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1.1 Introduction

This Community Strategic Plan has been prepared on behalf of the community by Watchet Action Strategic Partnership (WASP), a steering group of volunteers drawn from the community, formed in Spring 2007. The Plan has been made possible by the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTi) funded by the South West Regional Development Agency.

The Plan is intended to be a working document that is responsive to local needs and can be reviewed and updated. It brings together three strands of information about Watchet: highly detailed responses to consultation from local people, an analysis of socioeconomic baseline information, comparing Watchet to other towns in Somerset and the region, and a review of existing plans and strategies affecting the town and surrounding rural area.

The Plan provides a context: it seeks to draw on what is specific and valued about Watchet as a unique coastal town in Somerset and to shape future decision-making. The Plan is based on the views and aspirations of local people, who will be instrumental in maintaining momentum and determining the order in which local needs are met. We are optimistic that the Plan will prompt renewed support and opportunities for joint working with the private sector, public agencies, local authorities and voluntary and community groups.

The Watchet Community Strategic Plan examines strategic issues affecting the town and seeks to find practical ways to address socio-economic problems and environmental concerns, defining specific projects that can make a difference to people's wellbeing and their long-term prospects. Key projects have been prioritised for further feasibility because we feel they will make the maximum impact in helping us to achieve our vision. The next stage will be to develop, in consultation with the community and potential partners, an Action Plan to begin implementation and help us to achieve our vision for Watchet.

“A future Watchet will be an attractive and prosperous town, facing up to the challenge of climate change, with a thriving economy, a rich cultural/community life and a high quality natural environment complemented by well-designed public spaces. Watchet will offer a good life for all its residents and a memorable experience for its visitors.”

Our Goals

Improving prosperity

- Full employment, well-paid jobs and thriving businesses.
- A diverse market town economy
- A welcoming visitor destination based on local distinctiveness, quality and customer care
- An economy that uses its resources efficiently

Built & natural environment

- An attractive, vibrant town with well-designed public spaces and a high quality built and natural environment.

A safe, strong & inclusive community

- An active, healthy, caring and inclusive community
- High quality local services and facilities that will meet the needs and interests of people of all ages
- Choice of housing stock and affordable options

Culture

- High levels of community well-being
- Participation in local arts, culture, heritage and sport
- Civic pride and local distinctiveness celebrated

Becoming a low-energy community

- A more self-reliant, low-energy community
- A vibrant environmental economy
- A better quality of life for all
- Active, informed residents

2.1 Making the Plan

The preparation of the MCTi Community Strategic Plan for Watchet has been managed by Watchet Action Strategic Partnership (WASP), whose membership is drawn from the local community. The Group has been supported by representatives of Watchet Town Council, West Somerset Council, Somerset County Council and a co-ordinator and community agent.

2.2 Identifying the issues

The Watchet Community Strategic Plan builds on earlier consultations and the work of the Watchet Regeneration Partnership (WRP), which was closely involved with the building of Watchet marina, and related regeneration initiatives, since the formal closure of the docks in 2000.

Whilst the marina has had a positive impact on the regeneration of the town, a number of key sites relating to the marina development, the East Wharf and the Mineral Yard on West Pier, have yet to be re-developed, five years after the marina opened for business. These harbourside sites, once developed, will provide new homes, help create a vibrant economy, an attractive backdrop to the marina and facilities for the community and visitors. It is fair to say that in the process of consulting and developing the community strategic plan, the community has adhered to a process that, rather than seeing the development of specific locations as a driver of regeneration, has focussed on addressing needs and aspirations of the whole community.

The East Wharf development, when it happens, will be welcomed as another large piece of the jigsaw in place, an opportunity to develop the economic vitality of the town, to build investor confidence and stimulate expansion of local businesses and community enterprise.

During 2007-08 a series of consultation events was organised to gather current local opinion. Full details of the consultation process are contained in Appendix 3 at the end of this report, and are also available on the WASP website www.watchetonline.com. At the same time the Group completed the detailed MCTi 'Healthcheck', which analysed the socioeconomic status of the area and identified key issues facing Watchet, together with a 'Strategic Review' of the relevant strategies and plans that affect the area. The issues identified in the consultations, the Healthcheck and the review of existing plans and strategies were analysed and an outline 'Vision' for Watchet was developed. Five themes emerged, each headed up by a member of the Steering Group:

- **Improving prosperity**
- **Built & natural environment**
- **A safe, strong & inclusive community**
- **Culture and well-being**
- **Becoming a low-energy community**

A meeting of stakeholders was held on 28th January 2008, attended by fifty people, to encourage the community to consider the issues in depth, and come forward with ideas for action, which would address the identified issues in the short, medium and longer-term. The projects arising from the themed groups were rated and prioritised in terms of their contribution to the overall vision for Watchet

- **addressing issues identified by the community**
- **environmental impact and issues of sustainability**
- **clear community benefit**
- **strategic advantage, e.g. a project not dependent upon, but links with, or supports other project objectives to achieve 'added value'**

Getting Community approval

A final draft of proposals will be presented to the community in Spring 2009, and the plan amended to take account of the comments received.

3.1 About Watchet

The Strategic Community Plan area focuses on the town of Watchet in West Somerset. Situated on the Bristol Channel, nine miles to the east of Minehead, Watchet has been a port for more than 1000 years. Its maritime history, the ancient harbour, the presence of a paper mill since the 1750s, the medieval street pattern in the old town, the old Mineral Railway and West Somerset Railway lend to Watchet an air of industrious endeavour over the centuries.

The town has been the focus of a major regeneration initiative, a marina development, that opened in July 2003, with further enhancements of public spaces such as The Esplanade completed in 2008. Further mixed development for employment and residential use is planned for the prominent East Wharf location. East Wharf remains the major focus for regeneration of the town centre.

Watchet is a forward-looking community with a history of self-reliance. It is a town with tremendous appeal and potential; however, common to other coastal communities in rural locations, it has had to contend with considerable obstacles to realising its ambitions. The community strategic planning process has helped engage and empower local people. It has generated enthusiasm, openness and commitment that will mean local people can shape our future and help with practical delivery of the Plan. The Watchet MCTi 'Healthcheck' contains a vast amount of statistical information about the area and is available from Watchet Town Council Chambers or on the WASP website, www.watchetonline.com and within the appendices at the end of this report.

