and its tributaries may cause. The Council also has long-standing aspirations to develop key sites in the town centre including Firepool which would reduce the need of residents to travel, and deliver lower environmental impacts in comparison to and reduce burdens on developing greenfield sites in future years. Development of these sites is dependent upon alleviating flood risk. The Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme adopted earlier in 2020 identifies a total of 11 preferred approach flood alleviation projects which will all need to be delivered to ensure that flood risk is minimised.

Sharpest focus is in relation to Taunton due to the reasons stated above, however, future years may well see a need to focus actions elsewhere in the district. Year one is primarily geared around some of the immediate engineering solutions necessary for Taunton, natural flood management offers the potential to deliver multiple co-benefits for biodiversity, sequestration and physical and mental health in future years.

In Year one, the Council will focus on working closely with partners including the Environment Agency to get the priority, funded projects moving. It will also start to lay the foundations for exploring how and when some of the later projects might come forward.



Image credits: The Environment Agency

## Focus on Local Plan Review

Through planning, the Council can potentially exercise a fair amount of influence and control to ensure that development comes forward in a manner compliant with our declared Climate Emergency. Planning can be a vital tool for ensuring development comes forward in sustainable locations; reducing the need to travel and encourages sustainable travel patterns; minimising energy demand and waste production; fostering sustainable behaviours; reducing and mitigating for the impacts of flooding; protecting and enhancing the natural environment; and for enabling renewable energy generation, distribution and storage. However, in order to do so, the Council must have strong planning policies to rely upon and determine planning applications against.

The Council is working on a new Local Plan covering the entire Local Planning Authority area (the new SWT district excluding parts within Exmoor National Park, which is its own Local Planning Authority). In January 2020 we published an Issues and Options paper that was consulted on alongside our Framework CNCR Plan and which included a strong focus around planning for the Climate Emergency. However, it is important to recognise the national planning policy confines within which planning operates (including the housing targets against which authorities are judged and ensuring that plan policies are viable and deliverable), and other key priorities that planning must balance (such as the need for affordable housing).

In Year one, the Council will focus on evidence and policy development towards publication of a Draft Plan (timetable currently under review). This Action Plan identifies a number of actions that new Local Plan policy should look to address. The Local Plan must go through various statutory stages of plan production and examination in public before it can be adopted, with emerging policies gradually gaining weight as it progresses. Therefore it will likely be a number of years before any policies developed are able to be implemented. That being the case, in order to ensure our planning decisions take as much of a climate positive approach as possible in the meantime, the Council will bring forward an Interim Policy Statement clarifying the relevance and implementation of existing development plan policies on sustainable design and construction and relevance of the Council's Climate Emergency declaration as a material consideration.

It should be noted that the Government has recently published the Planning White Paper which proposes significant changes to the planning system in England. Depending on the progress and outcome of these proposals, the above may be reviewed.



## **Delivering, monitoring, and reviewing the Action Plan**

In developing the Year 1 Action Plan, an assessment of likely resource requirements has been undertaken and this will enable the Council to ensure that the Council's role in delivering the actions identified within the Year 1 Action Plan is resourced in priority order. However, in some cases, this has relied on assumptions that may need to be revisited as the full scale of projects and actions becomes clearer. In addition, delivery is also premised on an assumption that certain key additional officer roles can be filled with appropriate candidates. The Action Plan also assumes that COVID-19 lockdown and social distancing constraints continue to be lifted and relaxed within the next six months and that there are no major relapses. Therefore, whilst the Council's work will be guided by the "Immediate" Year 1 actions, we have to be realistic and understand that with staff and financial resources stretched, we have to prioritise. This may mean that some things identified as being "Immediate" (and therefore considered possible to be begun within 12 months), could well slip beyond that timeframe. The prioritisation should help ensure that the actions that we do carry out are of the most importance. Beyond this, upon further investigation, some actions may be considered to be unnecessary or not possible.

Financing the delivery of actions will be a major hurdle to be overcome. Not everything identified within the Year 1 actions is funded yet, and beyond Year 1, very little is funded at present. Over the coming year, the Council will work to explore different funding mechanisms, opportunities and investments to help support delivery of this Action Plan and future iterations.

Actions will be monitored by officers simply by reference to progress against delivery, aligned to other monitoring processes as much as possible. As actions are undertaken, more accurate understanding of impacts including carbon emission reductions will be assessed and reported where possible and appropriate. Progress monitoring will be reported quarterly to the Lead Member and an internal Member Consultation Panel, who will provide challenge and help to shape the future development of the Plan.

Annual progress review reports will be made to Full Council as part of the Council's Performance reporting framework in Q2 in order to align with budget setting processes for the following year. The annual report will set out how the Council has progressed in terms of delivery of the previous year's actions, review the appropriateness and detail of remaining actions and set out the Action Plan for the coming year plus any amended routemaps for future years.

We understand that achieving our goals will require close partnership working with other organisations, groups, businesses and a-our communities. As such, we will establish a local multi-agency Climate Emergency Task Force to bring together partners to aid collaboration, delivery and implementation.