Sturminster Newton Town Council

Strategic Plan

A practical plan for Sturminster Newton Town Council's priorities, delivery and accountability to May 2029

1. Where we are now

Sturminster Newton Town Council has prepared this strategic plan to set out its priorities clearly and to show residents how the Council intends to focus its time, resources and decision-making up to the next ordinary town council elections in May 2029. The plan has been developed from councillor workshop discussions, decisions of the Council, previous community engagement exercises and feedback from members of the public. It is intended to be practical, achievable and within the Council's jurisdiction. It recognises the good work already being done, the areas where residents and councillors want to see improvement, and the need to link future projects to available budget, staff capacity and clear measures of success.

The main body of the plan explains the Council's strategic themes, purpose, values, budget approach, delivery arrangements and review process. Appendix 1 will operate as the live delivery action plan. It will be completed and updated with the relevant working groups so that each strategic theme is supported by clear actions, responsibilities, resources, success measures and timescales.

What is working well

The Council has a strong base to build from. Councillors identified sound financial management, effective budget control and responsible use of public funds as important strengths. The town's appearance, grounds maintenance and the standard of public spaces are also valued, with the Council's operational work making a visible difference to the local environment.

The Council also benefits from active councillor involvement, improving communication between councillors, growing community engagement, the town newsletter and progress made on youth provision. These strengths should be protected and used as the foundation for future work.

DRAFT

Where improvement is needed

The Council wants residents to have a clearer understanding of what the Town Council is responsible for, what it is doing, and how decisions are made. Public communication, face-to-face engagement with community groups, and clearer explanation of Council finances were identified as areas for improvement. The Council also wants to strengthen its relationship with Dorset Council, particularly where local priorities are affected by housing growth, planning, services and wider infrastructure decisions.

Other areas for improvement include completing and embedding the Council's emergency planning work, supporting community projects more visibly, making progress on the youth hub and related youth facilities, preparing for the impact of a larger population, and ensuring environmental and biodiversity ambitions become practical projects rather than broad aspirations.

From workshop priorities to strategic themes

The workshop identified a range of priorities for the Council to consider during the plan period. These have been grouped into strategic themes so that future decisions, projects and budget proposals can be judged against clear local objectives rather than treated as separate or unrelated ideas.

- Improving youth provision, including the youth hub, youth club facilities, skate park and links with schools.
- Strengthening community engagement so residents and local organisations understand and can influence Council priorities.
- Maintaining and improving open spaces, grounds services, allotments and public areas.
- Delivering practical environmental and biodiversity projects, including greener policies and climate-aware decision-making.
- Improving emergency planning and local resilience through practical preparation, communication and review.
- Supporting heritage, tourism and town identity, including future opportunities linked to the Mill and wider visitor economy.
- Planning responsibly for housing growth, future local need and the impact of a larger population where this affects the Council's services, assets, finances, environmental responsibilities or ability to influence partner organisations.

2. Our strategy

The Council's strategy is to focus on a number of achievable priorities that will make a visible difference to the town, while continuing to manage existing services well. The plan is not intended to list every task the Council undertakes. It is a framework for choosing priorities, explaining decisions, allocating resources and reporting progress in a way that residents can understand.

Our purpose

Sturminster Newton Town Council exists to represent the local community, manage public funds responsibly, provide and maintain local facilities, support community wellbeing, and help Sturminster Newton remain an attractive, inclusive and thriving place to live, work and visit.

DRAFT

Plan at a glance

The Council's priorities are grouped into five strategic themes. Each theme is intended to be broad enough to guide decisions, but clear enough to support practical actions, measurable progress and public reporting. The delivery action plan at Appendix 1 will then break each theme down into specific priorities, projects and actions.