4.1 Our Community Plan Themes

After detailed consideration of the community consultations, the Healthcheck and a review of existing plans and strategies affecting the area, Watchet Action Strategic Partnership Steering Group has grouped the main issues under five broad 'Theme' headings.

THEME 1 – Improving Prosperity

There are two aspects to this theme, the first deals with the local economy and the second deals with tourism, recognising the importance of attracting visitors as a mainstay of the economy without compromising the qualities that make Watchet special

The Local Economy

Strategic Aim

WASP's strategic aim under the economy strand of this theme is to build the resilience and diversity of the local economy. In order to increase business competitiveness and productivity, Watchet will need a more highly skilled and qualified workforce relevant to the future needs of Somerset's economy. This can be achieved by encouraging and supporting existing and new businesses, and social enterprises, to maximise opportunities available to them for promotion, skills training, investment, innovation and diversification, without compromising the natural beauty and qualities of the area.

Context

Although Somerset has a growing economy, its recent economic performance compares unfavourably with regional and national performance. The regional, county and district economic development objectives all focus on the need to create a more productive and competitive economy, with a diversity of higher value jobs in West Somerset. The Learning and Skills Council Somerset Annual Plan 2007-08 identifies West Somerset as an area of high deprivation: 'Transport difficulties and diseconomies of scale in rural areas limit access to employment, learning and skills development and to information, advice and guidance'.

The majority of people in Watchet are employed in three key sectors: Manufacturing 18.8% (relative to a West Somerset figure of 9.94%), wholesale & retail 15.93% compared to 16.4% in West Somerset, and health and social work (15.5% to 12.33% respectively). People currently commute to access better-paid work in Taunton and Bridgwater. Many would prefer to work nearer to home. Currently only 3-4% of jobs are in knowledge-based industries compared with the national average of 18% (mainly financial and business services). Businesses in rural areas tend to be older, have older owners and be of a smaller scale (sole traders or partnerships). (SW Observatory SMEs Report 2007).

In Watchet, the local economy comprises 93 businesses, with 508 employees. Of these, 23% are categorised as 'financial and business services', 20% are retail and 16% are hotels and catering. The main employer is Wansborough Paper Mill. The retail sector supports 88 jobs; hotels and catering support 67 jobs.

Although it is not clear where new jobs will come from, predictions suggest the main 'growth' sectors are likely to be tourism, retail/leisure, care services for children and older people, the local food economy and specialist manufacturing, able to exploit new technologies or serve niche/localised markets. There is a need to provide training opportunities across a variety of key sectors to cultivate a more highly skilled, rewarded and qualified workforce relevant to the future needs of Somerset's economy.

Local people feel that rejuvenation will require provision of land and premises to encourage expansion and/or diversification of local businesses and start-ups, and attract inward investment. There is a perception of a lack of local business support. Many people commented on the lack of flexible accommodation: there is demand for small business start-ups and for businesses wishing to progress to larger premises, but not large industrial units. There was support for shared 'workspace' type accommodation, although more feasibility work is needed to identify actual demand.

East Wharf, described as the 'final piece of the regeneration jigsaw', is the key site for re-development in Watchet. The £12 million scheme proposed by Urban Splash includes residential and commercial elements, with public realm improvements. The scheme was approved by West Somerset Council in November 2008. An Economic Impact Assessment, by Roger Tym and Partners 2008, predicts the re-development will result in the creation of at least 68 jobs and will safeguard a further 9.5 jobs, equivalent to a 13.5 percent growth in the total number of employees. The commercial element of the proposed scheme, to include shops, light industry and a bistro/restaurant unit will help to address the shortfall of business space in Watchet and will contribute towards the West Somerset Economic Development and Access Strategy, particularly Objective 3.2: 'improve the number and range of flexible premises for small businesses'

Objectives

IP1 Promote existing and new businesses by

- Producing a web-based Local Directory of shops, businesses and markets
- Supporting collaborative working e.g. joint marketing activities
- Supporting businesses to identify new markets and develop local supply chains
- Enabling the community to buy local products and services
- Working with local news media to ensure maximum coverage of promotional events

IP2 Support local businesses to take up opportunities for training their workforce by

- Enabling access to continuing education and training opportunities for unemployed people, for people seeking NVQ/Level 2, 3 and 4 qualifications and career progression
- Enhancing the employment prospects of local young people about to enter the labour market through additional skills training in partnership with training providers, community college work placements, modern apprenticeship and skills development

IP3 Build capacity to stimulate community enterprise and entrepreneurship by

- Ensuring businesses and community enterprises are aware of business support services, grants and rate relief
- Research the barriers to AND support needs of rural micro-businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and self-employed people
- Seek to identify potential premises to meet the needs of SMEs etc.

IP4 Increase inward investment and encourage well paid employment opportunities by

- Research into potential to attract specialist businesses, for development of business cluster(s) – around e.g. marine-based activity, low carbon technologies, knowledge-based or creative industries or IT
- Review of stock of commercial premises and assessment suitability for new sector growth

IP5 Support local businesses to adopt energy efficiency and low-carbon technologies by

Identifying partners with the necessary expertise and developing a pilot project to promote and install greener technologies in existing businesses and domestic installations, thus developing an exemplar low-carbon economy

IP6 Enhance the local shopping experience

- Working with local partners to improve the pedestrian experience, signage and street lighting
- Encourage local residents and visitors to use the town's shops and services, and buy local produce

Tourism

Strategic Aim

To maximise the tourism potential of the town and surrounding area in a sensitive and sustainable way

Context

Watchet's hotels & catering businesses account for 9.56% of people employed, relatively fewer than West

Somerset as a whole (13.46%). The tourism sector however supports other local wholesale and retail businesses. The number of accommodation providers appears to be falling, with the loss of caravan facilities to residential development. According to Roger Tym and Partners, in their Economic Impact Assessment, as part of the Urban Splash East Wharf Development Proposal, February 2008, *"Many of the jobs in the town are reliant upon visitor spend. In the absence of official estimates, we estimate that visitor spend contributes approximately £6.7 million to the local economy per annum. This helps to support 185 jobs, which equals 131 full time equivalent jobs"*.

