

# Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Firepool Masterplan

## Post-Adoption Statement

March 2023



**LEPUS** CONSULTING  
LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY, PLANNING & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY



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## Post-Adoption Statement

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>EA</b>	Environment Agency
<b>ER</b>	Environmental Report
<b>HRA</b>	Habitats Regulations Assessment
<b>MHCLG</b>	Ministry of Health, Communities and Local Government
<b>NPPF</b>	National Planning Policy Framework
<b>ODPM</b>	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
<b>PPG</b>	Planning Practice Guidance
<b>PPP</b>	Policies, Plans and Programmes
<b>SAC</b>	Special Area of Conservation
<b>SEA</b>	Strategic Environmental Assessment
<b>SuDS</b>	Sustainable Drainage System
<b>SWT</b>	Somerset West and Taunton
<b>TCAAP</b>	Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan
<b>TVIA</b>	Town and Visual Impact Assessment

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context and purpose of this report

- 1.1.1 This report comprises the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Post-Adoption Statement for the Firepool masterplan. It has been prepared under Regulation 16 of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations (SI 1633) 2004<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.1.2 Lepus Consulting has undertaken a SEA for the Firepool masterplan on behalf of Somerset West and Taunton Council. SEA is the process which informs and influences the preparation of the masterplan to help optimise its environmental performance.
- 1.1.3 The purpose of this Post-Adoption Statement is to outline how the SEA process has informed and influenced the Masterplan preparation, and to demonstrate how consultation on the SEA has been taken into account.

## 1.2 Somerset West and Taunton Council

- 1.2.1 The Somerset West and Taunton Council area ranges from Exmoor to the edge of the Somerset Levels, an area of 463 square kilometres. There are major settlements at Taunton, Wellington and Minehead. The County town of Taunton sits between Bristol and Exeter and was designated a Garden Town in 2017.
- 1.2.2 The Firepool site is a key Town Centre Regeneration Area, with the Masterplan focused on a residential-led mixed use development.

## 1.3 Requirement for the SEA Post-Adoption Statement

- 1.3.1 In order to meet the legislative requirements of the European Directive 2001/42/EC and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (2004), a Post-Adoption Statement is required to be published “*as soon as reasonably possible after the Plan has been adopted*”<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.3.2 SEA Regulation 16<sup>3</sup> sets out the post-adoption procedures, including the requirement to produce a statement containing a number of particulars (Regulation 16 Paragraph 4). **Box 1.1** presents the requirements of this SEA Post-Adoption Statement.
- 1.3.3 This Post-Adoption Statement provides sustainability information beyond the strict environmental parameters outlined in **Box 1.1**, to reflect the broader SEA process.

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<sup>1</sup>The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/contents/made> [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

<sup>2</sup>RTPI (2018) RTPI Practical Advice: Strategic Environmental Assessment – Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of SEA/SA for land use plans. Available at: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1822/sea-sapracticeadvicefull2018c.pdf> [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

<sup>3</sup>The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004). Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/part/4/made> [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

