

## SWT Full Council

Tuesday, 17th December, 2019,  
6.15 pm

The logo for Somerset West and Taunton, featuring the text "Somerset West and Taunton" in white on a teal background with a white swoosh at the bottom right.

The John Meikle Room - The Deane  
House

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**Members:** All Councillors Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair), Simon Coles (Vice-Chair), Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Paul Bolton, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Dave Durdan, Kelly Durdan, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, John Hassall, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, Martin Hill, John Hunt, Marcus Kravis, Andy Milne, Richard Lees, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Chris Morgan, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Peter Pilkington, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Phil Stone, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Terry Venner, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

### Agenda

**1. Apologies**

To receive any apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

To receive and note any declarations of disclosable pecuniary or prejudicial or personal interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The personal interests of Councillors and Clerks of Somerset County Council, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes.)

**3. Public Participation - To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions, statements or petitions from the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 14,15 and 16**

The Chair to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public who have submitted any questions or statements, please note, a three minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak before Councillors debate the issue.

**4. To receive any communications or announcements from the Chair of the Council**

**5. To receive any communications or announcements from the Leader of the Council**

**6. To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13**

**7. Receipt of Petition on behalf of Extinction Rebellion**

Receipt of petition on behalf of Extinction Rebellion with over 200 signatures from people who live and work in Somerset West and Taunton. The petition calls for the creation of a citizen's assembly, immediate implementation of local policies to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2025 and reversal or revision of any existing policies which increase net carbon emissions. The petitioners have formally requested that a debate takes place at a Full Council Meeting. Ms Fran Hicks (Extinction Rebellion) to present the petition. A copy of the front sheet of the petition is attached. An assessment of the implications for the Council should the petition be carried will follow.

(Pages 5 - 20)

**8. Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

During discussion of the following item(s) it may be necessary to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 13 13.02(e) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision may be required because consideration of this matter in public may disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of

exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The Executive will need to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Recommend that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

**9. Mixed use development at Seaward Way, Minehead**

(Pages 21 - 38)

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Marcus Kravis, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development.

**10. SWT Commercial Investment Strategy**

(Pages 39 - 72)

This matter is the responsibility of the Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and Economic Development Cllr Marcus Kravis and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources and Cllr Ross Henley.

The purpose of the report is to set out the proposed Commercial Investment Strategy for Somerset West and Taunton Council. The Strategy is one of the key pillars that supports the delivery of additional income needed by the Council to meet the targets set within the Financial Strategy that Executive approved on 18 September 2019, which aims to achieve ongoing financial stability.



**JAMES HASSETT  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Please note that this meeting will be recorded. At the start of the meeting the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore unless you are advised otherwise, by entering the Council Chamber and speaking during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact the officer as detailed above.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions. There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions. Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 3 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chair will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate. Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chair will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors begin to debate the item.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group. These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room. Full Council, Executive, and Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: [www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

The meeting room, including the Council Chamber at The Deane House are on the first floor and are fully accessible. Lift access to The John Meikle Room, is available from the main ground floor entrance at The Deane House. The Council Chamber at West Somerset House is on the ground floor and is fully accessible via a public entrance door. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available across both locations. An induction loop operates at both The Deane House and West Somerset House to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team via email: [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

If you would like an agenda, a report or the minutes of a meeting translated into another language or into Braille, large print, audio tape or CD, please email: [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

Good Evening everybody.

My name is David Hincks, I live in Taunton and have been a member of Extinction Rebellion for nearly a year.

Extinction Rebellion is a relatively new phenomenon but it has been influential over the past year or so in radically increasing both public and governmental awareness of the climate and environmental crisis that is confronting us.

Extinction Rebellion remains concerned however that there are still many people, including probably some in this room, who do not fully realise the gravity of the emergency we are facing. Or, if they do recognise it, they are failing to act in a way that fully reflects that recognition.

All those in positions of power, such as in this very Council, hold an even greater degree of responsibility than normal for our future in these precarious times.

Unless suitable policies are implemented and fundamental changes are made swiftly we will simply run out of time. Time is of the essence.  
Action is needed **NOW**.