Watchet, in common with other seaside towns across the country, is vulnerable to wider changes in people's holiday choices, although recent oil price increases, and the 'credit crunch' may see the end of cheap flights abroad and a restoration in the appeal of domestic destinations. Other trends include an increase in numbers of people taking short breaks, particularly during the 'shoulder' months either side of school summer holidays. Customers are seeking quality accommodation, local produce, green credentials and a warm welcome. Watchet has a vast resource in its local maritime heritage and

beautiful scenery which can be marketed to visitors; alongside which, improvements in accommodation and services will create the conditions for a thriving tourism industry.

Objectives

IP7 Promote growth in the local tourism economy by supporting managed, strategically co-ordinated tourism initiatives

such as SW Coast Path, now extended beyond Minehead to link with the River Parrett Trail

IP8 Enhance the visitor experience by

- Improving quality standards within the tourism and service sectors, through training
- Working with traders to enhance the shopping experience, encourage longer seasonal opening hours, events, and markets

IP9 Develop and promote a co-ordinated programme of events, festivals, arts and cultural activities (Refer to theme 'Culture & heritage')

IP10 Develop and promote Watchet as a 'low-carbon' and 'green tourism' destination by

Encouraging tourism businesses to adopt sustainable tourism approaches and advertise their green credentials e.g. promote sustainable transport options to visitors e.g. promote public transport, cycling and cycle routes e.g. encourage tourism businesses to take account of environmental impact, 'Green Tourism Business Scheme' accreditation, use of local produce and services e.g. use local food, reducing 'food miles'

THEME 2 Climate Change

There are many different strands to this theme, reflecting a growing interest in acting locally to meet the challenge of climate change and its likely impacts on community well-being. The consultation process, together with ongoing campaigning work done by Forum 21 and the production of the West Somerset Community Climate Change Strategy 2008-2012, all point towards participation by active informed residents, creating a more self-reliant community, a vibrant environmental economy resilient to external changes and a better quality of life for all. We believe that Watchet has the potential to become recognised as an 'exemplar' 'low-carbon' community, increasingly self-reliant in energy, food, health, education, housing and transport.

Reduce, re-use and recycle

Strategic Aims

Under this theme we aim to encourage respect for and better use of our natural resources.

Context

Waste recycling has become relatively easier for households in West Somerset as the local authority has introduced kerbside collection and better recycling facilities (including garden waste composting). Nevertheless the area has lower rates of recycling than the regional or national averages according to Defra figures. A number of social enterprises have started up based on the re-use of Timber (TRUCE) and furniture (Engage West Somerset).

Objectives

CC1 Develop and support activities that reduce waste by

- Encouraging greater awareness and community action to minimise waste production through robust campaigning and provision of better local recycling facilities
- Encourage composting green waste at home or as part of a community composting initiative
- Encourage the development of social enterprises focussing on waste reduction

CC2 Support local businesses to take up opportunities for reducing, re-using and/or recycling non-domestic waste

Initiate discussions/commission research into the potential for the Paper Mill to develop new products and markets for their waste paper e.g. household insulation

Saving Energy

Strategic Aims

WASP's strategic aim under the saving energy strand of this theme is to achieve a reduction in the community's carbon footprint through

- **cutting energy consumption**
- **increasing energy efficiency**
- **reducing reliance on fossil fuels**
- **mitigating carbon emissions**

By making low-carbon technologies viable, easy, convenient, affordable and local for domestic consumers we aim to reduce the carbon footprint of the whole community. Through a process of education and awareness-raising that has already begun, Watchet has the potential to become a hub for technological innovation, employment, training and business diversification

Context

The West Somerset Community Climate Change Strategy 2008-2012 identifies the need for a 'collective focus' of every individual and organisation in order to reduce our carbon emissions. People in West Somerset emit more carbon dioxide per person (11.4 tonnes of CO₂ per person), than the southwest average of 8.9 tonnes carbon dioxide. The UK average is only 9.3 tonnes carbon dioxide.

The Strategy suggests action is needed across a number of sectors such as transport and energy use in the domestic, private and public sectors. A range of energy-saving measures is already available that are cost-effective and could make a significant contribution to reducing carbon emissions. The focus in Watchet, to achieve greater energy efficiency, will be to work with individuals and with small to medium-sized enterprises, which make up the majority of businesses in the town.

Objectives

We aim to achieve a reduction in the community's carbon emissions by

CC3 Encouraging energy efficiency measures across all sectors of the economy

CC4 Encouraging uptake of low-carbon technologies such as renewable energy

CC5 Encouraging uptake of domestic cavity and loft insulation

CC6 Seek opportunities to influence planning policies and process

Producing our own energy and carbon offsetting

Strategic Aims

Under this theme, WASP is seeking to engage the local community in addressing key issues relating to energy use and fuel poverty (where a household needs to spend more than 10% of its income on total fuel use). People in Watchet will make informed choices and take action to use energy more efficiently. Uptake of existing energy-saving technologies will help reduce energy demands, domestically and commercially. Greater uptake of renewable 'low impact' energy technologies such as solar, wind and water power, will mean energy needs can be met locally. The community will be enabled to build in some degree of 'buffering' and resilience to rising energy costs through generating its own electricity, at the same time as developing a highly skilled workforce, employment, increased connectivity to nearby rural markets and recirculation of money within the local economy.

Context

West Somerset spends £80 million per year to meet its energy needs (2008); households alone spend more than £20 million. Nearly 60% of households in West Somerset are without mains gas for space heating and are particularly vulnerable to rising energy costs. The district is very reliant on external sources to meet its current energy requirements for domestic, public and private sectors, resulting in a net outflow of revenue, skills and employment from the local economy, particularly into neighbouring towns such as Taunton and Bridgwater. Watchet has a number of natural assets that have the potential to be utilised for energy generation, e.g. microhydro on the Washford River; tidal power based on Watchet's tidal range (rise and fall) the second largest in the world, and exposed headlands with potential for wind power generation.

