

Full Council Meeting – 7 July 2020

Report of Councillor Peter Pilkington – Climate Change

Overview

It has been a difficult few months as you might have imagined with covid 19 but the Climate Change strategy and action plan work has continued

Assistant Director for Climate Change and Assets

Chris Hall has been appointed into this new role, reporting to Andrew Pritchard, Director for External Operations and Climate Change.

Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy

Paused in March and April due to the COVID crisis with many officers across the county redeployed onto COVID related work. Recently re-started, the draft Strategy is almost at the point where it can be shared with the joint Task & Finish Group. A revised timetable for the strategy is under consideration and is likely to come before Scrutiny, Executive and Full Council for consideration in the autumn.

Somerset West and Taunton Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan (CNCR)

In draft the CNCR plan has been shared with the Climate Change Member Working Group and sits alongside the County Framework. The long list of actions within the plan are aspirational and those with no pre-existing funding source / business case will be required to go through the approval process in the normal way. It is intended to hold a Member briefing session on the CNCR plan/County Strategy later in the summer ahead of formal adoption. Integrated Transport Strategy.

Strategy/Innovation/Opportunity

Strategy - work has begun on developing a Somerset Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy, which will help the Somerset authorities to guide and enable development of a county-wide network of electric vehicle charge points in time.
Innovation – we will soon have some exciting news to share on the implementation of electric charge points in Taunton
Opportunity – we are exploring opportunities with 3rd party operators who have expressed an interest in installing electric vehicle charge points at key locations within our district.

Electric Vehicle Survey

This survey was designed by graduates on the Somerset Local Government Graduate Scheme and was open until 22nd June, the survey will be used to inform development of the Somerset EV Charging Strategy mentioned above.

My Staff Shop

We have added Electric Vehicle and Electric Bicycle lease offerings to our staff benefits scheme, which will be launched soon.

Zero Carbon Affordable Housing Pilot

The related papers are about to start their journey through the Council Approval system. The pilot aims to build up to fifty (50) low carbon affordable homes within 30 months and will provide learning and a specification to support future Somerset West and Taunton low carbon developments and in particular low carbon affordable housing. Seven sites have been identified for these homes including six garage sites identified through the garage site review. A site currently used for the provision of temporary accommodation has also been identified and is part of the pilot. These sites are all owned by the council although circa 6 garages have been previously sold and require purchase through negotiation.

Sustainable Drainage System (SuDs) at the Coal Orchard development

We are installing Sustainable Drainage System tree pits in Coal Orchard as a means by which to filter the ground water run offs into the river Tone, in a natural way rather than through petrol interceptors. This is an initiative we have taken on board to assist in the flood alleviation and ground water control at the development. The advantage and benefit with these systems is documented and there can be no argument that this will promote tree growth in an urban setting and better water management, benefiting all.

Street Scene and Open Spaces Manager

Jonathan Stevens has been appointed into this role with effect from 15 June and will report to the new Assistant Director for Commercial Services within the External Operations and Climate Change Directorate. Jonathan will have green spaces and re-wilding within his remit.

Vivary Park

We have continued to work on our new environmental area, an area with a number of diseased trees, which we removed over the winter period, and was plagued with some anti-social behavioural issues.

We have removed the old concrete base of the bird aviary, graded the soil out and planted some of the trees we had at the nursery ready for this work.

Going forward, we hope to work with Somerset Wildlife Trust, Tenants of Canonsgrove, and Green Days Adult Care to continue to develop this area.

Rewilding

We have started our planned re-wilding at The Grange, cutting pathways and erecting signage to inform people of the Council's re-wilding plans. We have already received some very positive feedback even though we have been unable to sow wildflowers seed.

We have also prepared grass pathways in the re-wilding areas in Minehead. Along with a third area at Culvercliffe, where we have let the mounds grow and have prepared plans for wild flower sowing next year.

Oak Trees Offer / 3 Free Trees

We are exploring the options to purchase trees stock for our nursery and how this might align with our 3 Free Trees campaign for Parish and Town Councils.

Urban Tree Fund (Round 2)

Our Green Infrastructure and Tree Specialists have reviewed the criteria for this round to scope out what might be possible in relation to some of our land.

Round 2 is looking for block planting of woodland, small bare root plants at 1 metre centres, not parkland, verge or town-centre planting. The scheme is looking at which sites offer 'value for money' in terms of numbers of trees in a space and sites which will bring the greatest benefits. This means that those sites where block woodland creation/relatively high number of trees in an area are able to be facilitated, are likely to score more highly.

We have considered the likelihood of success for our sites and the cost benefits of the bids and weighed that against time we would need to spend putting the bids together (including establishing partnership links and commitment, which is a criteria) and we don't think that it stacks up. We are not convinced this is the right funding stream to be focussing our efforts on, as we think our greenspaces compared to other sites across the country are probably pretty good.

We do think that looking at sites in our ownership/management is a priority, but that this should be considered as part of a connected Green Infrastructure project looking at multiple benefits as opposed to just tree planting.

Active Travel Funding (Tranche 1)

£250 million fund for emergency active travel, £225 million provided directly to local transport authorities and £25 million to support cycle repair schemes.

The £225 million allocated to local authorities is being released in two phases, the first tranche is £45 million.

The amount available for emergency funding for Somerset in that first tranche is £120,000, the main purpose of this initial funding is to promote cycling as a replacement for journeys previously made by public transport and is designed to help with pop-up and temporary interventions that are safe for both walking and cycling across our whole area.

For SWT, this work resulted in the closure of East Street to all vehicles on the 15th June, and the removal of 3x on street parking bays. These interventions were deemed to be priority as having the biggest impact in the areas of highest footfall in our largest population centres, but were taken from a list of over 30 possible. This work has overlapped with the Re-opening High Streets work, which has been funded by the EU ERDF and was managed by SWT.

Active Travel Funding (Tranche 2).

The next tranche of funding will be more focussed on the cycling and walking infrastructure. To facilitate this work, SCC are working on a website that will allow members of the public to input their feedback on where they think improvements are needed. As with tranche 1, the list of possible work will be prioritised and submitted with the suggestions from the other districts. It is expected that the funding for Somerset as a whole will be £480k.

Outside Bodies

Harbour Board and District Flood Board haven't met because of Covid-19.

Exmoor National Park two virtual meetings

National Parks England two virtual meetings to discuss carbon baseline initiative

Councillor Peter Pilkington