While we have been running our daily vigil outside, we hope that some of our concerns have permeated, even if only subliminally, into the consciousness of the Council, its officers, staff and of course its Councillors themselves, and into the consciousness of the general public passing by.

We have not made a nuisance of ourselves, as the vigil has been a more subtle form of protest action for us than usual, but we hope it has had some effect, and that you have been able to recognise that there are many members of Extinction Rebellion who are just normal people, like yourselves.

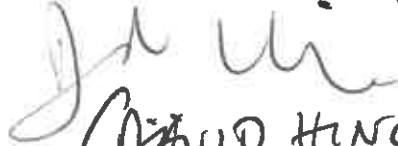
During our vigil we have collected signatures to a petition, from people who have just been passing by. We have not gone out of our way to garner signatures, and these are real signatures on paper, not just something people can do by a quick click on the internet.

The petition demands.....

- 1 The creation of a Citizen's Assembly to hold our local council authorities to account and oversee changes required to combat the climate emergency.
- 2 Immediate implementation of local policies to reduce carbon emissions to net zero within the Somerset area by 2025 and reduction of overall consumption levels.
- 3 Reversal or revision of any existing policies which increase net carbon emissions.

We have 23 pages of signatures.

It is now my privilege to formally present this petition to the Council, and thank you, for allowing me speak, albeit briefly, this evening.

  
(DAVID HINCKS)  
145 Firepool View  
Page 5 Taunton TA1 1NY

# VIGIL PETITION

*Tell the truth.....net zero carbon emissions by 2025 and reduce consumption.....Citizen's Assembly*

In 2019 Somerset West and Taunton Council and Somerset County Council declared a climate emergency. Urgent and radical action is required following these declarations and we, the undersigned, demand:

- The creation of a Citizen's Assembly to hold our local council authorities to account and oversee changes required to combat the climate emergency.

Immediate implementation of local policies to reduce carbon emissions to net zero within the Somerset area by 2025 and reduction of overall consumption levels.

- Reversal or revision of any existing policies which increase net carbon emissions.

C. D. HINCKS  
145 Firepool V  
Taunton  
TA1 1NY

Signed                      Full Name                      Address                      Postcode

*[Faint, illegible handwritten signatures and names]*

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## **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

### **Petitions to Council – Assessment Form**

On receipt of a Petition from the requisite number of people appealing to the Authority (more than 200 for it to be debated at the next ordinary Full Council), the Governance Team will ensure an assessment is made as to its contents to establish whether there are likely to be significant consequences to the Council should the request(s) in the Petition be approved at the subsequent Full Council meeting.

There are Excluded Matters which are matters that are excluded from the scope of the petitions duty and these are:

- a) Any matter relating to a planning decision, including about a development plan document or the community infrastructure levy;
- b) Any matter relating to an alcohol, gambling or sex establishment licensing decision;
- c) Any matter relating to an individual or entity in respect of which that individual or entity has a right of recourse to a review or right of appeal conferred by or under any enactment;
- d) Any matter which the Chair of the Council or relevant Committee believes to be scurrilous, offensive, improper, repetitious, capricious, irrelevant or otherwise objectionable.

Petitions submitted to the Council must include:

- a) A clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioners wish the Council to take;
- b) The name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition;
- c) The name and address of the petition organiser

If valid, the first question to be addressed when assessing the Petition will be:-

“Can the request of the petitioner, if approved, be implemented without the need for any resource (financial and otherwise) to be identified outside existing budgets or staffing capacity?”

If the answer is ‘yes’, then the Petition can proceed towards discussion and potential resolution.

An example of a Petition which would fall into the above category would be where the Council is being asked to lobby the Government, Somerset County Council or other body on a particular issue. If the Petition is carried, the action required will usually involve no more than a letter being prepared and sent to the intended recipient.

However, as in the case of the recent Petitions on The Brewhouse and Extinction Rebellion, the answer to the above question would clearly be 'no'.

In such circumstances, detailed analysis of the wording of the Petition will be required to identify what will be needed if the Petition – when it comes before Full Council – is carried.

Such analysis will include:-

- What additional resource would be required to ensure the Petition (if approved) could be implemented?
- What needs to be done to identify the level of resource necessary both in financial and staff terms?
- Are any approvals needed to provide these resources?
- Will this require reports to be submitted through Scrutiny and the Executive? If a Supplementary Estimate is required, Full Council approval will be required too.

