



CHARLBURY TOWN COUNCIL STRATEGY 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Context	2
Vision, mission and objectives	4
Planning and priorities	6
Engaging the community	9
Monitoring progress	11
Appendix 1 Estimated carbon footprint of Town Council activities	12
Appendix 2 Carbon footprint of Charlbury community (per household)	13
Appendix 3 Project scoring table (illustration)	15
Appendix 4 Project proposal review template	16

CONTEXT

The current Charlbury Town Council (CTC) was elected in May 2021. That election was delayed by a year because of the pandemic so the council will serve a three-year term rather than the normal four-year term. Of course, each new town council respects the policies and practices of the preceding town council, whilst also bringing fresh ideas to maintain and improve the town, and to respond to a changing political environment. New requirements and new opportunities arise.

Traditionally the powers and duties of town and parish councils have been limited. Where a council owns and manages assets, it has direct control over them. They also have the power to influence other stakeholders – residents, local community organisations and businesses, nearby landowners and communities, and the district and county councils.

CTC recently enhanced its potential for further powers and influence in two ways:

- Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and winning the community's approval of it in a referendum held in June 2021.
- The appointment in November 2021 of a town clerk with the CiLCA¹ qualification which means that the CTC is now able to use the General Power of Competence given to parish and town councils under the Localism Act 2011. This gives eligible parish and town councils *“the power to do anything that individuals generally may do”* as long as they do not break other laws. This better *“enables them to take on their enhanced role and allows them to do the things they have previously been unable to do under their existing powers”*. For instance, CTC could provide services previously managed by other authorities or provide entirely new services.

The previous town council declared a climate emergency in 2019. As a result of that declaration, and a follow-up community workshop held in February 2020 and attended by over 100 members of the public, CTC initiated a number of environmental working groups to explore opportunities for action (Land and Nature, Buildings, Journeys, Energy, Food and Stuff). These are areas of activity seen as key to reducing carbon emissions, around which groups of volunteers can come together to work alongside the council to develop projects to create the transformative change that is required.

Initially a health and wellbeing group was also envisaged but it became clear that health and wellbeing are integral to the outcomes that successful action to reduce carbon emissions would deliver – warmer and more comfortable homes with lower energy bills, more active travel, healthier food produced locally, and so on. It makes sense therefore to build health and wellbeing into each of the areas of activity. Similarly, the principles of inclusivity and establishing resilience in the face of climate threats need to be taken into account.

A thread that has emerged both locally and nationwide is that the climate emergency cannot be divorced from the ecological emergency. The former town council therefore became a signatory to the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill being promoted in parliament. It calls for protection and enhancement of land and nature to be integrated into strategy and planning in all tiers of government.

¹ Certificate in Local Council Administration

This understanding influenced our work from the outset, and CTC's vision and mission statements reflect the need for holistic thinking.

For example, slowing traffic speeds improves safety and can encourage more walking and cycling, all of which reduce carbon emissions and improve health and wellbeing.

We have spent our first few months in office recruiting our new clerk, updating multiple policies and procedures, building a new website and developing this strategy.

In the meantime, amongst other things, we have:

- Identified and started to enact maintenance and improvement programmes for Nine Acres, town benches and noticeboards, and the skate park.
- Appointed a trustee to the newly-formed Corner House and Memorial Hall charity.
- Received the initial results for mapping the carbon sequestration potential of the Mill Field and Wigwell Nature Reserve.
- Started a feasibility study for a small hydro scheme at the sluice gate on the Evenlode, at the north end of the Mill Field.
- Organised an e-bike try-out scheme and procured an e-bike which we are going to lend to residents to give them a taste of e-bike utility before they potentially buy their own.
- Surveyed the community's appetite for an electric car club.

VISION, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

VISION:

For Charlbury and the surrounding area to become a zero-carbon community that is thriving, inclusive, beautiful, biodiverse and sustainable now and in the future.

MISSION:

- 1) Ensuring that Town Council services are delivered efficiently, sustainably and cost-effectively to meet the needs of Charlbury residents.
- 2) Delivering on our commitment to act on the climate and ecological emergencies by actively preparing Charlbury and its environment for a zero carbon, biodiverse and sustainable future.
- 3) Engaging all of the community by providing appropriate leadership, governance and inspiration in an open and transparent way.

OBJECTIVES:

Community

- To maintain a pleasant, safe and well looked-after town that all can enjoy.
- To increase opportunities for everyone to exercise, socialise and enjoy green spaces.
- To provide support for, and work with, Charlbury's strong and active community.