### Box 1.1: SEA Regulation 16 Post-Adoption Procedures<sup>4</sup>

#### Information as to adoption of plan or programme

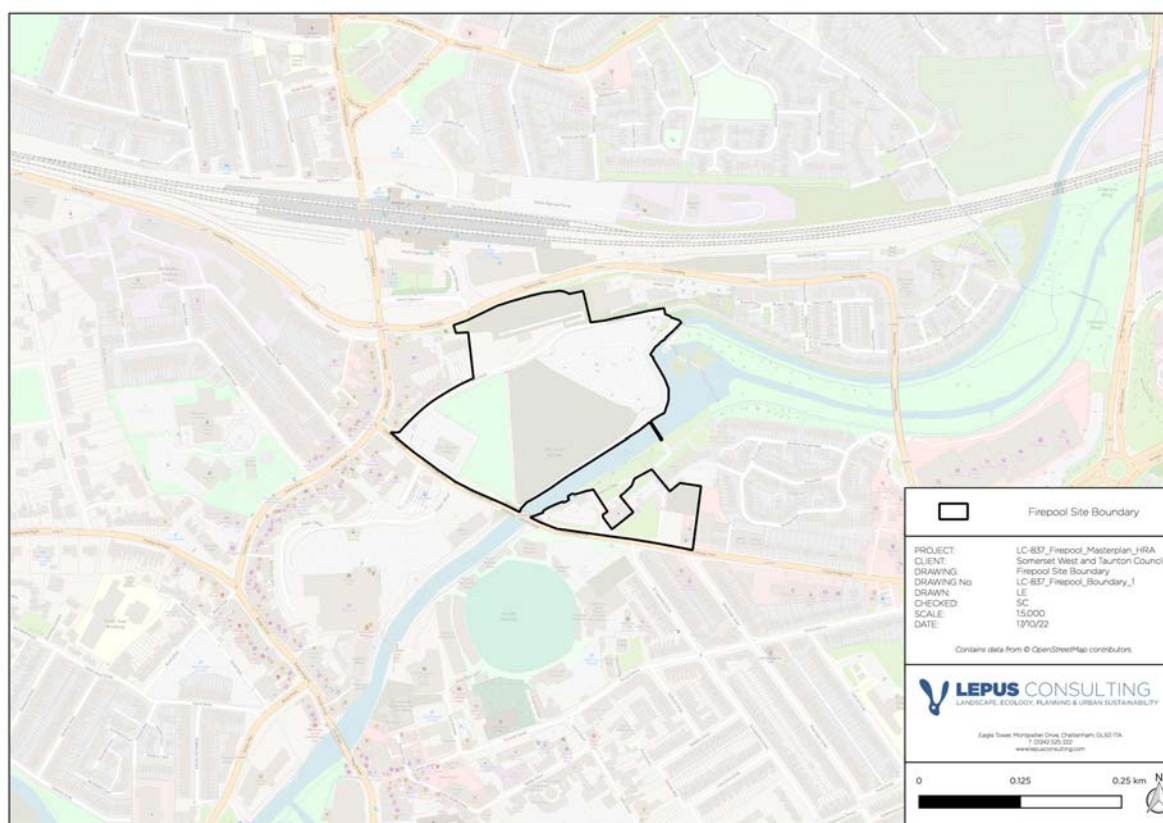
16.—

- 1) As soon as reasonably practicable after the adoption of a plan or programme for which an environmental assessment has been carried out under these Regulations, the responsible authority shall—
  - a) make a copy of the plan or programme and its accompanying environmental report available at its principal office for inspection by the public at all reasonable times and free of charge; and
  - b) take such steps as it considers appropriate to bring to the attention of the public—
    - i) the title of the plan or programme;
    - ii) the date on which it was adopted;
    - iii) the address (which may include a website) at which a copy of it and of its accompanying environmental report, and of a statement containing the particulars specified in paragraph (4), may be viewed or from which a copy may be obtained;
    - iv) the times at which inspection may be made; and
    - v) that inspection may be made free of charge.
- 2) As soon as reasonably practicable after the adoption of a plan or programme—
  - a) the responsible authority shall inform—
    - i) the consultation bodies;
    - ii) the persons who, in relation to the plan or programme, were public consultees for the purposes of regulation 13; and
    - iii) where the responsible authority is not the Secretary of State, the Secretary of State; and
  - b) the Secretary of State shall inform the Member State with which consultations in relation to the plan or programme have taken place under regulation 14(4), of the matters referred to in paragraph (3).
- 3) The matters are—
  - a) that the plan or programme has been adopted;
  - b) the date on which it was adopted; and
  - c) the address (which may include a website) at which a copy of—
    - i) the plan or programme, as adopted,
    - ii) its accompanying environmental report, and
    - iii) a statement containing the particulars specified in paragraph (4), may be viewed, or from which a copy may be obtained.
- 4) The particulars referred to in paragraphs (1)(b)(iii) and (3)(c)(iii) are —
  - a) how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme;
  - b) how the environmental report has been taken into account;
  - c) how opinions expressed in response to—
    - i. the invitation referred to in regulation 13(2)(d);
    - ii. action taken by the responsible authority in accordance with regulation 13(4), have been taken into account;
  - d) how the results of any consultations entered into under regulation 14(4) have been taken into account;
  - e) the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
  - f) the measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.

<sup>4</sup>The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004). Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/part/4/made> [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

## 1.4 About the Firepool Masterplan

- 1.4.1 The Firepool Masterplan will provide a framework for the development of the proposed site 'Firepool' allocated within the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP). Firepool is a strategic site which aims to achieve successful, high quality sustainable development with a sense of place whilst meeting with requirements and aspirations of adopted policies. Development of the Firepool site also responds to the aspirations of the local community and aligns with the Council's 'Vision for Taunton Garden Town'.
- 1.4.2 The boundary of the 'Firepool' site is shown in **Figure 1.1**. The site comprises 6.5ha and was formerly a cattle market. It is close to Taunton Railway Station, Somerset County Cricket Club and Firepool Wier from which the site takes its name.



**Figure 1.1:** Location of the Firepool site

- 1.4.3 The Masterplan takes the proposals from the adopted TCAAP (October 2008)<sup>5</sup> and outlines the aspirations of the area as well as responding to key issues that will influence the new development. The Masterplan will be a material consideration, which expands on policies set out by the LPA, to help guide the preparation and assessment of future planning applications within the site.

<sup>5</sup> Taunton Deane Borough Council (2008) 'Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan' Available at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-local-plans/taunton-town-centre-area-action-plan-2008/> [Accessed on 20/03/23]



1.4.4 The Masterplan expands upon the policy contained within the LPA and provides a framework to help guide the preparation and assessment of future planning applications within the proposed Firepool site.

## 1.5 Using this document

1.5.1 This Post-Adoption Statement should be read alongside the Masterplan and associated SEA documents, particularly the Environmental Report, which are summarised in **Chapter 2** and can be found on the Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) website<sup>6</sup>.

1.5.2 This report has been prepared in order to meet the requirements of the SEA Regulations (see **Box 1**). The chapters are structured as per the criteria presented in the Regulations (see **Table 1.2**).

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<sup>6</sup>Somerset West and Taunton Council. Firepool Masterplan. Available at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/firepool-masterplan/> [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

**Table 1.1:** Guide to the requirements of the SEA Regulations for this post adoption statement

Requirements of Regulation 16 (4)	Location in this report
a) how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme;	Chapter 2 (SEA Framework)
b) how the environmental report has been taken into account;	Chapter 4
c) how opinions expressed in response to— i) the invitation referred to in regulation 13(2)(d); ii) action taken by the responsible authority in accordance with regulation 13(4), have been taken into account;	Chapter 5
d) how the results of any consultations entered into under regulation 14(4) have been taken into account;	Chapter 5
e) the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with;	Chapter 3
f) The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.	Chapter 6

## 2 Overview of the assessment process

### 2.1 SEA Approach

- 2.1.1 The SEA Directive applies to a wide range of public plans and programmes on land use, energy, waste, agriculture, transport and more (see Article 3(2) of the Directive for other plan or programme types). The objective of the SEA procedure can be summarised as follows: *“the objective of this Directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development”*.
- 2.1.2 The SEA Directive has been transposed into English law by the SEA Regulations. Under the requirements of the SEA Directive and SEA Regulations, specific types of plans that set the framework for the future development consent of projects must be subject to an environmental assessment.
- 2.1.3 The SEA process focuses on significant environmental effects and is carried out during the preparation of a plan or programme.

