

Full Council Meeting – 30 March 2021

Report of Councillor Peter Pilkington – Climate Change

During 2020 we continued to work in partnership with the other local authorities in Somerset to develop the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy which was adopted by Full Council on the 26th October 2020.

We also developed and approved our own Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan (CNCR) which sits alongside the Somerset wide strategy. The plan has identified over 340 aspirational actions that have been prioritised into immediate, short, medium and long term actions and categorised into delivery, support, enable and lobby. The plan is iterative and will be reviewed on an annual basis, and as such will evolve as our understanding of what is necessary and possible improves.

As part of the resolution to approve the CNCR Plan, council approved a supplementary 'Climate Change Fund' budget of £500,000 within the General Fund 2020/21 Revenue Budget, funded from General Reserves, for the delivery of Somerset West and Taunton priority actions with delegated authority to the Director External Operations and Climate Change and the Assistant Director Climate Change, Regulatory Services and Asset Management to agree those priority actions in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change. Council also approved the principle that any unspent balance of this fund at the end of 2020/21 be carried forward to 2021/22 financial year.

We have established a dedicated climate change team within the External Operations and Climate Change Directorate, which includes a programme manager, three project managers and a project support officer. The climate change programme has two roles; 1) direct delivery of certain actions within the CNCR plan 2) monitoring and reporting progress for all actions within the CNCR plan. SWT along with other agencies (Wessex Water, Environment Agency and South Somerset Council) have part funded a project coordinator for the Somerset Wildlife Trust for the next 12 months.

In September 2020 SWT declared an Ecological Emergency complementing the climate emergency, as part of this declaration we have committed to recruit an Ecological Strategist to enable the council to create an Ecological Strategy and Action Plan. The post holder will also review our CNCR plan to ensure that carbon reduction or off setting measures do not inadvertently cause ecological harm.

SWT have also worked in partnership with the other local authorities, Exmoor National Park and our consultants WSP to produce a Somerset wide Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy, which was adopted by Full Council on the 15th December.

Ricardo and Western Power Distribution selected Somerset West and Taunton to host their trial for the DC rapid charging hubs. The development of rapid charging hubs will create a 'petrol station' like infrastructure and have a positive impact on decarbonising transportation and hence assist in the transition to greener transport. The components for the trial will continue to be developed throughout 2021, with go

live of 15 rapid chargers made up of 10 x 50kw and 5 x 100kw split across three locations (Coal Orchard, Canon Street and Firepool South) scheduled for Spring 2022.

As part of our commitment to this and our other electric vehicle charge point projects we have placed an order for our first two electric vehicles; this sees the start of our transition to an electric vehicle pool car fleet.

SWT have agreed commercial terms with an electric vehicle charging point operator who will be installing 50kw DC Rapid charge points at four locations across our district including Taunton, Wellington, Minehead and Dulverton. We are expecting these to be installed and to go live during Q1 2021/22.

With electric vehicle charging identified as a priority area we are installing a network of charging units in our Council owned car parks across the district. We are working with our supplier, who we selected from the ESPO framework, to install a number of charging units in priority locations, as identified in the Somerset wide electric vehicle strategy. We are progressing our phase one locations now and expect these to be in place during Q2 2021/22.

We are exploring the options for a pilot car share scheme in and around our Coal Orchard development site in Taunton. We will soon be seeking views from members of the public to help shape this scheme.

To support the 'green' restart of local travel and help mitigate reduced public transport capacity the Department for Transport (DfT) fast tracked and expanded their trials of rental EScooters. We submitted a bid for SWT to take part in the trial and were successfully approved. We procured EScooter operator Zipp mobility to manage the scheme on our behalf and our Taunton scheme went live on the 30th October 2020. Just 45 days after the trial started the number of miles travelled on EScooters hit 24,901, the equivalent distance of once around the world. The total number of miles travelled to date has now surpassed 46,000.

SWT launched our first 'Free Trees' give away to promote National Tree Planting Week at the end of November 2020. We offered parish and town councils across the district the opportunity to order free trees, stakes, ties and guards to support their tree planting schemes. They could choose from Oak, Beech, Lime and Hawthorn bare root trees and we successfully supplied and delivered 223 trees and plan to re-launch the scheme again later in the year for National Tree Planting Week 2021. We have agreed to make a significant financial contribution from our CNCR budget to fill a budget shortfall, enabling 12,000 trees to be planted on Exmoor national park. The trees will be ordered ready for the new tree planting season in the autumn.

We have also supported smaller tree planting schemes in Langford Budville and Galmington.

Our open spaces service have revised their design guides which commits SWT to a 3:1 tree replacement programme for all trees removed by the council.

More recently at Full Council in February 2021 a one-off budget of £100,000 for tree planting across the district was approved, and we are currently scoping out how best to use this budget with various tree planting options.

We have worked in partnership with the Somerset Wildlife Trust to create and identify and create a number of species rich wildflower meadows across the district. Initially created as a pilot on Council owned land, we have to date sown 60kg of wild seeds in our open spaces. We also set aside wild areas in our Green Flag accredited parks across the district. The initiative is part of the Council's commitment to protecting and improving biodiversity, identified as a priority in the climate emergency strategy.

Working with Wessex Water to reduce the consumption of single use plastics, we have agreed to install 3 water refill stations across the district, these will be located in central locations in Taunton, Wellington and Minehead and will be installed and available for use during Q1 2021/22.

It has been agreed that SWT will take the lead on launching a pilot 'Recycling on The Go' project within the region. SWT will work with Somerset Waste Partnership to deliver this project, the main aims of which are to provide a wider range of publically accessible bins that offer recycling options at the point of throwing an item in the bin. SWT has given the go ahead for new zero carbon social housing in Minehead and Taunton. The proposals approved at a Special Full Council Meeting on Tuesday 1 December, include the redevelopment of council-owned land to provide 54 housing units at Seaward Way, Minehead and a further 11 units at the old Oxford Inn site on the corner of Roman Road and Outer Circle in Taunton.

SWT is encouraging homeowners and private landlords to apply for a Green Homes Grant in line with its corporate priorities for climate change and housing. The Government's Green Homes Grant scheme will allow Somerset West and Taunton residents to make home improvements helping to save up to £600 a year on their energy bills. It will fund up to two-thirds of the cost of works with grants available for up to £5,000. Low income households are eligible to receive 100% government funding up to a maximum of £10,000.

We have partnered with training providers 'Three Point Five' to rollout interactive climate change awareness training for all employees and Councillors, sessions are scheduled throughout April.

SWT has been recognised as a leader in responding to the climate emergency by the not-for-profit charity CDP, who run the global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states and regions to manage their environmental impacts. We achieved a score of "A-" (Leadership) for our 2020 disclosure which identifies the ways we are working to mitigate and adapt to the projected impacts of climate change. Our latest score demonstrates that through the CNCR Action Plan and joint work on the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy, we have a clear understanding of future climate risks and district-wide emissions, have set emissions reduction targets, and are making strides with implementing our action plan.