Engagement

- To engage with residents, community groups and organisations in order to understand and address the needs and concerns of the whole community and to work together to deliver our strategy.
- To make sure the needs of all residents are considered (including young, elderly, less able and people in all parts of town)
- To improve our visibility and communication through better use of the website, noticeboards, surgeries and council meetings.

Land and nature

- To restore and connect habitats on council-owned and -managed land, and support to key species, and to encourage residents to do the same on their own land.
- To improve the capacity of local soils to sequester carbon.

Buildings

- To encourage the high-quality retrofitting of local community buildings and homes so they become low energy and zero carbon.
- To engage with the planning system to maintain the town's character while helping it thrive and achieve net zero emissions.

Energy

- To promote community-owned electricity generation.
- To promote household energy generation (e.g. solar panels, heat pumps).

Journeys

- To make our streets safer by reducing traffic speeds and tackling danger areas.
- To take proactive measures to promote and facilitate active travel.
- To support and enable the shift to electric vehicles.
- To improve and promote the use of public transport.

Food

- To support and signpost local food producers and suppliers.
- To promote initiatives for community-food production and sharing.
- To support climate-friendly diet initiatives.
- To encourage reductions in food waste.

Stuff

- To promote the purchasing of less stuff, and to promote low-carbon and eco-friendly purchases.
- To encourage sharing and re-use.
- To enable repair.
- To encourage recycling.

Value for money for residents

- To review CTC expenditure to make sure we are getting good value for money and spending our money on the right things.
- To review land the CTC owns, manages and leases to consider whether we could use it better for the community (e.g. for community activities, nature, carbon capture and storage, or income generation).

SCOPE

CTC acknowledges that the statements above represent a scope that is very wide-ranging and ambitious, and that much is beyond what would normally be expected of a small town council.

However, we are equally conscious that a climate and ecological emergency means that 'business as usual' is not an option. Therefore, we are aiming beyond our statutory responsibilities, and maintenance of existing assets and activities, to identify ways we can promote and enable positive change in all aspects local life.

The statements above therefore encapsulate Charlbury's collective potential that we are inviting everyone to participate in – see more about this on page 7. And in order to decide how best to rise to the challenge, we have developed a number of tools for the management, prioritisation and monitoring of any undertakings we pursue.

PLANNING AND PRIORITIES

Essential elements of our planning include:

- Maintaining a register of what we own and what we manage, and putting in place detailed management plans for these assets. The register indicates where we are a statutory consultee, what we support through annual grants, as well as what other community organisations own and manage.
- Establishing baselines from which we can monitor progress towards our objectives. Two key baseline measurements are the emissions from CTC's direct activities (see Appendix 1) and the emissions from the community as a whole – both direct and indirect (see Appendix 2, shown on a per household basis). Other baselines (such as measures of biodiversity, renewable energy generation or recycling) will be determined in line with our priorities (see below).
- Creating a project review template to assess feasibility and alignment with objectives and to help groups structure and refine their proposals (see Appendix 3).
- Identifying priorities and initiatives being undertaken by the district and county councils which we might amplify or build on. This helps to establish the spheres and levels of influence that the council can use.
- Maintaining a register of grant-giving bodies to which we can apply for support for projects.
- Identifying circumstances in which it makes sense to work with the nearby communities (such as Fawler, Finstock, Spelsbury, Chadlington, Taston, and Leafield) when thinking about, for example, sustainable journeys between them, working with landowners, mapping carbon and biodiversity corridors or developing food networks.

Despite our enhanced powers we have recognised that it is simply not possible to pursue all the objectives at once, and that activities will proceed at different speeds.

We have therefore developed a scoring system to help us identify short-, medium- and longer-term priorities for projects to pursue (see Appendix 4 for an illustration). Our first priorities have focused on projects which relate to the existing activities and responsibilities of CTC as this enables us to make more rapid and visible progress.

The council's key considerations for developing each action area or project to deliver the vision and mission are:

- Does it relate to our duties or to a statutory responsibility?
- How much power or influence do we have? Do we have direct control (such as with land we own or manage); can we enable (by providing funds, for instance), or engage (through events, displays, etc.)?
- To what extent will the cross-cutting factors of health and wellbeing, inclusivity and resilience be improved or enhanced?
- What is the intended scale of impact and how can it be measured?
- Can we build on our existing strengths to deliver quick wins?

