



# Wells City Council

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION APRIL 2023 ASSET AND SERVICE TRANSFER PROPOSAL





# Wells City Council's Strategic Plan and Priorities

*“Wells City Council strives to work conscientiously with the community to define and provide high quality services and facilities, ensuring that Wells is a 21<sup>st</sup> Century City that respects its heritage and upholds its values making it a great place to live, work, play and visit”*

- WCC mission statement, 2021

*Wells City Council recognises any decision undertaken throughout the local government reorganisation process must seriously consider the impact on its Climate Emergency Declaration and that we have a duty to act responsibly to reduce our carbon footprint.*



# Wells City Council's Vision

- Wells City Council is committed to taking a strong local leadership role through building on the opportunities presented by the transfer of assets during Local Government Reorganisation, and its aim is to provide its community with the very best services and facilities.
- Local residents are placed at the centre of decision making, increasing community trust, and their support for and assistance with the delivery of projects. This includes engaging with all demographics of the population, promoting a sense of civic pride that encourages community led initiatives, instilling Wells reputation as a special, safe place to live
- A staffing structure that will be capable of driving expanding operations across the city, professionally and effectively, for the benefit of citizens and visitors alike. Drawing on a wealth of experience and knowledge, equipped with the skills and motivation to ensure the continued smooth running of facilities and services, we recognise adaptation and growth is vital when reacting to changing circumstance.
- We acknowledge investment in digital advances are vital across the Council, with facilities and equipment expected from a 21<sup>st</sup> century council. As we experience rapid growth in technology we recognise the part it has to play in a more sustainable future, solidifying Wells' place as a city serious in its commitment to making a change not only for its current residents but for generations to come.



# Wells – steeped in history and a thriving tourist economy



Wells City Council boundary area, surrounded wholly by countryside, makes it the smallest free-standing city in the UK at 2.11 square miles, with around 12,000 inhabitants.

A medieval city, remarkably unspoilt with many historic buildings, its origins go back to Roman times when a settlement grew around the springs that bubble up here and give Wells its name.

Wells is a jewel in the local landscape, attracting large numbers of visitors from near and far. Tourism makes up around 80% of the city's economic wealth and it is imperative we build on this to continue to thrive, therefore incorporating ownership and management of car parks and local facilities is a must.

Wells was a borough up until 1974, when local government reorganisation meant that it became a parish council. It was most recently confirmed Wells would remain a city in April 1974 when Queen Elizabeth II issued letters patent under the Great Seal, which granted city status specifically to the civil parish.



# THE FUTURE



Wells City Council are proactively considering the options for asset transfer and services using the One Somerset business case document as a starting point. We are willing and able to make a difference in our city and for our community.

We note that the devolving of these assets and services should broadly result in a cost neutral budget position for both Parish and Unitary Authority, in order to minimise financial instability on either part.

Having taken all this into consideration our initial thoughts are contained in this document as a basis leading to more substantial discussions with the Unitary Authority.



# Wells Market Place – an opportunity for a focal point of activity

- The Market Place - currently under utilised given its position in the centre of Wells. We envision its development as a venue providing a range of uses, transitioning between the High Street and the historic Cathedral and Bishop's Palace. The Town Hall's facilities can be incorporated into any event plans, realising their combined full potential as an event space. Local independent cafes and bars that line the periphery provide a relaxed, continental feel.
- WCC has already undertaken to install new safety bollards and planters, visibly taking control of enhancing the area to Wells' residents approval and make for a more pleasing space to visit.
- Control of markets – Bustling markets are held twice weekly in the historic Market Place, continuing a tradition dating back nearly 900 years, to when Wells was granted weekly markets in the city's first charter. There is scope to expand on these traditional markets – additions that are of varying themes, seasonal, evenings.
- Monitoring and enforcement of environmental health matters, pavement licences, including local businesses compliance with standards of health and safety – managed locally will increase efficiency and responsiveness
- Licencing: event notices, street trading – coming hand in hand with the Council's vision for Wells and its Market Place.





# Control of the following assets and services are best kept at a local level, close to the community that benefit from them:

- All Car Parks - particularly South Street Pay & Display, where 6 spaces are already owned and revenue generating for WCC as part of the Wells Recreation Ground Trust.

As a City reliant on tourism we can ensure the best service, and positive first impression, for many of our visitors if managed at a local level.

Car parking facilities are also a necessity for those commuting into the City, WCC recognise that consideration of this demographic would be better appreciated at a local level, with greater ability to anticipate and manage their changing needs

- Local tourism – Expansion of Tourist Information Centre work. Recently returned to premises at Wells Town Hall, the Tourist Information Centre has scope to greatly enhance the experience of visitors to Wells.
- Library premises - to continue to provide a valuable service to the local community, a hub for resources and information. Many local residents rely on these facilities and this importance is recognised by WCC; if controlled at parish level there will be greater security that they will remain in place and a flexibility to meet Wells' residents changing needs.
- Public Toilets - Obtain the freehold of Union Street block, which faces closure with the dissolution of MDC, but is a valuable facility for the local community and visitors. (WCC already control the Town Hall, Bus station and Recreation Ground toilets)