Objectives

CC7 Develop and support local means of energy production and carbon offsetting by

- Developing local partnerships to deliver community-led micro-generation scheme(s)
- Promoting uptake of energy-saving technologies and services including woodfuel
- Identifying locally appropriate carbon-offset techniques (e.g. tree planting)
- Promote an improved local skills base in the context of new manufacturing and energy efficiency businesses

Transport

Strategic Aims

To reduce overall carbon dioxide emissions from transport sources, by encouraging the provision of alternatives to private car use, whilst enabling local people to access jobs, education, services, health and leisure opportunities.

Context

Petrol cars are the biggest contributor to transport carbon dioxide emissions in West Somerset, emitting more than 50,000 tonnes carbon dioxide (57%) of all transport emissions in 2007. In rural areas such as Watchet, people rely on their cars to access jobs, services, education and for leisure, particularly where public transport services are restricted. Whilst Watchet is well served in terms of basic services: doctor's surgery, optician, pharmacy, Family Centre, Nursery, Pre-school, First School, various churches and many voluntary organisations, people have to travel out of the District for many services. Public transport options include bus services to major towns and demand responsive transport for vulnerable people through an accessible transport company. West Somerset Railway is predominantly a 'leisure' route but has the potential to offer more options for commuting. West Somerset Cycle Network - the Steam Coast Trail - aims to encourage more cycling, via safe, mainly traffic free cycle routes.

Objectives

CC8 Support actions to reduce the number of car journeys, including raising awareness of car sharing and car clubs, improving cycling facilities, promoting public transport and encouraging alternatives

e.g. reproduction of the West Somerset Transport Guide e.g. campaigning to encourage people to use alternatives to their cars

CC9 Influence decision-making and support actions that retain local services and supply chains to reduce the need for people to use their own transport

Local food

Strategic Aims

WASP's strategic aim under the local food strand of this theme is to enhance the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of Watchet through a collaborative effort to build a locally based self-reliant food economy, in which production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated.

Context

Food produced locally contributes to economic, environmental and social wellbeing of the area: agriculture provides jobs, high quality landscapes and low 'food miles', keeping transport costs and environmental costs to a minimum. Livestock farming is most common in the area, with the majority of agricultural land grass ley or permanent pasture, or planted with fodder crops for cattle and sheep. Vegetable growing is limited by local soil conditions, although asparagus is a successful crop in nearby Withycombe. The development of local food networks of production, processing, distribution and consumption will be influenced by the rising costs of fuel and foodstuffs as well as government-driven funding that, it is predicted, will emphasise wider public benefits, landscape quality, biodiversity and improved public access to the countryside. The greatest change may well be a shift towards community-led food production: on allotments, through 'box' schemes, food cooperatives etc., involving far more people in the production of food locally.

Forum 21, the local environmental group, is working with the Primary Care Trust's 2009 'Grow, cook and eat' campaign to promote small-scale vegetable production. The County Youth Service aims to expand young people's cookery skills through training workshops during 2009.

Objectives

CC10 Promote diversification in the local economy by supporting managed, strategically co-ordinated initiatives linked to local food production, processing, distribution and consumption by

- Researching local food network opportunities including community gardening, 'box' schemes, allotments, food co-operatives, community supported agriculture (CSA), seed savers groups and expansion of the farmers' market
- Promoting healthy eating of seasonal, fresh, locally produced foods
- Supporting local producers, processors, distributors and food retailers
- Enabling the community to grow their own fruit and vegetables
- Enabling the community to buy local products and services

CC11 Build capacity to stimulate new forms of community enterprise and entrepreneurship by

- Attracting funding to develop a pilot local food network
- Researching demand for local organic high value niche products (organic vegetables etc)

THEME 3 Quality of Environment

A quality environment is fundamental to the whole of WASPs Community Plan, which to succeed must be sustainable and deliver not just for today's community but for tomorrow's as well. There are three aspects to this theme, firstly, the quality of Watchet's historic built environment, secondly the quality of residential property and its contribution to the well-being of the community and thirdly, the quality of the natural environment.

Built Environment

Strategic Aim

WASP's strategic aim under this theme is to protect, respect, conserve and enhance the local built environment and infrastructure.

Context

Watchet has been a port for over a thousand years; however much of the built environment around the 'Old Town' we see today can be dated from the 18th century onwards. The quality of the environment is reflected in designation of the Harbour and adjacent streets as a Conservation Area that includes a number of key 'feature' buildings such as the West Somerset Railway Station complex, the former Railway Engine Shed, currently the Boat Museum, and the Old Market House, currently the Town Museum. The main thoroughfare through Swain Street and Market Street is relatively narrow and can suffer traffic congestion. An Urban Design Statement prepared in 2003, a strategic Design Guide for Watchet's built environment to augment WSC Local Plan, identified a variety of town centre improvements, particularly to enhance the experience for pedestrians. A recently formed and very enthusiastic Conservation Society has developed a package of practical ideas that can make a significant contribution to the conservation and future enjoyment of Watchet's vernacular architecture and its public spaces. Future development of key sites around the Harbour will have a major impact on the aesthetic appeal of the waterside.

Objectives

QE1 Achieve better design standards

- Promote community consultation and participation.
- Influence decision-makers to seek the highest build and environmental standards and pay homage to vernacular architectural styles where appropriate, e.g. within the town's Conservation Area
- Re-visit the urban Design Statement document

QE2 Encourage environmentally sensitive town centre enhancement by

Establishing a partnership of local people, private and public agencies that can influence and have a stake in the improvement of Watchet's town centre (link to the Conservation Society's Pavement Project)).

QE3 Respect and preserve our heritage

Protect the town and surrounding areas' heritage sites and provide mechanisms for their appreciation and enjoyment (link to Conservation Society's Lime Kiln project).

Housing

The general perception in Watchet is of a town divided by the path of the West Somerset Railway, with the 'Old Town', with its medieval street plan, lying in the Washford valley and along the harbourside, and the areas 'across the tracks' dating mainly from the 1940's onwards.

