

City of Wells Neighbourhood Plan

Submission Consultation Draft



2019-2029

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Draft Wells Neighbourhood Plan

Submitted to Mendip District Council under Regulation 15/16 of The Neighbourhood Plans (General) Regulations 2012.

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1. FOREWORD

In October 2013, at a meeting of Wells Civic Society, the idea of a Neighbourhood Plan was put forward as a result of a discussion initially about the High Street. In 2014, Wells City Council set up a Steering Group to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for Wells. This was made up of equal members of Wells Civic Society and Wells City Council. The Plan proposal was launched in July 2014. A draft was produced and a consultation carried out with the people of Wells under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Plan regulations.

The policies and proposals set out in the draft Plan were broadly supported by the people of Wells and consultees. However, at a meeting in December 2016, the City Council resolved to disband the Steering Group. Following election of a new City Council in May 2018, a decision was taken to revive the Neighbourhood Plan. A new Steering Group was established and this draft is the fruit of their labours. It is very much based on the previous draft and is supported by two significant documents produced by consultants, AECOM, in collaboration with the Steering Group. These are a Housing Needs Assessment, a Masterplan featuring the three housing allocations within Wells and a Design Guide. These are set out as appendices to the Plan.

A note about Local Government Re-organisation

When reading this Plan, it should be noted that local government in Somerset is soon to undergo change. At the time of publishing this Plan for consultation, two authorities exist, Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council, each with different responsibilities. To meet planning regulations, that the Plan is set within the context of the most up-to-date picture in planning, the Plan refers to Mendip District Council where relevant, which is the current Local Planning Authority. On 1st April 2023, a new Unitary Authority covering the whole of Somerset will come into being. Before then, 110 Members (Councillors) have been elected in May 2022 to run the County Council for a year, and also to form a shadow authority for the new Unitary Authority. The new Unitary Authority will, on 1st April 2023, become the Local Planning Authority. Further information can be found here - <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/10568/Help-us-shape-a-new-unitary-council-for-Somerset> . As this Plan moves through consultation stages, references will be updated as and when necessary.

St Cuthbert Out Parish Council ("SCOP") started to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan in parallel with that of Wells City Council in 2012. However, in 2016 SCOP halted the process and no further work on their draft Plan has been done.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Community's Plan

This Neighbourhood Plan (the “Plan”) is *the community's plan*. It represents the community's vision and priorities for how they would like to see the local area change in the coming years and in doing so it sets out our local planning policies which will be taken into account as and when any proposals for development come forward in the City Council's administrative civil parish (neighbourhood) area.

The Plan is not one which can cover every issue identified as being important to the community: it has a focus on responding to proposals for development, the appropriate use of land and protecting areas of local value and importance. It puts us, as a community, in the driving seat when it comes to having a say over what, how and where development should take place where it requires planning permission. The box below summarises what the Plan can and cannot do. The Plan and its policies reflect our parish's own characteristics while recognising the need to align with both national and local authority planning policies.

Figure 1: A summary of a Neighbourhood Plan's “cans” and “cannots”

“It can...” ✓	“But it cannot...” ✗
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Develop policies specific to our area, for example, design of new development.✓ Protect the facilities and areas of land that the community values most such as community buildings, playing fields, etc.✓ Help us to get additional funding into the area, for example, through identification of projects or having a plan adopted (“made”)✓ Protect areas of land for conservation, biodiversity and landscape value.✓ Influence the type, location and design of development.✓ Help to secure additional funding for infrastructure and other projects.✓ Propose regeneration projects, transport solutions and areas of land for the allocation of housing and / or employment sites if we wish to do so.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Introduce policies which conflict with national or District Council “strategic” planning policies.✗ Force requirements on developers which make the delivery of development unviable.✗ Change regulations / legislation such as Building Regulations or Permitted Development Rights.✗ Simply repeat (duplicate) national or District Council planning policy.✗ Reduce the scale of new housing if proposed by the District Council.✗ Stop all development.✗ Deal with matters not dealt with through the planning system, for example:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change traffic speed limits• Increase broadband speeds• Enforce parking restrictions

The Plan covers the period between 2019 and 2029 and is therefore ‘in sync’ with the development plan documents produced by the District Council as the local planning authority.

The Plan Area

A Portrait of Wells City

Wells is located in Mendip district¹, south of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Ebbor Gorge National Nature Reserve. Farther afield, it is 21 miles from Bridgwater and the M5 to the west-south-west, the same distance to Weston-super-Mare to the north west and to Bath to the north-east. More locally, our nearest other towns are Glastonbury and Shepton Mallet.

Map 1: Wells and Environs



Wells is a place of contrasts. Officially recognised as England's smallest city (discounting the City of London), it is a bustling market town with twice weekly street markets. Located on the southern slopes of the Mendips, it looks towards the flat lands of the Somerset Levels.

It has a rich history and a unique heritage of high-quality buildings (including its Cathedral, Bishop's Palace and Vicars' Close) that have been protected as a conservation area since 1970. Its Mendip setting and access to open countryside (especially through Palace Fields) make a significant contribution to its sense of place. Its past is not only a powerful draw for tourists, but also for people who want to live or work here now.

According to the 2011 Census², Wells has a higher proportion of people aged 65+ than the Mendip, Somerset and national averages. This has caused concerns about an ageing city and the need to retain and attract young people in order to keep it vibrant.

¹ Until the new single unitary Somerset authority comes into being in 2022.

² At the time of drafting this Plan, more up-to-date census data from the 2021 census has not been published.

Figure 2: Wells Demographic Picture

	2001 Census	2011 Census	2019 Mid-year (population) estimates ³
Population	10,440	10,536	11,244
No. of households	4,800	4,912	-
Average household size	2.2	2.1	-
Ethnicity: White population	98.7%	97.6%	-
Ethnicity: Black and Minority Ethnic population	1.3%	2.4%	-

World-renowned for its historic buildings, Cathedral choir and specialist music school, Wells has a very active community life and a thriving cultural scene. This includes a literary festival; a food festival celebrating local produce; a contemporary art exhibition that attracts artists from all over the world; a music festival based at St Cuthbert's Church; a children's festival; an amateur theatre; and a film centre, as well as sports and leisure facilities.

Historically the local economy developed on the back of agriculture and industry, but its present and future growth is centred on the retail and visitor economies. It has the most diverse local economy of any of the Mendip towns with more jobs spread over a wider range of business sectors.

The economic benefits of tourism continue to grow in importance, providing employment opportunities in the large number of hotels, B&Bs, restaurants and cafes in the City and the heritage destinations and events. Data at District Council level indicates that the tourist spend for Mendip as a whole is £161m (Source: *Mendip Local Plan 2006-2029*) and that 3,570 jobs are directly related to tourism.



³ Mid-year 2019 projections. Data source on the Office for National Statistics website <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/12324parishpopulationestimatesformid2001tomid2019basedonbestfittingofoutputareastoparishes>

Figure 3: Important Employment Sectors in Wells

Employment Sector	% employed by sector ⁴
Wholesale / retail	17.3%
Education	12.9%
Health	12.4%
Manufacturing	8.7%
Construction	8.4%
Accommodation/food services	6.3%
Professional, technical and scientific services	5.9%
Other	5.3%
Public Administration & Defence	5.1%
Transport & Storage	4.0%
Information & Communication	4.0%
Administrative and support services activities	3.5%
Financial and insurance services	2.6%
Real estate activities	1.4%
Other sectors	2.2%

There is a high level of in-commuting (4,002), due in part to a limited supply of housing, and out-commuting (2,775) due to the proximity of Bath, Bristol and other centres of employment. In broad terms it is professionals who commute out to better paid jobs in Bath and Bristol and lower skilled workers who commute in⁵.

The number of new jobs is predicted to grow by 1,500-1,950 by 2029⁶. The increasing development of business services coupled with less centralised working and more remote working will provide more high value jobs, reduce out-commuting and enable the local workforce to compete for local housing.

⁴ Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

⁵ Source Mendip Local Plan, Table 1b at 2.7

⁶ Source: Mendip Local Plan 2006-2029

Mendip Local Plan forecasts the population to grow from 10,536 to 12,043 by 2029 and an additional 1,560 new homes will be provided to accommodate a greater share of the local workforce⁷. There is an urgent requirement, therefore, to plan for appropriately sized affordable housing to ensure this increase is in keeping with the area and has a high standard of energy efficiency.

Infrastructure and services (roads, schools and medical facilities etc.) need to be planned and developed in step with the projected increase in population.

Wells is already fortunate in having some superb green spaces close to the City centre, including the Recreation Ground and Palace Fields, but these need to be protected and enhanced for the future. The increase in population will require more provision to be made for green spaces for leisure and better equipped play areas. In addition, better links to the surrounding countryside will have to be developed, including wildlife corridors.

For Wells to retain the character of its compact commercial heart, it needs a mix of independent traders offering local produce and retaining the City's unique local identity, as well as attracting national chains to add to the diversity of the City's retail offer. As much as is possible, the balance of retail, food and commercial outlets needs to be maintained.

The City needs a sustainable transport strategy that enables it to become more pedestrian and cycle-friendly, with better car park provision and management, focusing on developing better local transport and less reliance on cars.

This Plan aims to build on the heritage, character and strengths of the City to ensure its continuing vitality and viability into the future. The work of the current and past councils, and its predecessors, in promoting the development of Wells is acknowledged, and is something which can be built on.

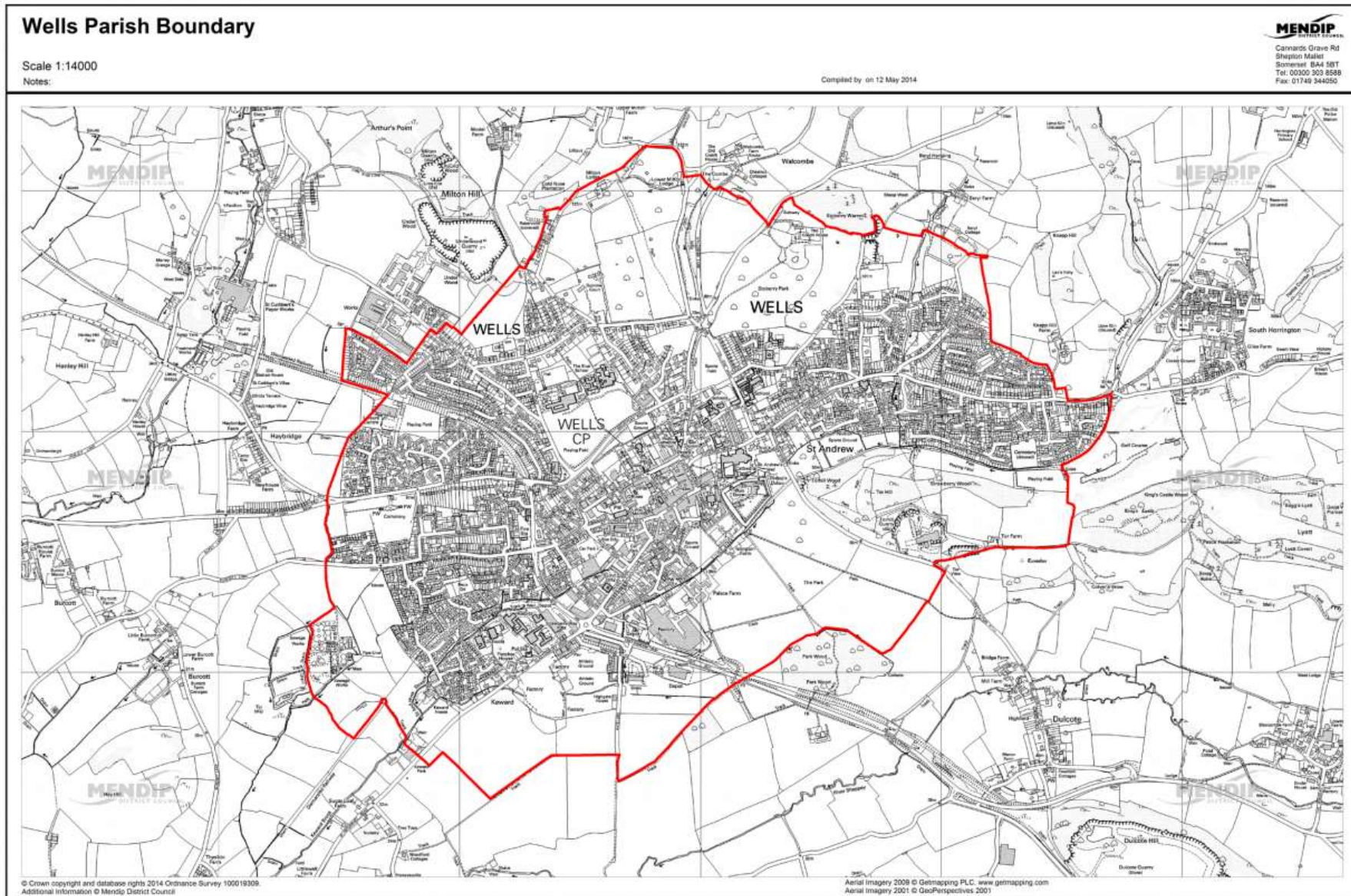
The Neighbourhood Area

The Neighbourhood Plan area (the whole civil parish) was approved by Mendip District Council ("Mendip") following consultation on the 8th of September 2014. Mendip subsequently confirmed that there was no need to re-apply for designation as regards the revived Plan. Map 2 shows the extent of the area.



⁷ Source: Mendip Local Plan 2006-2029

Map 2: The Neighbourhood Area



Note: The map base produced by Ordnance Survey is the most up-to-date available at the time of publication of this Plan and so some recent development may not show on the map.

Mendip District Planning Context

The Mendip District Local Plan⁸ provides the strategic policy context with which the policies in this Plan must align (or be in “general conformity”). Where relevant, this Plan references Local Plan policies where they relate to our specific policies. The following extracts from the Local Plan help to paint the vision and policy picture of the strategic policy context of most relevance to our Plan and City, although it is recognised that some of the original intended Vision may have had its course altered by changing circumstances brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Policies have not all been reproduced in full and the Local Plan should be referred to for the complete set of policies.

Vision

By 2029, Wells offers a wider range of housing, employment and community facilities which meet the needs of all sections of the community. The city continues to be celebrated for the quality of its landscape setting and built environment with new development, mostly provided for on previously developed land, being well designed and responsive to its surroundings.

The potential of the local economy has been realised. New employment space to the south of the city has allowed room for local firms to grow and new enterprises to be established, however the city as a whole continues to offer a range of premises to meet the needs of business, particularly in the professional, technical and knowledge based sectors. At the heart of the city centre, retailing and tourism remain as core parts of the local economy. To the south west of the High Street, redeveloped land now offers an improved range and choice of shopping to compliment that already available whilst the development as a whole has rejuvenated this important gateway to the city with design and architecture that makes effective links with the historic core.

The geography of the city has lent itself to the ongoing development and use of walking and cycling networks allowing more local people to gain access by these means to social, cultural and employment destinations, in turn contributing to healthier lifestyles.

⁸ See <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/planningpolicy>

Core Policy 10: Wells City Strategy

Wells is designated as a principal settlement serving a market town role to a wider rural catchment area and is a significant tourist and cultural destination. During the lifetime of the Local Plan, the overarching aim is to deliver new housing development to meet the needs of the workforce and local people as well as to maintain the aesthetic and economic health of the city for its residents and visitors. The following developments are proposed:

- 1,450 new homes will be delivered to accommodate a greater share of the local workforce in the city:
 - Around 800-1,000 new homes will come forward from already consented development sites and previously developed land (including the former Clares, Thales and Nutricia sites) and other sites within the Development Limits defined on the Policies Map. All proposals will be delivered in a manner which respects and enhances the city's historic core.
 - 350 new homes will be delivered on two greenfield areas as set out below. Both sites will be the subject of separate Development Briefs which will be adopted by the Council prior to any planning permission being granted.

Land South of Glastonbury Road – identified as CP10A on the Policies Map

- Land south of Glastonbury Road is allocated to provide up to 150 new homes. As a southerly second phase to the redevelopment of the Nutricia site it will be essential that the development is fully integrated with the preceding development area and sensitive to the prominent ridgeline which will define the southern edge of the site.

Land West of Wells – identified as CP10B on the Policies Map

- Land West of Wells (located between the A371 and Wookey Hole Road) is allocated to provide about 200 new homes, a site for a new 7 class primary school and public open space.

The southern portion of the area, capable of delivering a further 100-150 new homes is identified as a Future Growth Area offering flexibility in the supply of land should it be required to maintain the delivery of housing or make up shortfalls on brownfield sites. This land may be released for development during the Site Allocations process or under the provisions set out in Core Policy 2.

In response to concerns about urban coalescence with nearby Haybridge, the amenity value to which local people attach to the area and the findings of a Habitats Regulations Assessment, the diagram on the following page identifies the broad extent of the developable areas and indicative residual areas which will be safeguarded as a Local Green Space. A Development Brief will define in detail the extents, however for habitat offsetting purposes a minimum of 1.22 hectares for the Northern Development Area (NDA), and 4.1 hectares for the Southern Development Area (SDA) area north of the A371, will be required to be provided as managed habitat to offset the loss of foraging area available to horseshoe bats in the North Somerset and Mendip Bat SAC.

- Provision for around 1,500-1,950 new jobs will be made through:
 - Delivery of employment space, within the already consented sites at Cathedral Business Park and at Dulcote Quarry
 - Mixed use redevelopment of redundant employment sites where they arise, to deliver affordable, flexible premises for offices and small businesses.
 - Granting of consent of modest employment areas on other fringes of the city which deliver flexible modern workspace in a manner that is responsive to the city's setting.

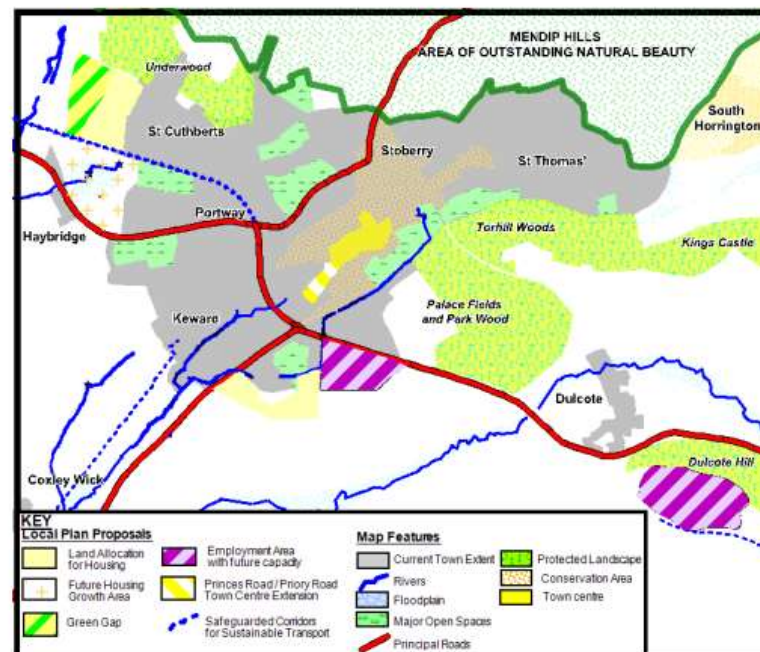
- Sensitive town centre development which complements the city's historic core should deliver:
 - up to 7,500sqm of new non-food retail floorspace through:
 - Redevelopment of land at Princes Road/Priory Road identified as CP10C on the Policies Map.
 - Smaller scaled shopping arcades through careful redevelopment of premises on both sides of the high street providing space for small retail businesses.
 - A proportion of the 9,750sqm of office space requirement (see Table 10).
- A Green Infrastructure Strategy for the city will be prepared to:
 - Identify how around 4.5 hectares of new open space will be secured from new development sites and other initiatives.
 - Identify priorities for expenditure of development contributions towards improvements to the extent and quality of public open spaces and accessible natural green spaces. This will include promoting best use of the network of open spaces across the town and links to the countryside beyond, particularly the Mendip Hills AONB, for multiple benefit including, for example, recreation, wildlife and improved accessibility.

In addition, the Council will work with partners, landowners and other interests to deliver:

- The multi-user path from Shepton Mallet to Wells and from Wells to Cheddar.
- Provision of additional car parking to serve the needs of visitors and users of the city centre.
- Further enhancement of the Conservation Area and wider setting of the city's historic core.
- Identified priorities for expenditure of development contributions towards infrastructure to support the growing population.