- Whether, when we provide funding, we might attach conditions which relate to our primary objectives such as reducing carbon emissions or improving biodiversity.
- How much capacity there is to develop new projects. Are there volunteers within the council or in community organisations willing and able to shape projects (including estimating how much they might cost, making the case for town council funding, sourcing grants from other organisations, or engaging volunteers from the community to undertake activities)?
- How the council can leverage the enthusiasm, know-how and finances of other organisations with similar objectives to work in partnership with it.
- Other drivers that exist, locally or nationally, that would allow Charlbury to showcase best practice, act as a test-bed for new initiatives or engage and enable new ideas where there is a gap in capacity.

CURRENT PRIORITIES

Based on the above criteria and project scoring (as shown in Appendix 4) our current priorities are:

1. To review all land CTC owns, manages and leases in light of our objectives and cross-cutting themes.

For example, the Mill Field:

- Improve access for less-able residents and for buggies.
- Enhance carbon sequestration and biodiversity through changes to grass-cutting schedules.
- Encourage contractors to move to more efficient, electric-powered mowers.
- Explore opportunities to improve biodiversity including providing wildlife corridors (e.g. fish by-pass; community involvement in wildlife surveys and conservation measures for, e.g. bats and water voles).
- Explore feasibility of renewable energy generation through a hydro-electric plant at the sluice gate.
- Advocate for measures to reduce sewage pollution and improve water quality.

(Proposals also being developed and prioritised for Allotments, Nine Acres, Cemetery, Ticknell Piece & Centenary Wood, Playing Close, as well as CTC maintained noticeboards, benches and verges.)

2. To prepare a local walking and cycling infrastructure plan to improve safety and promote and enable active travel.
3. To implement the Neighbourhood Plan by taking an active role on planning applications and representing the town's views to West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).
4. In partnership with WODC, to promote its new sustainability checklist and assist Charlbury residents with meeting the conditions attached.
5. To use our Community Grant Scheme to support community groups (especially those supporting vulnerable people) and important cultural events (like Riverside and the Charlbury Festival).

6. To invite and prioritise grant applications which align with our mission and which provide greatest impact.
7. To lead and catalyse wider transformative change, particularly in the areas of:
 - Buildings energy efficiency – identified as a gap in capacity both nationally and locally, with some local expertise.
 - Low carbon journeys – promoting a switch to electric vehicles; implementing active travel recommendations.
 - Nature recovery in Charlbury and surrounding area – recognising that nature recovery needs to take place at landscape scale (not just in pockets of CTC-managed land), and capitalising on local expertise and strong engagement from the community/volunteers.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Clearly the rate of progress with the strategy will rely on how successfully the council focuses on enabling, educating and supporting the energy and ideas of the community.

Charlbury has a wealth of talent both in the number and dynamism of its many community groups and organisations, as well as the enthusiasm and energy of many individuals working within and outside existing groups. If our strategy is to be successful, it needs to ensure that its engagement processes reach out to, and draw into the council's action network, as many of these as possible. The council can also inspire change without having to be closely involved in project development or delivery.

So, the council needs to define its role in supporting and harnessing that local energy and in driving change where it can have the most impact. Addressing the extensive range of existing actions and new ideas, we want to prioritise our time and energy and demonstrate – to each other, to the community we serve and to the wider Oxfordshire area – where we can best add value.

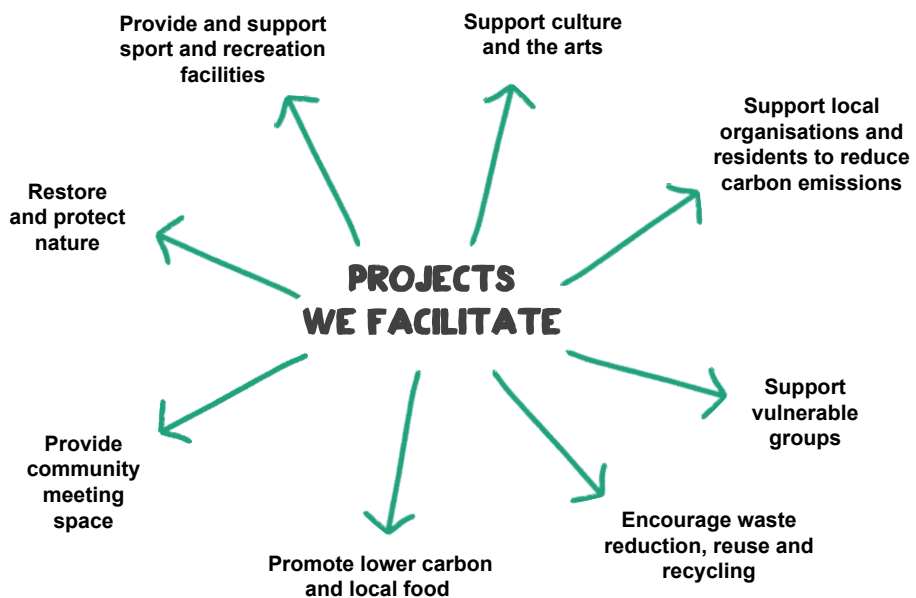
In prioritising, we do not want to demotivate or sideline wider or existing initiatives – the wider work of the community and individual personal choices will make the real difference to the impact of the overall strategy. But we do want to articulate and agree – with each other and the community – where we should focus the limited resources of time and funding.