Strategic Aim

To ensure current and future housing stock offers diversity and quality that enable people to choose to live in Watchet

Context

With very high house prices relative to incomes more needs to be done to provide local people with options for affordable housing and to provide the necessary services and community facilities for all residents. A recent survey showed that average house prices across West Somerset were seven times average earnings, making the area the least affordable for buyers in the southwest. Second home ownership is not perceived to be a major problem in Watchet. The opening of the marina has driven house prices up in an area that was previously considered more 'affordable' than Minehead or the National Park. Watchet's housing stock is of variable quality: ageing properties together with poor insulation and poor construction techniques mean that investment is needed to upgrade homes to meet current standards and to benefit individual householders in terms of energy efficiency measures that could reduce their costs. 'Warm and well' and 'Warm streets' projects are promoting grants for cavity and wall insulation; however, to address issues such as fuel poverty and have a longterm impact to improve the quality of housing stock, more concerted efforts, by a range of organisations, street-by-street, will be needed.

Objectives

QE4 Quality Homes

- Achieve better housing standards Influence decision-makers to ensure new housing meets high environmental and sustainability standards e.g. features to encourage energy and water efficiency, rainwater harvesting, locally sourced materials
- Work in partnership to identify and develop a flagship housing project to showcase quality and sustainability
- Encourage existing homeowners to upgrade their homes to latest environmental standards through the uptake of grants e.g. for insulation

QE5 Improve the availability of affordable housing

- Address actual demand for local affordable housing by undertaking consultations or surveys to establish a more accurate picture of demand and 'affordability' for local people
- Assess whether there is unmet demand for shared ownership schemes
- Ensure all eligible claimants take up their rights to means-tested benefits, including housing benefit

Natural Environment

Strategic Aim

To protect, respect, conserve and enhance our natural environment

Context

The town is set in an attractive high quality natural landscape, straddling the Washford River valley with scenic cliffs and the fossil-rich Jurassic beds exposed on the foreshore. These fossil beds are allied to the geology of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site on the Dorset Coast, albeit on a smaller scale. However the coastline attracts interest in its own right from the Field Studies Council

Nettlecombe, universities and scholars for its fossil elevations. Watchet's natural environment has tended to be overlooked as an asset; however, a Heritage Lottery funded project being managed by The Exmoor Society in partnership with Exmoor National Park Authority, to enhance and interpret the Old Mineral Railway Line from the Brendon Hills down to the port has highlighted landscape features of value in scenic and wildlife terms. More study of Watchet's natural areas is needed to inform future management objectives for public open spaces and land in private ownership, to enhance the landscape and wildlife value of the area. Opportunities exist for voluntary participation in habitat management and also the creation of 'greener' spaces within the town, through additional tree planting and sensitive management of public spaces etc.

Objectives

QE6 Encourage environmentally sensitive management of key natural environments

- Identify opportunities for voluntary participation in wildlife habitat and landscape creation and management
- Identify key sites for preservation e.g. herb-rich grasslands, woodland etc

THEME 4 A Safe, Strong and Inclusive Community

This theme has many strands that are interlinked and will need to be co-ordinated to achieve the vision of the Community Plan. Watchet has prided itself on its community spirit, its self-reliance and ability to mobilise local opinion to influence decision-makers on matters affecting the town. Looking to the future, the town's population is set to increase in line with the rest of the south west. In order to achieve an active, healthy, caring and inclusive community with access to high quality local services and facilities to meet the needs and interests of people of all ages, attention needs to be paid to retaining existing services and planning for changing needs. Watchet currently has a population structure with more people of working age with children compared to the majority of West Somerset, which supports a proportionally larger elderly population. Given the whole country has an ageing population profile, it seems likely there will be increasing demand for services and facilities to cater for more elderly people. A more strategic approach to service provision that ensures children and families can access good quality, affordable health, social and wellbeing support they need locally is suggested here.

The consultation identified training and building people's skills and confidence as drivers of a safe, strong and inclusive community, enabling people to express their aspirations and meet their needs based on a thorough understanding of community-led action

Vocational Training & Lifelong Learning

Strategic Aims

People in Watchet will be able to access appropriate training and learning to equip them to be flexible, to lead rewarding lives, to be better qualified and rewarded in their work and to help meet the future needs of the Somerset economy.

Context

In 2006 the overall employment rate for Somerset was 78% between July 2006-June 07, for West Somerset the figure was 63.3%, with larger numbers of people of working age on benefits and/or with caring responsibilities. The percentage of people excluded from paid employment in West Somerset was 11.92% in 2006, compared to a Somerset average of 8.9%, triggering action under the 'Working Neighbourhoods Fund' to increase skills levels and employability of people in West Somerset, but in particular in Watchet, where individual average skills levels, and employment choices are limited.

Objectives

SS1 Improve access to life long learning

opportunities, including employment-related training, business skills, Information Technology, basic skills (literacy and numeracy) and personal development opportunities

SS2 Work in partnership with others to access training and skills development opportunities

through the Working Neighbourhood Fund

Facilities and Access to Services

Watchet aims to be an active, healthy community using local sports and leisure facilities that meet the diverse needs of all ages.

Strategic Aim

To maximise the social, health, leisure, and educational benefits to the community through increased participation in sports and leisure activities by

- Improving existing facilities
- Creating additional high quality and affordable facilities
- Promoting existing opportunities

Context

An audit of the facilities and services and the SWOT analysis demonstrated that local people have access to a wide range of health, education and care services, at a level to be expected for the size of population (See Appendices for details). In addition the town has an extensive assortment of voluntary and community organisations to meet the diverse needs of people of all ages. In all there are more than eighty local groups providing opportunities covering sports, healthy lifestyles, care for the elderly, cultural and youth activities. Whilst the community has little direct control over the delivery of healthcare and education services, there is more scope for more creative, sustainable, independent community-led solutions that are tailored to local conditions, can provide local employment and retain resources in the community. Increases to the population will require a review of facilities and the development of an overall concept plan for amenity, sports and other facilities.