WELLS KEY DIAGRAM

A graphic representation of the major features, designations and proposals of the Local Plan



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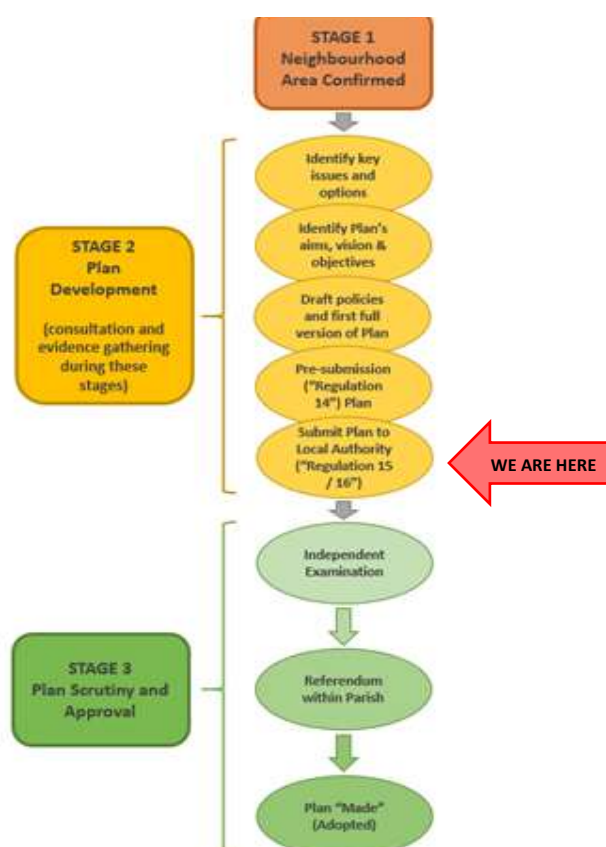
How Have We Got Here?

In order to produce the Plan, its development has been driven by a steering group, comprised of residents and City Councillors. It was recognised at an early stage that for the Plan to be truly representative of the planning issues of relevance in the City and to be *the community's plan*, we would need to conduct thorough engagement with those who live and work in the City. We also recognised that the Plan could not be properly developed without the input of organisations and Agencies with a district, county, sub-regional or national remit. As we set out in the Foreword, this version of the Plan is a second pre-submission version, the first being paused by the then City Council.

The process and types of consultation and discussion that we have gone through is documented in detail in our Consultation Statement which will accompany this Plan at Submission stage. However, the key methods we have used have included:

- Public meetings and events;
- A community questionnaire;
- Discussion with local businesses and local organisations; and,
- Directly contacting wider-than-local organisations and Agencies (strategic stakeholders) which have an interest in planning issues in the area.

Figure 4: Neighbourhood Plan Process



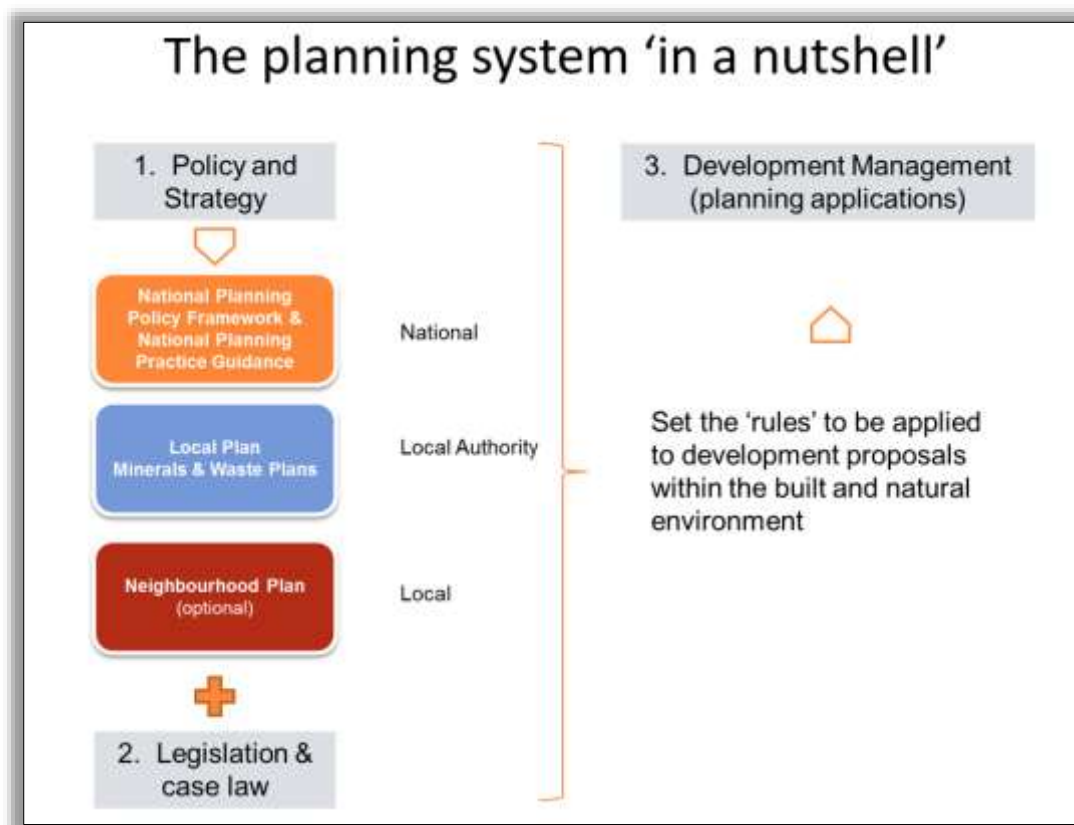
Our development of the plan was based on a desire to be open and encouraging comments and contributions from all quarters with the aim being to achieve consensus, but also to have debates about issues where the community was divided in its views.

Having developed the plan through this iterative approach, this Plan is being shared with the community and other stakeholders and, it is anticipated, will be revised to reflect comments before progressing through the regulatory framework. After this consultation on the revised Pre-submission Plan, formal Submission will be made to the local authority which will then arrange for an independent Examination of the plan before an independent Examiner. After that point, assuming that the plan passes through the Examination successfully, the Plan will be subject to a public Referendum where residents on the electoral register will be asked if they support the final plan. If the referendum answer is a "yes" from a majority of voters turning out on the day, the plan will be "made" (or adopted) by the local authority.

The Plan's Status

This Neighbourhood Plan, once made, will be part of the statutory development plan. That means that its policies will have significant weight (or 'real teeth') when it comes to being used by the local authority to help determine proposals for development submitted through planning applications. It will form the local tier of planning policy in Wells. It sits with the District-wide Local Plan (parts 1 and 2), produced by Mendip District Council (also part of the statutory development plan) and underneath the umbrella of national planning policy in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), as the main planning policy documents relevant to our area. Mendip District Council's Local Plan Part 1 deals with strategic planning policy while Part 2 details site allocations for housing, employment and community facilities across the district. Other important planning documents which govern specific issues are the Minerals and Waste Plans produced at the county-wide level by Somerset County Council.

Figure 5: Summary of the Planning System



The relationship between our Neighbourhood Plan and other planning policy documents is summarised in the illustration "The planning system 'in a nutshell'".

However, this plan should not be treated as a blueprint. When this plan is made (adopted) policies will need to be used by the local planning authority when it considers decisions that need to be made about development proposals submitted through the

planning application process. The Plan's policies, however, cannot guarantee that a proposal will be refused nor be granted permission, but the policies will carry significant weight, alongside policies of the NPPF, NPPG and the adopted Local Plan when weighing up the appropriateness of the proposal in question. If, during the lifetime of this Plan, a new revised Local Plan is adopted by Mendip District Council, where there is any conflict between the policies of a new Local Plan and our Neighbourhood Plan, the most recently adopted policy will prevail.

Sustainable Development

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) set out the Government's planning policy to which all plans and proposals for development should comply. The NPPF includes, at its heart, a "presumption in favour of sustainable development". It is important to understand what that means for our Plan as it sets the parameters within which we can make proposals and set policies.

When taking decisions on proposals for development this means that proposals should be approved where they accord with the development plan without delay; and where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF or specific policies in the NPPF indicate that development should be restricted. Translating this to

what it means for our neighbourhood plan, it states that "Neighbourhood plans should support the delivery of strategic policies contained in local plans or spatial development strategies; and should shape and direct development that is outside of these strategic policies"⁹. The



NPPF goes on to say that "Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies"¹⁰. Once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in a local plan covering the neighbourhood area, where they are in conflict; unless they are superseded by strategic or non-strategic policies that are adopted subsequently."¹¹

⁹ See paragraph 13, National Planning Policy Framework, July 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

¹⁰ Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in any development plan that covers their area.

¹¹ See paragraphs 29 and 30, National Planning Policy Framework, July 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Testing Sustainability

The Plan will require “screening” by Mendip District Council and the statutory environmental agencies (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) to determine whether or not a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) will be necessary. In broad terms, these assessments test the Plan for adverse impacts on the environment. Not every Neighbourhood Plan has to carry-out one or both tests. We will know once this version of the Plan has been through its consultation.

The Structure of Our Plan

Our Plan sets out the vision, aims and objectives for our area, which have been developed based on our extensive dialogue with the community and shaped by existing planning policies, plans and contributions of key organisations and Agencies.

Having explained our rationale for these, the Plan sets out our local planning policies on a theme by theme basis. Our themes have been derived by pulling together common aims and common key issues arising from consultation.

Within each theme we set out the aims and objectives to which the theme’s policies are seeking to respond, a summary of the characteristics of the theme and the key issues which have arisen during the Plan’s development. Then, for each policy we also set out our justification for why we need the policy and the key evidence which supports it.

It is important to note that, while we have packaged policies under theme headings, when development proposals are being assessed, the whole plan (i.e. all policies) should be considered as policies in one theme may apply to proposals which naturally fit under another. In other words, the Plan should be read as a whole.

Our Plan finishes with a summary of community actions, an explanation of how we will monitor and review the plan and a glossary which seeks to demystify some of the planning terminology used in our plan.

A Note About Planning Policies

The planning policies in this Plan are not able, within the context of planning policies and regulations, to provide a solution for every issue in the Parish. Broadly speaking, the following factors need to be remembered when looking at or using the policies in the Plan:

- Policies must be evidenced and justified, supported by written evidence gathered and community consultation;
- Policies need to relate to land-use and either protect something, propose something or be able to be used by the local planning authority to respond to a development proposal (i.e. help determine its appropriateness, or not);
- Policies should be ‘positively framed’ to support or enable development subject to various criteria / conditions;

- Policies cannot deal with certain “excluded matters” such as waste or minerals planning matters which are dealt with by the County Council;
- Policies in a neighbourhood plan should not simply duplicate policies set out elsewhere in policy at the national or local authority level. The neighbourhood plan forms part of the “development plan”, the other part of which is the district-wide Local Plan and other development plan documents produced by the district council. The policies across these documents should align, with policies in the neighbourhood plan being in “general conformity” with the strategic policies of the local authority’s Local Plan; and,
- It is the planning policies in the Plan which carry legal weight (or are the statutory element of the Plan).

Community Projects

We have identified several community projects during the development of the Plan which relate to various key issues identified during consultation. Some of these can only be delivered outside of the planning system or only in part. These actions and projects are likely to be explored and / or delivered by more than one responsible organisation, authority, agency or association and will require partner working. The City Council will help to facilitate the projects and action where possible and appropriate where there is not already a lead organisation pursuing them or the lead organisation is not identified in the action or project.

3. VISION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Plan sets out a Vision Statement which frames the aims, objectives and policies of this Plan and states what Wells should be like by 2029.

Wells Vision

1. *Wells will continue to be an attractive place to live, work and visit; sufficiently compact to retain its distinctive identity whilst accommodating the growth necessary to ensure its economic viability.*
2. *Wells will have accommodated its additional residents in housing that not only matches their material and economic needs, but which also contributes to the distinctive nature of its surroundings and incorporates high standards of design, energy efficiency and sustainability.*
3. *Parking will be made available where possible to meet the needs of residents and visitors while ensuring that the historic character of the city is not compromised.*
4. *The increase in population will sustain and develop the service and employment base in Wells, providing the necessary economic growth and reducing the need for in-commuting.*
5. *The additional population will have good access to health and education facilities.*
6. *The city centre will be thriving and vibrant, providing a range of retail and other services and facilities.*
7. *The character of the City's heritage and its landscape setting will be protected and enhanced.*
8. *The people of Wells will have good access to open spaces, play equipment and recreation facilities.*
9. *The visitor economy will have developed sustainably to be a strong sector, with employment opportunities and attracting sufficient investment to sustain the visitor attractions.*
10. *Wells will have achieved, or be close to achieving, carbon neutrality. Businesses and residents of Wells will have knowledge and understanding of the steps necessary to prevent catastrophic climate change and biodiversity loss.*

Aims and Objectives

Our intention is for this Plan to provide a consensus framework for the future development of Wells, balancing the preservation of the distinctive character of its heritage with the needs of a growing, dynamic City. Within this context we have developed a set of aims for the Plan. These provide the broad “direction of travel” within topics and represent an initial response to the key issues raised as important by the community in previous

consultations. They then inform our more detailed objectives within each topic which represent the direct response to how we can respond to or deliver the aims. The objectives also have either a policy response or project designed to help deliver change.

Aim	Objectives
Heritage and the Built Environment	
To ensure that the character of Wells and its heritage assets are protected and enhanced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Seek to protect and enhance the heritage assets of Wells. ii) To protect and enhance those buildings and features of the historic fabric and identity of the city which are not currently listed.
Housing	
To ensure the provision of the right kind of housing for a diverse community of varying ages and financial resources which respects Wells' character and reduces the impact on climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Seek to match the housing needs of our diverse community and of our ageing population by providing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) greater priority for smaller homes, including starter and smaller homes for purchase or rent, smaller homes for the elderly to facilitate downsizing, sheltered housing or housing with care and affordable housing for rent or shared ownership; b) lower priority for large homes; some achieved through inclusion to ensure viability of allocated sites and deliver a minimum percentage of affordable homes; and, c) accessible and adaptable housing to suit the needs of its residents. ii) Establish design principles so that new development is designed with regard to the existing character and context of Wells. iii) Proposals for new housing shall take account of the aspirations set out in the Climate Emergency Declaration passed by Wells City Council.
Moving Around	

<p>To ensure the provision of effective links into, out of and around the City which also encourage the use of sustainable alternatives to motor vehicles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Improve safe accessibility into and out of the City's centre and to and from new development for pedestrians and cyclists. ii) Maintain and enhance access into and around the High Street which benefits pedestrians (shoppers), retailers and other businesses. iii) Encourage improved management of City centre car parking provision and opportunities for parking solutions including "park and walk". iv) Support the improvement of public and community transport options (including frequency) in and around Wells.
<p>Retail and Commercial Buildings</p>	
<p>To maintain and regenerate the local economy of the city centre and promote its vitality and viability by not only protecting the retail economy and encouraging traders but also encouraging alternative uses which permit residential use and attract the local community to meet, eat and drink together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Maintain the unique character of the historic city centre which accommodates smaller retail units which in turn are attractive to independent traders ii) Support independent retailing in the city centre (including the twice weekly markets) to enable people to source local produce and services, maintain the local identity of the city centre and encourage the visitor economy iii) Encourage residential use of the city centre and also alternative uses which attract the local community to meet, eat and drink together. iv) Support the provision of small and flexible workspaces for micro, small and medium-sized businesses and those working from home as their main place of work.
<p>To help respond positively to the pressures of climate change in commercial, retail and business developments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Encourage new commercial, retail and business premises to exceed Building Regulations standards to limit and reduce carbon emissions.

Tourism

To support the visitor economy with a wide range of attractions and accommodation, strong links between major visitor attractions and other partners, and support for a wide range of cultural events and festivals.

- i) Support new developments which promote the visitor economy and extend the stay time of visitors
- ii) Promote and encourage links between the major visitor attractions within the City.
- iii) Promote and encourage cultural events and festivals within the City.

Environment

To develop, protect and enhance a green infrastructure network, which provides woodland, riparian (streams and brooks), grassland and hedgerow habitats and corridors for wildlife thus enhancing the linkages of the City to the surrounding countryside, and provides accessible open green space for people in the City and on its rural fringe.

- i) To ensure that planned development respects the landscape of Wells including, in particular, views of its heritage assets and rural context. In addition, to ensure that development on the edge of Wells is sensitive to its impact on both the rural landscape and the character of the historic settlement.
- ii) Preserving the green spaces within the city is important, whether informal or designated play areas. There is national recognition that green spaces enhance well-being and are beneficial to health.
- iii) Environment policies will protect and enhance existing natural space and create new wild spaces for the benefit of wildlife and people.

4. HERITAGE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Introduction

The Mendip Local Plan acknowledges that Wells is a settlement of exceptional merit. There are also policies set out at national level which afford good protection of heritage assets. Buildings and monuments of merit also enjoy legal protection through designations such as Listed Building and Scheduled Monument status. The city also enjoys protection from much of its areas being within a Conservation Area.

The purpose of the policies in this part of the Plan is to ensure that the unique character of Wells and its cherished heritage assets are respected and enhanced. This Plan uses Historic England's definition of heritage assets as any "building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.



Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority including local listings.”¹² Much of the core of Wells is covered by the Wells Conservation Area. This is focused on the medieval core comprising the Cathedral, Bishop's Palace and Vicars' Close but extends well beyond these landmark buildings to cover most of the centre of Wells.

The Conservation Area Appraisal (October 2011)¹³ (CAA) identified several issues relevant to this section of the Neighbourhood Plan. Alongside the legal protection afforded by statutory legislation, Local Plan policies the CAA provides additional support. The CAA sets out the importance of character areas, the built form and character within its boundary and the impact of, for example, traffic,



parking and signage which detract from these assets, as well as the potential impact of development proposals on the wider setting of Wells.

¹² See https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/hpr-definitions/#cat_H

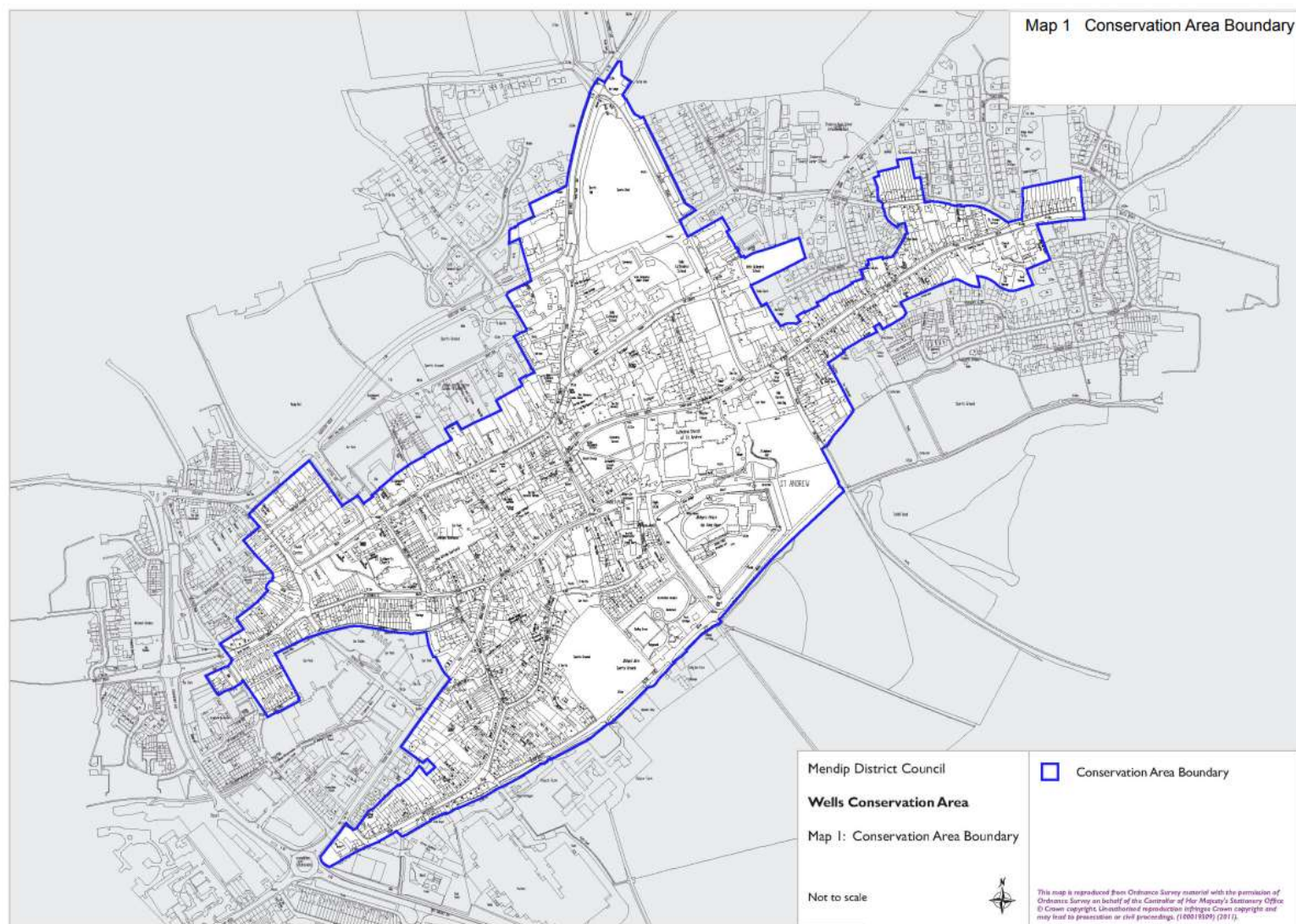
¹³ See https://www.mendip.gov.uk/media/7628/Wells-Conservation-Area-Appraisal/pdf/Wells_Consevation_Area_Appraisal_inc_Maps.pdf?m=635380137308930000