## 2.2 Best Practice SEA Guidance

2.2.1 A range of documents have been utilised in preparing the SEA of the Firepool Masterplan:

- European Commission (2004) Implementation of Directive 2001/42 on the assessment of the effects of certain plan and programmes on the environment<sup>7</sup>;
- Office of Deputy Prime Minister (2005) A Practical Guide to the SEA Directive<sup>8</sup>;
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)<sup>9</sup>;
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities & Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021) Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)<sup>10</sup>; and
- Royal Town Planning Institute (2018) Strategic Environmental Assessment, Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of SEA/SA for land use plans<sup>11</sup>.

## 2.3 SEA and the sequential Masterplan making process

2.3.1 The SEA process has accompanied the preparation of the Masterplan and has informed the different stages of plan making on an iterative basis. SEA is the process which informs and influences the preparation of the Masterplan to help optimise the environmental performance of the plan.

2.3.2 The key stages and outputs are as follows

- SEA and HRA Screening Document (June 2022) provided by SWT Council;
- SEA Scoping Report (September 2022); and
- SEA Environmental Report (October 2022).

2.3.3 The Masterplan and the accompanying reports are available on the SWT Council website<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> European Union (2001) SEA Guidance, Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/eia/pdf/030923\\_sea\\_guidance.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/eia/pdf/030923_sea_guidance.pdf) [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

<sup>8</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf) [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2021) National Planning Policy Framework. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2> [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

<sup>10</sup> Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2021) Planning Practice Guidance Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

<sup>11</sup> RTPI (2018) Strategic Environmental Assessment. Available at: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2018/january/strategic-environmental-assessment-seasa-for-land-use-plans/> [Accessed on: 20/03/23]

<sup>12</sup> Taunton Deane Borough Council (2008) 'Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan' Available at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-local-plans/taunton-town-centre-area-action-plan-2008/> [Accessed on 20/03/23]

## 2.4 SEA Screening

2.4.1 The Screening report reviewed the extent to which the Firepool Masterplan could potentially result in significant effects on the environment. The screening report concluded that the Masterplan would be likely to have a significant environmental impact on the surrounding area and would therefore require an SEA in relation to:

- Air;
- Biodiversity;
- Climate change;
- Cultural Heritage;
- Landscape;
- Population and Material Assets; and
- Water.

## 2.5 SEA Scoping

2.5.1 Scoping is the process of deciding the scope and level of the SEA. A report was prepared to present the findings of the scoping exercise. The scoping report included baseline information, a review of plans and programmes, identification of key issues and the creation of SEA Objectives, presented in a framework, for use with evaluating proposals in the plan.

2.5.2 The SEA Framework consists of objectives, which are measurable using indicators. There is no statutory basis for setting objectives, but they are a recognised way of considering the environmental effects of a Plan and comparing alternatives. The SEA Objectives are used to provide the basis against which effects of the Masterplan are assessed.

2.5.3 The SEA Framework for the Firepool Masterplan is focused on air, biodiversity, climate change, cultural heritage, landscape, population and material assets and water resources for the reasons specified within the scoping report. The SEA Framework has been developed through the PPP review, the baseline data collection and the key issues identified for the Plan area.

2.5.4 The SEA Objectives included within the SEA Framework are set out in **Table 2.1**.

*Table 2.1: SEA Framework objectives*

	SEA Objectives	Relevance to SEA Regulations – Schedule 2
1	<b>Air Quality:</b> Mitigate and reduce the impacts of air pollution arising as a result of the development of the SWMSPA.	Air Quality
2	<b>Biodiversity:</b> Protect, enhance, restore and manage the flora, fauna biodiversity and geodiversity assets of the areas affected by the development of the SWMSPA.	Biodiversity
3	<b>Climate change:</b> Mitigate and Reduce the SWMSPA’s contribution towards climate change.	Climate change
4	<b>Cultural Heritage:</b> Protect, enhance and manage heritage assets, including designated and non-designated, as well as features and areas of and heritage importance.	Cultural Heritage

	SEA Objectives	Relevance to SEA Regulations – Schedule 2
5	<b>Landscape:</b> Conserve, enhance, restore and manage the character and appearance of the landscape and townscape, maintaining and strengthening their distinctiveness.	Landscape
6	<b>Material Assets and Soil:</b> Protect, enhance and ensure the efficient use of land, soils, minerals and water.	Material Assets and Soil
7	<b>Water resources:</b> Conserve, manage, restore and enhance water quality and supply.	Water Resources

## 2.6 Assessment assumptions

2.6.1 The assessments carried out during the SEA process were based on the best available information at the time of writing. Every attempt has been made to predict effects as accurately as possible.

2.6.2 SEA operates at a strategic level which uses available secondary data for the relevant SEA Objective. All reasonable alternatives are assessed in the same way using the same method. Sometimes, in the absence of more detailed information, forecasting the potential impacts of development can require making reasonable assumptions based on the best available data and trends.

2.6.3 Assumptions have been used to help incorporate proportionality to the SEA of reasonable alternatives. In terms of published policy guidance, it has been assumed that the following policies will apply to the Firepool site and surrounding environments, and have been borne in mind when completing the assessment of reasonable alternatives:

- Adopted TTCAAP 2008 Policies<sup>13</sup>;
- The Somerset West and Taunton Core Strategy<sup>14</sup>;
- The Somerset West and Taunton Site Allocations and Development Plan (SADMP)<sup>15</sup>; and
- The NPPF (2021)<sup>16</sup> and related PPG advice<sup>17</sup>.

2.6.4 Full details of the assessment assumptions and methodologies are set out in the SEA Environmental Report.

<sup>13</sup> Somerset West and Taunton Council (2021) Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP) 2008. Available at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/1064/taunton-town-centre-area-action-plan.pdf> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

<sup>14</sup> Taunton Deane Borough Council (2011) Taunton Deane Borough Council Adopted Core Strategy 2011-2018. Available at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/1061/adopted-core-strategy-2011-2028.pdf> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

<sup>15</sup> Somerset West and Taunton Council (2022) Site allocations and development management plan 2028. Available at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-local-plans/sadmp/> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2021) National Planning Policy Framework. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2021) Planning Practice Guidance. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

## 2.7 Habitats Regulations Assessment

2.7.1 The Firepool Masterplan was subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended<sup>18</sup> (the Habitats Regulations).