Objectives

SS3 Youth & Community Inclusion

- Facilitate mechanisms to include young people in the civic life of the community including issues of access to opportunities, services, facilities, transport etc.
- Support young people to address issues raised in response to consultations and to help them acquire the skills and expertise they need to engage with partners in the delivery of services targeting specific age groups

SS4 Promote healthy living at all ages

Encourage exercise, healthy eating for all through consultation, community engagement and partnership working

SS5 Provide a mix of facilities and activities appropriate to the needs of all ages

Develop a more detailed picture of emerging needs through further audit and mapping. Identify a concept plan based on further consultation and an assessment of changing demographic needs

Voluntary & Community Sector

Strategic Aim

A community that is heard, has robust leadership and vibrant community and voluntary organisations

Context

Watchet is well-served by a diversity of voluntary and community groups at local, district and county level, with an exemplary track record of self-help, particularly for older people, young people and families on low incomes. Many organisations report problems with recruitment and retention of volunteers and there is a general trend, not confined to Watchet, of the average age of volunteers increasing and fewer recruits to take their place, as people place more emphasis on supporting their families, jobs etc. Through their voluntary and community engagement, many people have acquired a wealth of skills in managing resources, consultation, fundraising, participation and personal development. As a vehicle for building an inclusive community that is able to express and meet its needs, there is scope to provide more support through existing networks and engage in detailed discussions about the changes needed to meet the needs of the community in the future

Objectives

SS6 To increase the social, leisure and education benefits arising from the activities of a strong community and voluntary sector

SS7 To support individuals to develop a range of skills, leadership, expertise and confidence to engage in influencing policy at local, county and regional levels

THEME 5 Culture & Heritage

Culture and Heritage

Strategic Aims

People in Watchet can experience high levels of wellbeing through participation in rich and varied cultural life, with a choice of local arts, culture, heritage, sports and environmental opportunities for all ages.

Context

Community wellbeing could be described as the degree of integration in a community between its economic, social, cultural and environmental elements. It's a complex concept for which there are few measures of success, other than how people feel about where and how they live. Wellbeing is holistic, affecting every aspect of people's lives and relies on people being empowered to address issues important to their community. Community well-being is often observable through the cultural life of a community. The cultural life of a community is somewhat dictated by the experience of local people and their sense of a shared emotional connection to their locality, their ability to express and fulfil their needs and their capacity to participate and influence decision-making. Communities flourish where there is a clear identity, embodied within members of the community, the local environment, within the buildings and open spaces; an identity which embraces the arts, culture, heritage, sports and environment. Communities are becoming increasingly aware of the need to live in a more environmentally friendly way and to make changes to their lifestyles that can have a global impact. Whilst Watchet can be said to have a thriving cultural life, based on the high levels of participation in voluntary and community activities, there is potential to develop a more strategic approach. Such an approach can harness the enthusiasm, skills and initiative of local people and deliver long-term sustainable well-being for all sectors of the community. Participation in cultural activities in Watchet is relatively easy because of the large numbers of people involved in organising voluntary and community activities, sports and youth action as well as notable town events such as the Court Leet, Carnival, Queen Catur's Night, the Children's Festival, 'Wonderful World' music on The Esplanade, museum open days, local produce markets etc.

The town has a long history and many iconic themes upon which to write its cultural 'back story' e.g. its maritime history embracing Viking raids; links to the romantic poets (Watchet is understood to be the starting point for the poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and borders The Coleridge Way, a recreational long distance path), through to 'Yankee Jack', famed for his repertoire of sea shanties; the route of the Old Mineral Line, (for transporting iron ore from the Brendon Hills to be shipped across to Wales), and the manufacture of paper. Heritage is not just about old buildings and artefacts, but includes memories, customs and traditions that celebrate our culture. Similarly, by raising the cultural profile of the town as a venue, and its reputation for high quality events and facilities, it is likely that the town can attract new audiences and boost visitors, to support the local economy. A rich cultural backdrop could also stimulate the development of a cluster of related businesses and enterprises in the creative industries, as has happened in other coastal rural communities in the southwest.

Objectives

C1 Improve community's cultural asset base e.g. Improve community venues, and the organisations that support cohesive, active and inclusive communities

C2 Seek support for community, social and cultural asset development projects e.g. Boat Museum extension

C3 Develop a community cultural development strategy to engage all sectors of the local community in cultural activity, to develop the community's range of skills and to create a vibrant cultural life for the town, its residents and visitors

C4 Create an attractive cultural environment with the potential to attract people working in the creative industries

C5 Increase participation by local people in sports and leisure activities by improving existing facilities and creating high quality and affordable additional facilities

5.1 Community Plan Projects

A series of projects has emerged through the process of developing our Community Plan, in response to the community's aspirations. WASP is confident that this process has identified a robust programme of initiatives that benefit not only the local community but the economy of West Somerset and the county as a whole.

The projects are grouped under the theme headings; however, some projects contribute to realising one or more objectives under other themes in the plan. For each potential project there is a brief description of the actions needed. The list of projects is not set in stone: project opportunities will arise during the life of the plan and can be checked against the plan's goals identified through the consultation, Healthcheck and groupworking to ensure the greatest benefit can be achieved for the community. Many of the actions identified will require the commitment of project champions, partners and funders. We recognise, as a community-led group, that the actions that have been identified must be prioritised and efforts concentrated on the projects, which will bring most benefit to the community. WASP also recognises that implementation will depend upon the principles of the Plan being aligned with the Local Area Agreement and regional strategies, as well as the work of the Watchet Regeneration Partnership. For evidence of strategic 'fit' please refer to Appendix 4.

In order that Watchet is successful in competing for resources, commitment will need to come from a senior level within the statutory authorities, Watchet Town Council, West Somerset Council, Somerset County Council and from South West Regional Development Agency. The projects and actions in this Plan fall broadly into three areas of responsibility:

Influence

Activity which will seek to **influence** the policies and actions of others.

Partnership working, monitor outcomes

There is a need for roles and responsibilities to be clarified. Further discussion is needed with the statutory authorities to develop partnership working, to evidence the strategic importance of projects in the Plan and to secure financial support for their early delivery.

Endorse

Activity that **endorses** existing projects and actions of others.

With other agencies, monitor & review progress

Own Ourselves

Projects and activities which are not being addressed by others and on which we will need to take action and develop **ourselves**.