Theme	What this means in practice	How progress will be visible
Young people and community wellbeing	Develop youth provision, progress the youth hub and support facilities and opportunities for younger residents.	Clear project milestones, agreed facility plans, engagement with young people and reports on delivery progress.
Communication and community engagement	Improve how the Council explains decisions, listens to residents and works with local groups.	Regular updates through the website, newsletter and social media, with more face-to-face engagement and clearer public reporting.
Open spaces, environment and biodiversity	Maintain high standards in public spaces while delivering practical environmental and biodiversity improvements.	Completed projects, visible improvements, inspection outcomes, maintenance reports and environmental measures built into decisions.
Heritage, tourism and town identity	Support projects and partnerships that strengthen the town's identity, heritage assets and visitor appeal.	Progress on agreed heritage projects, partnership work and opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the town.
Governance, finance and resilience	Use public funds responsibly, strengthen emergency and service resilience, plan for future pressures such as housing growth, improve reporting, and make sure projects are affordable, lawful and properly governed.	Budget-linked priorities, risk-aware decisions, clear committee oversight, partnership influence where services are outside the Council's direct control, and an updated emergency planning approach.

Our values

The Council will use the following values to guide how it works and how it makes choices between competing priorities.

Financial responsibility: making the best possible use of available funds and avoiding commitments that are not affordable or sustainable.

Openness and transparency: explaining decisions clearly and making it easier for residents to understand what the Council is doing.

Fairness and inclusion: considering the needs of the whole community and improving access to information, facilities and opportunities.

Environmental responsibility: allowing environmental and climate considerations to guide decisions where practical and proportionate.

Partnership working: working constructively with Dorset Council, local organisations, volunteers and community groups where this helps achieve better outcomes.

Practical delivery: focusing on actions that are achievable, measurable and within the Council's powers, budget and capacity.

What success will look like

By the end of the plan period, residents should be able to see clear progress against the Council's priorities. Success will not only be measured by completed projects, but by whether the Council is clearer, more accountable and better able to show what it is doing for the town.

- The youth hub and linked youth provision have either been completed or moved through clear, reported delivery milestones.
- The Council has a visible programme of funded projects, with residents able to see what is planned, what has progressed and what has been completed.
- Public engagement has improved, including more face-to-face contact with residents, community groups and young people.
- Environmental and biodiversity projects are being delivered and reported, not simply discussed as aspirations.
- The Council has strengthened working relationships with Dorset Council and other partners where this supports local priorities.
- Emergency planning, financial planning, project reporting, partnership working and committee oversight are stronger and easier to follow.
- Residents have a clearer understanding of the Town Council's role, responsibilities and use of public money.

DRAFT

3. Budget implications

The strategic plan must be realistic and linked to the Council's budget-setting process. The Council will continue to budget for core running costs, staffing, services, contracts, maintenance and administration. Strategic priorities will then be considered alongside those core commitments so that projects are affordable, phased where necessary and supported by appropriate reserves, grants, partnership funding or external advice.

- Each priority project should identify likely budget needs before it is included in the annual work programme.
- Major projects, including the youth hub, workshop facilities, allotment provision or heritage-related work, should be monitored carefully to prevent unauthorised overspend.
- Environmental and biodiversity work should consider opportunities for partnership support, including Dorset Council services, Dorset Wildlife Trust and other relevant local or regional environmental organisations where appropriate.
- Emergency planning and resilience work may require modest but planned provision for items such as communication equipment, high-visibility clothing and maintenance of existing equipment.
- Where a project cannot be delivered within one financial year, the Council should agree whether it is to be phased, supported from reserves, grant-dependent or reviewed before further commitment is made.

4. How the plan will be delivered

This plan will be delivered by turning the strategic themes into clear actions through the delivery action plan at Appendix 1. The Council will use that delivery plan to connect priorities to committee work, budget planning, staff capacity, working groups and public reporting. This will make it easier to track what is happening, what needs a decision, what resources are required and what progress has been made.

Turning priorities into actions

Each agreed priority or project will be developed into specific actions with a named lead, expected resources, success measures and a realistic timescale. Actions should be clear enough for councillors, officers and residents to understand what is being done and how progress will be judged. Where an action depends on funding, external partners, permissions or further Council decisions, that should be recorded so expectations remain realistic.

Decision-making and accountability

Each priority will be linked to the most appropriate committee or Council route so that responsibilities are clear and decisions are made properly. Committees, officers and working groups should provide updates in a consistent way, identifying progress made, decisions required, budget implications, risks or delays and the next milestone.

Where a decision is needed and the normal committee timetable would cause unnecessary delay, the matter may be referred to Full Council, provided this is consistent with the Council's standing orders, financial regulations and agreed scheme of delegation.

