

South Somerset Environment Strategy 2019

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Purpose of the Report

1. To invite Members to agree the adoption of the South Somerset Environment Strategy 2019.

Public Interest

2. The Environment Strategy sets out the Council's ambition to be an exemplar local authority in both caring for, and enhancing, our environment. Adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change means changing the way we do things. The Environment Strategy outlines the first phase of our commitments and future direction of travel for the Council.

Recommendations

That Council:

- Approves and adopts the new South Somerset Environment Strategy
- Agrees the identified intermediate actions and next steps

Background

3. In May 2019, a Full Council resolution was agreed to develop a Strategy that sets ambitious targets to protect the environment and ecology; to reduce Carbon Emissions; and for a) South Somerset District and b) the Council to become carbon neutral. The Council agreed to deliver this Strategy by the autumn.

Delivering our Vision

4. The objective of the Environment Strategy is to help us achieve our aim of caring for and enhancing our natural environment and to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change.
5. The Strategy identifies four priority outcomes and how we will deliver our aims. The four priority outcomes are:
 - To reduce our reliance on fossil fuels
 - To reduce emissions
 - To minimise waste and increase recycling;
 - To offset carbon emissions
6. The Strategy sets out our plan to tackle climate change in two clear pathways. One of these is for our own estate and operations and what actions we can take to become carbon neutral; the second

looks at our responsibilities in respect of the wider geography that comprises the South Somerset District.

7. The Strategy identifies a series of actions and targets that are achievable in the short-term. It sets out 26 short-term-tactical actions for change across our own organisation and land holding in a 1-2 year timeframe. In addition, 18 commitments set out how we will support activities which we cannot deliver directly, but which we can enable through others or support others to deliver. The strategy also details how we will develop our longer term plans.

Strategy Development

8. The strategy's development has been led by our Environment Community of Practice (CoP) which comprises internal experts and those with strategic and /or operational responsibility in the areas identified.
9. We have also drawn heavily on the views of a sample of various stakeholders, from within South Somerset and beyond, with whom we have engaged fairly extensively. This includes community engagement activities with:
 - expert local interest and action groups
 - local primary schools
 - Parish and Town Councils
 - elected council Members
 - staff employed by South Somerset District Council.
10. The purpose of this initial engagement activity was to hear what stakeholders feel the key environmental issues are and how we might address these.

Developing our Longer Term Plans

11. The Council has recognised a climate emergency and, in doing so, acknowledges that there is a need to act now to tackle carbon emissions and become carbon neutral. However, we need to balance the need to act, with the necessity to be accountable for the way in which we prioritise the allocation of funds.
12. The Environment Strategy outlines the first phase of our commitments and future direction of travel for the Council, but it is by no means the end of work. The strategy acknowledges that this is only the beginning of the journey and further work is required to develop the optimum portfolio of activity in the future, ensuring a thorough assessment of return on investment (either monetary or environmental or other benefits) and the opportunity cost of the financial commitment has been completed.
13. The strategy identifies some of the possible interventions which will require far more detailed business cases to be put together, and appropriate assessment made. We have identified appropriate expertise from outside the organisation to support this. The consultant will also provide expertise to establish an appropriate baseline and benchmark framework to measure continuous environmental improvement.

Somerset County Wide Climate Emergency Strategy

14. This Strategy precedes a Somerset-wide Climate Emergency Strategy that is currently being developed by a partnership of all Somerset Local Authorities to tackle climate change. South Somerset, through both staff and elected member participation, is fully engaged with the development of that strategy and our expectation is that the County and South Somerset strategies will be aligned.

Next Steps - Developing a Detailed Delivery Plan

15. Once the Strategy is adopted, a detailed delivery plan will be developed along with the next phase of commitments. This will effectively become an Action Plan that sits below this overarching Environment Strategy once approved, detailing what, how and when we will deliver our Priority Outcomes and Vision.
16. The delivery plan will be informed by wider engagement with our communities that is being undertaken later this year as part of evidence gathering for the development of the county-wide strategy. In addition, the Strategy will be presented as part of the agenda for this autumn's Annual Parish Meetings, which are events held for Parish and Town Councils to hear more about and discuss local services and topical issues. We are keen to work closely with our communities to realise our shared ambitions around tackling climate change.
17. The pace of change related to climate change and policy direction is fast and the strategy will therefore be fully reviewed in two years to ensure that our ambitions and actions are aligned to emerging national and global policy and to identify the next tranche of activities.

Financial Implications

18. A sum of money has been identified in order to support our future delivery plans, but it is important that we know where to prioritise our efforts. This requires a stage beyond assessment criteria, to understanding the opportunity cost of pursuing one outcome over another and to understand the full life cycle of any decision we make, and some of the possible interventions will require far more detailed business cases to be put together.

Council Plan Implications

19. Our current Council Plan (2019-20) identifies the environment as one of our five key areas of focus. It specifically details that 'we wish to be a leading Council in developing and adopting a Green Agenda to promote sustainable environment, economy and communities'

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

20. This strategy seeks to help us achieve our aim of caring for and enhancing our natural environment and to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change. The Strategy has a specific action to adopt appropriate measurement systems for tracking our reduction in emissions and increased capacity for offsetting and publish our progress.

Equality and Diversity Implications

21. An Equality Impact Assessment relevance check was completed (see Appendix 1) and it is determined that a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required at this stage, but may be required once we develop specific actions.

Privacy Impact Assessment

22. A Data Protection Impact Assessment has been completed and identified that the data risk is very low.

Background Papers

SSDC Full Council Minutes, May 2019