5.2 Summary of Community Plan Projects

Employment of Project Staff

Economic Regeneration Strategy

Web-based Directory

Tourism Development Plan

Tourism Organisation

Green Tourism

Steam Coast Trail

Watersports Centre

Improving Facilities and Services for Visitors

Environmental Awareness Campaigns

Commercial Waste Reduction

Low-Carbon Technologies

Attracting Knowledge-Based Industries

Investing in Skills Training

Watchet 'Pavement' Project

Town Design Statement

Quality Homes for Local People

Assessment of Demand for Affordable Housing

Youth Inclusion Strategy

Audit of Community, Sports & Leisure Groups, Facilities & Support Services

Audit of Vocational Training & Lifelong Learning Opportunities

New Community Building

Voluntary & Community Sector Support

Community Cultural Development Strategy

5.3 Individual Projects

WASP Project Staff

Now Identify resources and partners to enable WASP or partner organisation to employ project staff to implement the Plan **WASP/WRP**

Theme 1 INCREASING PROSPERITY

Economic Regeneration Strategy

Now Identify partners and resources to commission an 'Economic Regeneration Strategy' to achieve WASP's stated objectives. Based on the recommendation of Hyder Consulting (UK) Limited provided through the MCTA. A copy of the consultants' report 'Community Studies, Lot 2 Support for Communities in Project Planning Development, Watchet June 2008, Hyder Consulting (UK) Limited can be found in the Appendices to this report. Cost estimate £20,000-£25,000, with potential funding sources identified as Somerset Rural Renaissance Scheme and Somerset County Council Rural Regeneration Fund. **SCC/WSC**

Web-based Directory

Now Produce a web-based directory of local businesses and services **WASP**

Tourism Development Plan

Soon Identify partners and resources to commission tourism development expertise to prepare a Tourism development plan and marketing strategy - to include key projects and events to attract visitors, extend length of stay and increase spend with minimum impact on the environment. **WTC/WACET/
WSC/SCC**

Promoting Tourism Organisation

Later Establish a new local group to take forward recommendations of the Tourism Development Plan **New group**

Green Tourism

Now Research/undertake a review and consolidate existing initiatives to develop a local branding and promote Watchet as a 'Green Tourism' destination e.g. use of local foods, goods and services; promotion of sustainable transport options, public transport, cycling, walks leaflets etc. **WASP/
Private sector**

Steam Coast Trail

Now Work with Sustrans and other partners to take forward the proposals **Sustrans/SCC**

Watersports Centre- making the most of Watchet's natural assets

Now Identify partners and resources to take forward the proposals for a major Watersports Centre **WBOA, Watchet
Marina, WS**

Improving Facilities and Services for Visitors

Now Identify and promote training opportunities to tourism-related businesses and services to encourage accreditation and raise quality and service standards **Training providers,
WACET**

Soon Work with traders to enhance the shopping experience, encourage longer seasonal trading, extend opening hours, and work in partnership to organise events and markets **WACET**

Theme 2 CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECTS

Delivery of the community's aspirations under this theme will require external support for feasibility studies. Forum 21 will need support to develop its capacity to increase community participation and volunteering in environmental campaigning, education and awareness raising and publicity.

Environmental Awareness

Now Identify funding to resource Forum 21 to deliver a programme of awareness-raising campaigns and practical environmental projects to promote greater participation and well-being and foster greater respect for the planet's resources e.g. promoting domestic recycling. **Forum 21**

Commercial Waste Reduction

Soon Commission research to identify potential for local businesses to reduce their commercial waste and identify new opportunities for waste re-use and recycling.e.g. Commission feasibility to explore use of waste products from Wansborough Paper Mill **WASP/Forum 21**

Low-Carbon Technologies

Soon **Producing Our Own Energy through Micro-generation**
Feasibility study into the potential for a community-led micro-generation scheme and the formation of a local community-owned energy services company (ESCO) that can develop community renewable energy micro-generation schemes e.g. micro solar, wind, water, biomass, for Watchet

Energy Saving

Now Develop and fundraise for a local campaign using Forum 21's trained volunteers to reach every home in Watchet to offer renewable energy assessments, to raise awareness and uptake of grants for cavity & loft insulation and ways of saving energy at home and at work **Forum 21/WSC**

Transport

Now Co-ordinate partnership working with the Steam Coast Trail and others to develop practical volunteer projects that will help reduce local car use, promote walking, create safe cycle ways and seek develop a pedestrian-friendly town centre **SCC Highways/ Forum 21/ Conservation Society**

Community Woodland

Soon Undertake a feasibility study into the planting of a community-owned or managed woodland as a local carbon offset scheme or as part of woodfuel supply chain **Private sector/ community group**

Local Produce

Later Commission a feasibility study into local food network opportunities including community gardening, 'box' schemes, allotments, food co-operatives, community supported agriculture (CSA), seed savers groups and expansion of the produce market **Forum 21**

Sustainable Home Building

Now Influence others to adhere to Code for Sustainable Homes and adopt low-energy technologies in all new builds, conversions and renovations **Forum 21**

Attracting Knowledge-Based Industries

Now Identify resources and partners to undertake feasibility studies into the development of a cluster of knowledge-based industries and manufacturing relating to low-carbon technologies and services e.g. Use of local natural assets/resources to produce sustainable **SCC/WSC/private sector**

- construction materials
- e.g. Waste wool, waste paper as insulation products
- e.g. Development of businesses based on the use of locally-sourced materials
- e.g. Development of local/regional supply chains

Investing in Skills Training

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------|
| Now | Establish links to the Working Neighbourhood Fund Programme managed through West Somerset Council to meet emerging skills gaps and training needs. e.g. Potential for skills training in Sustainable Construction and Low-Carbon technologies and services such as installation of insulation, micro-generation appliances | WASP/WSC/SCC |
| | e.g. potential for skills training in rural and woodland management skills | |

Theme 3 QUALITY OF ENVIRONMENT PROJECTS

The quality of the local environment is very important to many Watchet residents, and projects to enhance the built environment are seen to offer a broad range of opportunities for participation, celebrating local heritage, the acquisition of technical skills and for expressing civic pride.