2.7.2 Following a screening exercise (Stage 1 of the HRA process) an Appropriate Assessment<sup>19</sup> (Stage 2 of the HRA process) was undertaken to assess Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) in more detail. The Natura 2000 sites which were considered within the HRA of the Firepool Masterplan were the following:

- Hestercombe House SAC; and
- Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar.

2.7.3 The HRA concluded that there would be no adverse effects on any Natura 2000 site as a result of the Firepool Masterplan.

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<sup>18</sup> The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

<sup>19</sup> Somerset West and Taunton Council (2022) Firepool Masterplan and Design Guidance Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report. Available at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/3513/firepool-masterplan-and-design-guidance-screening-report.pdf> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

## 3 Why the adopted Masterplan was chosen, in light of reasonable alternatives

### 3.1 Reasonable alternatives

3.1.1 The SEA Regulations require that the SEA process considers “*reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme*” (Regulation 12) and gives “*an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with*” (Schedule 2).

3.1.2 SWT Council identified three reasonable alternatives for evaluation in the SEA process:

- **Reasonable Alternative 1:** The employment and retail-led option;
- **Reasonable Alternative 2:** The residential-led Firepool Masterplan proposal; and
- **Reasonable Alternative 3:** The ‘do nothing’ option.

### 3.2 Describing the reasonable alternatives

3.2.1 There are no discernible differences between the reasonable alternatives at the strategic scale however, there are some minor differences at the local scale related to site layout. All reasonable alternatives have an identical site boundary; however, the layout of the strategic placemaking area is different.

3.2.2 Reasonable Alternative 1 (RA1) is focused on provision of retail within floorspace allocations, with a secondary focus on residential provision. RA1 sought to include pedestrianised areas with active travel links to the surrounding area, implementing positive design principles with built form and green infrastructure within the layout.

3.2.3 Reasonable Alternative 2 (RA2) presents an increased focus toward residential provision, with the inclusion of student accommodation within the layout design. Provision of floorspace which caters to leisure, entertainment, office space and an innovation centre is also included within RA2. Furthermore, a health hub and strong links to public transport and active travel are featured within the RA2 layout, which would be likely to deliver a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the local population.

3.2.4 Reasonable Alternative 3 (RA3) involves doing nothing, leaving the site at Firepool in its current condition. The site is currently a previously developed site, containing car parking, poor quality amenity grassland and pedestrian links in the north of the site, with car parking and the Viridor building in the south. There is very little GI present at the site in its current form, and the site has very little utility other than car parking provision and minor connectivity for pedestrians from the canal path to canal road.



### 3.3 Assessment of Reasonable Alternatives

3.3.1 Each reasonable alternative was assessed against the SEA Framework. The assessment concluded that potential negative impacts would be expected as follows:

- **Air** – RA1 and RA2 would be expected to reduce air quality due to increase in vehicular emissions associated with residential and employment provisions, however RA2 would mitigate reductions in air quality due to GI and pedestrian provision. RA3 would have negligible effects on air quality, RA1 and RA2 would have a potential minor adverse effect.
- **Biodiversity** – RA1 does not outline any specific provisions for nutrient neutrality or biodiversity net gain. RA2 seeks to implement biodiversity net gain principles and GI provision to reduce impacts to existing biodiversity. A minor positive effect would be expected as a result of the inclusion of biodiversity net gain principles within the layout. Minor adverse impacts are expected to affect local habitats and protected sites. RA3 would be expected to have a negligible impact.
- **Climate change** – RA1 and RA2 both include new buildings which is likely to cause an increase in energy consumption and motorised traffic during both the construction and occupancy phases, resulting in minor negative impacts on climate change. RA2 mentions methods to help reduce climate change but no specifics are mentioned so it is uncertain how much of a positive effect this may induce. RA1 and RA2 would have a minor positive and minor adverse effects. RA3 would have a negligible effect on climate change.
- **Historic environment** – RA1 and RA2 would be expected to have a potential minor negative impact on the surrounding historic environment as a result of the proposed development at Firepool. RA3 would have a negligible effect.
- **Landscape** – A TVIA undertaken in October 2022 determined that RA2 would be unlikely to impact views and it is expected that RA1 would have a similar effect. RA1 and RA2 would be expected to locate site end users in close proximity to multi-functional greenspace, as both plans outline the provision of greenspace within the layouts. As a result, RA1 and RA2 would be expected to have a minor positive impact on the public realm. RA3 has a negative effect on landscape since the current environment is something of an ‘eyesore’.
- **Population and material assets** – RA2 and RA3 comprise a mix of residential and employment/retail development, both of these alternatives are expected to have a minor positive effect. RA3 would have a negligible effect.
- **Water** – RA1 and RA2 would be expected to increase pressure and demand on water resources and drainage but RA2 recognises sustainable water management should be included. RA1 and RA2 could potentially have a minor negative effect, RA3 has a negligible effect.

### 3.4 Selection and rejection of reasonable alternatives

3.4.1 Of the three Reasonable Alternatives, RA2 was selected as the preferred option.

## 4 How the Environmental Report has been taken into account

### 4.1 The preferred approach

4.1.1 The likely significant effects of the preferred option associated with the Masterplan were assessed with and without mitigation considerations in relation to the topics of air, biodiversity, historic environment, landscape, climate change, population and material assets and water in the Environmental Report.

4.1.2 The assessments included consideration of the impacts arising as a consequence of the inter-relationship between the different topics and identified secondary, cumulative and synergistic effects where they arose.

