

Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge Town Council Strategic Plan 2023-2027



Introduction

This Strategic plan takes as its starting point documents produced by the Town Council in recent years. The Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in 2018. The Burnham Evolution Bid was partially successful and contains ideas that can be taken forward this year by the Burnham High St Task Force Group utilising the £50,000 put aside for this purpose by Sedgemoor DC. The Highbridge Regeneration Bid to the Levelling Up Fund, written by Sedgemoor District Council, was sadly unsuccessful in 2022 but was part of the wider Regeneration Framework for the development of Highbridge which was adopted by Sedgemoor DC as a planning document and will be taken up by Somerset Council.

In addition, it takes note of relevant SDC documents such as the Local Plan and supporting background material where these are relevant to the two towns. However, it is not intended that this plan should be limited to what is in these documents but represents a 4-year programme of actions to be taken by the Town Council, which, as well as taking forward ideas in these documents also include others which have been discussed.

It has become clear that the financial constraints of the new Unitary Authority has resulted in a devolution of services from the Authority to the Town Council. This Town Council will continue to put itself at the heart of our community and respond to the needs of our residents, taking the opportunity to ensure devolved services meet the specific needs of our towns. We will continue to focus our work around the Vision and Mission Statement.

Vision

‘At the heart of our community’

Mission Statement:

We will:

- Celebrate our uniqueness.
- Optimise the economic performance of our towns
- Create a sense of place: a place where people want to live and choose to spend their time.
- Maximise the potential of existing assets and resources.
- Become a vibrant coastal destination.
- Promote a more sustainable and greener lifestyle for all



Reviewed and updated at Council on 30th October 2023, 27th February 2024, 20th January 2025, 14th April 2025, 11th November 2025, 3rd March 2026, 29th June 2026, 2nd November 2026

Strategic Aims for 2023-27

We will aim to:

1. **Develop an efficient, transparent council at the heart of our community representing the needs of our residents and improving access to services**

   Success criteria:

   - The staff team and councillors have the right IT and other tools to work effectively
   - There is improved communication across the council and towns
   - Committee structures and meeting diaries are appropriate to the council's priorities
   - The public are able to raise concerns with councillors in suitable forums
   - Information about the council and its activities is available both online and in print to maximise reach
   - Good governance, fiscal responsibility and the habits of a good employer are embedded in the council
   - The Council is positively engaged in LCNs in the new Unitary authority

2. **Develop the cultural and economic well-being of our towns by drawing on the Highbridge Regeneration Plan and involving other stakeholders.**

   Success criteria:

   - The increased number of local residents using local businesses day to day
   - The towns are connected to sources of employment and business opportunity
   - Open public spaces in the town centres provide a place for people to enjoy
   - Community facilities and events are used to their maximum potential
   - There is good public and active transport connections which allow people to reach places for work and leisure
   - The town centres continue to be full of independent shops where people spend money in local businesses
   - A Strategic Plan is in place for the development of the Princess Theatre and surrounding area

3. **Princess Street is a cultural and civic hub attracting residents and visitors alike. Create a greener and sustainable future for our towns by working with interested stakeholders**

   Success criteria:

   The Council has:

   - Enabled the community to work towards a net-zero target for 2030
   - Ensured its operations are on the route to becoming net zero by 2030
   - A plan to help adapt to the worst impacts of climate changes
   - Encouraged a healthy lifestyle that makes the most of natural assets
   - The community benefits from locally sourced food and renewable energy
   - There is increased biodiversity in our green and blue (water) spaces
   - The sea front has several activities and attractions to make it a destination for visitors

4. **Enhance the well-being of our residents**

   Success criteria:

   - Both towns provide a wide variety of opportunities for sport, leisure and cultural activities for all ages
   - There is a well-informed directory of support groups available in the towns, both online and in print
   - Community groups are encouraged to identify need, and find creative ways to support people

Strategic Aim 1: To develop an efficient, transparent council at the heart of our community, representing the needs of our residents and improving access to services.			
Action	**Lead Councillor/ Officer/ Committee**	**Timescale Year 1/2/3/4**	**Review of action taken**
Review the IT systems including: • Better website platform	Cllr Baker/ Town Clerk/ Deputy Town Clerk	By the end of Year 1 (April 2024)	Some improvements have been made to the website. Regularly being updated. Microsoft 35 was installed at the end of January 2025 and is working well.
• Web access for meeting papers			Councillors have a shared portal for accessing meeting papers.
• Improve email/ Office systems			IT, Cyber Security and Email Policy was approved at Council in December 2025 and updated in August 2026.
• Bring your own device policy for councillors			Laptops were issued to Councillors in July/August 2026, as required. Ongoing

Improve communication of meetings and consultations: • Better website platform	Chair/ Town Clerk/ Cllr Perry	By the end of Year 2 (April 2025)	Meeting dates published in Local Reach in September. The website is currently being reviewed with the proposal to get quotes for an updated site.
• Find best practice and explore further use of social media to promote the Town Council			
• Review the visibility and use of noticeboards			Noticeboards have been refurbished. One has been removed as requested by the property owner.
• Distribute information to the library and community hubs			
• Councillor drop-in sessions to be set up twice a year			Councillor drop-in session held on 13th January 2026 and 17th September 2026.