Watchet 'Pavement' Project

- | | | |
|------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Now | Establish a partnership of local people, private and public agencies that can influence and have a stake in the enhancement of Watchet's town centre, | Watchet Conservation Society |
| Soon | Develop a pilot to engage the expertise and resources needed to undertake practical physical repairs to historic 'fabric' such as cobbled areas. | |

Undertake a Design Statement

- | | | |
|-------|--|--|
| Later | Identify partners and resources to re-visit the Urban Design Framework to inform the Watchet Pavement Project and other initiatives. | WASP/Watchet Conservation Society |
|-------|--|--|

Quality Homes For Local People

- | | | |
|-------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Soon | Influence decision-makers to ensure new housing meets high environmental and sustainability standards e.g. to encourage energy and water efficiency, rainwater harvesting, and the use of locally-sourced materials. | WSC |
| Later | Identify partners and resources to test feasibility of a flagship housing project to demonstrate quality environmental and sustainability standards. | Ecos Trust/TRUCE /Forum 21 |

Assessment of Demand For Affordable Housing

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| Now | Work in partnership with local housing providers and planning authority to review local needs and seek to attract proposals appropriate to Watchet, within the wider District provision. | WSC |
|-----|--|------------|

Theme 4 SAFE, STRONG AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Web-based Directory

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|-----|---|--|
| Now | Research and commission a web-based directory of information on services, facilities and community activities, healthy lifestyles, lifelong learning and other opportunities in Watchet and elsewhere | WASP/PCT/Youth Service/Somerset Skills & Learning |
|-----|---|--|

Youth Inclusion Strategy

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Soon | Develop a partnership of local community, public and private agencies to create a coherent Youth Inclusion Strategy, better co-ordination of service provision and develop ways to involve | WTC/WASP SCC Youth Service |
|------|--|-----------------------------------|

young people in the development and delivery of services.

Audit of Community, Sports & Leisure Groups, Facilities and Support Services

Soon Identify specific opportunities to improve the quality & access to services and facilities, particularly for disadvantaged groups of people e.g. youth café, indoor sports.

**WASP/
SCC Youth Service**

Audit of Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Now Work with training providers and other partners to identify specific opportunities to improve the range and quality of learning and training opportunities and to improve access to opportunities elsewhere, e.g. affordable transport options, childcare etc.

**Somerset Skills &
Learning and other
learning providers**

Investing in Skills Training

Now Establish links to the Working Neighbourhood Fund Programme managed through West Somerset Council to meet emerging skills gaps and training needs.

WASP/WSC

New Community Building

Now Identify resources and partners to undertake a feasibility study into **Town Council/** the level of support for and the longer term sustainability of a **Working Group** Community Building to provide shared premises for a variety of health, sports and leisure activities

Voluntary And Community Sector Infrastructure Development

Soon Work in partnership with Engage West Somerset and others to identify resources to deliver training, build the capacity of voluntary and community organisations, raise skills levels and promote participation by individuals and organisations in civic life, volunteering, campaigning and delivery of services.

Engage WS

Theme 5 CULTURE and HERITAGE Projects

Responsibility for the maintenance and sustainability of Watchet's many cultural assets lies in the hands of volunteers who work tirelessly to achieve a rich and varied programme of activities, to manage highly-valued premises and who promote Watchet's heritage and identity.

The projects identified below aim to build on existing strengths and establish a higher profile for Watchet that will be demonstrated by increased visitor numbers and a stronger local economy. An attractive cultural environment also has the potential to attract people to re-locate in the area.

A Community Cultural Development Strategy

Now Commission research and develop a model to engage all sectors of the local community in cultural activity, to develop the community's range of skills, to create a vibrant cultural life and to foster creative enterprise, skills training and employment opportunities

WASP/Artlife

Cultural Assets

Soon Identify partners and resources to establish a co-ordinated package of local cultural heritage projects and events. This would include support for voluntary organisations such as the Museums and also developing events such as a Festival of the Sea or a Romantic Poets Trail (linked to the long-distance footpath the Coleridge Way), the Steam Coast Trail and the Old Mineral Line Heritage Project.

WASP

6.1 The next steps

Watchet has seen several waves of regeneration initiatives over the last twenty years and much has been achieved through joint working with the local community, interest groups, the Watchet Regeneration Partnership and the public and private sectors. The Watchet Community Strategic Plan is the latest step in developing the shared vision of many partners, newly validated by the community. The Plan builds on previous achievements with the added dimension of a community aiming to address global issues at a local level, such as climate change.

WASP's steering group recognises the need for a continuation body to work with partners to deliver the projects in the Plan. The steering group will be looking at a number of options to ensure that the plan can be taken forward, such as

- i) Creation of a newly constituted body such as a Development Trust or Community Interest Company
- ii) Hand-over to the existing Watchet Regeneration Partnership
- iii) Work with existing partners to deliver priority projects

The Steering Group recommends that early discussions be held between WASP and the Watchet Regeneration Partnership to consider the principle of establishing a constituted body capable of representing the full range of interests of the community and those bodies with which it works. Independent from local government, this body would be community-led, self-managing, able to apply for funding and able to co-ordinate project delivery. This body would also have responsibility for monitoring progress over the lifetime of the Plan. At present, no organisation has a responsibility to undertake this work. Monitoring could take the form of a quarterly review (by members of the continuation body) and an Annual Review, which would look in more detail at achievements and obstacles and would update the Community Plan so that it remains relevant and acts as a stimulus for further community action. The on-going engagement with local people is a high priority. The Steering Group recognises the importance of communication with local people, through press coverage, the website www.watchetonline.com and as part of the delivery of individual projects, keeping people informed of progress.

The Market and Coastal Towns Initiative has ended. It is closed to further bids to support the development of detailed Action Plans or specific projects. Nevertheless, the Community Strategic Plan for Watchet provides the strategic framework to underpin the next phase in Watchet's regeneration. The Steering Group is keen that all efforts are focussed on forming a strong body, led by local people who can work in partnership, to deliver the vision for Watchet.

This report has been prepared on behalf of the Watchet Action Strategic Partnership by Carol Stone (Facilitator). A list of Steering Group members appears on the website:

www.watchetonline.com

Chair: Sally de Renzy-Martin

Telephone: 01984 631495

Email: raffles@btinternet.com

Community Agent: Sarah Reed

Telephone: 01984 633344

Email: townclerk@watchettowncouncil.org