DRAFT

Simple project reporting

A short project update sheet will be used where helpful so that progress can be reported clearly without creating unnecessary paperwork. The update should show what has been completed, what is on track, what has changed, what decision is needed, and whether there are any budget, staffing, timing or risk issues.

Working groups and councillor involvement

Working groups will support delivery by bringing councillors together around specific priorities or projects. They can help gather information, explore options, test ideas, liaise with partners where authorised and develop recommendations for the relevant committee or Full Council.

Working groups are not decision-making bodies unless authority has been formally delegated. They must work within the objectives, scope, budget and parameters agreed by the Council and must not commit expenditure, instruct staff or change the direction of a project without proper approval.

This approach should keep councillor involvement practical and focused, while ensuring that decisions remain transparent, accountable and properly recorded.

Keeping residents informed

The Council will publish the strategic plan and use the website, newsletter, social media and other appropriate communication routes to explain progress. Updates should be written in plain language so residents can see what is planned, what has been completed, what is delayed and what is being considered next.

5. Review, reporting and accountability

The strategic plan will be reviewed regularly so that it remains a practical working document rather than a statement of ambition that is not followed through. Review should focus on evidence of progress, barriers to delivery, decisions still needed and whether priorities remain realistic in light of budget, capacity and local circumstances.

Quarterly progress review

Full Council will receive a quarterly progress update covering the delivery plan, key projects and any significant changes. The review should identify what has been completed, what is on track, what is delayed, what has changed and what decisions are required. This will help councillors maintain oversight and will make it easier to address issues before projects lose momentum.

Annual review and budget setting

An annual review will take place before budget setting so that the next year's work programme is linked to realistic financial information, including precept planning, reserves, known commitments and any external funding opportunities. This review will also allow the Council to confirm which projects should continue, which should be phased, which need further development and whether any priority should be amended or removed.

DRAFT

Measuring progress

Progress will be measured through clear and proportionate indicators, including completed milestones, Council decisions made, funding secured, projects delivered, budget position, resident engagement, maintenance outcomes, partnership work and evidence of improvement in services or facilities. Measures should be practical and relevant to each project rather than creating unnecessary administration.

Public reporting

The Council will publish or summarise progress in a way that residents can follow. Updates should show what the Council said it would do, what has actually happened, what is due next, and how priorities are being managed responsibly. Where projects are delayed or changed, the Council should explain the reason clearly so that residents understand the position.

Keeping the plan live

The strategic plan should be updated when there is a significant change in local need, legislation, funding, available resources or Council priorities. Minor updates may be made through the review process, while major changes should be agreed by Full Council. This will keep the plan useful, current and connected to the Council's real work.

DRAFT

Appendix 1.

Sturminster Newton Town Council

Delivery action plan

Strategic theme	Project	Actions	Lead responsibility	Resources / budget	Success measures	Timescale
	(Individual project within the strategic theme.)	*(What needs to happen? Include decisions, reviews, consultation, grant applications or delivery stages.)*	*(Which committee, officer or working group will lead, monitor or report on this?)*	*(What budget, staff time, grants, partners, volunteers, equipment, land, buildings or professional advice are needed?)*	*(How will progress or completion be shown? For example, milestones, budget position, funding secured, usage, feedback, inspections or reports.)*	*(Short, medium or long term, or a target date such as by March 2027.)*
Young People and Community Wellbeing	Youth Hub	1. Obtain confirmation of the boxing club's funding and	Youth Hub Working Group reporting to the Amenities	Clerk and Grounds Manager time. Budget	Progress report to Amenities	Next deadline November 27.

		continued involvement. The Grounds Manager has met with the club to explain the scale of the project and emailed a follow-up in the week commencing 2 November 2026; a response is awaited. 2. Arrange a working-group meeting to agree next steps and provide an update to the Amenities Committee on 25 November 2026. 3. Update other stakeholders. 4. Draft a Memorandum of Understanding between the Town Council and Scouts.	Committee to recommend to Full Council.	unknown at present.	Committee November 27	