At the moment, the town council has working groups (see page 2) which are required to have councillors as members, as well as volunteers. There has been a lack of clarity about quite how these should work. In the context of the climate action plan being delivered through a multiplicity of community activities, the role of the working groups should be one of liaising with and enabling community groups and volunteers to deliver projects.

Our goal is to have a network which operates across the different areas of activity. The town council would operate within this network as an enabler, giving agency to others to act where appropriate, and providing financial and other support where a need is identified.

Town council-led projects will be delivered by the working groups or town council-appointed project teams. Community-led projects will be delivered by external groups and networks. Town council working groups will facilitate community input to town council-led projects. They should also provide town council input to, and enablement for, community-led projects.

Another way of looking at it is:



MONITORING PROGRESS

Assessment and monitoring will be carried out by:

- Six-monthly reviews of progress (aiming for October and April).
- Carbon emissions monitoring (where possible) using existing baselines (Appendix 1 and 2) and new baselines where possible and applicable.
- Monitoring criteria for individual projects to be included in all proposals.

APPENDIX 1

ESTIMATED CARBON FOOTPRINT OF TOWN COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

The council's direct emissions – related to its own limited assets and activities – are very low.

The council has completed its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions account for year ending 2020/2021 which is referred to within this strategy as the council's baseline.

During 2020/2021, emissions totalled **14,400 kg CO₂e²**.

(Based on a number derived from various sources, including the assumed environmental cost for grass-cutting in terms of fuel used (petrol or diesel) per acre of grass per annum is between circa 600 kg and 1,000 kg CO₂e. The assumed average of 800 kg CO₂e per acre per year has been used in this instance.

The council currently cuts around 17.45 acres of grass, the majority being made up of the Mill Field 5.4 acres, Nine Acres 4.5 acres, Ticknell Piece 5 acres, the Cemetery 1.62 acres and the rest at 1.03 acres approximately.

The CO₂e from grass cutting activity is therefore 17.55 acres x 800 kg = 14,040 kg CO₂e.

An allowance has been made for an additional 360 kg CO₂e for heating, lighting, website hosting, etc., which is roughly equivalent to 1/10th of what an average UK household uses per year. This does not include items such as grant money spent on cutting the playing close at 0.5 acre.