If such analysis is required, the Governance Team will arrange for the attached pro-forma to be completed and this will accompany the relevant Petition onto the agenda of the Full Council meeting so all Members are aware that further investigation will be required before the Petition – even if it is carried – can be implemented.

The Council will decide how to respond to the petition which may include;

- a) To take the action requested.
- b) Not to take the action requested for the reasons given in the debate.
- c) Refer the matter for further investigation.
- d) Refer the matter to the Council's Executive for final decision.

A petitioner has the right to request a review of the steps taken in response to the petition if they are unhappy and that request shall be made to the Council's Scrutiny Committee.



## Petitions to Council – Assessment Proforma

**(To be used in circumstances where it appears the wording of a proposed Petition will commit the Council to providing further financial or staffing resources which cannot be met from existing budgets)**

### Details of the Petition -

#### Petition

The Petition demands;

1. The creation of a Citizen’s Assembly to hold our local Council authorities to account and oversee changes required to combat the climate emergency.
2. Immediate implementation of local policies to reduce carbon emissions to net zero within the Somerset area by 2025 and reduction of overall consumption levels.
3. Reversal or revision of any existing policies which increase net carbon emissions.

### Questions to be addressed

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>What additional resource would be required to ensure the Petition (if approved) could be implemented?</i></b></li> </ul> |
|---|

1) Citizen’s Assembly -
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Comment: The costs will vary greatly depending on exactly what format is pursued and its scale.
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2) Net Zero by 2025 -
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Comment: The additional resource required to make Somerset West and Taunton Council Area Carbon Neutral by 2025 has not yet been quantified at this moment. This would require further research and resource.
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3) Reversal or Revision of Existing Policies -
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Comment:
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In terms of looking at existing policies - in February 2019 SWT committed £25k of budget for 2019/20 to support development of a climate strategy/action plan and early project delivery. Of this, £10k has been committed to support the development of the county-wide strategy; largely to permit the Strategic Management Group to access appropriate external expertise, including execution of the consultation plan.
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All authorities have already committed considerable resource to development of the county-wide framework to date and, as a result of our activity so far, it is becoming apparent that future development would be better served by securing county-wide project management expertise. This is likely to incur an additional cost but will be
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supported by a detailed costing plan and brought forward for approval through appropriate channels.

To date, work developing the Framework documents, initial work stream briefs, and setting up programme management and governance arrangements has been carried out by approximately 2.6 FTE, spread across 11 different officers. The next phase of developing up the action plans and projects for inclusion in the Draft and Final documents will require inputs from a wider range of officers. Some of this will be part of business as usual, some things will be additional tasks. On this basis it is important to recognise the importance of the fact that the SWT Plan will be a “live” and iterative document that evolves over time, and it will not be possible to identify every single action and project that will be required in the time allowed. However, this model will ensure that climate action begins to permeate business as usual across all functions of the Council, rather than being the preserve of a single specialist officer.

As we move towards finalising and ultimately delivering action plans and projects, this will inevitably in some cases lead to further financial and resource implications, however, these will be dealt with separately nearer the time.

- ***What needs to be done to identify the level of resource necessary both in financial and staff terms?***

1) Citizen’s Assembly -

Comment:

As an example, Devon County Council (DCC) are setting a Citizen’s Assembly up (which will be advisory only) and DCC has set aside £250,000 to support this, but overall costs are estimated at just shy of £500,000 (see paper at <https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/documents/s6163/Process%20for%20Developing%20a%20Devon%20Carbon%20Plan%20v3%20App%20C.pdf>).

2) Net Zero by 2025 -

Comment:

An intensive research exercise would need to be undertaken involving staff resource, and may also require outside expertise.

3) Reversal or Revision of Existing Policies -

Comment:

The SWT Framework identifies a number of key early tasks and commitments. Some of these will be for the Council to take forward, some of which are part of operational plans already, some of which will be in addition.

Precise budgets for specific tasks and projects are not possible to establish in detail at this stage. However, the principle of earmarking an initial sum in the 2020/21 budget to support delivery of the Council’s climate change commitment has been identified and will be subject to further discussion as part of the budget setting process. Budget setting for specific projects and commitments will be refined alongside approval and implementation of the final strategy, from July 2020 onwards.