The CAA refers to the Article 4 Direction that restricts the scope of permitted development¹⁴ within the Conservation Area (see Map 3). The monitoring of compliance with these Directions is a recommended action in the Appraisal. Whilst power to take enforcement action lies with Somerset Council, a responsibility also rests with owners of listed buildings and heritage assets to care for them. Of the 3000 listed buildings in Mendip, Wells has 25 Grade 1, 36 Grade 2* and 275 Grade 2 listed buildings – the highest concentration in the District. Two historic parks or gardens registered at Grade 2* lie within the City boundary: Milton Lodge and the Bishop's Palace and former deer park, now known as Palace Fields. A ruined portion of the Bishop's Palace and the wells are also a Scheduled Monument, as is the Bishop's Barn. Fortunately, none of the listed buildings in Wells feature in Somerset's Heritage at Risk Register. The location of these heritage assets can be seen in the Conservation Area Appraisal.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Permitted development" is development which does not normally require planning permission to proceed. Further information is set out here - https://www.planningportal.co.uk/info/200187/your_responsibilities/37/planning_permission/2

¹⁵ See the maps section - https://www.mendip.gov.uk/media/7628/Wells-Conservation-Area-Appraisal/pdf/Wells_Conservation_Area_Appraisal_inc_Maps.pdf?m=635380137308930000

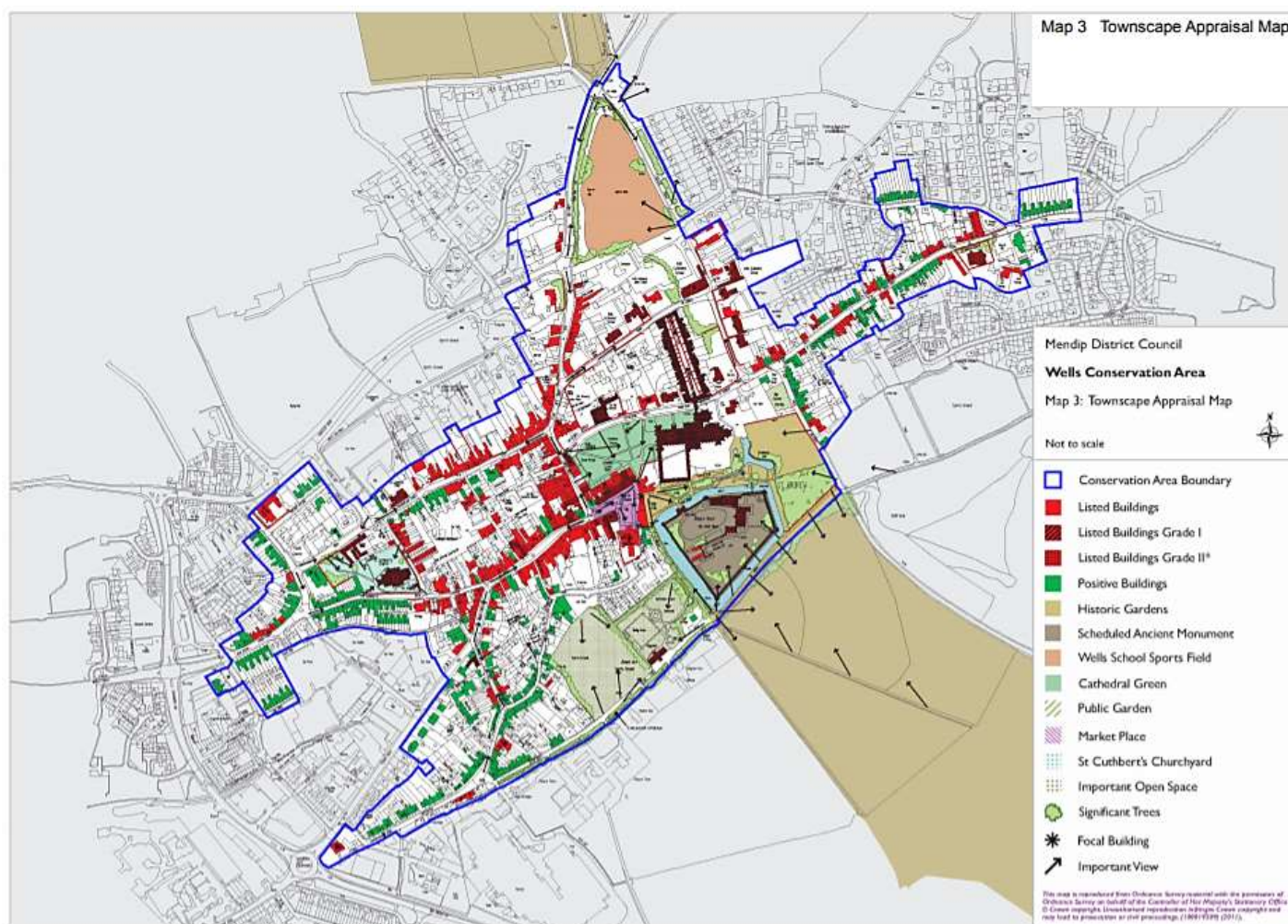
Map 3: Wells Conservation Area



Source: Mendip District Council, https://www.mendip.gov.uk/media/7628/Wells-Conservation-Area-Appraisal/pdf/Wells_Consevation_Area_Appraisal_inc_Maps.pdf?m=635380137308930000

The CAA also helps to set out the importance of the landscape setting for Wells, including important views into and outwith the City (for example, see Map 4). This has informed our own Wells Design Guide (see Appendix 1) which adds further local perspective to the content of the CAA analysis.

Map 4: Wells Conservation Area Appraisal Townscape Appraisal Map



Source: Mendip District Council, https://www.mendip.gov.uk/media/7628/Wells-Conservation-Area-Appraisal/pdf/Wells_Consevation_Area_Appraisal_inc_Maps.pdf?m=635380137308930000

Note: This map does not show Kings' Castle Scheduled Monument which, while outside of the neighbourhood plan area boundary lies just to the east of the map's extent. Therefore, the setting of this SM, which lies within our boundary, is important to note.

This Plan also endorses the Mendip Shopfront Design Guidance published in 2013 which aims to support and guide the care and protection of the City's unique heritage and recognizes that shopfronts are a significant feature of certain parts of the City.

Local consultation and the evidence drawn together to inform and support this Plan has suggested that the people of Wells support the need for a policy response to help maximise protection of the built environment.

The following sections introduce planning policies which focus on protecting and enhancing heritage assets and the built environment's character in Wells. They aim to add a local layer of protection to policies and designations already in place at the national level and in the Local Plan.

The following matrix shows the relationship between the aims, objectives, policies and community actions and projects.

Aim	Objective	Policy	Community Project
To ensure that the character of Wells, its heritage assets and setting are protected and enhanced	Seek to protect and enhance the heritage assets of Wells.	Policy HBE1: Heritage and the Built Environment	Project 1: The City Council will work with Somerset Council to complete a Settlement Setting Assessment.
	To protect and enhance those buildings and features of the historic fabric and identity of the city which are not currently listed.	HBE2: Local Heritage Assets	Project 2: Wells City Council will work with Wells Civic Society and Somerset Council to create and maintain a Non Designated Heritage Assets list

Policy HBE1: Heritage and the Built Environment

Justification

The Plan supports Development Policy 3 of the Mendip Local Plan which seeks to ensure that proposals affecting heritage assets or their setting demonstrate an understanding of the significance of these assets. A noteworthy example of how this can be achieved, without recourse to pastiche, is Cedars Hall at Wells Cathedral School which is contemporary in design and contrasts sensitively with the



neighbouring Georgian buildings.

The Plan recognizes that heritage assets have a significant level of protection through legislation, the NPPF, Local Plan policies and the CAA and by establishing a local list of registered local heritage assets, the assets themselves have sufficient protection from adverse change. However, while the recognition of potential impact is set out in the CAA, it is worth emphasizing and adding detail to it in this Plan.

Plan policy HBE1 seeks to reinforce the need to protect the unique and cherished character of the built environment of Wells from adverse impact from new development, whatever the use, and does so by referring to key factors which the Plan considers to be “high-quality” design in the Wells context. The policy also looks forward to encourage standards of development which surpass current standards in relation to sustainability, with a view to responding positively to climate change whilst ensuring that such change is appropriate to the unique context of the built character of Wells which is so critical to what makes the city the special place that it is and helps to underpin and sustain the local economy through tourism.



During consultation on the previous Regulation 14 draft Plan in 2015 there was support for policy coverage of design issues.¹⁶

Policy HBE1: Heritage and the Built Environment

1. All new development should be of high-quality design detail and materials, complementing the local vernacular, enhancing visual amenity and minimising any adverse impacts on the historic environment and neighbouring amenity.

2. Within the context of Local Plan policy DP3: Heritage Conservation and DP1: Local Identity and Distinctiveness, for proposals to be considered high quality in the Wells context, they should demonstrate how they have had positive regard to the:

- i) Wells Design Guide (Appendix 1);**
- ii) Wells Conservation Area Appraisal; and,**
- iii) National Design Guide 2019.**

¹⁶ 85.2% agreed with the proposed policy that development proposals which conserve and enhance a heritage asset will be supported where this is clearly and convincingly demonstrated by way of an assessment of the asset and its setting.

Policy HBE2: Local Heritage Assets

Justification

Historic buildings and the conservation area make up a large part of the Wells and convey a strong link with the past. They give the area a character and distinctiveness that make the city an inspiring and unique place to live, work and visit. Past and/or near losses of many fine buildings in and around the city demonstrate the continuing need to take an active approach to the protection and enhancement of its historic fabric and special identity.

It is important that all development respects the historic character of Wells as reflected in its conservation area. The district council documents referred to in the policy elaborate on what makes these areas special and how they should be preserved or enhanced.

There are a number of assets of local heritage interest which add to the attractiveness of the Wells but which are not protected by statutory listing. This is recognised at paragraph 6.20 of the Mendip Local Plan. This paragraph goes on to state that *“the Council, in conjunction with the local town councils and amenity societies, will continue to pursue the production of a Local List of Assets of Historic or Architectural Importance”*. *“The status and processes associated with the administration of a local list will be confirmed through the production of a Local List Supplementary Planning Document.”* This aspiration written in 2014 is yet to be achieved and the Wells Neighbourhood Plan sees this as a proactive opportunity to recognize the importance of such assets.

Working with Mendip District Council, Wells Civic Society drew up a Local List of assets of merit not yet nationally recognized. These assets are noted in the Character Assessments set out in the Wells Design Guide – 33 in the Conservation Area; 6 in Wells Residential East and 12 in Wells Residential West. Wells Civic Society have already produced photographs and criteria assessments for the Local List.



The Civic Society and City Council will work with Mendip District Council to seek to ensure that this list is fully recognized as local heritage assets.

This Plan recognises that there is good protection from damage to heritage assets in national policy and in the Local Plan. However, there are several buildings which are considered play an important role, within the local context, to the character of the city and could benefit from additional policy response.

HBE2: Local Heritage Assets

Non designated local heritage assets will be selected against the criteria set out in Appendix 2. Planning applications for demolition, development or alterations of buildings or structures recognised as local heritage assets will be expected to show what consideration has been given to retaining:

- i) the asset itself;**
- ii) its most distinctive and important features;**
- iii) the positive elements of its setting and immediate surrounds; and,**
- iv) the contribution the asset and its setting make to the character of the local area (whether in a Conservation Area or not).**

4.2 Community Projects

The Wells Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect and enhance the historic city. This is not achievable solely through planning policies and so the following actions and projects aim to help ensure protections are in place.

Project 1

The landscape setting of Wells must be maintained. The Wells Conservation Area Appraisal was produced in 2011 and it is now time to refresh this document and explore critical issues in relation to the setting of the city within the context of future housing allocations which may be at the interface between the existing settlement and open countryside. The City Council will therefore work with Somerset Council to complete a Settlement Setting Assessment.

Project 2

Wells City Council will work with Wells Civic Society and Mendip District Council to create and maintain a Non Designated Heritage Assets list and all entries, following appropriate consultation, will be approved by resolution of the City Council's Planning Committee and Somerset Council.



5. HOUSING

5.1 Introduction

As with other themes in this Plan, we must take our lead and be in alignment with the policies of the NPPF and adopted Mendip Local Plan. With regards to housing, this means that our Plan cannot seek to reduce the scale of housing proposed as a minimum for our area in the Local Plan nor remove allocated housing sites. There are other policy areas already covered by the Local Plan where we do not need to repeat policy, such as the requirements for affordable housing provision as a percentage of market led housing sites.

As acknowledged earlier in this Plan, the Mendip Local Plan acknowledges that Wells is a settlement of exceptional merit. The Plan also recognizes that as a consequence, housing is expensive and also that the numbers of jobs in Wells exceeds the number of Wells people who can fill them. This results in more people travelling in to Wells to work than travel out¹⁷. To deal with this imbalance and, in particular, to accommodate a greater share of the local workforce, the Mendip Local Plan currently allocates three housing sites in Wells namely: West of Keward – 100 homes, the Tincknells site – 25 homes and the Rugby Club site – 80 homes over the Plan period to 2029. Although much of the additional housing has been immediately west of the Wells City boundary and therefore outside the jurisdiction of this Neighbourhood Plan, the effects of the housing will be felt by the City.

With regard to any further housing proposals which come through the planning system over and above the Local Plan allocations, Wells residents were clear during consultation that they wish to see priority given to the use of previously developed land (brownfield sites) before building on green field land. Whilst it is recognised that development cannot be sequential, using all brownfield land first before green field sites, this Plan echoes national planning policy which requires planning policies to make as much use as possible of brownfield or previously developed land¹⁸.

The first Regulation 14 consultation process suggested that the people of Wells have no real desire to add to this influx of additional residents. Indeed, they are more concerned to ensure that the infrastructure can cope with the demands put upon it and that the character of the natural and built environments are protected from adverse impact. Accordingly, this Neighbourhood Plan proposes no additional housing allocations.

However, this Plan can introduce policies which add local specificity and detail to existing planning policies elsewhere. Local consultation and the evidence drawn together to inform and support this Plan has suggested that, where developed, the people of Wells need housing that comprises the following elements:

¹⁷ Census 2011. Travel to work data. Mendip Highway Investment Strategy Evidence Base

¹⁸ See NPPF, paragraph 117, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>. During the first Regulation 14 consultation, 84.6% of respondents agreed that priority should be given to previously developed land (brownfield sites) before greenfield land is built upon.

- meets the diverse needs of the population across age-groups and their ability to afford somewhere to live;
- is attractive in terms of design, of good quality and appropriate to its setting, of particular importance in a historic city such as Wells; and,
- is limited in terms of energy use and carbon dioxide emissions in its construction and future living.

The following sections introduce planning policies which focus on protecting and enhancing the three key elements identified above and responding to the overall environment aim, providing local detailed policies which build upon and add specificity to planning policies at the national and district levels.

The following matrix shows the relationship between the aims, objectives, policies and community actions and projects.

Aim	Objective	Policy	Community Action or Project
To ensure the provision of the right kind of housing for a diverse community of varying ages and financial resources which respects Wells' character and reduces the impact on climate change.	i) Seek to match the housing needs of our diverse community and of our ageing population by providing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) greater priority for smaller homes, including starter and smaller homes for purchase or rent, smaller homes for the elderly to facilitate downsizing, sheltered housing or housing with care and affordable housing for rent or shared ownership; b) lower priority for large homes; some achieved through inclusion to ensure viability of allocated sites and deliver a minimum percentage of affordable homes; and, c) accessible and adaptable housing to suit the needs of its residents. 	Policy H1: Responding to Local Housing Demand and Needs	Project 3: The City Council will seek to work with Somerset Council to keep the Housing Needs Assessment up to date. Project 4: The City Council will seek involvement in negotiations relating to infrastructure and planning gain between developers and Somerset Council and Somerset Integrated Care Board.
	ii) Establish design principles so that new development is designed with regard to the	Policy H2: High Quality	

	existing character and context of Wells.	House Design	
	iii) Proposals for new housing shall take account of the aspirations set out in the Climate Emergency Declaration passed by Wells City Council.	Policy H3: Housing Fit for the Future	

Policy H1: Responding to Local Housing Demand and Needs

Justification

This Plan has the opportunity to introduce policy which complements and adds a layer of detail to national and Local Plan policies for housing. We have a robust evidence base which includes an independent Housing Needs Assessment, Design Guide and emerging strong response at city council, local authority, county and national levels to the climate emergency. This has been driven by initial support for the direction of our housing policies in our previous 2015 consultation.

In accordance with paragraphs 193 and 194 of the Housing Needs Assessment, the City Council will seek to work with the new Unitary Authority to keep the Assessment up to date.

In the 10 years to 2016, the number of residents under the age of 15 years have fallen by 9%, and by 2031 this decline will have accelerated to a reduction of 15.9%. At the other end of the age range the number over the age of 65 years is projected to increase by 8%. And by 2031 this will have increased by 33.7%, far more than is the case in the rest of Mendip or nationally¹⁹. These figures have important implications for the future vitality and viability of Wells as a place to live and work, and places significant demands on the future provision of housing, schools and health services within the City.

During our initial consultations during 2014 and 2015, there was significant support for policies on housing which is affordable to local people, housing for families and younger people and for retired people wishing to downsize issues.²⁰ These areas of support was reiterated during consultation on our previous Regulation 14 draft Plan in 2015. These soundings in the local community have been “sense checked” by our recently completed Housing Needs Assessment²¹ which has focused on three issues: 1. Tenure & Affordability; 2. Type & Size; and, 3. Specialist Housing for Older People.

Projections indicating that the population of Wells is ageing are confirmed in the

¹⁹ Source: 2010 ONS

²⁰ 72.2% agreed with the policy that support will be given to proposals for housing which consider local housing need and provide at least 40% affordable homes. 72.8% agreed that priority should be given to the inclusion of smaller homes of 1 and 2 bedrooms on each new development in reflection of an identified need for small homes for single households for both young and old. 72.8% agreed with the policy that a minimum of 10% of new homes (per development of a minimum size of 10 dwellings) shall be built to meet Lifetime Home Standards so as to offer particular benefits to older and disabled people.

²¹ See <https://www.wells.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan#0>

Housing Needs Assessment which revealed the following.

- a) *In terms of demographic change, the analysis suggests that there is little attraction and retention of younger generations, particularly the 25-44 age cohort, which often comprises young families. Meanwhile, there is a higher proportion of residents aged 45-64, some of whom are likely to reach retirement age over the plan period to 2029 and likely to require housing to support their evolving needs*
- b) *It is therefore important for new development to prioritise housing that is appropriate both to young families with children and older households.*

However, when reaching its conclusion as to “Type and Size”, it took into account the finding that market housing for sale is increasingly unaffordable and that those on the median incomes are unable to live outside the rented sector. Based on this, the HNA concluded that the most appropriate dwelling size mix should be as set out in policy H1 below.

Wells needs more young people and families to maintain its age balance, but the shortage of houses which are affordable to young people and young families means that they can struggle to afford property to rent or buy in the City. The Housing Needs Assessment confirms the evidence of the Mendip Housing Register which indicates that there is a need for increasing the number of smaller homes for the elderly, to enable them to downsize and free up larger family sized accommodation. While we wish to encourage a greater number of affordable houses brought forward in Wells as a proportion of total development, we are content that the Local Plan policy which requires a minimum of 40% of housing on qualifying sites to be for affordable tenures in line with the Government’s definition in the NPPF, we wish to provide more local steer to developments with regard to type and size of dwelling in particular.

We are conscious, therefore, that our local population, in line with national trends, is ageing as people live longer. In order to future proof for this as far as possible, we wish for development to reflect the likely needs of older people. This extends to ensuring that development is adaptable for people with mobility issues. In seeking this requirement, housing can also be built in a way which ensures adaptable accessibility for other age groups and household types at any stage in life. We encourage developers to adopt Building Regulations standards relating to accessibility in new housing for all new housing development where viable to do so²². Encouraging developers to use this approach is set out in our policy below and should be read alongside the design criteria set in policies H2, H3 and HBE1.