### 4.2 Residual effects

4.2.1 Due to the scale of the proposals outlined within the Masterplan, the likelihood for residual effects is reduced. The Masterplan was considered to have the potential to lead to minor residual adverse effects in relation to climate change and water (see **Table 4.1**).

*Table 4.1: Adverse effects of the Masterplan recorded in the Environmental Report*

SEA Topic	Residual impacts	SEA Score
Objective 3: Climate change	The TTCAAP, ACS and Masterplan set out various requirements which aim to help mitigate the adverse impacts relating to climatic factors. However, the implementation of these requirements would not be expected to fully mitigate the adverse impacts associated with net increases in greenhouse gases. An increase in carbon emissions would be likely to be a long term but potentially temporary significant effect.	Minor adverse impact
Objective 7: Water	Increased pressures on demand for water resources and wastewater treatment as a consequence of the proposed development has the potential to be a long-term and potentially permanent significant effect. Though Wessex Water indicates that supply is sufficient up to 2040, there may be a residual effect on capacity and provision in the longer term. In line with the precautionary principle, a minor negative residual effect has been identified.	Minor adverse impact

### 4.3 Recommendations

4.3.1 In order to help optimise plan performance against each SEA Objective, the environmental report included a series of recommendations. These have been reproduced in **Table 4.2**, these recommendations should be taken into consideration with any future planning application at this site.

**Table 4.2: Recommendations to further improve sustainability of the Masterplan**

SEA Topic	Recommendations
<b>Objective 1: Air</b>	Greater inclusion and incorporation of GI within the development may help to further improve air quality for site end users.
<b>Objective 2: Biodiversity</b>	<p>The Masterplan should seek to remain in line with and incorporate the aims, objectives and principles of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan to ensure that the habitats and species surrounding and connected to the site benefit. The Masterplan should also seek to embrace the priorities of the future publications from the Natural Environment Partnership including the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy.</p> <p>The development should consider opportunities for enhancing connectivity of the wider ecological networks associated with designated biodiversity sites, particularly those habitats and species associated with the River Tone and its hydrological catchment.</p>
<b>Objective 3: Climate change</b>	<p>Opportunities for increasing the proportion of trips made through sustainable transport should be understood and pursued, in line with the hierarchy of decarbonisation recommended in the RTPi's Net Zero Transport<sup>20</sup>.</p> <p>In line with the NPPF, the Masterplan should seek to prioritise renewable and low carbon energy sources, opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers. Energy statements could be required in order to demonstrate how carbon emissions have been minimised for the development over its lifetime.</p> <p>The Masterplan should implement principles highlighted within the Masterplan itself to deliver Zero Carbon design principles in the construction and operation of the site.</p>
<b>Objective 4: Historic environment</b>	<p>Development proposals should seek to explore ways to maximise enhancement of, and minimise harm to, designated heritage assets and their settings, in line with Historic England's Good Practice Advice<sup>21</sup>.</p> <p>It is recommended that, where the opportunity exists, proposals should seek to increase the local awareness of cultural heritage assets in the local area.</p>
<b>Objective 5: Landscape</b>	<p>No specific recommendations are required for the development outlined within the Masterplan in relation to Landscape.</p> <p>It is recommended that, where the opportunity exists, proposals should seek to reduce the likelihood of impacts to the surrounding landscape.</p> <p>It is recommended that all findings of the TVIA are acknowledged and any further recommendations are adhered to.</p>
<b>Objective 6: Population and Material Assets</b>	All waste management measures should be developed and implemented in line with the NPPF <sup>22</sup> .
<b>Objective 7: Water</b>	In line with the NPPF, development should seek to, wherever possible, help to improve environmental conditions, such as water quality.

<sup>20</sup> RTPi (2021) Net Zero Transport: the role of spatial planning and place-based solutions. Available at: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2020/june/net-zero-transport-the-role-of-spatial-planning-and-place-based-solutions/> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

<sup>21</sup> Historic England (2017) The Setting of Heritage Assets - Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3. Available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/> [Accessed on: 22/10/22].

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2021) National Planning Policy Framework. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1005759/NPPF\\_July\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf) [Accessed on: 24/10/22].

SEA Topic	Recommendations
	Development proposals should be built in accordance with recommendations within relevant documents within the Evidence Base, including Water Resource Management Plans, Catchment Flood Management Plan and Basin Management Plans.

## 5 How opinions of consultation bodies and the public have been taken into account

### 5.1 Consultation responses

5.1.1 During the preparation of the Masterplan, and in order to meet the requirements of the SEA Regulations, three SEA outputs were shared with the statutory bodies (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency):

- SEAScreening Report;
- SEA Scoping Report; and
- SEA Environmental Report.

5.1.2 The Environmental Report was also published for consultation with the public. The consultation stages relating to the SEA documents as well as the consultation responses received from statutory bodies relating to the SEA are summarised in **Table 5.1** (screening), **Table 5.2** (scoping) and **Table 5.3** (environmental report).

5.1.3 Consultation responses to the Masterplan and the accompanying evidence base, including comments from the statutory consultees on the Masterplan itself, can be found on the SWT Council website.