• **Are any approvals needed to provide these resources?**

1) Citizen's Assembly –

Comment: Yes – Full Council approval would be required to set up and define Terms of Reference as well as to approve the budget to support. SWT had not proposed establishing a citizen's assembly. This matter was discussed with the County wide climate change members task and finish group in October 2019, where it was felt that this method of engagement was not necessary or appropriate at this time and was more suited to 'single issue' topics where matters had reached an impasse. SWT nevertheless remain committed to engagement and consultation with our communities and will use a variety of means – other than citizen's assemblies - to do so. **(Please see attached Appendix A)**

2) Net Zero by 2025 -

Comment: Yes - The Council - in common with the County Council and three other district councils in Somerset - has declared a climate emergency and to work towards a carbon neutral district by 2030. This is a very challenging commitment – a full 20 years earlier than the Government's own declared ambition to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This was also included in the Corporate Strategy 2020-2024 recently adopted by Council in October 2019 - "Work towards making our District carbon neutral by 2030 - deliver projects based on a Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan that work toward this goal (for example installing electric vehicle charging points across the District)." The Council's Executive Committee has also approved (October) a 'framework' carbon neutral and climate resilience plan for the district which establishes a range of policy commitments and early actions across a range of topic areas. This framework will be developed into a final strategy and associated action plan in 2020. Meanwhile SWT will act to deliver the early actions identified in the framework document already approved.

3) Reversal or Revision of Existing Policies -

Comment: Yes – However the framework document referred to above includes commitments to policy changes that support the move towards carbon neutrality. This will be developed further in the final strategy and action plan in 2020. Performance around carbon neutrality & climate resilience will be monitored through the relevant delivery plans.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2019 SWT Executive approved the following;

1) Noted the comments of the Scrutiny Committee and the Climate Change Member Working Group included in the appended minutes of each meeting;

2) Noted the timeline for delivery of both documents, and high level comments in relation to funding and resources going forward;

3) Endorsed the Draft SWT Framework as a driver for stakeholder engagement and public consultation activities over November 2019 – January 2020;

4) Delegated authority to agree and endorse the future Draft SWT Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan due in early Spring 2020 to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change (Cllr Peter Pilkington) in consultation with the Climate

Change Member Working Group, noting that the final draft strategy would come to Executive and Full Council for approval;

5) Endorsed the Draft Somerset-wide Framework as a driver for stakeholder engagement and public consultation activities subject to potential amendments to be discussed with the Joint Task and Finish Group and agreed by the Joint Cabinet/Portfolio Holders Group, in line with the agreed governance arrangements; and

6) Delegated authority to agree and endorse the future Draft Somerset-wide Strategy due in early Spring 2020 to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change (Cllr Peter Pilkington) in consultation with the Joint Task and Finish Group, noting that the final strategy would come to Executive and Full Council for approval.

- ***Will this require reports to be submitted through Scrutiny and the Executive? If a Supplementary Estimate is required, Full Council approval will be required too.***

#### 1. Citizens Assembly

Comment: – Yes – FC approval to set up and define Terms of Reference as well as to approve budget to support.

#### 2. Net Zero by 2025

Comment: – Yes – at least Full Council approval in a further report or reports.

#### 3) Reversal or Revision of Existing Policies -

Comment: - Yes – Any reversion or revision of existing Policies will require Executive and Full Council decisions in further reports. SWT can't reverse some decisions (e.g. once a planning permission is granted it is granted). SWT would also need to evaluate what decisions are relevant. Also, the answer is not to necessarily stop anything that will have emissions taking place, it is to overall balance them with offsetting and sequestration (carbon neutrality) – clearly the onus is on reducing and avoiding new emissions, but it will be impossible to achieve without offsetting and sequestration.

### **Likely timescale involved –**

1. **Citizen's Assembly** – Potential estimated timescale of up to a year to get the necessary approvals and organise before starting.
2. **Net Zero Carbon in Somerset by 2025** – This is a target that would not be solely down to the District Council to enforce, even if adopted. No policies drawn up if this was set up as the revised target could be immediately implemented as a piece of work would need to be undertaken into the feasibility and partnership work required. The target of 2025 would be significantly more difficult to achieve. The work the Council has undertaken since the adoption of a Climate Emergency is leading to a reduction in overall consumption levels and this is ongoing work.