# WCC have the ability to manage current gaps in delivery of highly visible, highly valued local services:

- Grass cutting and open space maintenance such as road sweeping to keep gullies, verges, roads and estates clean. Preventing build up of debris, leaves etc, that can impact negatively on the community's pride in their City and ultimately be a safety hazard
- Street cleaning: litter control, bin emptying, graffiti removal – highly visible to locals and tourists alike, regular consistent upkeep is needed to show our City at its best.
- Maintenance of local parks and play areas:
  - Hawkers Lane / Kidder Bank – grassy area with mature trees, woodland and brook, separate children's play area
  - Bigal Rand Park - open grassy area suitable for dog walking, games, community events with fenced play area for children with seating areas
  - Parsons Way – Playground plus surrounding green space
  - Tor Furlong – pitch with goal posts and adjacent fenced children's play area. Bordered by popular walking and cycling route and National Trust owned woodland
  - Land west of Leisure Centre – well used pedestrian link into City Centre. Open grassy area popular with runners and dog walkers
  - Cathedral Walk – children's playground and basketball court with adjoining seating areas
  - Black Dog Gardens, Tor Street – green space and garden area with sheltered seating. Large variety of plants, trees and wildlife including bats
- Other green open spaces – i.e. communal green spaces on estates and in other residential areas - Coronation Road, Reakes Close Lethbridge Road, Jocelyn Drive corner, Sealey Crescent / Everett Close and Churchill Close
- Hard open spaces, areas used for parking on estates.





# Recreation and allotment provision

## Promoting Community participation

### Health and environment



- Sports Grounds

- Freehold of Wells City Football Club – sporting and community events

- Freehold of the Athletics ground - including dedicated tennis courts, netball courts and Archery zone, along with associated clubhouses

- Land adjacent to Wells Rugby Football Club

- Freehold of land used for Wells Skateboard Park off Mountery Road.

- Allotments – Obtaining the freehold of Burcott Road site will secure green space within the City boundary for community use, supporting self sufficiency
- Local climate change initiatives via liaison with WCC’s Sustainability Officer getting the local community involved, aware and inspired to make a change. Wells is seeing a move more and more to attaining carbon neutrality and possibilities in the pipeline include separated recycling bins around the City, improved network for cyclists.



# Civic Pride



- Closed churchyards and cemeteries

Mendip Hospital Cemetery - the burial ground for the Somerset and Bath Pauper Lunatic Asylum, with small chapel on site

The closed churchyard that is the Cathedral Green

St Cuthbert's Churchyard - green space adjacent to historic Alms-houses that dates from 13C.  
Popular cut-through with pedestrian pathways to maintain

WCC already manage and maintain Wells Cemetery to a recognised high standard, often sought out for praise for the meticulous care and attention taken, and would be able to extend this across all the City's churchyards and cemeteries, as well as the previously mentioned parks and green spaces.

- Maintenance of Memorials

War Memorial in St Cuthbert's churchyard

The freehold of the Conduit – centrally situated in the Market Place, regular attention is required to preserve this memorial of significant historical importance.

- Street naming - ensuring roadways in new developments are given names that are of significance to the community in Wells, honouring local people and historic events

## Further services and facilities WCC could take into consideration in the initial phase of devolvment

- Planning application control functions

Wells City Council has recognised the possible need to appoint a Planning Officer, in respect of smaller applications. This may best be implemented in collaboration with other Parish Councils, sharing this resource locally to ensure value and cohesiveness of decision making across the local area.

- Car parking management

It will obviously be necessary to make provision to manage the performance and misuse of car parks back under WCC control, alongside this the Council would then also undertake to manage on-street parking, putting procedures into place.

- Leisure and arts centres – currently none designated in Wells but could be explored subject to arts funding?

## Other possibilities referred to in the One Somerset business proposal, not considered viable in Phase 1 but could be considered at a later date.

- Wells Leisure Centre – under long term lease to Fusion (60 years)
- Group Volunteering (health, social care, fostering etc) currently provided through established groups in Somerset such as Spark who already have links with primary care networks.
- Minor Highways functions such as minor road and footpath repairs, lining, signage – implementation costly and onerous, needing expertise and could leave WCC open to liability claims
- Abandoned vehicles
- Recycling Management – currently managed by Somerset Waste Partnership
- Health & Wellbeing - isolation / volunteering / befriending – local community groups / charities already set up
- Mendip Community transport – local minibus and bus routes, WCC could continue to support
- Community safety / neighbourhood watch (already volunteer run)
- Footpath lighting
- Local town economical development (e.g. job clubs)



# To conclude...and next steps

- WCC consider it is best placed to manage services and facilities at a local level bringing real meaning to the word Localism.
- We listen and respond to our community so we can fully anticipate their needs and action accordingly, without the delay and bureaucracy often experienced at broader Council levels.
- We are a historic Council, well capable of expanding the current services and facilities we offer to include those outlined. The people of Wells have a particular pride in their City and we can build on this by keeping their provision managed at a local level.
- We are asking for the return of assets taken from Wells in the 1974 Local Government reorganisation
- We undertake to work with the new Unitary Authority in devolving these services and assets aiming for transfers to have a broadly cost neutral outcome for both Councils.
- We are presently in liaison with our peers in the surrounding parishes in anticipation of the formation of our Local Community Network under the new Authority, discussing how our neighbouring communities can all benefit from getting involved, communicating and working together.
- Engagement with the local community through public meetings once more certainty is known regarding the Council's position and any resulting changes, ensuring clarity so that residents are fully aware the Council is acting in their best interests.