• Ensure residents know the pathways for raising their concerns			
• Explore ways of increasing community use of our website			
• Ensure the financial reporting system is delivering transparency and control		By the end of Year 1 then continuously until the end of Year 4	Relaunch of the accounting system for 2024/25 ensures the accounts are easier for councillors and the public to understand. More financial information is provided at Council and Committee meetings.
• Continuously review procurement practices to ensure value for money as per audit regulations	Chair of Finance/ RFO/ Town Clerk		Improved financial processes have been established and recognised by auditors. Ongoing
• To reconfigure the Old Courthouse to	Town Clerk/Assets and Amenities	Plan April 2025	Costings report received January 2026.

become an effective and useful building for all that use it for now and in the future		Changes April 2026	Further options being considered and a report will be presented to Council in due course. Ongoing
• Review committee structures annually and have a rolling programme of policy review to ensure the fiscal duties of the council are fulfilled	Town Council	Annually	Core governance documents are reviewed annually and considered at Council in May. Ongoing annually. Other policies are being updated on a rolling programme.
Achieve the Local Council Award run by NALC. Apply for Quality then Gold.	Chair of Council and Town Clerk	Achieve the Quality by Year 3 and be working towards Gold by Year 4.	Registration for silver level has been made (equivalent to previous Quality). Application is being progressed, although has been delayed due to other priority work commitments. Ongoing
To continue to work with LCNs	Council Representative and Council		We now have representation on the Highways Task Group. Both groups

			are working effectively to network and share knowledge and experience. The Youth Group has been absorbed within the Community Breakfast. It is no longer part of the LCN.

Strategic Aim 2: To develop the cultural and economic well-being of our towns by drawing on the Highbridge Regeneration Plan including other stakeholders			
Action	**Lead Councillor/ Officer/ Committee**	**Timescale Year 1/2/3/4**	**Review of action taken**
Develop a sustainable business plan for the Princess Theatre. • Use the independent advisors report to explore options available	Asset & Amenities Committee/ Officers		Business Plan was adopted by Assets & Amenities Committee in August 2025 and actions are being implemented by the Theatre Manager.
• Consult with the community on future plans			
• Present a report to the Town Council with fully costed recommendations for the future of the theatre			
Improve our Burnham town centre and as a Town Council we will; • Explore car parking provision	Working group continues to work collaboratively with Better BOS which also includes residents and business groups	Working group to develop plans and take action through years 2-4	The working group received a workshop from the High Street Taskforce which delivered information and background and supported the formation of Better BoS as a

			placemaking partnership. Better BoS has been wound up.
• Pedestrianisation: Improve the space available for pedestrians			Development of plans is ongoing.
• Stimulate the High St growth			
• Review disabled access to the High St			
• Events to stimulate footfall			
• Explore other ideas to enhance the seafront			
Develop Highbridge Town Centre; • To ask Somerset Council to trial first hour free parking at Bank Street Car Park	Town Council/Somerset Highbridge Regeneration Working Group	Year 4	Working Group have made the request to Somerset Council. Somerset have refused a trial of 1 free hour, but suggest B&HTC consider funding free car parking in the run up to Christmas in 2027. They are going to update and

			improve signage for the carpark.
• To send a letter to Somerset Council to encourage EV parking facilities at the car park	Town Council/Somerset	Year 4	Somerset Transport Unit has confirmed in correspondence that Bank Street and Oxford Street car parks have been prioritised for LEVI funded EV charger programme. Other nominated sites have been submitted to Somerset Council
• Explore the possibility of a BT portal-charge points for phones and a payphone for emergencies by contacting BT and ascertain interest	Town Council	Year 4	BT are reviewing the possibility of installing a Hub near the Community Centre.
• Ask Somerset Council to investigate the development of the derelict houses by the YMCA to see if it could be used as a nursery school/family unit	Town Council	Year 4	Somerset Council has now given permission for the cottages to be demolished and plans have been

			submitted by the YMCA to build 8 flats and a children's nursery. There will also be parking spaces. The cottages have now been demolished.
• Support Our Highbridge by giving them advice as they work with Somerset Council on possibility of taking over the lease of St John's Ambulance building	Town Council	Work to be completed during Year 2-4	Our Highbridge has taken over the lease and may be approaching the Town Council for funding.
• Continue to support Highbridge Community Hall by giving advice	Town Council		Support has been provided as needed.
• Support the use of the Millennium Green for community use - adverts on our website		Work to be completed during Year 2-4	Request made to Somerset Council asking for charges to be reduced, which was rejected.