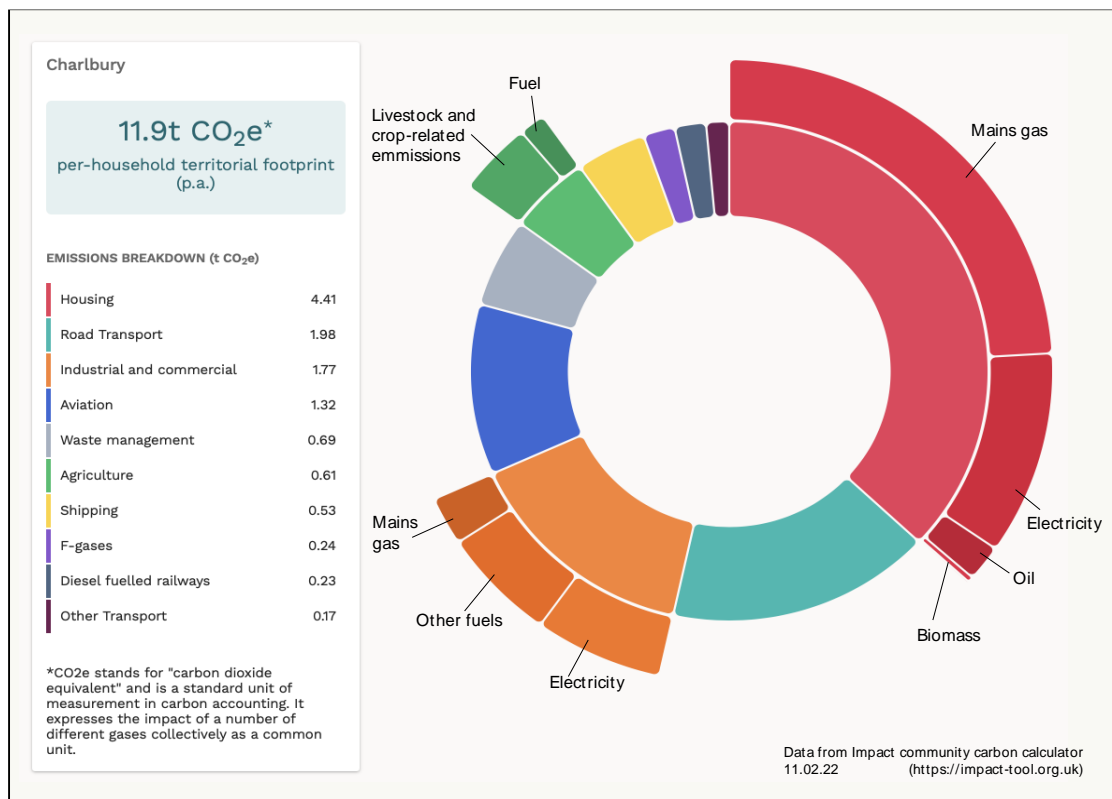
The 14,040 kg from from grass cutting activity plus the additional 360 kg CO₂e for heating, lighting, website hosting, etc. equals our total of 14,400 kg CO₂e.)

² CO₂e stands for 'carbon dioxide equivalent' and is a standard unit of measurement in carbon accounting. It expresses the impact of a number of different gases collectively as a common unit.

APPENDIX 2

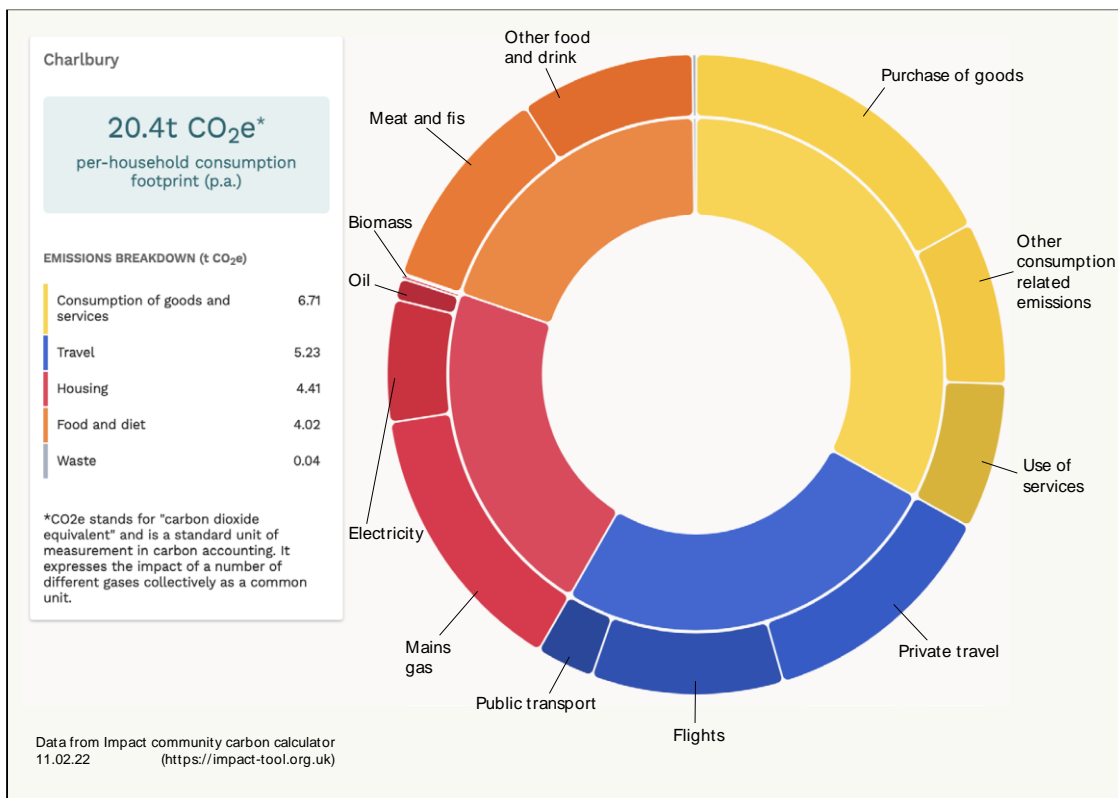
CARBON FOOTPRINT OF CHARLBURY COMMUNITY (PER HOUSEHOLD)

The community carbon calculator *Impact*³ shows that the estimated average direct household emissions in Charlbury are 11.9 tonnes of CO₂e. The biggest emitters are housing 37%, road transport 17%, industrial and commercial (includes pubs, school, retail and so on) 15%, and aviation 11%.