- 3. Reversal or revision of policies** – This could be estimated at potentially taking at least 1-2 years. A piece of work would need to be undertaken to assess current and forthcoming policies and procedures for their carbon emissions and then the approvals would have to be taken through the democratic process.

#### **Appendices:**

**Appendix A – Consultation Proposals for the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy.**

**Appendix B – Draft Somerset Climate Emergency Framework**

<https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/documents/s7199/Appendix%20A%20-%20Draft%20Somerset%20Climate%20Emergency%20Framework.pdf>

**Appendix C – Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan**

<https://democracy.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/documents/s7200/Appendix%20B%20-%20CNCR%20Plan%20Framework.pdf>



## Consultation Approach for the Somerset wide Framework

### Introduction

As discussed at the last Task and Finish Group meeting a draft Framework Document has been developed by officers, and partners, from across the county. The document outlines the areas of focus that have been identified as part of the research to understand how Somerset can achieve its intention to be carbon neutral by 2030.

This paper gives a broad overview of the consultation that will be taking place during November and December to obtain feedback from our communities on the direction of travel being taken and ensure that we are moving in the direction our communities expect.

### Public consultation events

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Somerset Climate Action Network has been commissioned to run four public consultation events where residents can learn about the councils' draft framework and have their say on the proposed areas of focus for the strategy. There will be one event in each district area on the following dates:

- 16th November – Somerset West and Taunton
- 23rd November – Mendip
- 30th November – South Somerset
- 7th December – Sedgemoor

Each event will run from 10am – 4pm. It is intended that events will be welcoming for all, lively and positive with something for all the family to do. When residents enter the event, they will be invited to place themselves on a 'ladder' in terms of their attitude to climate change (ranging from extremely concerned / taking action to don't believe in climate change). A pop-up café offering tea, coffee, and biscuits etc. will provide a venue for informal talks and conversations with volunteers.

The core content for the consultation would be displayed on self-standing infographic boards. Each board will highlight the area of focus, quick wins, and direction of travel. Alongside each infographic will be a 'HAVE YOUR SAY' board for residents to share their views.

At regular intervals throughout the day (e.g. every hour on the hour) there would be a short talk in the café followed by a Q&A. We are inviting local school / college students and youth group members (via Young Somerset) to give talks. They will not only attract a younger demographic but also speak passionately and knowledgeably about the importance of taking action to mitigate climate change.

Other speakers will include workstream stakeholders, local U3A or WI. Talks will link to workstream themes. They will be in 'conversation with' for example Mike Dilger (One Show presenter and wildlife broadcaster), Stephen Moss (writer, naturalist and broadcaster) or Emma Howard Boyd (Chair of the Environment Agency).

As the events will take place in the run up to Christmas, we are offering decoration and card making from natural and recycled materials. In addition, residents will be invited to contribute to one big

shared collage depicting a positive vision of the district in 2030. This activity will be facilitated by a local artist.

When attendees arrive at the events, we will seek to obtain their view at a number of points, including a measure of their feelings towards climate change on arrival. While they move around the event their views will be gauged through a variety of methods with a final contact just prior to departure to cover their satisfaction with the ideas, what they would change, and how they consider they can make change happen.

### Residents' survey

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Given that not all of our residents will be able, or wish, to attend the four events a much larger and wider (online) consultation will also take place online. This will run for six weeks and the Somerset councils will all promote its completion via our communications channels. Questions on participant demographics will be included so the sample can be weighted to match the population as a whole (based on the 2011 census).

### Young people consultation

Given the importance of climate change for future generations, a key part of this consultation is to obtain opinions from young people living in Somerset. The councils have defined young people as aged 11-25 to take account of the fact that the 18-25 group is often overlooked.

This consultation will run for the same period as the main one. We know that many schools are active in teaching issues around climate change and we will be promoting the survey via the school. In addition, we will be using support of student ambassadors to promote the survey in their schools, through tutorial periods, related lessons or assemblies as well as on school websites where possible. We will also look to work through Young Somerset to promote the consultation.