*Table 5.1: Consultation responses from statutory consultees on SEA Screening Report*

Response from	Summary of Consultation Responses	Incorporation into the SEA
Natural England	<p><i>"We concur with your assessment that both SEA and Appropriate Assessment will be required.</i></p> <p><i>You have stated that the site is outside of the identified consultation zone of the Hestercombe House SAC. However, in common with most of Taunton, the site falls within the Bat Consultation Band C (<a href="#">link here</a>).</i></p> <p><i>We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us."</i></p>	Added to scoping report
Historic England	<p><i>"However, what the documents and our meeting identified was that the regime of building displacement and associated heights may have the potential to generate impacts upon the settings of offsite heritage assets. In particular, and by way of example, we were able to identify the important roles played by the Grade I Listed Church of St Mary Magdalene and Grade II* St James Church which are prominent features in the area whose presences can be seen and appreciated from a significant distance in many directions. It is therefore possible that their individual and collective settings could be extensive and complex and therefore affected or harmed by what is emerging. It will be important to ensure that the masterplan and design guidance are appropriately informed by the heritage significance of these assets to avoid such an eventuality in accordance with overarching policy for the protection and enhancement of the historic environment as exists in the National Planning Policy</i></p>	Reference to listed buildings added to scoping report

Response from	Summary of Consultation Responses	Incorporation into the SEA
	<i>Framework (NPPF) and Local Plan....The masterplan and design guidance therefore need to demonstrate with evidence that they are in conformity with such overarching policy and at the meeting we made the observation that such an evidence base appears to be lacking....the masterplan and design guidance documents need to be able to stand alone in providing a rationale for their proposals, either by demonstrably basing them on an original evidence base (such as possibly the 2017 Cotswold Archaeology report / Heritage Statement referred to at our meeting) or by cross referencing with previously approved proposals, such as the outline consent, to demonstrate that they took appropriate account of relevant considerations and that by reflecting them the latest proposals do also....We agree with the conclusion of the SEA Screening Report that a full SEA is required. Such an exercise would require and help ensure that relevant heritage assets were identified, understood and appropriately informed the masterplan and design guidance. Such an exercise could also capture broader aspects of historic character, of the site and its context, to help the design agenda reflect that in creating a sense of place and the qualities of human scale and intimacy which are perhaps now more intrinsic to the regime of uses envisaged compared with previous proposals."</i>	
Environment Agency	<i>"It is noted that Somerset West and Taunton Council have applied the SEA/HRA Directive, and the Environment Agency can agree with their draft outcome of the screening."</i>	No action required

**Table 5.2:** Consultation responses from statutory consultees on SEA Scoping Report

Response from	Summary of Consultation Responses	Incorporation into the SEA
Natural England	<i>N/A – No comment received</i>	N/A
Historic England	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>"You had previously indicated that you envisaged sending out the SEA Screening Report with this Scoping consultation but a copy hasn't been received. Nonetheless, the Scoping Report in Section 2 identifies the relevant SEA topics which the Screening identified as likely to be relevant and confirms the inclusion of Cultural Heritage within the scope of topics to be included."</i></li> <li>2. <i>"In our response to the SEA Screening consultation in September 2021 we identified the potential that the masterplan might have for generating impact on the setting of the Grade I and II* churches respectively. Even any individual impact, however modest, could be capable of being regarded as "significant environmental effects" within the context of SEA definitions and case law. So although such consideration has not been cited specifically within the Scoping Report – and not having had sight of the final Screening Report we don't know how prominently this consideration may have featured in its conclusions – it is certainly something which should be given significant detailed and informed assessment within the SEA exercise."</i></li> <li>3. <i>"Sections 6.2.2 to 6.2.14 of the Historic Environment section of the Scoping Report set out the relevant heritage assets</i></li> </ol>	Comments incorporated into Environmental Report

Response from	Summary of Consultation Responses	Incorporation into the SEA
	<p><i>and states the likely impacts on them from the proposed development. This is based on the findings of a preliminary screening assessment, heritage assessment, and Townscape Visual Impact Analysis (TVIA) as key evidence documents. However, these documents have not been shared, nor is it clear how much they have been subject to wider assessment or scrutiny. We therefore feel that it would be premature to form a view on the nature and scope of impact which the masterplan may have on heritage assets and include this within the Scoping Report. It may suggest that these heritage considerations do not need to be subject to the full and informed assessment incumbent upon the preparation of an SEA Environmental Report, especially given the limited impact on heritage assets which has been identified. Further, there is a risk that this is perceived as tendentious within the context of such an exercise, and create an unwitting bias in its conclusions.”</i></p> <p>4. <i>“This concern is reinforced by uncertainty over the means by which such conclusions have been arrived at. Emphasis is placed on the distance of identified heritage assets from the site and, where applicable, their relationship with surrounding townscape, as the basis upon which impact on their settings has been deduced. However, the determination of an asset’s setting, as a contributor to its significance, needs to take account of more extensive considerations, as set out in our guidance on Setting. It is not clear whether and how this guidance might have been used in the preparation of any of the evidence documents referred to above, and the absence of any reference to it within this section of the Scoping Report as source material which has, or would be used to, inform the preparation of the full SEA Environmental Report underscores that concern.”</i></p> <p>5. <i>“This highlights the need for clear and informed methodology on the identification and assessment of relevant heritage assets relative to the potential for significant environmental effects which the masterplan may have. We are not sure whether the absence of reference within the Scoping Report to our guidance on Setting, and SEAs more generally, is a reflection of the consultants not being aware of it, or a belief that it is not relevant to the exercise in question. We would therefore strongly encourage the reference and use of this guidance within the full SEA process to ensure it is fully informed from a heritage perspective, and thereby its comprehensiveness and credibility.”</i></p>	
<p>Environment Agency</p>	<p><i>“The Environment Agency supports the SEA but wishes to make the following comments:</i></p> <p><i>Chapter 4 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna Section 4.2.11</i></p> <p><i>The Tone and Tributaries Local Wildlife Site (LWS) has not been included. This needs to be written into the document and should be one of the main considerations in any biodiversity assessments about possible impacts, both to the LWS species and habitats, but also opportunities to improve and enhance things through the development.</i></p>	<p>Comments incorporated into Environmental Report</p>