³ Developed by the Centre for Sustainable Energy with Exeter University using government and other publicly available data (<https://impact-tool.org.uk>).

When emissions are included that relate to consumption – the stuff we buy – emissions total over 20 tonnes of CO₂e based on average household consumption. These include goods and services (manufacturing, production, delivery etc), travel, housing, food and diet, and waste.



APPENDIX 3
PROJECT PROPOSAL REVIEW TEMPLATE

CHARLBURY TOWN COUNCIL
PROJECT PROPOSAL REVIEW TEMPLATE

Project name:

Proposed by:

Date:

Brief description of project (<500 words):

Type of support sought from Charlbury Town Council (please tick all that apply):

CTC to lead project	
CTC to provide funding	
CTC to bid for external funding	
CTC to convene stakeholders	
CTC to endorse / provide communications support	
Other (please specify):	

Alignment with Charlbury Town Council priorities:

How does this project support the CTC's Vision and Mission and what level of impact will it have?

Missions and themes	How will the project support this?	What impact will it have?
MISSION 1: Ensuring that Town Council services are delivered efficiently, sustainably and cost-effectively to meet the needs of Charlbury residents.		
MISSION 2: Delivering on our commitment to act on the climate and ecological emergencies by actively preparing Charlbury and its environment for a zero carbon, biodiverse and sustainable future.		
MISSION 3: Engaging all of the community by providing appropriate leadership, governance and inspiration in an open and transparent way.		
THEMES: To improve health and wellbeing, inclusivity and resilience		

Feasibility

What level of influence does CTC have over the project scope / activities?

CTC owns or manages the land	Y / N
Falls under CTC's existing responsibilities (e.g., as consultee on planning and highways; cemetery plots)	Y / N
CTC has an official role in governance (e.g. Nine Acres Management, Corner House)	Y / N
CTC provides grant funding	Y / N
Other (please give details):	

What capacity is there to develop and implement this project?

Are there volunteers within the council or in community organisations willing and able to shape the project, including sourcing external funding if required?	
Are there volunteers or paid staff who will be able to deliver the project?	
What support and expertise is available within other organisations (either local or elsewhere) and how will this be leveraged?	

What funding is required?

From CTC	
From other sources (please give details of potential funding sources/availability)	

How will the project be assessed and monitored?

Further supporting information (optional):

CTC reviewer's name and role:

Impact score (1–3):

Feasibility score (1–3):

Date:

[Final decisions on whether to proceed will be made by Full Council.]

APPENDIX 4

PROJECT SCORING TABLE (ILLUSTRATION)

CTC responsibility	Project ideas	Which missions does it support (1, 2, 3)	Impact score (1–3)	Feasibility score (1–3)	Mechanism of support (lead, facilitate, promote, encourage)	Timeframe
Mill Field	Weir repair	1	2	2	lead	2 years
	Mowing	1, 2, 3	2	3	lead	ongoing
	Tree management	1, 2, 3	2	3	lead	ongoing
Ticknell Piece land	Skate park improvement	1	2	3	lead	1 year
	Access	1	2	3	lead	1 year
	Mowing/nature	1, 2, 3	2	3	lead	ongoing
	Display board	3	1	3	lead	1 year
Nine Acres	Playground	1	2	3	co-lead	1 year
	Margins	1, 2, 3	2	3	co-lead	ongoing
	Access	1	2	3	co-lead	1 year
	Benches, etc.	1	1	3	co-lead	6 months
Cemetery	Biodiversity	1, 2, 3	2	3	lead	ongoing
	Benches	1	1	3	lead	6 months
Traffic & transport	Cycling & walking plan	1, 2, 3	3	3	lead	2 years
	E-bike loan	2,3	1	3	lead	ongoing
Planning	Uphold Neighbourhood Plan	1, 2, 3	3	3	lead	ongoing
	Promote and implement WODC planning checklist	1, 2, 3	3	3	promote, encourage	6 months, then ongoing