Policy H1: Responding to Local Housing Demand and Needs

1. To help ensure a locally appropriate supply of dwelling types and sizes, development proposals which demonstrate how they meet the local needs, demand and demographic profile of Wells City as supported by evidence in

²² Building Regulations Part M4(2) replaced Lifetime Homes as an optional requirement in 2015. While this is an optional requirement our local needs suggest that accessible housing is a priority. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-and-use-of-buildings-approved-document-m>

an up to date Housing Needs Assessment will be encouraged. This should include consideration of demand for dwellings suitable for young people and families wishing to form new households from within the City and retired and older people wishing to downsize and remain in the City.

2. Proposals for accommodation for older people, the disabled and others with mobility constraints should take into account the mobility of residents and be located within easy access (close proximity / short distance and on level ground) to local facilities, services and public transport. Developers are encouraged to provide as much housing as viable following Building Regulation Part M4(2) standards.

3. Developers are encouraged to provide dwelling types in the following approximate proportions across tenures to help deliver a balance in supply to meet local demand, where feasible and viable; and unless it can be demonstrated that other up-to-date evidence indicates alternative proportions:

- i) 20% 1 bedroom dwellings;**
- ii) 30% 2 bedroom dwellings;**
- iii) 30% 3 bedroom dwellings;**
- iv) 10 % 4 bedroom dwellings; and,**
- v) 10% 5 bedroomed dwellings.**

4. Proposers of major housing development (on sites of 10 or more dwellings) should engage with the local community and City Council, prior to submission of a planning application to the local planning authority, to help ensure that proposals take into account both this plan's aims and objectives and the views of the local community.

Policy H2: High Quality Housing Design

Justification

Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make developments acceptable to communities. Winston Churchill is reputed to have said that we shape buildings and then they shape us. In July 2021, the Housing Secretary launched the government's "Building Beautiful Places Plan" which resulted in quality, beauty and sustainability being acknowledged in the National Planning Policy Framework as "material considerations" to be taken into account when determining housing proposals²³. Policy H2 sets out the key guidance, policy and criteria that new housing should meet in Wells in order for it to

²³ See NPPF, section 12 and paragraph 134. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/12-achieving-well-designed-places>

be considered “high quality” in the Wells context. This includes the need to fully consider the Wells Design Guide (see Appendix 1) and the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit²⁴ adopted by Mendip District Council as a Supplementary Planning Document and national guidance, as well as issues particularly important in Wells. The policy accords with the focus of the Environment Act 2021 on biodiversity net gain.

Policy H2: High Quality Housing Design

1. All new development should be of high-quality design, complementing the local vernacular, enhancing visual amenity and minimising any adverse impacts on the built environment and neighbouring amenity.

2. For proposals to be considered high quality in the Wells context, they should meet the requirements of the Wells Design Guide (Appendix 1), Local Plan Policy DP7: Design and Amenity of New Development and the associated Net Zero Carbon Toolkit, and the National Design Guide and Code. They should have particular regard to the following considerations, where feasible, viable and applicable:

- i) be well-related to scale, form, density and character of the settlement / built-up area and of its setting;**
- ii) respect and have no significant harm on historic buildings, character and heritage assets and their setting;**
- iii) have no adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring uses (factors such as noise, tranquility, light pollution, enjoyment of space);**
- iv) ensure good and safe accessibility for refuse, emergency and delivery vehicles, where feasible, taking into account likely levels of on-street parking by residents and / or employees;**
- v) provide safe and easy access for pedestrians and cyclists onto existing pedestrian footpaths and cycle lanes and, where feasible provide segregated, direct, safe routes to enable good connectivity to local facilities and amenities. Pedestrian and cycle routes should ensure permeability and “desire line” point to point access into and out of the development;**
- vi) have boundary treatment well-related to those of nearby dwellings and other buildings to complement the character of its setting;**
- vii) provide publicly accessible green infrastructure which plays a multi-functional role at the heart of the development to enable safe and easy access for health, leisure and recreation purposes**
- viii) delivers a net gain of a minimum of 10% in biodiversity and across the site in accordance with the British Standard for Biodiversity (BS 8683)**

²⁴ See https://www.mendip.gov.uk/media/29839/Net-Zero-Carbon-Toolkit/pdf/Net_Zero_Carbon_Toolkit.pdf?m=637776719764030000

improves interpretation of geodiversity and makes a positive contribution to help mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change by encouraging the efficient use of energy and where appropriate micro-scale onsite/distributed renewable energy generation; and,

- ix) for proposals for dwellings, provide private amenity space (gardens) appropriate to dwelling type and size and to inform consideration of the appropriateness of a proposal's suitability in relation to the character of the built environment and the site's setting, applicants should provide an analysis of proposal's plot size(s) and building footprint in relation to garden areas of the dwellings in the surrounding area.**

3. Where development proposals do not meet the design requirements above and those set out in the Wells Design Guide, applicants are required to demonstrate (as part of a Planning Statement) why the proposal cannot meet requirements due to feasibility, viability and applicability.

4. Proposals for major development should aim to have gone through a design review process prior to the submission of a planning application.

Policy H3: Housing Fit for the Future

Justification

In 2019, Wells City Council passed a Climate Emergency Declaration.

Energy use in buildings is one of the largest sources of CO₂ emissions. There is the opportunity for new buildings to be designed to be more energy efficient, reduce carbon emissions and make use of renewable energy generated on site. This is required to meet the UK legal commitment of net-zero emissions by 2050 and local climate emergency declarations.

Incorporating these principles when buildings are constructed is more effective and cheaper than modifications later. The Government is introducing new Building Regulations to require new development to meet increasing emission reduction targets²⁵. Developers are encouraged to exceed these standards wherever feasible and viable in order to help move more quickly to achieving net zero targets.

Alongside Building Regulations, policy DP7 in the adopted Local Plan Part 1 addresses various requirements for new development including measure to achieve energy efficiency through siting, layout and design and maximising opportunities for use of sustainable construction techniques, use of sustainable drainage systems, renewable energy generation on site, water efficiency measures and minimising waste. Mendip District Council requires developers to provide a Sustainability Statement addressing policy DP7 for major developments, and to provide information for minor developments before a planning application can be validated.

²⁵ For example, from 15th June 2022, all new dwellings must produce 30% less carbon dioxide emissions than standards required up to that point. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conservation-of-fuel-and-power-approved-document-1> for further details. Further changes to tighten standards are expected in 2025.

Passivhaus provides a model by which energy efficiency and sustainable construction can be achieved and use of Passivhaus accreditation is encouraged.

Policy H3 below adds a level of specificity relevant to Wells, to achieve lower emissions, reduce energy use and contribute to energy efficiency through careful siting, layout and design.

New developments should respond to the site specific microclimates and sun paths and use these as key design drivers to increase the environmental comfort for building users, both internally and externally. Correct building orientation can contribute to passively heating or cooling buildings and effective energy usage. Street trees and landscaping for shade and shelter can also contribute to thermal comfort and energy efficiency. Building materials should be selected to both reflect the sites surroundings and to reduce embodied energy. This may include light weight materials, sustainably produced materials, recycled or locally source materials.

The Wells Design Guide provides guidance on building layouts, local design features, landscaping and appropriate materials. This policy should also be read alongside the Wells Design Guide.

Developers should demonstrate the measures incorporated in any scheme to comply with policy H3. Developers are encouraged to incorporate this information into sustainability statements and questionnaires provided in response to Mendip District Council's Local Plan Policy and Supplementary Planning Documents.

Policy H3: Housing Fit for the Future

- 1. Applications for residential developments should incorporate design measures to maximise energy efficiency through the siting, layout and design of the scheme.**
- 2. Proposals should include all practical measures to incorporate sustainable construction techniques, renewable energy generation, landscaping for shade and shelter, water efficiency measures, waste minimization and to reduce embodied energy in construction materials.**
- 3. Measures to reduce carbon emissions through the above measures should be informed by the Wells Design Guide.**

Playspace Statement

Outdoor play and leisure facilities are vital to health and wellbeing. "Back Out to Play in Mendip 2007 states that "Overall provision of open space in Wells is low". This remains the case. The Local Plan Part 1 sets provision standards and the strategic

policy framework for open space in new housing development. This includes the protection of play areas against loss through Local Plan policy DP16: Open Space and Green Infrastructure. This Neighbourhood Plan already protects Local Green Spaces in Wells, within which some play areas are located (see policy ENV3). Outside of these areas, play areas which comprise solely of hardstanding / tarmac surfaces will have protection through Local Plan policy DP16. Mendip District Council is publishing a green spaces audit and Supplementary Planning Document for consultation in the summer of 2022 and this will provide further support for green open spaces.

Therefore, while it is important for this Plan to recognise the critical importance of play areas (both within / part of and outwith green spaces), there is no need to introduce a planning policy which would simply have the same role as and repeat much of Local Plan policy DP16.

Statement relating to housing and infrastructure

Several public comments during the public consultation as responses from the leaflet or at public meetings related to lack of infrastructure consequent on recent housing developments on the edge of Wells. Comments have been sought from the County Council relating to “Schools Sufficiency” and also the Somerset Integrated Care Board regarding impact on the two surgeries in Wells. The latter deal with funding and resources for local GP practices. The Schools Sufficiency officers referred to the land adjacent to the Bovis development on Wookey Hole Road which is currently reserved for a future primary school. However, having taken into account the recent reduction in birth rate together with other factors they have decided that there is no need in the Plan period for a new school. The Somerset Integrated Care Board would assess any appropriate contribution relating to a development on any of the housing allocations based on a formula. The relevant factors would be the increase in population, the GP list size and any evidence of over capacity together with any additional GP space required to support the development.

Although negotiations relating to infrastructure and planning gain would take place between developers and the successor to Mendip District Council and Somerset Integrated Care Board, Wells City Council would seek involvement in such negotiations.

Community Projects

Project 3

The City Council will seek to work with Somerset Council to keep the Housing Needs

Assessment up to date.

Project 4

The City Council will seek involvement in negotiations relating to infrastructure and planning gain between developers and Somerset Council and Somerset Integrated Care Board

6. MOVING AROUND

6.1 Introduction

Following the removal of a train service to Wells in the 1960s, the majority of residents of Wells travel to work or elsewhere by car.

To these must be added those who do not use the limited public bus service to Wells as visitors or to pass through on their way to other destinations.

Somerset County Council (soon to be replaced by Somerset Council) is the statutory highway authority and has been consulted as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process. It is fully recognised that any improvements to the highway will have to be agreed and co-ordinated by the highway authority.

This section comprises one policy and three projects. The purpose of the policy is to encourage developers when preparing their proposals. Such proposals should take account of the need for those using such developments to be able to move around the city safely, conveniently and with a choice of modes including walking and cycling. The projects are commitments by the City Council to implement improvements in Wells which will support the aims of the policy.

The following matrix shows the relationship between the aims, objectives, policies and community actions and projects.

Aim	Objective	Policy	Community Action or Project
To ensure the provision of effective links into, out of and around the City which also encourage the use of sustainable alternatives to motor vehicles.	i) Improve safe accessibility into and out of the City's centre and to and from new development for pedestrians and cyclists. ii) Maintain and enhance access into and around the High Street which benefits pedestrians (shoppers), retailers and other businesses. iii) Encourage improved management of City centre car parking provision and opportunities for	MA1: Constraints and Opportunities on the Local Highway, Cycleway and Footpath Network	Project 5: The City Council will carry out an independent survey of local retailers, shoppers and pedestrians to help clarify traffic calming options in the High Street. Project 6: The City Council will work with Somerset Council to improve parking signage within Wells and seek appropriate solutions to the shortage of parking within the City.

	parking solutions including “park and walk”. iv) Support the improvement of public and community transport options (including frequency) in and around Wells.		Project 7: The City Council will work with Somerset Council and relevant service providers to improve the provision of bus services to, from and within the City.
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Policy MA1: Constraints and Opportunities on the Local Highway, Cycleway and Footpath Network

Justification

The consultation exercise²⁶ showed considerable support for better links on foot and by cycle within the Plan area and beyond. The need for better links is of increasing importance due to the development of housing on the west side of Wells. Much of this new housing will border Wells but will be sited in the Parish of St Cuthbert Out. The fact that Wells is a compact and relatively level settlement should encourage travel on foot and by cycle. However, at 2%, the level of cycling in Wells is low compared to other Somerset towns. The barriers to cycling at present are primarily “the busy road network which surrounds the City, the constrained and busy arterial routes and the impermeability of the City centre to cyclists”. This was the conclusion reached by the document “Mendip Market Towns: Wells” produced jointly by Somerset County Council and Sustrans in August 2012.²⁷ This document proposes minimal improvements to the existing network for the following which could have a significant positive effect for cycling:

- the City Centre
- Tor Hill and South Horrington route
- Dulcote route
- Keward route and
- Haybridge route

The scope of this document is developed from an earlier report “City of Wells Cycle Network”²⁸ produced by Sustrans and local groups in March 2007. The report was regarded as a work in progress document, designed to inform and guide future development in the City as it changed and developed. The objectives of the network were to link residential areas with significant destinations including schools, health

²⁶81.5% agreed that with the policy that proposals for residential development shall incorporate pedestrian and cycle access to and around the City centre from such developments. 82.7% agreed with the policy that proposal for residential development shall contribute to the cost of improving the city's existing pedestrian and cycle network.

²⁷ [Mendip Market Towns: Wells, Sustrans 2012](#)

²⁸ [City of Wells Cycle Network Report, Sustrans 2007](#)

centres, shops, City Centre and work places. It also refers to the former railway line from Coxley to Wells as a logical traffic free route to Jocelyn Drive and the cycle/walk network. This line is identified in the Mendip Local Plan as a 'Safeguarded Corridor for Sustainable Transport'.



Provision of additional cycle racks within the City Centre would be a further encouragement to cyclists. Many extra cycle racks have been provided in the last 12 months.

Improving the free-flow of people to gain access to the centre of Wells in a manner which is not only speedy and convenient but also sustainable is important if we are to maintain the quality of our built environment and the local economy. We have identified a number of transport constraints, opportunities and projects which can be implemented, in part, through this Plan, and in part through working with other bodies and agencies responsible for transport issues and infrastructure (such as the Highways Authority, Mendip District Council and the Police). These are highlighted on Map 5 below.

During our initial consultation during 2014 and 2015, there was significant support for policies on and the introduction of transport solutions including cycle and footways, park and walk and pedestrian prioritization in some areas. These areas of support were reiterated during consultation on our previous Regulation 14 draft Plan in 2015 – as set out below. Policy 1 which proposed that residential developments should incorporate pedestrian and cycle access to and around the City centre from such developments was supported by 81% - 132 of the 147 who commented. Policy 2 which proposed that residential developers should contribute to the cost of improving the city's existing pedestrian and cycle network was supported by 82% - 134 of the 147 who commented.

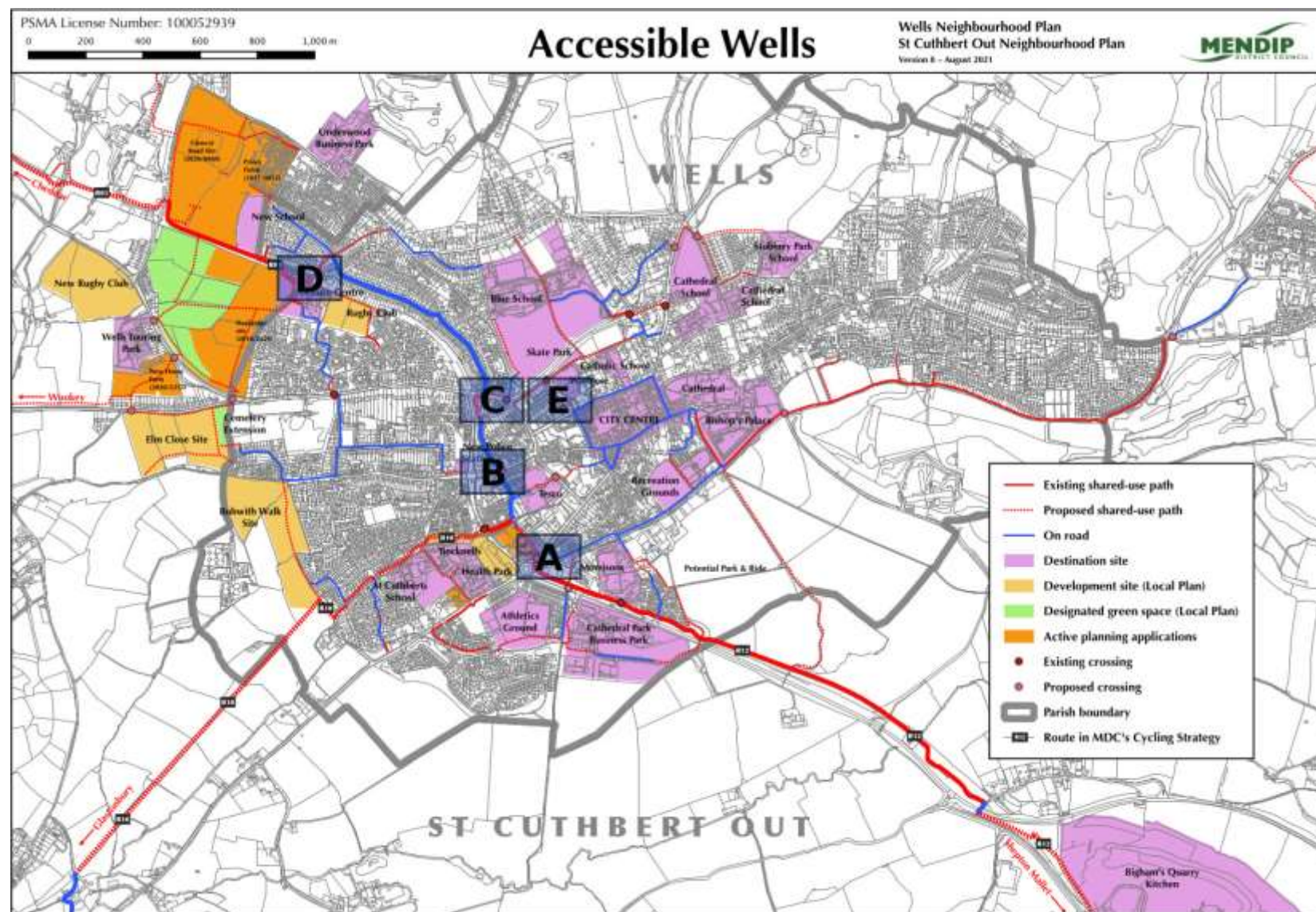
Wells Transport Plan

The Wells Transport Plan, set out in the following section, captures the key projects in

the city which are required to improve accessibility and active travel in and around the city.

Efforts are being made by the Strawberry Line Group to improve cycle access in to Wells from the east and west. These efforts need to be matched with changes to the road network within Wells to improve access for cyclists, walkers and wheelchair users (shared-use routes).

