

Council Meeting – 8 October 2019

Report of Councillor Peter Pilkington – Climate

Climate Change Strategy

Members will already be aware that Somerset West and Taunton Council, along with all other Somerset local authorities, has declared a climate emergency and is working towards achieving a carbon neutral district by 2030. This is undoubtedly a massive challenge – arguably the biggest we have ever faced as a society – and we are stepping up to this with determination. Some headline areas of activity as follows:

- We are working hard with other Somerset councils to produce a 'framework' climate change document for Somerset. The framework document will contain crucial evidence about our local impact on the climate and initial proposals to support our collective efforts towards a carbon neutral Somerset. Achieving a carbon neutral Somerset needs action by *everyone*, from national Government, residents, businesses, parish and town councils and many other organisations. The framework document will be a starting point for consultation and engagement with local groups over the winter and spring of 2019/20. Alongside the county wide framework, Somerset West and Taunton will be putting forward a complementary document with a range of initial ideas and actions that have a specific emphasis on action by SWT to tackle the climate emergency. Both documents (County wide and SWT) will come through Scrutiny and Executive during October 2019 and then be consulted upon over winter and spring 2019/20, working towards approval of a final strategy in Summer 2020.
- A climate change 'task and finish' group of elected members from all Somerset authorities met for the first time in Glastonbury on 4 September 2019. This group will oversee progress in the development of the Somerset Climate Change Strategy and make recommendations to Council Leaders and individual authorities for decision making across Somerset. Somerset West and Taunton has also established a Climate Change Member Working Group which will be feeding views for consideration by Scrutiny Committee and Executive.

Elected Member Training on Climate Change

We recently teamed up with Somerset Climate Action Network (SCAN) to deliver a successful member training event on 19th September. SCAN is a new organisation bringing together climate expertise, groups and individuals from across the county, aiming to work with local authorities and other key players to help drive down carbon emissions across Somerset. This was a valuable opportunity for members to learn more about the facts behind climate change and the actions we can all take as individuals and as a council to make a positive

difference. A further session will be arranged for those members who weren't able to attend.

Bid to Urban Tree Challenge Fund

One way to make a positive difference on climate change (as well as local amenity and health) is by tree planting. Earlier this summer, we submitted a bid to the Government's 'Urban Tree Challenge Fund', focused on proposals to plant 711 trees on Council-owned land within Priorswood, Halcon and Holway and seeking c.£250k of grant funding towards this. At the time of writing this update, we are waiting to hear if our bid was successful but hope to be able to report verbally at the Full Council meeting itself. If our bid is successful we will be working with schools, community groups and organisations to carry out the planting over the coming months. There will also be a second round of the fund available next year which we will explore too.

The Council's own Carbon Footprint

We have commissioned an assessment of the Council's own carbon and environmental footprint, arising from our own direct activities and the influence we can have as a planning authority, policy maker, purchaser of good and services and elected leader in the community. The solar panels on the roof of Deane House are an example of direct action to reduce our own carbon emissions. The assessment, to be completed in early 2020, will provide a baseline of evidence on our current impact and provide recommendations on the priority actions we should be taking.

Managing Flood Risk

We know that climate change is already creating more extreme weather events around the globe. Whilst tackling the root causes of climate change, we also need to take steps to adapt to the changes it is creating, now and into the future. An example of this is the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation and Improvement Strategy (TFAIS). We have worked in partnership with the Environment Agency to better understand and model the impact of climate change to the flood levels in the River Tone over the next 100 years. The resulting strategy will suggest a range of measures that need to be taken to reduce the flood risk to existing properties in Taunton into the long term, whilst also enabling the development of key riverside sites in the town centre. The strategy will come to Executive for approval in November 2019.

Electric Vehicle Community Charge Point Fund

With private transport being one of the major contributors to climate change, I wrote to all parish and town councils in early August 2019, encouraging applications to a one-off budget of £20k, to support the installation of electric vehicle charging points in communities throughout the district. This fund will be available to parish and town councils to apply for grants of between £500 and

£1500. A small number of applications have already been received and the final deadline is 1 November.