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### Business consultation

It is recognised that there is a need to engage, encourage and support businesses in Somerset to recognise the impact of climate change and work to both address this and identify the opportunities for businesses. As a consequence a separate business summit will be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December to discuss the framework and gauge their views.

### Thoughts on other routes of consultation – Citizens Assemblies and Juries

There has been discussion in a number of councils about the suitability of having Citizens Assemblies or Citizens Juries (known loosely as 'mini publics') as a way of consulting with the public and getting their views as a way to create the strategy. A review of reports and conversations on these approaches indicate the following:



There has been positive use of Citizens Assemblies in a number of different countries, including Ireland and Canada.

The approach for both Juries and Assemblies is to use the views of the representatives involved as a map of the wider community. Breckon et al (2019) identify that the representatives act as proxies on behalf of the wider community. Bryant et al (2017) however note that this approach is always imperfect as databases are always incomplete, people are not under any obligation to take part and so the final group are therefore self selecting, and that as a consequence the participants tend to be more politically active and better educated than the initial sample identified.

A strength of this approach is that it allows a group of residents to spend a focused amount of time investigating the pros and cons of an issue to try to resolve a way forward. This was seen to be of particular value in Ireland where there appeared to be political deadlock regarding the issue of abortion (Palese, 2018). Allan (2019) notes that there are three types of issues where this approach is a real benefit; issues that are politically stuck (such as social care funding); moral issues (such as abortion) and constitutional reform. Pal (2012) shows that where there are political disagreements and the main political process cannot find a way due to incumbent self-interest then the approach is particularly good at finding a way through. In the case of Somerset it would be difficult, at this time, to argue that any of these apply.

Finders et al (2016) and Smith (2015) have pointed to the pressure that is placed upon those residents to take part, particularly where the subjects being investigated are technical or complex. Bryant et al (2017) note that research has indicated that the way that these events run has led to perpetuating the dominance of citizens with more skills in higher forms of communication thus disenfranchising less confident or educated attendees.

The research into these approaches acknowledge a high cost to them. The pilot assemblies on English devolution for example cost £200,000. Many of the reports point to the high costs of the approaches and question whether they are always of value where they are carried out (Flinders et al, Breckon et al), specifically where the issues at hand are resolvable through other routes. Given that there is consensus in tackling climate change and that all councils are working to very limited budgets it is possible that the limited existing resources might be better focused on delivering actions to address climate change.

Given that there is considerable public interest in the subject of Climate Change and people want to engage and share views, give support and feel they are contributing, the idea that a small number of 'proxies' have given views on their behalf, thus removing them from the process, is unlikely to be acceptable to the public at this time.

Finally the impact of these approaches is also something that is challenged in many of the reviews of juries and assemblies. Historically in many cases, it is argued, they have failed to move matters forward post the actual process. Wakeford notes that 'they have been employed to give the appearance of public legitimacy to political decisions that have already been made behind closed doors. (Wakeford et al 2015). With this in mind Smith (2019) notes that politicians have been rushing in to organising assemblies because they are in vogue rather than because it would be specifically beneficial and this is a question worth asking of Somerset at this point.

Conclusion - The Councils are in collective agreement that there is a climate emergency and are working collaboratively to deliver a strategy. As it stands there is strong agreement about ways forward and there is to be a comprehensive consultation process to enable a currently animated public to engage. The engagement of the public is vital if we are deliver on the commitments made and there could be a danger that by engaging with only a small section of our community via an assembly or jury we could lose buy in and active engagement from many. In addition to this the cost of delivering a 'mini public' properly is likely to be high and, in the current financially constrained local government environment, it is likely that councils will be criticised for investing in this approach when the resources could be spent tackling climate change.

While the county appears to currently be of one voice in acknowledging a climate emergency and is actively working to tackle this, the decisions that need to be made moving forward will not always be easy. As a consequence of this, it is of merit to recognise the ability that assemblies and juries (regardless of their flaws) have to find resolution where there are political or self-interests blocking decision making. It would therefore make good sense to return to the concept should the local authorities find they reach a position on future actions and priorities, that they are struggling to resolve.

## References

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Agenda Item 9

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Agenda Item 10

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