Map 5: Accessible Wells

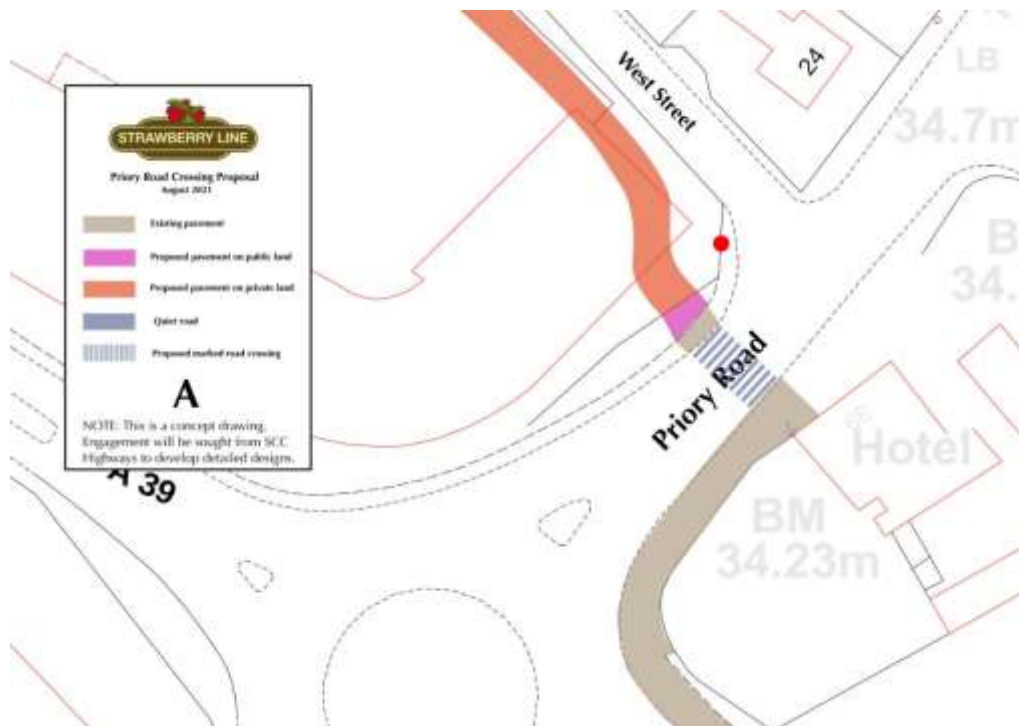


To effect these changes indicative proposals are set out below relating to the following interchanges:

Indicative proposals relating to:

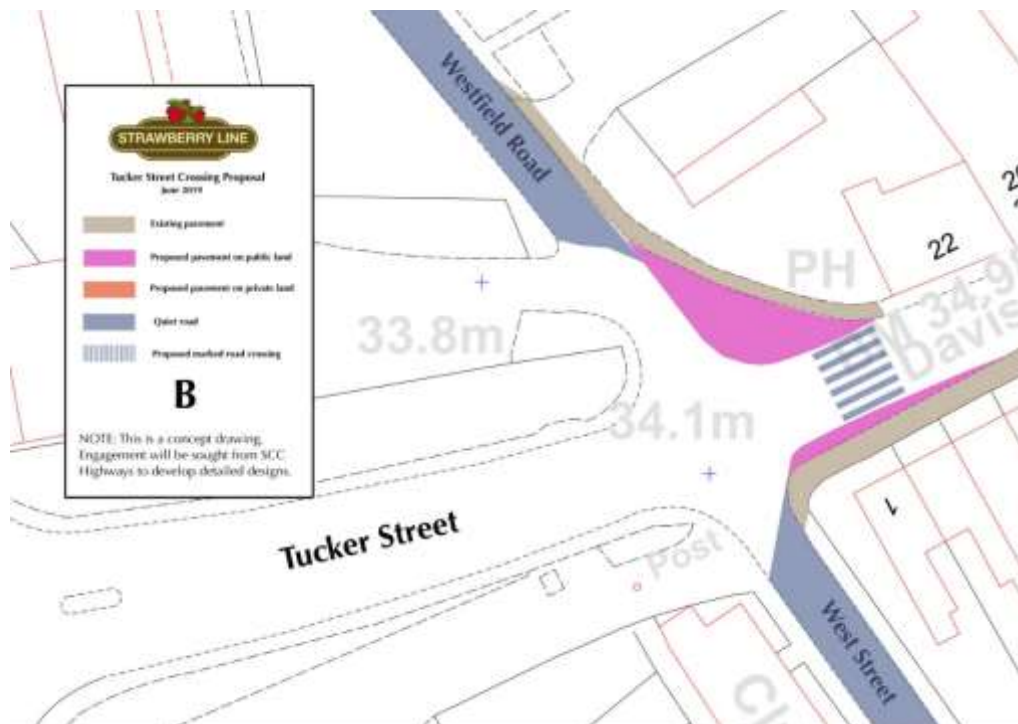
- A. Priory Road
- B. Tucker Street
- C. Portway
- D. Leisure Centre Link
- E. Lovers Walk

Map 5A. Priory Road:



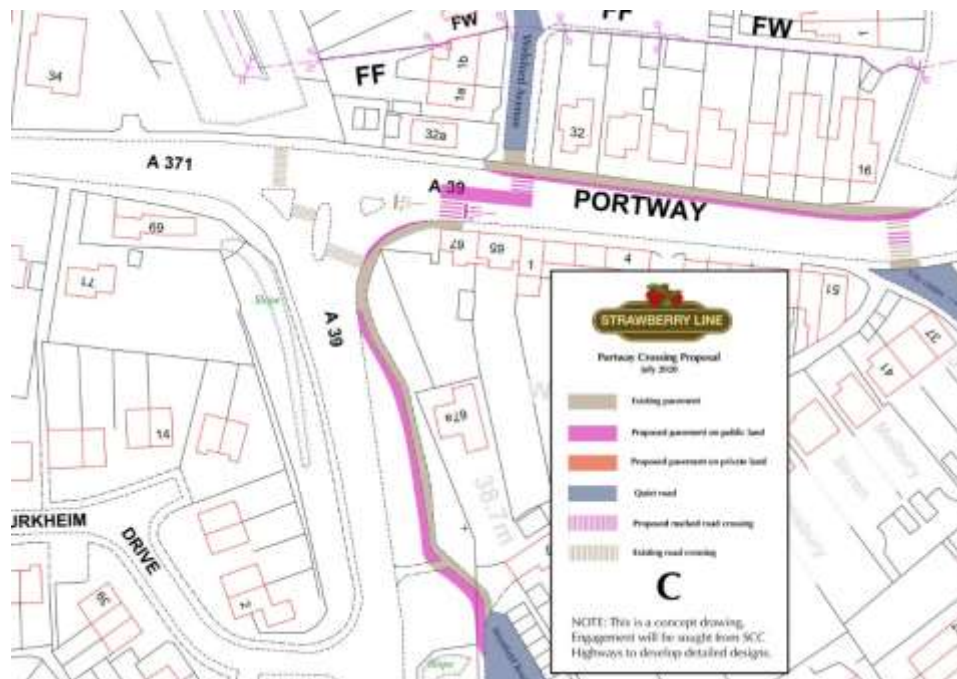
Enlarge the existing pedestrian crossing and footway to West St as a temporary shared-use route until the Lidl /Travis Perkins site is redeveloped. Engage with Lidl to plan a suitable shared-use path through their site.

Map 5B. Tucker Street:



Tighten the Westfield Road junction with Tucker St and install a raised table crossing from West Street to Westfield Road – this is a recommendation by Sustrans.

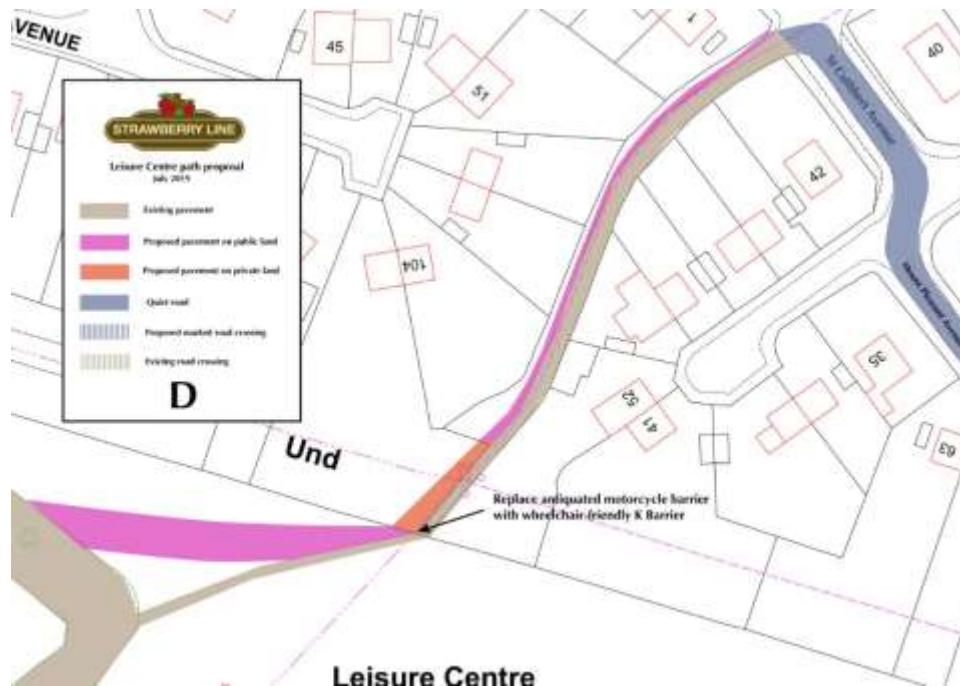
Map 5C. Portway



This major junction needs radically re-thinking to improve safety for shared-use path

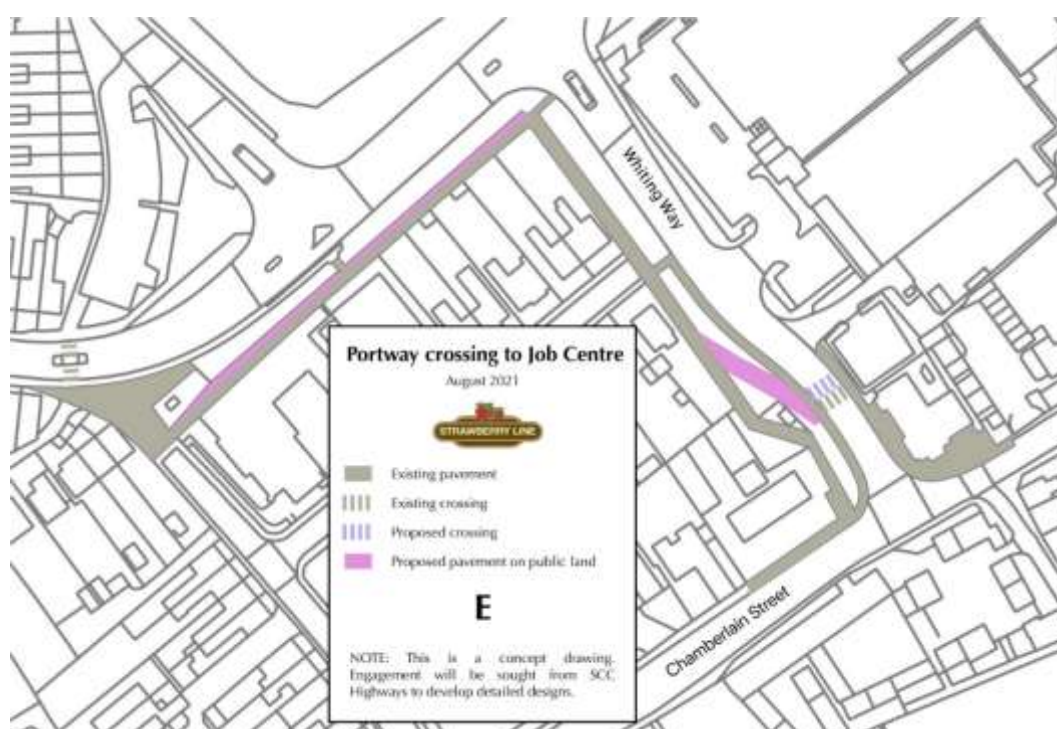
users. (a) The desire line south-north crosses Portway from the Westfield Road path to Welsford Avenue, but the existing three stage crossing is unsuitable. (b) The desire line from Welsford Avenue to City Centre uses the existing footway and pedestrian crossing to Portway Avenue, but the footway is too narrow for a shared-use path.

Map 5D. Leisure Centre Link



Removal of the barrier to the north of the Leisure Centre and improvement of the path surface leading to Mount Pleasant Avenue would create a useful cycle link.

Map 5E. Lovers Walk



- (a) Widen existing path to become a shared-use path and remove 'no cycling' signs.
- (b) Widen existing path parallel to Whiting Way and spur through shrubbery by electric substation to existing pedestrian crossing by Job Centre.

These suggestions for junction improvements emanated from a group of local cyclists in 2019 and were then discussed with a City Council Working Party in 2021. Between January and May 2022, they were then focussed on by Matthew Prince, Senior Active Travel Officer SCC Highways and Kelly Knight, Principal Sustainable Travel & Tourism Officer – Mendip DC, in discussions with Wells City Council.

In addition, the three housing sites proposed in the Local Plan – west of Keward; the Tincknells site at the junction of Strawberry Way and Glastonbury Road and the Rugby Club site at Portway need to incorporate cycle ways and links to the network.

The aim of the policy below is to help deliver the projects and opportunities identified in the Transport Plan.

MA1: Constraints and Opportunities on the Local Highway, Cycleway and Footpath Network

1. Our Transport Plan, as set out on Maps 5 and Maps 5A to 5E (inclusive), identifies the key transport and accessibility constraints, opportunities and the network's key features contributing to the character of Wells.

2. Where relevant, development proposals will be supported which:

- i) deliver identified opportunities and projects and / or make a financial contribution to costs and / or resolve identified constraints. Where financial contributions are made, they should be secured through community infrastructure levy or section 106 obligation; and / or,**
- ii) do not erode the built and landscape character of Wells and the proposal's setting; and / or,**
- iii) demonstrate how they respond positively to the Wells Design Guide and Conservation Area Appraisal; and / or,**
- iv) do not exacerbate identified constraints or satisfactorily mitigate adverse impacts which arise from the proposal.**

6.2 Community Projects

For this topic, the projects are as follows.

Project 5

A significant number of those consulted²⁹ identified a measure of prioritisation for pedestrians in the High Street as an important means of making shopping a more pleasant and safe experience - and hence supporting the local economy. This view was contradicted by a number of retailers who expressed the view that the ability of car drivers to have close access to shops would benefit all concerned. However, the potential benefits for retailers and shoppers alike are such that improved access for pedestrians in the High Street between 1000 and 1600 on market days is a project worth pursuing. Such a project could benefit not only retailers and shoppers but also provide an opportunity for the popular market to be expanded. This could also give opportunities to those waiting for a market stall allocation.

At their meeting on the 27th January, the Council decided to proceed with traffic calming measures in the High Street. Since then, discussions have taken place between the Council, Mendip and Somerset councils with a view to commissioning a feasibility study. The Council will pursue this initiative.

Project 6

The lack of adequate long-term car parking in Wells has not only been acknowledged by Mendip District Council³⁰ but also was a common response during the consultation process. Nearly 2000 commuters drive in to Wells every working day. Reluctant to pay for car parking, many commuters resort to on-street car parking which causes environmental and amenity problems – such as wasted energy by those driving around in a search of a space and the unattractive aspect of cars fronting the Bishop's Barn and along Silver Street, an attractive route to the Moat. In 2009, Mendip's Parking Strategy Report accepted that the worst parking problem was in Wells. They referred to evidence that the then demand for parking at peak periods could not be met and

²⁹ 67.9% - 110 of the 146 consulted in 2015

³⁰ Parking Strategy Report 2009; Wells Conservation Area Appraisal 2011; Mendip Local Plan Core Policy 10

the situation would worsen with time.

The Report concluded that as providing for visitors is such an element of the economic vitality and viability of Wells, the demand for additional parking needed to be addressed. Two years later, Mendip's Conservation Area Appraisal acknowledged this problem and recommended that Mendip should work with the County Council to ensure that there is adequate car parking provision in the City centre and that new traffic management schemes should be produced if required. The Mendip Local Plan acknowledges the need for "provision of additional car parking to serve the needs of visitors, residents and users of the City centre".³¹ Traffic management schemes would comprise not only re-consideration of the charging tariffs but also clearer signage and draw on the work done by the Civic Society in 2012 and presented to the City Council.

In the 2015 consultation, 74% - 120 out of 142 – who commented, supported the need to improve parking signage.

The City Council will work with Somerset Council to improve parking signage within Wells and seek appropriate solutions to the shortage of parking within the City.

Project 7

The introduction of additional housing during the Plan period on the western side of Wells will increase traffic flows on roads into Wells. To avoid reliance on the car and hence increased traffic flows on road into Wells and pressure on car parks adequate bus services are essential. In its Future Transport Plan, the County Council has committed to maintaining essential bus services and those linking housing on the edge of Wells with its centre are considered to be such.

Furthermore, the visitor economy is, to an extent, dependent on those coming to Bristol or Bath or Castle Cary by public transport, then being able to continue their journey via an adequate bus service to Wells. Such bus services are essential in terms of promotion of the visitor economy which underpins the vitality of Wells.



The FTP Implementation Plan 2013-2017 embraces the concept of "localism" as a positive process and as having "the potential to allow communities to take on local services such as Community Transport" and secure funding through the CIL process. The Plan aims to promote engagement with the County Council to maintain essential bus services to and from and also within and around Wells by whatever means.

Currently, there are plans to expand the 67 bus route to provide a service to and from Wells city centre from the outlying new estates on the west side of Wells.

³¹ Core Policy 10: Wells City Strategy

81% - 131 out of 146 – who commented, supported the need referred to below for improved bus provision.

As part of the Government's Climate Emergency agenda Somerset County Council has received funding to improve public transport in the form of an initiative called Bus Back Better (BBB). The money will be used to support a partnership between Somerset, which is our Local Transport Authority (LTA), bus operators and bus users with the intention of producing a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). At the June 2021 council meeting Wells City Council agreed to make a submission to Somerset County Council as part of the Government's Bus Back Better Campaign. Councillors have carried out surveys of passengers at the Wells Bus Station gaining their views on the bus service, the bus station and existing routes. We have also sought suggestions and views on possible new routes.

The City Council will work with Somerset Council and relevant service providers which have agreed an Enhanced Partnership (EP) to implement the Somerset Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). It has also recently set up a Wells Bus Users group which has links with the voluntary organisation, the Somerset Bus Partnership, to work with bus users and ensure the BSIP goals are achieved in Wells.

7. RETAIL AND COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

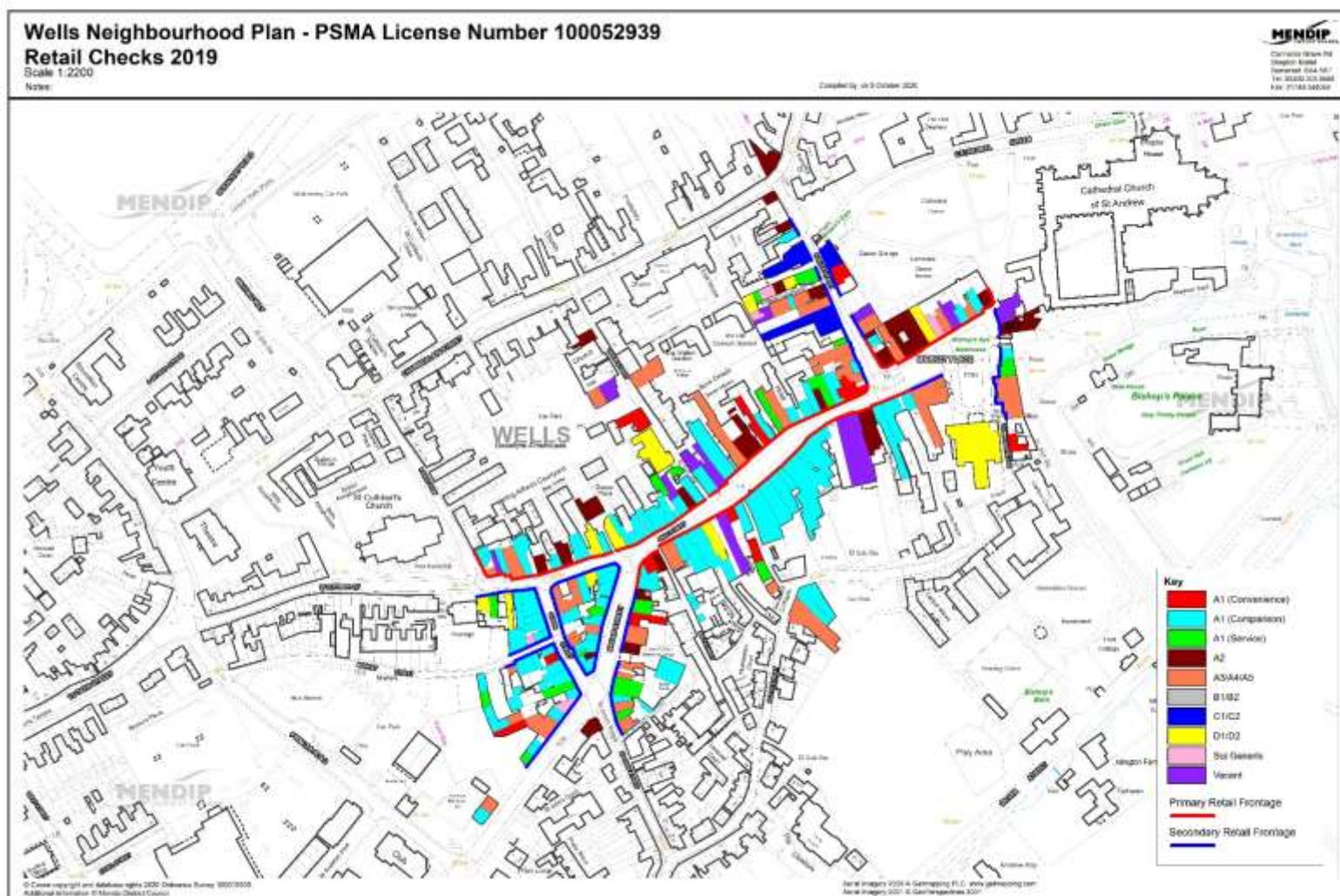
7.1 *Introduction*

Wells currently has a vibrant retail economy with a range of retail outlets in primary and secondary streets as well as a twice weekly market held in the Market Place. However, rents and business rates are reportedly high and many retailers are subject to seasonal fluctuations in trade, factors likely to be influenced by the pandemic, changing shopping behaviours and economic recovery.