DRAFT

	Youth Council & School Engagement	Progress: Cllr Lacey and the Clerk have met with the Head Teacher to review arrangements and confirm aims and objectives. A crib sheet has been emailed to the Head Teacher. Next action: Assistant Town Clerk to arrange a Youth Council meeting before the end of December 2026.	Cllr Lacey lead as Town Council youth representative. Assistant Town Clerk – arranging the Youth Council meetings. Grounds Manager in attendance. Report to Full Council.	Assistant Town Clerk and Grounds Manager time for preparation and attendance.	Report from Cllr Lacey to Full Council after each Youth Council meeting.	Youth Council meeting before the end of December 2026.
	Skate Park Extension	Project in the pipeline but currently on hold and not active. Public consultation will be required when the project progresses.	Amenities Committee to recommend to Full Council.	Some funding available. Further funding to become available from future developer contributions.	On hold timescale to be confirmed.	On hold; timescale to be confirmed.
Communication and community engagement	Develop a communication and engagement strategy	Progress: The Council has appointed a Communications Officer internally,	Community Engagement Working Group and Communications	Breakthrough Communications Council Hive subscription; other training	Completed draft strategy presented to Full Council	Working-group meeting: 13 November 2026. Draft strategy to

		who is researching and preparing material for the Community Engagement Working Group to consider. Next action: Communications Officer meeting working-group 13 November 2026 to agree the contents of the draft strategy for reporting to Full Council.	Officer, reporting to Full Council.	completed; Communications Officer time.	in January 2027. Longer term: A programme of engagement opportunities agreed, with feedback from residents on how the Council is doing.	Full Council: January 2027.
	Develop community organisations networking groups	Reach out to attendees of networking sessions and those who do not currently attend, and gather feedback. Arrange a meeting with Volunteer Centre Dorset to review the current arrangements.	Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Clerk and Communications Officer, reporting to Full Council.	Clerk and Communications Officer time.	Feedback received and attendance at networking events.	March 2027.

DRAFT

	Community projects – S106 funding support: Honeymead Lane Education and Leisure Hub	Currently working with four community groups on projects using the Honeymead Lane Education and Leisure Hub funding. Next steps: public consultation, followed by support from SNTC and the Ward Councillor, then submission of applications.	Clerk – supporting the community organisations.	Clerk time.	Projects receive funding.	Short term.
	Community projects – S106 funding support: The Exchange solar panels	Work with The Exchange on a solar panel project using funds from the A357 development. Quotes are being obtained and a joint application is in progress.	Clerk – supporting The Exchange.	Clerk time.	Project receives funding.	Short term.
Open spaces, environment and biodiversity	Open spaces group	Amenities Committee to consider the aims and objectives of the Open spaces	Chair of the Amenities Committee. Reporting to the Amenities	No budget at present. Grounds Manager staff time.	Aims, objectives and future role agreed by the	25 November 2026.

DRAFT

		group and how it could be better utilised at its meeting on 25 November 2026.	Committee to recommend to Full Council.		Amenities Committee and reported to Full Council.	
	Biodiversity Project	Work with Dorset Wildlife Trust to increase biodiversity on identified areas of Council-owned or managed land. Progress: Areas have already been identified and schools have been contacted to join the project. Aim: Become a model Council for others to learn from.	Cllr Jackson and Grounds Manager, reporting to the Amenities Committee to recommend to Full Council.	TBC – project in early stages.	TBC	TBC
	Policy review – environmental considerations	Review policies over the next two-year cycle to ensure environmental considerations are included wherever possible.	Clerk to F&P and Full Council	Clerk time.	Changes to working practices following policy changes.	Over the next two-year policy review cycle.

DRAFT

	Workshop extension	Dependent on the Youth Hub project moving forward. Further actions TBC.	Amenities Committee recommending to Full Council.	TBC	TBC	TBC
	Allotments – enhancements to existing site at Filbridge Rise	Provide new water storage and system at the existing site. The application for S106 funding is nearing completion.	Clerk and Grounds Manager, supported by the Chair of the Allotments Association (AA). Reporting to the Amenities Committee to recommend to Full Council.	S106 funding application nearing completion; Project dependant on receipt of funding.	Funding received and project completed	Within financial year
	Allotments – Management Agreement between SNTC and AA	Agreement completed; awaiting sign-off from the AA.	Agreed at Full Council	Completed	Signed by SNTC and AA	Short Term
	Allotments – Standpipe at Chinnocks allotments	Council has already agreed the project. AA is obtaining quotes. Apply for S106 funding in due course.	AA – obtaining quotes. Reporting to Amenities Committee to recommend to Full Council.	Quotes being obtained. S106 funding to be applied for; budget TBC.	Standpipe installed.	Short term.