• Review the feasibility study for repurpose of the old station building	Town Council, Somerset Council, Network Rail and GWR	Work to be completed during Year 2-4 Reviewed	Proved not feasible to go ahead and pursue this.
• Continue to work with GWR to encourage signage to direct passengers to the east platform and better access for the disabled	Town Council, Somerset Council, Network Rail and GWR	Work to be completed during Year 2-4	GWR Community Fund has been awarded to install improved signing to improve access for all, around the station and streets in Highbridge. This will be installed by June 2026 and is being led by Somerset Council. A Business Plan to seek government support for step free access at the station is being developed. Signs delayed, now August 2026. Sir Ashley Fox is working at government level to

			improve access at the station.
Councillors invited to attend the walkabouts on Poplar and Morlands Estates when possible	Highbridge Councillors	To be arranged	Ongoing – Dates provided to Councillors.
To put in process to develop and review Neighbourhood Plan	Town Council/Community Group	Start 2026-27	

Strategic Aim 3: Create a greener and sustainable future for our towns			
Action	**Lead Councillor/ Officer/ Committee**	**Timescale Year 1/2/3/4**	**Review of action taken**
To work towards a net zero carbon for 2030			Monies included in 2026/27 budget.
To continue to review the TC working practices and contracts to reflect this aim	Town Clerk/ Officers/F&G Committee/Assets and Amenities Committee	1-4	Working Group set up to review practices
Create a plan to adapt to climate change	Town Clerk/ Officers/Council	By Year 4	Councillors appointed onto a Working Group to produce Emergency Plan.
Town Council to work to build climate resilience for both towns			
Encourage a healthy lifestyle that makes the most of natural assets • Ensure all the towns green spaces are well maintained and encourage residents to make full use of them	Town Clerk and Officers/ Assets and Amenities Committee Town Clerk/Officers/Growing Group	By Year 3	Growing Group has been very effective in planting and helping to maintain various flowerbeds.
• Encourage greater wildlife diversity in our green and blue spaces	Working Group		Biodiversity policy adopted by the Council in

			January 2026. Actions being progressed. Council agreed to apply for funding from Hinkley Point Community Fund in partnership with Somerset Council and the Woodland Trust. Application will be submitted in August 2026.
• To prioritise and implement actions suggested by LCWIP	Cllr Gudka		Cllr Gudka now represents the Council and the LCN on the Active Travel Steering Group. He is working with that body to prioritise locations to implement improvements proposed in the LCWIP.
Encourage the provision of locally sourced food and renewable energy • Encourage local producers to give their excess food to the community	Town Clerk and Officers	By Year 4	Forge Rhyne Allotments give their excess food to the foodbank.
• Provide information about renewable energy on the website and signpost people to providers		By Year 3	

Explore ways of ensuring that the seafront has a variety of activities and attractions to attract visitors • Continue to plant sustainable plants to give all year round displays	Town Clerk and Officers/ Assets and Amenities Committee/ Growing Group	Year 1-4	Growing Group continues to assist the Estates Team in maintaining these flower beds.
• Explore ways of making the seafront more attractive with a variety of activities, including events such as the fireworks			Fireworks event held in November.

Strategic Aim 4: To enhance the well-being of our residents			
Action	**Lead Councillor/ Officer/ Committee**	**Timescale Year 1/2/3/4**	**Review of action taken**
The Town Council will use the devolution of services to take control of green spaces, play parks and local environment.	Town Council		TC took over the maintenance of the agreed flowerbeds in 2025.
Will ensure the environment around Burnham and Highbridge is clean, welcoming and a pleasure to walk around			Litter picks have taken place each year and are scheduled quarterly for 2026.
To ensure that well-being is kept in mind whilst delivering the Climate and Ecology Action Plan. • Use the Energy strand to support residents to reduce their energy use.	Climate and Ecology Working Group	Years 1-4	This is now being driven by the Burnham and Highbridge Green Team CIO. See reports given to TC

• Use the Sustainability strand to encourage reuse, reduce, recycle and repair			
• Use the Transport strand to encourage active transport choice (walking, cycling)			
• Use the Ecology strand to enhance, protect and encourage the active use of our green and blue (water) spaces.			
Redesign a cost of living support tool on the website. Publicise this on all media platforms. Ensure people at the Information Centres for Somerset Council are aware of it and support its use.	Cllr Vickers and Cllr Gudka	Review by April 25	Information provided on website and updated on an ongoing basis.