There is a combination of independent traders and national chain stores and both high and low value shops, and the markets offer a range of local produce. This attracts residents and visitors and serves the varied demographic and socio-economic mix of the City and its hinterland. While data from 2019 is prior to the pandemic and the shock felt by the city centre as a result, the picture has remained relatively positive for Wells and the centre has few more vacancies since that time.

Map 6: Wells City Centre Retail Composition 2019



Due to the nature of the historic built environment there are constraints on the size and layout of retail premises as well as specification concerning the shop fronts (Mendip Shopfront Design Guidance 2013). Whilst this helps to maintain the character of the City centre and its unique sense of place, these constraints on size and layout of retail premises can inhibit development.



The following matrix shows the relationship between the aims, objectives, policies and community actions and projects.

Aim	Objective	Policy
To maintain and regenerate the local economy of the city centre and promote its vitality and viability by not only protecting the retail economy and encouraging traders but also encouraging alternative uses which not only encourage residential use but also attract the local community to meet, eat and drink together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Maintain the unique character of the historic City centre, which accommodates smaller retail units which in turn are attractive to independent traders. ii) Support independent retailing in the City Centre (including the twice weekly markets) to enable people to source local produce and services, maintain the local identity of the City Centre and encourage the visitor economy. iii) Encourage residential use of the city centre but also alternative uses which attract the local community to meet, eat and drink together. iv) Support the provision of small and flexible workspaces for micro, small and medium-sized businesses and those working from home as their main place of work. 	RCB1: New Development within the Primary Frontages
To help respond positively to the pressures of climate change in commercial, retail and business developments.	i) Encourage new commercial, retail and business premises to exceed Building Regulations standards to limit and reduce carbon emissions.	Policy RCB2: Commercial Development and Responding to Climate Change

Policy RCB1: New Development within the Primary Frontages

Justification

Evidence from traders³² supports the need for more long stay parking, better signage (see Moving Around projects 4 & 5) and better management of the pedestrian flow from the visitor destinations (the Cathedral and Bishop's Palace in particular) to the High Street and secondary retail areas. There is evidence³³, which demonstrates the increase in turnover and footfall in retail centres which have introduced restricted vehicular access. Traders in Wells agree³⁴ that trade increases on market days (Wednesdays and Saturdays) when footfall is higher.

Surveys of traffic signage (2012) and traders' opinions (2013) carried out by the Wells Civic Society supported the need for greater pedestrian priority and better signage for drivers and pedestrians.⁸

As far as can be achieved within the planning framework, the sustainability of the retail centre will be supported and enhanced to maintain its viability, vitality and character.

The above was true when the draft Plan was consulted upon in 2015 at a time when the retail component of the city centre was relatively secure and the word “coronavirus” was unheard of. We now live in a post pandemic world which has accelerated the prevalence of internet shopping.

Nationally, internet sales as a percentage of total sales have risen from 18.8% in May 2019 to 32.8% in May 2020 (Office for National Statistics). The effect of three “lockdowns” between March 2020 and January 2021 will have accelerated this trend. Retailers now have to consider selling online as part of their offer.



3232/Volumes/Untitled/Docs to WCC/Traders Survey Report Jan 2013.pdf

../../../../Volumes/Or

³⁴ See [./../../../../Volumes/Untitled/Docs to WCC/Questionnaire with all responses.pdf](#)

A Government report stated in May 2019 that *“The most successful high streets and town centres will need to change to reflect the communities they serve by transforming themselves into community hubs, playing to their strengths of offering human interaction and a unique sense of place and community”*. This view is strengthened by the arrival of the pandemic. This approach is entirely in line with the Grimsey Review 2 (July 2018) conclusions which highlighted the need to reshape town centres into community hubs which incorporate health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space, as well as some shops, while developing a unique selling proposition.

Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan should aim to protect the city centre as a focus for shopping, its vibrancy must be supported by attracting local people and visitors to meet, eat and drink together in the context of the heritage of a medieval city. The types of attractions could include elements related to health, housing, education, arts/entertainment, business/office space, and manufacturing and leisure. In general terms, opportunities should be considered which promote a high street culture which extends to day, evening and night time uses and so support Wells as a market city.

Due to the first lockdown in May 2020, the reduction in numbers of cars permitted to park in the Market Place and its use for musical events has significantly promoted its use as café culture and also improved the air quality.

Previous consultations and a public meeting in 2019³⁵ raised concerns about the level of traffic in the High Street. There has been a continuing debate between those supporting proposals to redress the balance of high street users in favour of walkers rather than car drivers and those who believe that



to do so would adversely affect trade. A project is proposed to look at the potential for reducing traffic in the town centre. This, however, will need to consider practicalities, cost feasibility, and impact on deliveries, footfall and retailers and further consultation with traders, shoppers and visitors.

In addition to these proposals, and as another regeneration initiative, the City Council is keen to address the improvement of traffic flow within the town centre. However, it recognises that such proposals require time to debate with traders and other organisations in the town, and the highways authority and that a Neighbourhood Plan is not the correct platform for such debate. This plan does not therefore make such proposals but informs local people that these discussions will begin once the Plan project is completed.

Many aspects of retail development are dealt with in national (National Planning Policy Framework NPPF) and district (Mendip Local Plan) policy documents and these set

³⁵ [file:///Users/adrianianson/Library/Mobile Documents/com~apple~CloudDocs/Adrian/WIN/Notes following on the meeting of Wells Independents on 9.2.19 re pedestrianisation and parking v.4.docx](file:///Users/adrianianson/Library/Mobile%20Documents/com~apple~CloudDocs/Adrian/WIN/Notes%20following%20on%20the%20meeting%20of%20Wells%20Independents%20on%209.2.19%20re%20pedestrianisation%20and%20parking%20v.4.docx)

out control of ‘uses’ and ‘frontages’. The Local Plan Policy DP21 “Managing Town Centre” due to the fact that it was written in 2014 takes no account of the changing high street landscape accelerated by the pandemic. It has also been superseded by changes in September 2020 to the Use Class Regulations³⁶. These combine Use Classes relating to shops, financial/professional services, cafes/restaurants, sport and health facilities, creche/nurseries and office/business uses into one new single Use Class E – the Commercial, Business and Service Use Class. Since 2020, the change of Use Class E provides greater flexibility for traditional shop owners to change, without the need for consent, to a use in the 21st century such as a coffee shop

RCB1: New Development within the Primary Frontages

1. Proposals for new development within the Primary Frontages defined in the Local Plan Part 1 and within Use Class E will be encouraged to not only acknowledge the importance of retail uses in the Market Place and High Street but also to the extent that other appropriate uses demonstrate that they are:

- i) likely to enhance the vibrancy of the city centre; and,**
- ii) will enhance and complement the City’s historic core.**

2. Proposals for changes and alterations to shopfronts should be framed by and respond positively to the Mendip Shopfront Design Guidance published in 2013.

Policy RCB2: Commercial Development and Responding to Climate Change

Justification

While there is an opportunity to have a positive impact on carbon emissions through housebuilding, the same exists for commercial and business developments. While, as with housing development, requirements for development to meet carbon emissions standards are set through Building Regulations, with only minimum opportunity at the current time for planning policies to require greater standards to be met, Policy RCB2 aims to encourage commercial developments to go beyond Building Regulations standards where feasible and viable.

Policy RCB2: Commercial Development and Responding to Climate Change

1. Development proposals for all new commercial developments should demonstrate, through a Design and Access Statement, how measures have been taken to design energy efficient buildings and should aim to achieve at least one of the following:

³⁶ See <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/permission/common-projects/change-of-use/use-classes> for further details about use classes.

- i) Passivhaus certification or equivalent; or,
 - ii) BREEAM Excellent or higher and achieve BREEAM Outstanding for the energy section of the assessment. Developments should also demonstrate how they have been designed to take into consideration building orientation, solar gain, high levels of insulation and airtightness as best practice for a Passivhaus design approach, which aims for zero carbon emissions; or,
 - iii) BREEAM Excellent in combination with achieving a minimum of AECB Silver Standard.
- 2. Development proposals for the refurbishment of existing buildings should, where feasible and viable, achieve energy efficiency and carbon emissions standards beyond those set in Building regulation.**

Policy RCB3: Supporting the Local Economy through Provision of Small Employment Premises and Workspace Hubs

Justification

Responding to national data³⁷ and local information about the likely impact of Covid-19 with regard to changes to how people work with increased working from home, whether a person is employed by a large or small company or organisation, policy RCB3 provides support for the development of small-scale employment units which can support micro, small and medium sized businesses which are starting up or in the early stages of growth. The provision of these types of spaces also provides an entry point location and premises for “home-grown” businesses meaning that residents wishing to start-up a business in the place in which they live can do so without having to look elsewhere. The policy also looks to support multi-use and community-based business spaces for short-term rental and hiring on a daily or hourly basis. This will help to retain spend, and grow and sustain the local economy.

Policy RCB3: Supporting the Local Economy through Provision of Small Employment Premises and Workspace Hubs

- 1. Development proposals for the creation of flexible workspaces, business and community hubs, workshops and other business premises to support micro, small and medium sized local businesses and people using their home as a place of work, will be supported in principle within the settlement boundary, subject to other policies in the development plan.**

³⁷ For example,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19latestinsights/lifestyle#homeworking> ,
<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/during-COVID-19-and-beyond#gref> and
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/bulletins/businessinsightsandimpactontheukconomy/13january2022>

- 2. The local amenity enjoyed by existing neighbouring uses and residents should not be compromised.**
- 3. Proposals which also provide community access or facilities will be particularly welcomed.**

8. TOURISM

8.1 Introduction

The unique history of Wells and its largely intact historic built environment and surrounding natural environment makes it a very attractive destination for regional, national and international visitors.

This generates employment and income related not only to the destinations themselves but also through parking, retail and accommodation.

The Cathedral attracts some 300,000 visitors each year. Similarly, the Bishop's Palace attracts over 450,000. The city is home to a wide range of cultural initiatives and these attract significant and diverse audiences. They include the November Carnival, the Literary Festival, the Food Festival, the Comedy Festival, the Theatre Festival and Wells Art Contemporary. For the most to be made of these events the City needs appropriate car parking and accommodation. The former is dealt with in the "Moving On" section and the latter is covered in the policy below.

The proximity of the City to other visitor attractions – Hauser & Wirth and The Newt both near Bruton, Glastonbury Abbey, Clarks Village in Street, Bath, Bristol, Wookey Hole, the Prison and Kilver Court in Shepton Mallet, Cheddar Caves & Gorge and the Somerset Levels - offers a varied package of venues and activities to travellers and holiday makers, as well as regional visitors, of all ages and interests.

Coach parties are also a vital part of the visitor economy. In the 12 months following September 2017, 1028 coaches used Wells Coach Park and in the following year the number rose to 1315. Due to an effective "Meet & Greet" initiative, Wells won the "Coach Friendliest Destination 2019" Award. A survey of coach passenger spending over 3 months in 2019



revealed an average spend in the City of £13.50 per person. On the basis of an average of 34 passengers per coach this provided a yearly estimated income for Wells of £603,000. The position of the Coach Station at the southern end of the High Street at the opposite end from the Cathedral and the Bishop's Palace is to the advantage of the retailers who line the route between the two. Hence the Meet & Greet initiative seeks to encourage coach operators to use the Coach Station as

a drop off point as opposed to the less suitable lay by on Sadler Street. However, the Coach Station is in need of refurbishment and this is covered by one of the Projects set out below.

The accommodation options in the City are medium/high value due in part to the nature of the historic inns and hotels. Development constraints and limitations have not, to date, encouraged expansion of the range of accommodation, for example a budget hotel, or parking for caravans or motor homes.

Since the return of the Tourist Information Centre to the Town Hall in the Market Place the needs of visitors for relevant information and booking of accommodation and events are now well catered for. Under the umbrella of Visit Wells, the Wells Heritage Partnership and the Tourism Forum, there are now more effective links between the Cathedral, the Bishop's Palace, the Chamber of Commerce and the City Council to promote tourism. This is exemplified by the creation in 2019 of the Wells Heritage Pass providing access to the Bishop's Palace, Wells Museum and the Cathedral.

While the pandemic would have seen a drop in visitor numbers in 2020, popularity of the staycation in the summer season of 2021, anecdotally³⁸, saw visitors return to pre-pandemic levels.

However, the length of stay time by tourists is a matter of concern and developments which would lengthen this are encouraged. This is exemplified by evidence for Mendip in 2017 relating to the prevalence of day visits over staying visitor nights – 3,074,000 as against 373,000.

The following matrix shows the relationship between the aims, objectives, policies and community actions and projects.

Aim	Objective	Policy	Community Action or Project
To support the visitor economy with a wide range of attractions and accommodation, strong links between major visitor attractions and other partners, and support for a wide range of cultural events	i) Support new developments which promote the visitor economy and extend the stay time of visitors ii) Promote and encourage links between the major visitor attractions within the City. iii) Promote and encourage cultural events and festivals	TOU1: Tourism	Project 8: The City Council will work with partners to promote the visitor economy, help ensure the success of festivals and events and refurbish the coach station.

³⁸ Neither Mendip District Council or Somerset County Council have up-to-date data on visitor numbers since the start of the pandemic.

and festivals.	within the City.		
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Policy TOU1: Tourism

Justification

During consultation in 2014 and 2015, respondents to survey questions supported the need to support the visitor and tourism economy.³⁹

Since then, the pandemic has had a profound effect on tourism in the UK. Post lockdown and prior to the opening-up of foreign travel on a significant scale, there has been a resurgence in holidaymaking in the UK – staycationing – which has benefitted Wells as a tourist destination. Anecdotally, visitor nights in hotel, bed and breakfast and other accommodation (such as



Air BnB and Vrbo lets) has increased in summer 2021.

Our policy TOU1 therefore gives support to developments which would promote and support attractions to bolster the visitor economy and extend stay time. In doing this, it aligns with one of the key issues forming the context of the Local Plan i.e. *“maximising tourist potential in a manner sensitive to the area’s natural, physical and historical assets”*.

TOU1: Tourism

Development proposals which provide a wider range of visitor attractions and accommodation and extend stay time will be supported where they are of an appropriate scale so as not to have an adverse effect on the character of Wells and the immediate environment and infrastructure can accommodate the visitor impact.

³⁹ TP1 Provision of a wider range of tourist accommodation – 73% TP2 Support of the visitor economy with improved visitor information – 81%



8.2 Community Projects

There are a number of projects and opportunities which can be pursued in Wells to help to further support and improve the visitor experience and retain and enhance the Wells offer. As they are an important link with planning for the City's future, we have set them out in this Plan. The following projects are not deliverable through the planning system and so the City Council will seek to work with other in the community and relevant organisations to deliver them.

The historic interest of the City does not lie with any one attraction and by working together the synergy between the various places and organisations could benefit both the visitor and the local economy. Joint ticketing and promotion, as well as a co-operative approach to events, could encourage visitors to increase their stay time and their 'spend', and overall their experience would be enhanced. This could also have economic advantages to those involved.

The range of successful events and festivals are referred to above. There is scope for building on this success to broaden the type of events to include participants of all ages and interests, and to promote these more widely, ensuring that the appropriate infrastructure is also in place (parking, accommodation etc) to guarantee success in terms of visitor numbers, economics and community participation.

Project 8

The City Council will work with:

- a) Visit Somerset, the Cathedral, the Bishop's Palace and the Chamber of Commerce to promote the visitor economy;
- b) event and festival organisers to help ensure their success; and,
- c) Somerset Council to refurbish the Coach Station as a more attractive interchange for visitors.

9. ENVIRONMENT

9.1 Introduction






This section focuses on our environment in and around Wells. Wells is a city of neighbourhoods intersected with woodlands, grasslands, parks, green space, gardens, waterways and intimate spaces and footpaths. It is surrounded by two significant and distinct areas: the grasslands and woodlands of the Mendip Hills to the north and wet grasslands of The Avalon Marshes to the south.

The city is a built-up area in the middle of these spaces creating a barrier to the free movement of flora and fauna, potentially creating species isolation which can result in a breakdown in ecological resilience, notably in the face of climate change.

The green and blue spaces and corridors which surround and cross the city are collectively known as “green infrastructure” ⁴⁰.

Mendip District Council made a commitment in the adopted Local Plan (Part 1) to produce a Green Infrastructure Strategy, in consultation with the local community and landowners. However, this has yet to be done at the time of drafting this Plan.

This emphasises the importance of the Neighbourhood Plan introducing protections on a range of spaces which contribute to the green infrastructure network.

What is “green infrastructure” in Wells?	
	Agricultural field systems, rural landscape, urban fringe and gaps between built areas
	Grassland, heathland, woodland, hedgerows, trees and their interconnecting corridors critical to biodiversity and habitat
	Recreational, sport and leisure greenspaces, parks and gardens, public amenity greenspace, village greens, formal greenspaces, playing pitches, heritage / cultural greenspace, churchyards and allotments
	“Greenways”, footpaths, cyclepaths, bridleways and lanes, roadside verges and former railway embankments
	Includes “blue infrastructure” such as: river and stream corridors, least, moats, open sustainable drainage systems, drainage ditches and wetland

⁴⁰ Defined by the NPPF as “A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.” Natural England describes green infrastructure as “...a strategically planned and delivered network comprising the broadest range of high-quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering those ecological services and quality of life benefits required by the communities it serves and needed to underpin sustainability. Its design and management should also respect and enhance the character and distinctiveness of an area with regard to habitats and landscape types. Green Infrastructure includes established green spaces and new sites and should thread through and surround the built environment and connect the urban area to its wider rural hinterland. Consequently it needs to be delivered at all spatial scales from sub-regional to local neighbourhood levels, accommodating both accessible natural green spaces within local communities and often much larger sites in the urban fringe and wider countryside.” See “Green Infrastructure Guidance”, Natural England, <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35033> .

Biodiversity and wildlife across the world and in the UK is under unprecedented pressure. According to a 2018 report by WWF, in nearly 45 years, humanity has wiped out 60% of global wildlife populations and more than 4,000 species were in decline between 1970 and 2014.⁴¹

The UK's wildlife continues to decline according to the State of Nature 2019 report⁴².

The evidence from the last 50 years shows that significant and ongoing changes in the way we manage our land for commercial and housing development, agricultural intensification, and the ongoing effects of climate change⁴³ are having the biggest impacts on nature.

The 1996 Mendip Landscape Character Assessment has been updated by the Landscape Character Assessment produced in 2020⁴⁴. Both Assessments refer to "The Wells Bowl" and the latest one sets out its "Perceived Characteristics" which include "sensitivity around the urban edge where development adjoins high quality landscape and impacts on a sense of tranquil unspoilt character on the edge of this historic settlement."⁴⁵

Biodiversity and wildlife across the world and in the UK is under unprecedented pressure. According to a 2018 report by WWF, in nearly 45 years, humanity has wiped out 60% of global wildlife populations and more than 4,000 species were in decline between 1970 and 2014.⁴⁶

A similar report has found that more than 40% of insect species are declining and a third are endangered.⁴⁷

UK State of Nature Report 2019

Examples of Decline

Since rigorous scientific monitoring began in the 1970s there has been a 13% decline in average abundance across wildlife studied and that the declines continue unabated.

41% of UK species studied have declined, 26% have increased and 33% show little change since 1970, while 133 species assessed have already been lost from our shores since 1500.

Butterflies and moths particularly hard hit. Numbers of butterflies down by 17% and moths down by 25%. The numbers of species, such as the High Brown Fritillary and Grayling, that require more specialised habitats have declined by more than three quarters.

UK's mammals also fare badly with greater than 26% of species at risk of disappearing altogether. Wild Cat and Greater Mouse-eared Bat are among species teetering on the edge of disappearing.

⁴¹ WWF. Living Planet Report 2018: Aiming higher, www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/wwfintl_livingplanet_full.pdf

⁴² <https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-UK-full-report.pdf>

⁴³ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning/climate-change-effects-on-nature-and-wildlife/effects-of-climate-change-on-wildlife/>

⁴⁴ See <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/7785/Landscape-and-Environment> for details.