	Land transfer – Corallian Heights	Council has already agreed the transfer. Commuted sums have been received. Await completion of the legal process before signing the documents.	Full Council.	Budget dependent on the solicitor's quote, which has not yet been confirmed due to outstanding queries for the developer.	Transfer process completed.	Short term; exact timescale unknown.
	Land transfer – A357	Interest has been confirmed; a response is awaited.	Full Council.	TBC	Transfer process completed.	TBC
	Land transfer – allotments at Fiddleford Ridge	Allotment land to be transferred in spring 2027. No action required at present.	Full Council.	TBC	Transfer process completed.	Spring 2027.
Heritage, tourism and town identity	Mill restoration project	1. Complete the condition survey: partially completed; awaiting millwright findings. 2. Review the management agreement with the Heritage Trust.	Mill Working Group and Clerk, supported by the Heritage Trust and Dorset Council Museums Co-Ordinator. Reporting to Amenitites Committee to	Budget dependent on costings from the condition survey.	Works completed and lease extended.	Medium term.

DRAFT

		3. Obtain costings for the works recommended in the survey. 4. Work with the Heritage Trust and Dorset Council Museums Co-Ordinator on funding and an Expression of Interest (EoI) for Lottery Funding. 5. When the EoI is confirmed, negotiate an extension of the lease with the owners. 6. Submit the lottery application.	recommend to Full Council.			
Governance, finance and resilience	Governance review by DAPTC	Recommendations reviewed during the strategic planning workshop and agreed. Implementation approximately 75% complete, with the	Full Council and Clerk.	All officers' staff time. Actions to be funded within current budgets.	All agreed actions completed.	By financial year end, March 2027.

		remainder in progress. Complete the remaining agreed actions.				
	Community Emergency Response Plan (CERP)	CERP is in place and approved by Full Council. Continue regular working-group meetings to review and adapt CERP following incidents and as new information is received from Dorset Council or the emergency services.	CERP Working Group, reporting to the Amenities Committee to recommend to Full Council.	Purchases may be necessary and may be charged to the group's operational budget where within the Clerk's delegated spending authority, with retrospective reporting. Assistant Town Clerk and Grounds Manager staff time.	Effectiveness assessed incident by incident.	Ongoing: adaptations following incidents and new information from Dorset Council or the emergency services.
	Neighbourhood Plan (NHP)	Moderate changes for this review. 1. Clerk to review edits from the working-group meeting. 2. Refer queries to Dorset Council for advice or response.	NHP Working Group, reporting to the P&E committee to recommend to Full Council.	Minimal budget unless professional services are required for the design code.	Draft presented to the P&E committee to recommend to Full Council.	Short term – January/February 2027.

		3. Hold a further NHP Working Group meeting to review the edits and responses. 4. Consider whether professional services are required for the design code. 5. Report the draft to the P&E committee.				
	Staffing review and business continuity planning	Review all job descriptions and agree a business continuity plan covering all tasks.	Staffing Committee to recommend to the F&P Committee	Clerk time.	All job descriptions reviewed and a business continuity plan covering all tasks agreed.	February 2027.
	Budget-setting timetable and public consultation	Budget-setting timetable already agreed by Full Council. Undertake public consultation planned for 2 December 2026. Prepare and issue a	Clerk. Full Council	Clerk time.	Budget set at the January 2027 Full Council meeting.	Public consultation: 2 December 2026. Budget-setting deadline: January 2027.

		press release about the budget to support public engagement.				

DRAFT

Appendix 2.

Sturminster Newton Town Council

Project Update Sheet

This template should be used for projects or priorities where a clear update is needed for committees or Full Council. It is intended to support consistent reporting. Please submit the completed report to the Clerk at least one week prior to the meeting by email in word format

Project / priority	
Date	
Chair/Officer Reporting	
What has been completed	
What is on track	
What has changed	
Decisions required	
Budget / resource position	
Risks, issues or delays	
Next milestone	
Public update required?	Yes / No

DRAFT