

Annual Report 2019/20

Report of Councillor Peter Pilkington – Climate Change

Portfolio Holder Highlights (Climate Change)

The year in review

- The Council started the year by declaring a climate emergency and committed to working towards achieving carbon neutrality and climate resilience by 2030.
- We agreed to work in partnership with the other local authorities in Somerset to develop a Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and simultaneously develop our own Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan as an action plan for the district.
- We nominated two Members to sit on a Joint Task and Finish Group to oversee development of the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and established a Climate Change Member Working Group to contribute to the development, monitoring and ongoing review of a Somerset-wide Climate Emergency Strategy and SWT Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan as well as provide guidance and advice to Scrutiny and Executive on and champion and raise awareness of the Council's response to the climate emergency.
- Nine workstreams (built environment; business etc.; energy; farming and food; natural environment; transport; waste; water; and communications and engagement) were identified with work stream leads for each to co-ordinate our response in each area. Work then began with leads to plan for early actions based on the proposed early directions of travel identified. This included leads developing a brief and scoping top level actions.
- Early programme governance and reporting was put in place and Programme board meetings ran in 2019.
- A Somerset Climate Emergency Framework and a Framework SWT Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan were discussed by the member working group in September 2019, reviewed by Scrutiny Committee in October 2019, and formally endorsed for public consultation by Executive Committee later that month. Both documents were published for consultation in January 2020 following delay caused by the General Election purdah period.
- A Comms and Engagement Plan to consult the public on the SWT Framework and our early ideas for action was agreed and signed off by the member working group. The plan included:
 - 7 roadshow events run in tandem with Local Plan consultation events and attendance at local parish meetings to raise awareness.
 - The production of display materials and a 4 page summary document that summaries the Council's early ideas.
 - An online survey.
 - The compilation of top tips, best practice and council action lists to support social media activity.

- Creation of Council web pages (www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/climate-emergency) and an internal intranet site - (<http://oneteam/sites/f/Localities/CC/SitePages/Home.aspx>).
- Over 600 comments were made by the public at events, via the survey and through email. These comments will be used in defining the draft plan.
- The Somerset Climate Emergency Framework was hosted on separate webpages (www.somerset.gov.uk/waste-planning-and-land/climate-emergency). Somerset Climate Action Network were commissioned to deliver four "Have Your Say Drop-In events" around the county to support community engagement on the Framework and manage two online surveys. 625 people attended the events and 4,228 people responded to the surveys and these comments will be used to shape the draft strategy. A Business Summit was also very successful in engaging local businesses in the climate emergency.
- In July 2019 we disclosed the district's emissions and the Council's current climate action to CDP – a not-for-profit charity which collates, aggregates and publishes data from companies and cities/authorities across the globe, tracks progress in reducing emissions and wider environmental impacts and evaluates and benchmarks performance against peers. As a result of this disclosure we were awarded a score of C "Awareness". We will continue to disclose to CDP on an annual basis to track our progress.
- We commissioned the University of Exeter to conduct an assessment of the Council's own carbon and environmental footprint. The assessment, will provide a baseline on our current impact and enable us to set in motion actions to begin getting our own house in order and playing our part as a leader in the community on climate action. The report is in the final stages of being finalised but shows that our corporate carbon footprint is approximately 37.6ktCO₂ per annum, with 35% of those emissions coming from Scope 1 and 2 emissions associated with our social housing stock and 29% from Scope 3 procured goods and services. The forthcoming draft Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan will identify the actions we intend to take to begin addressing this;
- 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 focus has been on Taunton as this is where the majority of future housing growth within the district will be centred;
- SWT has been encouraging the installation of electric vehicle charging points in communities throughout the district. We have offered all parish and town councils the opportunity to apply for grants of between £500 and £1,500 from a one-off budget of £20k set aside to support community led action to tackle the climate emergency. Grants have so far been awarded to: Trull Parish Council, Brushford Parish Hall CIO, Luxborough Field and Village Hall Charity and Stoke St. Gregory Parish Council.
- As part of the Council's commitment to protecting and improving biodiversity we have worked with the Somerset Wildlife Trust to identify pilot areas for wild flower meadow planting. The meadows will initially be created on council owned land at Grange Drive,

Leycroft Grove and Moorfields, Taunton; Gay Street, Wellington; and at Seaward Way, and Culvercliffe, Minehead.

- We have adopted a new Corporate Strategy with tackling the climate emergency as the Council's number one priority.
- The Council teamed up with Somerset Climate Action Network (SCAN) to deliver two member briefing sessions (Sep-19 and Feb-20). This was a valuable opportunity for Council 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.
- We have published an Issues and Options document as part of the Local Plan Review which places tackling the climate emergency as its primary objective, setting out our ambition to require zero carbon developments, enable renewable energy and facilitate sustainability.
- We responded to the Government's consultation on changes to Building Regulations and the Future Homes Standard, calling on the Government to set a trajectory to zero carbon buildings by 2025.
- We have adopted the Taunton Garden Town Vision document with a heavy emphasis on our target for carbon neutrality and climate resilience as part of this. We have also produced a Garden Town Charter and Checklist, draft Public Realm Design Guide and a draft district-wide Design Guide all of which look to encourage much greater emphasis on sustainability and designing for the climate emergency within them.
- We have joined the Good Homes Alliance with the intention to lead a step change in mind-sets, priorities and investment in low carbon housing.
- We have provided financial contributions to support the viable delivery of Taunton's Park and Ride service until September 2020 and continue to explore options to improve its ongoing viability and environmental sustainability.
- We passed a motion to declare Somerset West and Taunton a Frack Free Zone, oppose unconventional onshore oil and gas exploration on land we own or have an interest in, avoid investment in companies involved with these activities, call on Somerset County Council and Exmoor National Park Authority to pass similar motions and put planning policies in place to include a presumption against such operations and to lobby Government to ban the practice.
- We worked closely with Somerset County Council to close St James Street in Taunton to traffic as part of a 12 month pedestrianisation trial to improve public space in the town centre. Monitoring of impacts is ongoing.