⁴⁵ p.136, section 6.1 Central Mendip, Landscape Character Assessment, https://www.mendip.gov.uk/media/25601/Section-6-1-Central-Mendip/pdf/Section_6.1_Central_Mendip.pdf?m=637315417834400000

⁴⁶ WWF. Living Planet Report 2018: Aiming higher, www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/wwfintl_livingplanet_full.pdf

⁴⁷ See <https://pollinatorproject.gg/insect-declines-and-why-they-matter/>

Pollution is also a major issue. Whilst emissions of many pollutants have been reduced dramatically in recent decades, pollution continues to have a severe impact on the UK's sensitive habitats and freshwaters, and new pollutant threats are continuing to emerge.

In response to threats to wildlife, habitat and biodiversity, we have developed a set of ambitious policy criteria that support the Government's National Planning and Policy Framework⁴⁸ requirement to develop measurable gains to biodiversity wherever possible.

The City Council will also work with Mendip District Council (or its successor authority) to help them meet their obligations under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006⁴⁹ and embed consideration of biodiversity as an integral part of policy and decision making, which should be seeking to make a significant contribution to the achievement of the commitments made by government in its 25 Year Environment Plan.⁵⁰

This will result in a city neighbourhood that is greener and more pleasant to live in, helps sustain the community and the natural environment, and contributes to enhanced biodiversity (net gain) and a safer climate.

Wells will have an enhanced and sustainable green infrastructure network consisting of a connected network of green sites and corridors, that will be widely beneficial to the community, wildlife and the environment to support sustainable growth in Wells.

In 2015, our suggested policy approach to the Environment was supported by 89.5% of the 148 who commented.⁵¹ It is proposed that the Green Infrastructure Network will be based on protection for the following elements:

- attractive landscapes, their setting and views looking both towards and out of Wells;
- small scale local green spaces which play an important role in recreational, environmental, heritage and / or cultural terms; and,
- biodiversity and habitat areas of critical importance to wildlife, to people and as key local contributors to recovery from the climate and ecological emergencies.

The following sections introduce planning policies which focus on protecting and enhancing the three key elements identified above and responding to the overall environment aim, providing local detailed policies which build upon and add specificity to planning policies at the national and district levels.

The following matrix shows the relationship between the aims, objectives, policies and community actions and projects.

⁴⁸ NPPF: Natural environment Section 15 page 49

⁴⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/section/40>

⁵⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

⁵¹ In the 2015 consultation, the proposal that the City Council will facilitate wide public consultation with Mendip District Council in the production of the Green Infrastructure Network and its implementation met with agreement from 89.5% of the 148 who commented.

Aim	Objective	Policy	Community Action or Project
<p>To develop, protect and enhance a green infrastructure network, which provides woodland, riparian (streams and brooks), grassland and hedgerow habitats and corridors for wildlife thus enhancing the linkages of the City to the surrounding countryside, and provides accessible open green space for people in the City and on its rural fringe.</p>	<p>To ensure that planned development respects the landscape of Wells including, in particular, views of its heritage assets and rural context. In addition, to ensure that development on the edge of Wells is sensitive to its impact on both the rural landscape and the character of the historic settlement.</p>	<p>Policy ENV1: Protecting the Character of the Landscape, Views and Setting</p>	<p>Project 9: The City Council will work with neighbouring parish councils to consider developments that may impact the environment beyond their respective boundaries</p>
	<p>Environment policies will protect and enhance existing natural space and create new wild spaces for the benefit of wildlife and people.</p>	<p>Policy ENV2: Nature Recovery Network (including protected areas of biodiversity, geodiversity and habitat)</p>	<p>Project 10: The city council will develop projects to enhance biodiversity</p>
	<p>Preserving the green spaces within the city is important, whether informal or designated play areas. There is national recognition that green spaces enhance well-being and are beneficial to health.</p>	<p>Policy ENV3: Local Green Space</p>	

Policy ENV1: Protecting the Character of the Landscape, Views and Setting

Justification

The justification for this policy is based on the Landscape Character Assessments carried out by Mendip District Council in 1996 and 2020 (both already referred to earlier in this Plan) although the latter remains in draft.

The 1996 Assessment emphasises at 4.1.6 the quality of the Wells Bowl part of which it describes as being of the highest quality at a district level and taking on national significance as the setting of Wells Cathedral.

The 2020 Assessment states that “Wells forms important backdrop to open landscape with Cathedral and St Cuthberts as major landmarks”.

There is no doubt that Tor Furlong, the public footpath across the medieval deer park and Constitution Hill (B3139) as illustrated are well used routes with walkers and drivers alike.

The inclusion of view cones relating to the cathedral and Palace Fields are supported by the listing which includes Palace Fields as a Grade 2* Garden with the following words:

“The park to the south-east of the Palace is enclosed by a mixture of fences and hedges which separate it from adjoining agricultural land. To the north-east the park is adjoined by the A371 road. The site is generally level, with the ground beyond rising steeply to the east where Torhill Wood forms a dramatic backdrop to the park. There are extensive south-easterly views across the park towards Glastonbury Tor, while to the north the cathedral provides a series of designed picturesque views from the Palace pleasure grounds.”

The listing deals with the historical significance of Palace Fields in the following way:

“Bishop Jocelin was granted the right to form a park to the south of the Palace by King John in 1207. The medieval park extended beyond the boundaries of the present park to include Park Wood and land adjacent to the River Sheppey. The larger area appears to have been disparked in the C16 or C17, and by the C18 much of the former park was in agricultural use. The Park Fields appear to have been laid out to provide an ornamental prospect from the Palace and rampart walks in the early C19 as part of Bishop Law's improvements.”

The value to wellbeing of significant views is well put in the following extract from the 2020 Assessment:

“7.23 The value of landscapes in terms of health and well-being is less easy to economically quantify but is still well recognised as having significant economic impact. While the highest quality landscapes may deliver most in terms of tourism, it is the everyday landscapes across the district that will be most relevant to most people (not least reflecting the 80/20 split in non-designated to designated landscape within the district). It is noted that while landscapes close to the existing settlements may be of lower quality, they may still be valued for the day-to-day experience of the outdoors.”

The 2015 draft Plan identified “view cones” which are proposed to prevent damage to significant views. These are from:

- Tor Furlong at the western edge of the Play Area looking west across the Cathedral School Playing Fields towards the east end of the Cathedral.

This is framed by Tor Woods to the south and in the centre embraces open playing fields and pasture leading the eye to the western end of the Cathedral.



- The eastern end of the footpath leading across Palace Fields looking westward across Palace Fields towards the Cathedral.

This provides a view across the medieval deer park owned and used by former Bishops of Bath & Wells part of which is included as Grade 2* on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.



- Constitution Hill (B3139) Bristol Road east of its junction with the footpath leading towards Torhill Quarry looking south across Palace Fields and towards the Cathedral.

This view takes in a panoramic view of Wells with the Cathedral to the right and pasture leading to the deer park referred to. It is somewhat marred by the signage of Morrisons supermarket which serves as an illustration of the need to preserve significant views.



- Upper Milton - the junction of Monarch's Way and the city boundary and Upper Milton Lane looking south towards the western area of Wells.

This view takes a panoramic view of west Wells from a northern entry to the city for walkers and demonstrates the Wells Bowl referred to in the 1996 Assessment.



These important views are shown on the following maps.

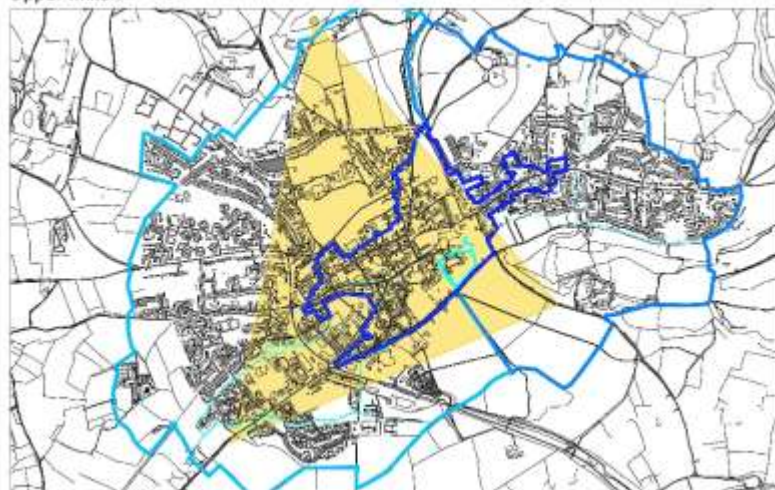
Map 7: Locally Valued Landscape Areas (and Views)

Wells View Cones

Monarch's Way



Upper Milton



Key

Wells Conservation Area

Residential West

Residential East

Upper Milton View Cone

Monarch's Way View Cone

Constitution Hill View Cone

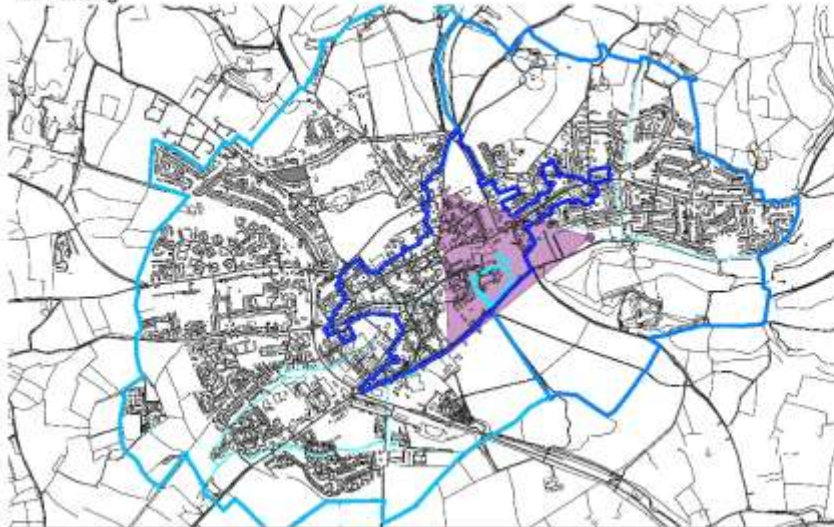
Tor Furlong View Cone

Wells View Cones

Constitution Hill



Tor Furlong



Key

- Wells Conservation Area
- Residential West
- Residential East
- Upper Milton View Cone
- Monarch's Way View Cone
- Constitution Hill View Cone
- Tor Furlong View Cone

Policy ENV1: Protecting the Character of the Landscape, Views and Setting

Development proposals on land within or immediately adjacent to the view cones listed above and identified on the maps above will only be supported where they do not compromise the special landscape character exemplified in

- a) the 1996 Mendip Landscape Character Assessment**
- b) the 2020 Landscape Character Assessment and**
- c) the statutory listing of Palace Fields as a Grade 2* garden as referred to above.**

Policy ENV2: Nature Recovery Network (including protected areas of biodiversity, geodiversity and habitat)

Justification

Whilst Wells is surrounded by landscape and environmental designations, nature reserves and wildlife sites it is the links between different habitats, also known as green infrastructure, which allow wildlife populations to move around and thrive.

Supporting healthy green infrastructure is vital for the resilience of wildlife and adapting to climate change.

All new development proposals will be assessed on the impact on locally valued areas of biodiversity, their ability to contribute to the NPPF, the UK Government 25 Year Environment plan and the enhancement of nature recovery networks and green infrastructure.

We have developed a Wells Nature Recovery Network which includes areas of land and corridors of green infrastructure that requires protection. Policy ENV2 seeks to ensure this protection and that the enhancement of such areas is sought where possible and relevant.

We have used four key sources of data to define this network:

- The Somerset Wildlife Trust Somerset Nature Recovery map⁵²;
- Designations listed in Natural England's MAGIC mapping system including priority habitat inventory areas⁵³;
- Individual site flora and fauna species data sourced from Somerset Environment Records Centre⁵⁴; and,

⁵² See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-recovery-network/nature-recovery-network>

⁵³ See <https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/priority-habitat-inventory-south-england/explore>

⁵⁴ See <http://www.somerc.com/>

- Our local knowledge of sites and nature connected areas in the city of Wells⁵⁵.

The Wells Nature Recovery Network comprises the following layered designation areas:

- Habitat Network;
- Tree Preservation Zones;
- Ancient Woodland;
- Great Crested Newt Opportunity Areas; and,
- Bee Lines.

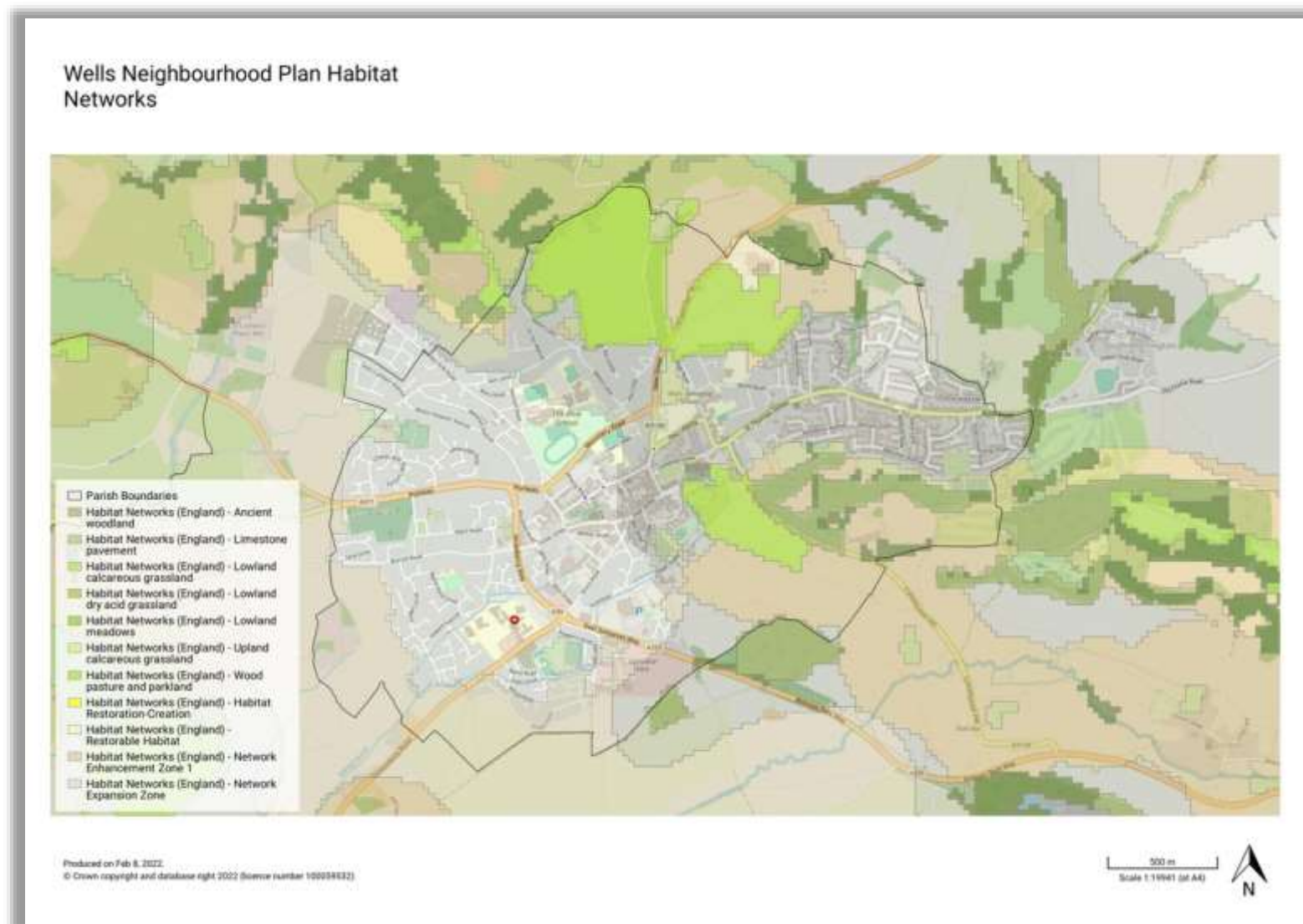
The UK Government states that the Nature Recovery Network will be a national network of wildlife-rich places. The aim is to expand, improve and connect these places across our cities, towns, countryside and coast. The NRN is a major commitment in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan and enacted by the Environment Act 2021. In 2018 the government published 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment' which committed to developing a national and local Nature Recovery Networks, and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. **Footnote 51**

The Environment Act became law in November 2021 making it a statutory obligation for all Local Planning Authorities to have a Local Nature Recovery Plan based on the mapped Nature Recovery Network. Somerset's Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategy is emerging at the moment, led by Somerset Wildlife Trust through the Somerset Local Nature Partnership with all Districts and Council Councils, who have a legal obligation to produce these.

Habitat Network

A habitat network is a configuration of habitat that allows species to move and disperse through a landscape. Habitat networks increase the connectivity of a landscape for species with low dispersal ability and Wells is an important link for many habitat networks including grasslands, woodlands and rivers. When considering development proposals the Local Planning Authority will take into account habitat connectivity. Map 8 shows areas of valuable habitat across Wells. It should be noted that these areas extend beyond the Wells City Council and Neighbourhood Plan boundary. Policy ENV2 will only apply to those areas within the boundary.

Map 8: Wells Habitat Network



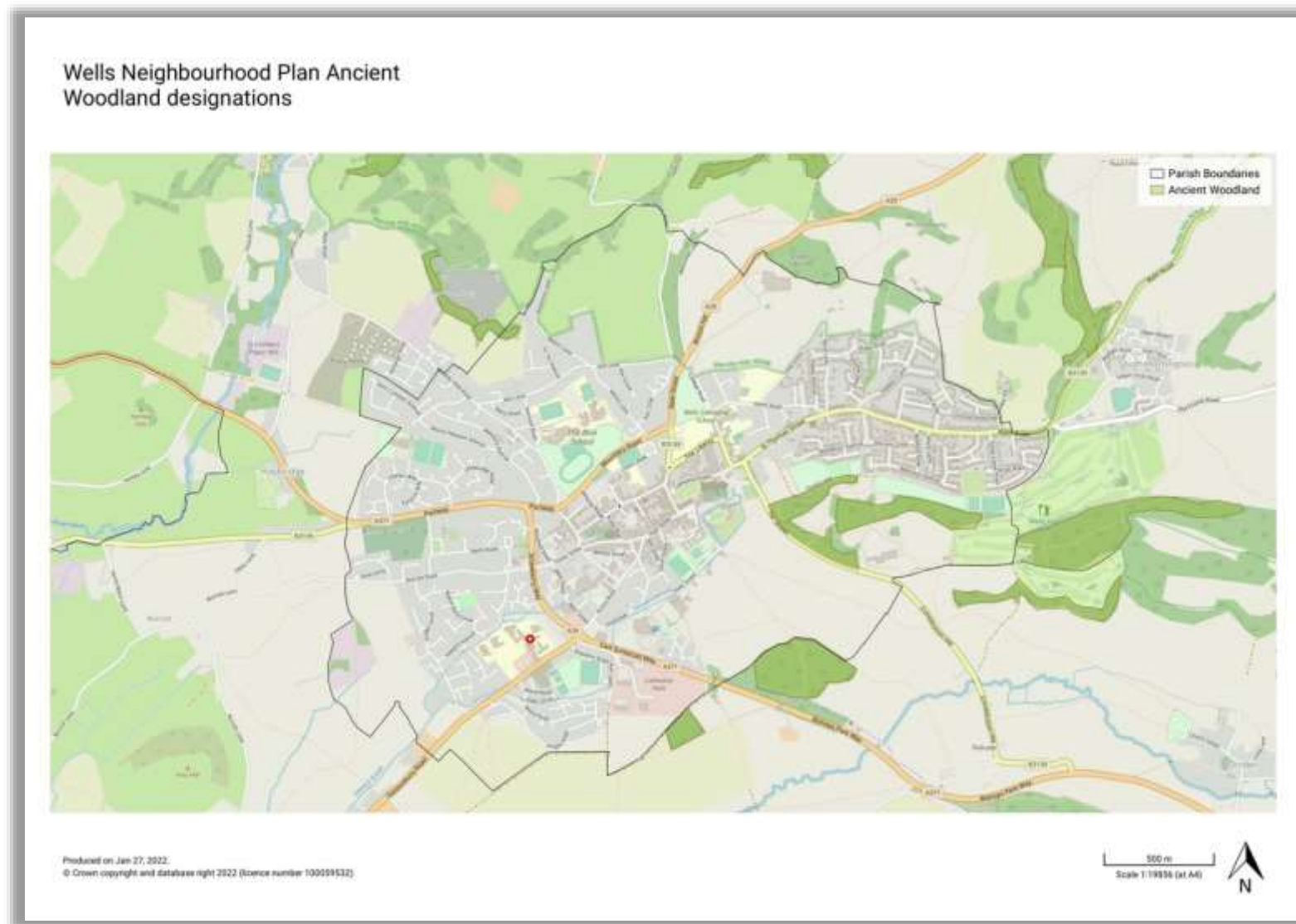
Ancient Woodland and Tree Preservation Zones

Ancient woodland is an important habitat in Wells and takes hundreds of years to establish and is defined as an irreplaceable habitat. It is a valuable natural asset important for:

- wildlife (which include rare and threatened species);
- protected species, soils;
- carbon capture and storage;
- contributing to the seed bank and genetic diversity;
- recreation, health and wellbeing; and,
- cultural, historical and landscape value.