Response from	Summary of Consultation Responses	Incorporation into the SEA
	<p><i>These sites were designated using robust scientifically determined criteria and detailed ecological surveys, and the Tone is the best example in the county of a whole river from source to saline limit with species of national and international protection. It is a biologically rich river including tributaries with a variety of associated habitats and legally protected species. Local Wildlife Sites offer corridors for wildlife, forming key components of ecological networks and they play a vital part in the natural green fabric of our towns.</i></p> <p><i>For all the above reasons we would hope SWAT would aspire to be an exemplary developer and in turn offer inspiration to others in the future.</i></p> <p><i>Section 4.2.13</i></p> <p><i>Protected species should include water voles, otters, kingfishers, and salmon, especially relevant in relation to being a LWS and the importance of the river habitat in the context of the development being next to the river.</i></p> <p><i>Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)</i></p> <p><i>This should be included in the SEA even though it is not mandatory until 2023. The Local Planning Authority have signed up to deliver it, and with the river being adjacent to the development seems appropriate to include river based BNG assessments as well as the terrestrial ones.</i></p> <p><i>Chapter 5 Climate Change</i></p> <p><i>We support and encourage all means of reducing the effects of climate change and carbon neutral development, through sustainable development, and in particular the encouragement of resource efficiency, waste minimisation and recycling.</i></p> <p><i>Green Infrastructure</i></p> <p><i>The inclusion of aspirations for greening river corridors for biodiversity improvements are also encouraged, set back of development would create recreation and access for maintenance benefits. Any lighting should be set back and suitably designed with wildlife in mind. This would also align with the aspirations of the Taunton Garden Town.</i></p> <p><i>The masterplan should recognise the importance of wildlife corridors and connectivity. Given that the development is alongside an important Somerset River that runs through Taunton and is a real asset for everyone, as well as being critical for biodiversity, it would be good to see the development embracing opportunities to enhance this linear habitat and protect it for species to live in and to move through safely and successfully.</i></p> <p><i>Longrun Meadows is at the upstream end, followed by French Weir and the park, moving through Goodland Gardens and Firepool and finally straight into Children’s Wood Local Nature Reserve. The whole stretch is part of the Tone and Tributaries Local Wildlife Site as discussed above. There are also several Local Nature Reserves adjacent to numerous sections throughout this stretch and so anything to help make these areas more connected and more resilient to long term change the better. Considering the Firepool site in relation to the part it plays in the wider landscape for species and habitats would be beneficial.</i></p> <p><i>Flood Risk</i></p>	



Response from	Summary of Consultation Responses	Incorporation into the SEA
	<p><i>As indicated SW&amp;T should follow guidance for new development and flood risk in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. This details flood risk, permitted development and advice on managing flood risk.</i></p> <p><i>New Development</i></p> <p><i>New development should be encouraged to create green infrastructure and maintain habitats, for example creating wildlife corridors or green space, tree planting etc.) and advocating the use of green roofs.</i></p> <p><i>We look forward to working alongside SW&amp;T in reducing Climate Change, as well as working in partnership with the Taunton Flood Alleviation Strategy.”</i></p>	

**Table 5.3:** Consultation responses from statutory consultees on SEA Environmental Report

Response from	Summary of Consultation Responses	Incorporation into the SEA
Natural England	<i>The SEA Report concluded that, following mitigation measures, residual adverse effects could be ruled out, except for minor adverse effects on climate change and water. Natural England concurs with the findings.</i>	No action required
Environment Agency	<p><i>We can agree with the outcomes of the draft SEA Environment Report, although it is noted that:</i></p> <p><i>Under table 4.4: Assumptions for the SEA Objectives 7. Water - An approximate 10m buffer zone from a watercourse should be used in which no works, clearance, storage or run-off should be permitted (page 34).</i></p> <p><i>Under an earlier approved planning application there will be an access road, street lighting and the amphitheatre within this area.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, I agree with point 2 there must be no increased risk of flooding to third parties through the development south of the river.</i></p>	No action required
Historic England	<i>The Masterplan depends on the Heritage Assessment carried out by Cotswold Archaeology in August 2022 for its heritage evidence. This concedes that it is principally a desk-based study (p14) and assumes and builds on the accuracy of information contained in previous heritage reports, such as that carried out in 2017 in support of the 2019 planning approval. But in doing so it makes little reference to evidence in that report upon which assertions are now based, making it difficult in reading the current report in isolation to verify in confidence its conclusions. There are few visuals and no sections for example which would help provide demonstrable evidence in this respect.</i>	<p>No action required. Comment relates to the Masterplan.</p> <p>HE were directed to the Town and Visual Impact Assessment (TVIA).</p>
Historic England	<i>Para 5.60 of the Heritage Assessment states that the proposed development is likely to be discernible on the skyline in some views which encompass the two church towers but that owing to distance and intervening built form development will not detract from these non-specific views and their significance will not be harmed. This is something of a qualified conclusion, especially perhaps given that the Context Appraisal in the Design Review document references in section 2.03 on Heritage the key vistas of the two churches. In that development height is likely to be one of the main challenges of the</i>	<p>No action required. Comment relates to the Masterplan.</p> <p>HE were directed to the TVIA.</p>

Response from	Summary of Consultation Responses	Incorporation into the SEA
	<p><i>masterplan the impact of the development in views of the Taunton’s skyline may mean that views of the church spires within the town and further afield could be significantly affected. Due to the close proximity of the site and the bulk of the units, this could have a considerable impact in near and further away views. Accurate long sections through the site might help to establish the scale of development that could be accommodated, and demonstrate that what is proposed is then acceptable.</i></p>	
<p>Historic England</p>	<p><i>At present it is not clear that the heritage evidence supports the overall massing of the masterplan proposals, and that the settings of the churches can be respected and harm avoided simply by creating views of them as part of the site’s layout. It will be important to ensure that the development overall in its massing and regime of heights does not undermine the strategic and historic dominance of the churches’ settings.</i></p>	<p>No action required.                      Comment relates to the Masterplan.                       HE were directed to the TVIA.</p>
<p>Historic England</p>	<p><i>Historic England does not have any objection to the SEA conclusions (email correspondence with the Council; 07.03.23).</i></p>	<p>No action required</p>

## 5.2 Updating the Masterplan: Heritage matters

- 5.2.1 Further to comments received on the Masterplan from Historic England, the Council revised the Maserplan using text in **Box 5**. The revisions will not change the findings of the SEA and Historic England have confirmed that Historic England does not have any objection to the SEA conclusions.