• Use the Energy Information Hubs to give individual face to face support		Needs an update 2026. New team required to update information and simplify	Burnham and Weston Energy are continuing to provide individual support to residents to reduce their energy bills.
Create a working group to Identify all support groups in the town, then create a directory	Working Group (to be decided) and Cllr Metcalfe	By April 26	
• Publicise via social media/website/ print then circulate to community areas.	Possible to adapt and update a lot of material we already have on the cost of living page and add to this. See above	Update bulk by August 2026 and invite other groups to provide information as an ongoing process	Cost of Living pages already contain a lot of information regarding support groups in Highbridge and Burnham-on-Sea.

• Also work with Sport Groups to show where they operate and what they offer. Publicise as above.			
• Encourage new groups to grow and develop by supporting through grant applications.			
To produce an emergency plan to assist residents during emergencies and to consider further plans e.g. flood plan	Town Clerk/ Officers/Councillors	Year 3	Working Group appointed and a plan has been drafted. Letters have been sent to organisations identified for shelters to ask for their permission to be included in the plan. Currently on hold. There was a showing of the National Emergency Briefing film in July 2026, which was well attended.

Appendix

These were actions that were originally identified in the original Strategic Plan and have now been completed.

Strategic Aim 1:	
Action	**What the Council have done**
Review the IT systems including: • Web access for meeting papers	A VSM Portal is being used for Councillors' access to meeting papers. Meeting papers are published on the website.
Continue Drop-in sessions before each Town Council meeting	Due to poor attendance, it was agreed at Council in May 2024 to cancel the drop-in sessions.
Improve communication of meetings and consultations:	Information regarding Council activities and events are being distributed to more outlets e.g. Morland Hub, The Waffle Hub, Tesco's etc. The Council's Facebook page was relaunched in February 2024.
Review committee structures annually and have a rolling programme of policy review to ensure the fiscal duties of the council are fulfilled	Changes to the Committee structure were approved by Council in May 2024.

Strategic Aim 2:	
Develop a sustainable business plan for the Princess Theatre. • Use the independent advisors report to explore options available • Consult with the community on future plans Present a report to the Town Council with fully costed recommendations for the future of the theatre.	New Theatre Manager recruited in September. Working Group now established and setting out an Action Plan.
Resolve the play park situation and then explore other ideas to enhance the sea front. Present a report to TC with recommendations that are costed. Seek funding to complete the project.	Permission for the play area to be installed on the seafront was not granted by Somerset Council. The project is now closed.
Reform the working group to develop plans for Burnham Centre using the High St Taskforce initiative. Report to be presented to TC with recommendations for further action. Funding to be sought where necessary.	Town Board has been established and were rebranded as Better BOS. They have set their Terms of Reference and are working on an Action Plan. Better BOS are applying to be established as a CIC.

Reform Highbridge Regeneration Group to rework the levelling up bid plans. Group to include stakeholders. • Highbridge Station travel plan- ensure pedestrian access from the Brue Farm estate. Cycle link from Highbridge to Burnham. • Bank St car park- gather data to enable exploration of car park charging regime and use of space. • Review alternative sources of funding or a renewal bid.	Terms of Reference and membership was agreed in November 24. A meeting has taken place with GWR to pursue the development of the station premises and travel plan. The new working group is now established with many representatives from the community involved. They are in the process of creating a 3-year Action Plan. Nick Tait is providing support from Somerset Council. The Action Plan will go to the Town Council for ratification by July 24. The Working Group has now completed the Action Plan and will be bringing to the September meeting of the Town Council.
Strategic Aim 4:	
Develop the provision of green and blue spaces for public use.	Already in another section Group, Town Council, Somerset Council
To ensure that well-being is kept in mind whilst delivering the Climate and Ecology Action Plan. Use the energy strand to support residents to reduce their energy use. Use the Sustainability strand to encourage reuse, reduce, recycle and repair. Use the Transport strand to encourage active transport choice (walking, cycling).	The CE Working Group has taken the following action: • Weston Solar Energy are completing energy audits on private and community buildings. • We now have 2 Repair Cafes, one in each town. • Some businesses have signed up for the City to Sea Refill Scheme to reduce single use plastic. • The Bus Users Group has now met with the new Leadership Team at First Bus and Cllr Mike Rigby of Somerset Council. They have established a communication link with the Operations Manager of Buses of Somerset.

Use the Ecology strand to enhance, protect and encourage the active use of our green and blue (water) spaces.	• Somerset Wildlife Trust and Our Highbridge continue to develop ideas to enhance the Brue Green Pathway. • The Growing Group is now working with Burnham in Bloom and Clean Surroundings to improve our planting scheme. The Working Group is now seeking to become a CIC to open up opportunities for applying for grants. The Group will still deliver the Action Plan for the Town Council. There are 4 Town Councillors involved in the group. The Working Group has now applied to become a CIO. We are awaiting the response.