Ancient woodland is any area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. It includes ancient semi-natural woodland mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration plantations on ancient woodland sites - replanted with conifer or broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi. Ancient Woodland has equal protection in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Map 9 shows areas of Ancient Woodland. It should be noted that these areas extend beyond the Wells City Council and Neighbourhood Plan boundary. Policy ENV2 will only apply to those areas within the boundary.

Map 9: Wells (and Environs) Ancient Woodland



Ancient woodland areas are not the only wooded areas which require a form of protection from a biodiversity and habitat perspective. Other notable areas of woodland, which we class as “Tree Preservation Zones” (different to Local Planning Authority Tree Preservation Orders or Areas) are worthy of protection because of their essential contribution to biodiversity and habitat. Map 10 shows these zones. It should be noted that these zones extend beyond the Wells City Council and Neighbourhood Plan boundary. Policy ENV2 will only apply to those areas within the boundary.

Map 10: Tree Preservation Zones



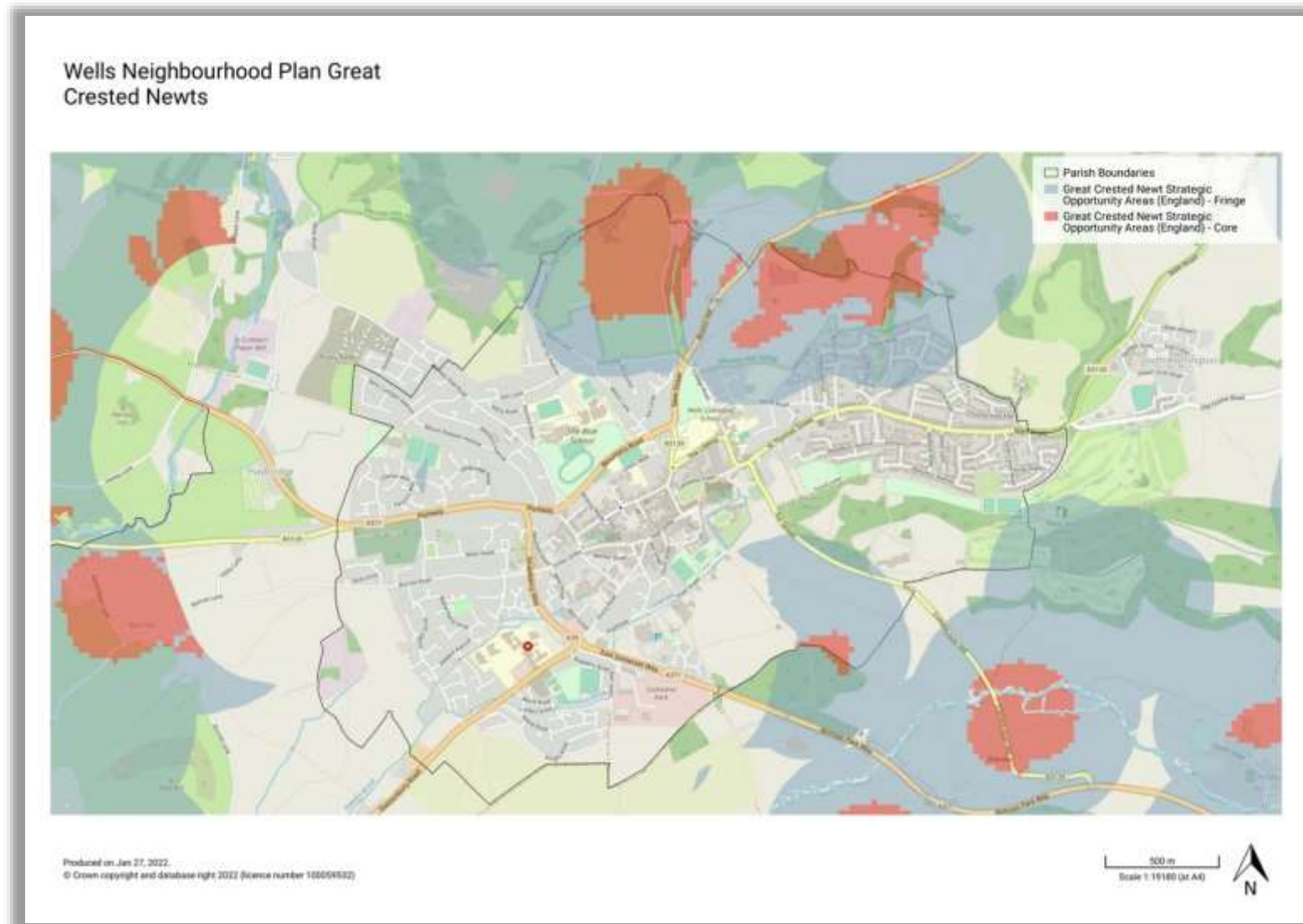
Great Crested Newt Opportunity Areas

Great Crested Newts are a European protected species. The animals and their eggs, breeding sites and resting places are protected by law.

Wells City Council expects developers to take into account Great Crested Newt populations in Wells and where appropriate mitigate their development's impact on newts by creating new habitat using Great Crested Newt opportunity areas⁵⁶ which identify locations where the addition of new ponds would benefit Great Crested Newt populations. Map 11 shows Great Crested Newt Opportunity Areas. It should be noted that these areas extend beyond the Wells City Council and Neighbourhood Plan boundary. Policy ENV2 will only apply to those areas within the boundary.

⁵⁶ <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/08082819-c50e-4049-bf56-74b2dc642a21/gcn-strategic-opportunity-areas-england>

Map 11: Wells Great Crested Newt Opportunity Areas



Bee Lines

The B-Lines⁵⁷ are a series of 'insect pathways' running through our countryside and towns, along which we are restoring and creating a series of wildflower-rich habitat stepping stones. They link existing wildlife areas together, creating a network, like a railway, that will weave across the British landscape. This will provide large areas of brand new habitat benefiting bees and butterflies– but also a host of other wildlife.

Wells is part of the B-Lines network.

The National Pollinator Strategy for England 2014 sets out a 10 year plan to help pollinating insects survive and thrive across England. This strategy outline actions to support and protect the many pollinating insects which contribute to our food production and the diversity of our environment. They also look to everyone to work together to help our pollinators.

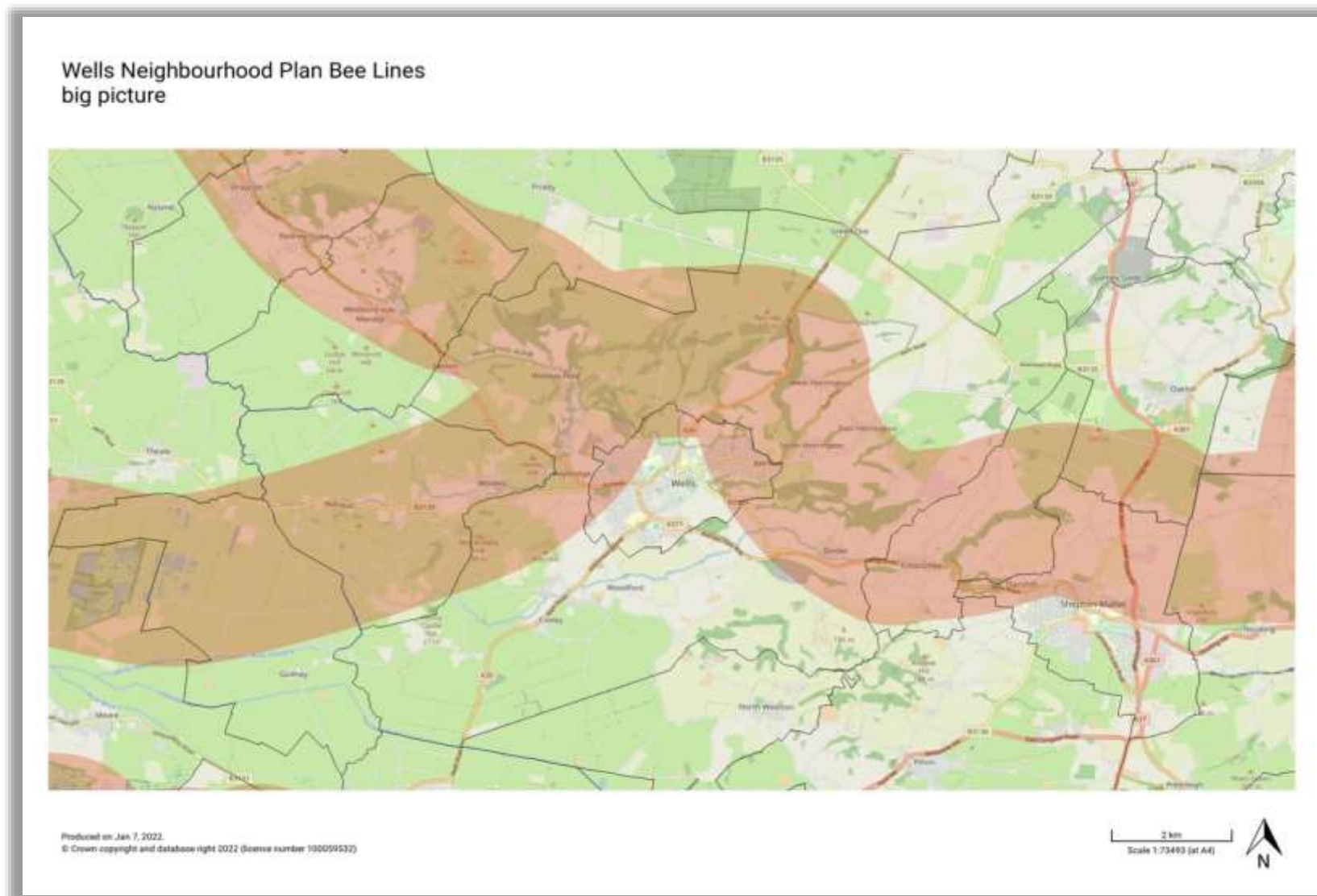
The National Pollinator Strategy aims to ensure good practice to help pollinators through initiatives with a wide range of organisations and professional networks including managers of public and amenity spaces, utility and transport companies, brownfield site managers, local authorities, developers and planners.

Wells City Council would expect any new housing or commercial development proposal to include actions to create and/or enhance habitat for pollinators as detailed in the National Pollinator Strategy.

Map 12 shows Bee Lines which cross Wells. It should be noted that these areas extend beyond the Wells City Council and Neighbourhood Plan boundary. Policy ENV2 will only apply to those areas within the boundary.

⁵⁷ See <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/> for further details.

Map 12: Bee Lines across Wells



Protecting and Enhancing the Network

To help protect this Network, we have set criteria in Policy ENV2 which emphasise the critical relationship between the areas defined, biodiversity and habitat, and development. These focus around providing positive outcomes (through protection, enhancement and mitigation where necessary) for:

- Habitat and achieving net gains in biodiversity;
- Local ecology and wildlife including through installation of supporting infrastructure such as hedgehog routes, bird and bat boxes;
- Replacement trees; and,
- Visual and amenity value of plants, hedgerows / hedgebanks and trees.

The focus of our Network and policy must, by law, be on areas within the Plan area. However, green infrastructure areas and routes do not stop at the boundary and the importance of the network in the countryside areas and through neighbouring settlements cannot be emphasised enough.

Development proposals should demonstrate how protection, enhancement and / or mitigation is achieved for them to be supported. Further guidance on definitions used in the policy including “native plants” and guidance on how to determine appropriate replacement trees can be found by searching on the internet for “Right Trees for a Changing Climate”.⁵⁸ Guidance on recommended native trees is set out in Appendix 6.

Policy ENV2 requirements should be read alongside our policies in the Built Environment and Heritage section which include requirements for the design of development in relation to issues such as climate change (including, but not limited to, flood risk, carbon dioxide emissions and low carbon energy generation and active travel).



Policy ENV2: Wells Nature Recovery Network (including protected areas of biodiversity, geodiversity and habitat)

- 1. Our locally valued areas of biodiversity, geodiversity and habitat form the Wells Nature Recovery Network. This network is defined on Maps 8 - 12.**
- 2. The Network and its constituent parts will be protected to support wildlife habitats, biodiversity and geodiversity and the role they play within the wider network of green infrastructure. Opportunities should be taken to enhance**

⁵⁸ See - <http://www.righttrees4cc.org.uk> – for details

biodiversity, habitats and landscape settings of these areas. Their loss will not normally be supported.

3. Development should, where relevant, aim to:

- i) demonstrate how it contributes to the enhancement of nature recovery networks, green infrastructure and local wildlife corridors;**
- ii) maintain the visual and biodiversity value of hedgerows, banks and groups of trees which provide connectivity as green corridors for wildlife (achieving a net gain in biodiversity);**
- iii) retain and integrate existing individual green assets, within and on the edge of the site, including mature trees and hedgerows;**
- iv) replace trees unavoidably lost to development with trees native to the Wells area of equivalent “massing”, leaf “volume” canopy and cover to mitigate loss and capacity of carbon capture achieved by the lost tree. Where possible, replacement trees should also be resilient to anticipated changing weather conditions resulting from climate change;**
- v) create, where appropriate, ponds and other wetland habitats planted with native wetland plant species as part of open green space provision and / or open SuDS system; and,**
- vi) incorporate mitigation strategies including (but not limited to) the installation of bat and bird (Swift/House Martin) boxes and hedgehog routes to encourage wildlife into developments.**

4. Proposals which result in significant harm to biodiversity (in whole or in part) will only be supported where they demonstrate that:

- i) there is no significant damage to the assets identified in the Wells Nature Recovery Network;**
- ii) the value of the areas (quality, land area and habitat, biodiversity and / or geodiversity value) can be satisfactorily replaced on-site and / or in close proximity to their original location with demonstrable net gains in biodiversity;**
- iii) a funded management and maintenance plan is agreed to ensure that net gains in biodiversity are realised; and,**
- iv) the proposal would not have significant adverse impacts on the site’s wider setting (with regard to biodiversity, geodiversity and habitat) or such impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated.**

Policy ENV3: Local Green Space

Justification

The Localism Act (2011) gives communities powers to designate Local Green Spaces (LGS) through Neighbourhood Plans. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires such areas of land to pass certain tests to qualify. Broadly speaking,

LGS are typically small green spaces which are notably locally for beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife.

The NPPF sets out the requirements for Local Green Spaces in Paragraphs 101 – 103.

'101. The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Designating land as Local Green Space should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or updated, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.

102. The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*

103. Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts.

The Wells Design Guide states that *"Wells benefits from a generous swathe of green space relative to the settlement size"*.⁵⁹

The Local Plan Part 2 had proposed some of these areas as LGS. However following comments from the Local Plan Inspector suggesting that insufficient detailed local work had been carried out by the District Council to designate them under the requirements of the NPPF, they seem likely to be deleted from that Plan. However, Neighbourhood Plans can also designate LGS. Local feeling supported the designations and wanted to make them in this Plan.

We have therefore surveyed the Plan area and have identified 40 spaces which we designate as Local Green Spaces (LGS). These have been tested against the criteria in the NPPF at paragraph 102. Appendix 4 sets out the reasons for designating each proposed Local Green Space. Local consultation through this draft Plan. The List of Local Green Spaces also takes account of the action by Mendip District Council who are creating a Supplementary Planning Document based on an audit of green spaces in Wells and beyond.

The Local Green Spaces which are designated in this Plan are as follows:

1. Land to the West of Leisure Centre
2. Playground East of Parsons Way

⁵⁹ See <https://www.wells.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan#0>

3. Land off Lethbridge Road
4. Disused Railway Line North of Portway
5. Blue School Playing Fields
6. Land between Blue School and Ash Lane
7. Blue School Playing Fields (FIRS 12)
8. Wells Cemetery
9. Balch / Coronation Road
10. Allotments to West of Barnes Close
11. Reakes Close
12. Allotments North of Fire Station
13. Bignal Rand Park
14. St Cuthbert's School Playground
15. Land adjoining Keward House
16. Jocelyn Drive / Glastonbury Road corner (OALS 12)
17. Wells Sports Ground (FIRS 20)
18. Cathedral Walk Play Area
19. Recreation Ground
20. Approach to Bishop's Palace
21. Cathedral Green
22. St Joseph and St Teresa Primary School Playground
23. St Cuthbert's Churchyard
24. Wells Cathedral School Cricket and Rugby Ground
25. Land Opposite The Cedars
26. Tor Street Gardens
27. Bishop's Place Allotments
28. Tor Furlong
29. Tor Furlong Wells Cathedral School Playing Fields
30. Tor Furlong Playground and Pitch
31. Tor Hill Meadow
32. Tor Hill Verges
33. Churchill Close
34. Sealey Crescent
35. Hawkers Lane / Kidder Bank Play Area

36. Stoberry Park School Playground
37. Kidder Bank
38. Mendip Hospital Cemetery
39. South Walk
40. St Andrews Stream
41. Keward Avenue Green Space

These Local Green Spaces are shown on Maps 13 a and b below.

Map 13a: Wells' Local Green Spaces (West)

Green Spaces within the Wells Parish Boundary (West)



Wells Parish Boundary

Wells Green Spaces

Google Satellite

id	Name
1	Land West of Leisure Centre
2	Parsons Way Playground
3	Leathbridge Road Play area
4	Disused Railway
5	Blue School Playing Fields
6	Land between Blue School & Ash Lane
7	Blue School Playing Fields
8	Wells Cemetery
9	Balch/ Coronation Road
10	Allotments west of Barnes Close
11	Reakes Close
12	Allotments north of Wells Fire Station
13	Signal Rand Park
14	St Cuthbert's Junior School
15	Land adjoining Keward House
16	Jocelyn Drive/ Glastonbury Road
17	Wells Sports Ground
22	St Joseph&St Teresa Primary School
23	St Cuthbert's Churchyard
40	St Andrews Stream
41	Keward Avenue

This map was created in February 2023 to display the green spaces within the Wells Parish Boundary (West)

Map 13b: Wells' Local Green Spaces (East)



Policy ENV3: Local Green Space

- 1. The areas defined on Map 13 and in Appendix 4 are designated as Local Green Space in accordance with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.**
- 2. Development that would harm the openness or special character of a Local Green Space or its significance and value to the local community will not be permitted unless the proposal can demonstrate very special circumstances that outweigh the harm to the Local Green Space.**
- 3. Any development of such areas will be managed in accordance with national policy for Green Belt.**

9.2 Community Projects

For this topic, the projects and actions are as follows.

Project 9

Because planning is spatial, the City Council will work with neighbouring parish councils to consider developments that may impact the environment beyond their respective boundaries.

Project 10

The city council will develop projects to enhance biodiversity including:

- Restoring the cities streams and waterways for wildlife working with the Wild Trout Trust in the Town project⁶⁰
- Enhancing parks, allotments, cemeteries, school grounds, public spaces and verges for biodiversity working with the Blue Campaign⁶¹
- Work with the Diocese of Bath and Wells to enhance biodiversity in the cities churchyards⁶²

⁶⁰ <https://www.wildtrout.org/content/trout-town>

⁶¹ <https://bluecampaignhub.com/councils>

⁶² <https://www.somersetwildlife.org/news/somerset-wildlife-trust-and-diocese-bath-and-wells-launch-wilder-churches>

10. APPLICATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

When “made” (adopted), this Plan will form part of the statutory development plan and will be used by the local planning authority when determining planning applications. It will also be used by the City Council when it responds to planning applications on which it is consulted.

The Plan will be subject to continual “light touch” monitoring and review, largely through the Planning Committee who will be closest to the process and able to raise issues where parts of the Plan may need to be revised to ensure that its policies continue to be appropriate and relevant.

It will be subject to a review periodically and where changing external circumstances dictate the need for updating (such as national or local authority planning policy change which triggers a review).

11. APPENDICES

Please see separate files to view the appendices.

Appendix 1 – Wells Design Guide – see Wells City Council web site

Appendix 2 – Masterplan of sites within Wells City boundary allocated for housing – see Wells City Council web site

Appendix 3 – Housing Need Assessment for Wells – see Wells City Council web site

Appendix 4 – Local Green Space Assessment with illustrations – see Wells City Council web site

Appendix 5 – Local Heritage Assets criteria – see Wells City Council web site

Appendix 6 – Guidance on native trees