### **BOX 5: Text revisions to the Masterplan relating to Historic Environment**

- Text under the “Non-physical effects” heading under Heritage section of 3.04 should be expanded upon to reflect the comments of HE to the effect of the following: *“Comments from Historic England have suggested that the indicative visuals as provided within the Masterplan, particularly in relation to the height and massing of proposals within block 5 as shown, could potentially generate a significant impact on the setting of the Church of St Mary Magdalene and St James Church. In response to this, further design principles have been incorporated into the Masterplan, the heights parameters plan has been updated, and it is recognised that further detailed heritage evidence will be required to support planning applications in relation to block 5 in particular. Whilst the visuals remain included within the Masterplan document, they are indicative only, and in themselves will hold no weight in the decision making process on future applications. As such, whilst it is recognised that the Masterplan proposals may have a level of heritage impact associated with them, it is considered that the above mentioned principles and additional evidence required at application stage provide sufficient hooks within the Masterplan, combined with national and local planning policies to consider at this stage that significant effects are unlikely to result”*.
- The heights plan in section 4.00 and the height parameters plan in section 9.00 should be amended to identify a potential heights *range* for the buildings in block 5 which correspond to a 4-5 storey height. The plans could also, usefully provide the heights of the GWR car park and Canal Court/Lock House on the diagram for reference. These changes should be supplemented with the following annotations: 1) to explain that the heights identified within the plans are not definitive, and are indicative broadly of the heights which may potentially be appropriate, subject to detailed design considerations around heights, scale and massing, and submission of appropriate demonstrating evidence; and 2) to explain that further evidence in relation to building heights and massing and potential heritage impacts associated with views and settings of the church towers of St Mary’s and St James will be required to support specific proposals as applications come forward, particularly in block 5.
- Include further clarification within the Building Design Principles (section 6.00) under the “massing and heights” heading for Block 5 buildings clarifying *“Up to 4/5 storeys”* and identifying that *“scale, massing and height of buildings in these blocks will require further consideration of impact in relation to heritage and townscape as detailed proposals come forward”*.

## 6 How the environmental and sustainability effects of the Local Plan will be monitored

### 6.1 Monitoring

6.1.1 The SEA Regulations require that significant effects resulting from the implementation of the Masterplan should be monitored. SEA Regulation 17 states that:

6.1.2 *“The responsible authority shall monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of each plan or programme with the purpose of identifying unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and being able to undertake appropriate remedial action”.*

6.1.3 The monitoring requirements typically associated with the SEA process are recognised as placing heavy demands on authorities with SEA responsibilities. For this reason, the proposed monitoring framework focuses on those aspects of the environment that are likely to be negatively impacted upon, where the impact is uncertain or where particular opportunities for improvement might arise.

6.1.4 The purpose of monitoring is to measure the environmental effects of a plan, as well as to measure success against the plan’s objectives. It is therefore beneficial if the monitoring strategy builds on monitoring systems that are already in place. It should also be noted that monitoring could provide useful information for future plans and programmes.

6.1.5 Monitoring the impacts should seek to answer:

- Were the assessment’s predictions of sustainability effects accurate?
- Does the development contribute to the achievement of desired sustainability objectives?
- Are mitigation measures performing as well as expected?
- Are there any unforeseen adverse effects? Are these within acceptable limits, or is remedial action required?

6.1.6 The SEA guidance suggests that SEA recommendations for monitoring and reporting activities can be integrated into the regular planning cycle. As part of the monitoring process, Somerset West and Taunton Council are required to prepare Authority Monitoring Reports<sup>23</sup>. It is anticipated that elements of the SEA monitoring programme for the development could be incorporated into these processes. The monitoring targets will be informed by the SEA Framework and its indicators.

6.1.7 Whilst the SEA process has not identified any significant negative effects associated with the development it is considered that monitoring may be beneficial to ensure the successful implementation of recommended mitigation and enhancement measures set out within the Masterplan. Monitoring suggestions are set out in **Table 6.1**

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<sup>23</sup> Somerset West and Taunton Council (2022) Monitoring Report. Available at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-base-and-monitoring/authority-monitoring-report-amr/> [Accessed on: 20/03/23].

**Table 6.1: Proposals for monitoring adverse sustainability impacts of the Masterplan**

SEA Topic	Indicator	Scale and frequency	Target
Biodiversity	Condition of Children’s Wood LNR and other potentially affected designated sites	Annually, Plan area wide	Increase
	Number of Planning Approvals granted contrary to the advice of Natural England or the Wildlife Trust	Annually, Plan area wide	Zero
	Percentage loss of the ecological network	Annually, Plan area wide	Zero
Climate change	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per capita	Annually, Plan area wide	Decrease
	Renewable energy generation	Annually, Plan area wide	Increase
Population and material assets	Amount of waste generated as a result of new developments	Annually, Plan area wide	Decrease
	Amount of recycling processed	Annually, Plan area wide	Increase
Water	Number of planning permissions granted contrary to Environment Agency advice	Annually, Plan area wide	Zero
	Quality of watercourses	Annually, Plan area wide	Increase
	Water efficiency in new homes	Annually, Plan area wide	Increase

Habitats Regulations Assessments  
Sustainability Appraisals  
Strategic Environmental Assessments  
Landscape Character Assessments  
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments  
Green Belt Reviews  
Expert Witness  
Ecological Impact Assessments  
Habitat and Ecology Surveys



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