

## SWT Full Council - 17 December 2019

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, 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, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Peter Pilkington, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: James Barrahan, Lesley Dolan, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Gerry Mills, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas and Joe Wharton

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

### 84. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors P Bolton, J Hunt, P Stone, M Rigby, A Trollope-Bellew and T Venner.

### 85. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr L Baker	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Barr	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Blaker	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Trustee		
Cllr A Govier	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Palmer	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Wedderkopp	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Wedderkopp	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

86. **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**

Phil Cookson spoke on Agenda Item 10, Commercial Investment Strategy:-  
I would like to request that each and every investment was only approved to go ahead after detailed carbon projections and a proposed carbon neutral action plan had been audited to ensure the capital and operational works during any construction and over the *lifetime* of the investment were achievable and had a robust monitoring and evaluation scheme legally integrated into the investment contracts and terms and conditions.

Only in that way, would the Commercial Investment Strategy contribute to the delivery of a carbon neutral district by 2030

Nigel Behan asked the following questions:-

Q1 Bus Provision/Contracts

Would Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) divert focus and attention (with other Councils in Somerset) to Public Transport - starting with prioritising the creation of a comprehensive bus network (involving immediate investment) which was sustainable, affordable for all and inclusive? That might require Local Authorities pressing Government for the power to take over private (bus) contractors?

Q2 Procurement

“We were in the process of incorporating wording into our procurement processes that would aim to ensure that our suppliers and partners were actively working towards reducing their carbon and environmental footprints.”

Presumably SWT would include a series of contractual requirements (with Key Performance Indicators including pollution penalties etc) which were measurable and meaningful. Was a model “Climate Emergency” procurement template available for inspection at present?

Q3 Local Plan Review

At the SWT Executive last month it was noted that:

“Climate and Sustainability Implications”

8.1 The climate emergency, and our response to it, was a strong theme running throughout the document. The proposed policies aimed to mitigate the climate emergency and adapt to its effects. It covered issues including reducing carbon emissions through walking, cycling and public transport, the location of development in sustainable locations, the energy efficiency of buildings, renewable energy, biodiversity enhancements, tree planting and flood risk.”

Whilst perhaps implicit there did not appear to be direct reference to setting up practical actions to reduce pollutants in the environment merely, for instance, as an example, “7b/7 Not worsen, and where possible improve the quality, quantity and availability of the water resource, reduce flood risk “And: “Improve air quality in Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAS) at the A358 in Henlade and East Reach, Taunton.” Should the policy approach (es) be more robust and “ambitious”?

Councillor P Pilkington, Portfolio Holder for Climate, would provide a written answer to all of Nigel Behan’s questions.

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

The Chair advised that she was sending round a collection pot for Councillors to make a contribution towards the local Food Banks, to provide assistance for those in need at this time of year.

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

The Leader made the following announcements:-

- She reminded Councillors that the ice rink at Castle Green was now open and proving very successful.
- The swimathon was taking place in the February 2020 half term week and she was looking for some volunteers to join her team.
- As many Councillors would be aware, part of the harbour wall at Watchet had collapsed and left a large hole in the sea defences.

Chris Hall then gave the following information to Full Council:-

Today was the first day of visible works with a 13 tonne excavator and pecker being diverted from other coastal works to our location. The machine had spent the day removing loose sections of the Quay surface, exposing the full scale of the hole, and breaking up a large pieces of concrete within the hole in preparation for the geotextile membrane and rock armour that was to be installed tomorrow. The decision was made not to remove the archway as technical advice led us to the conclusion that to remove it would place us at risk of further material loss from the sea facing section.

The contractors on site today had been through a range of options with us in regard to the surface of the material that was exposed, my report yesterday suggested that shot fired concrete was being considered and whilst that remained a possibility there were very real concerns that it wouldn't last. We had seen more material loss today, although considerably less than in the previous 48 hours. To deliver that as a solution would require preparation and equipment, that took time to bring to site and might be too late upon arrival due to the fragility of the surface, alternatively the work was undertaken but did not last, we continued to take advice on this as well as the risk associated with all aspects of the works.

Today had also been a busy planning day and we had been able to secure 50 of the 200 tonnes of material, in the right size, that was needed, this would start arriving to site tomorrow (Wednesday) as would a larger excavator and the geotextile material. The Lego blocks from the Environment Agency would also be delivered tomorrow and the car park had been cordoned off in preparation for that.

We expected tomorrow to be very busy with activity on the wall and wider traffic movements of large vehicles starting from 7 am, traffic planning for that was also underway.

In conducting these works we continued to liaise with the Marina Operator, the Onion Collective, the Town Council, and of course the residents and visitors who had been taking an interest in the incident.

89. **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

No questions were received from Councillors.

### 90. Receipt of Petition on behalf of Extinction Rebellion

#### **Presentation for Extinction Rebellion Petition on Climate Change**

David Hincks and Fran Hicks introduced themselves to the Councillors and gave the following speech:-

We all knew a climate emergency was declared by SWT Council back in February 2019 and that was a great start, and we also all knew it was no good shouting “fire” and then all sitting down to have a cup of tea. Actually we did recognise that SWT was already making some good moves. Park and Ride extension, grants for outlying areas to have electric vehicle power points installed, St James Street pedestrianisation, improvements at the Railway Station, were all examples of steps already underway, but much more needed to be done, and quickly.

Q. So, Fran, was the target set for net zero carbon emissions in the district by 2030 ambitious enough?

It was certainly better than the Government’s current national target of 2050, but I urged the Council to set its sights even higher. It would be too late if we got to 2030 and looked back thinking we should have done more. We had to be ambitious. Very ambitious. The situation demanded it.

Q. Could you give some examples of policy areas that the Council should be looking at to achieve carbon reductions?

Actually probably every area that fell within the ambit of local authority governance. If we took Transport, for example, we needed to find ways of incentivising people to lessen their dependence on cars, so better public transport, better transport links, encouragement of car sharing schemes, more traffic free areas, reliable park and ride going forward, incentives for taxis and buses to move away from petrol and diesel engines, better cycling routes and infrastructure, and so on.... Those were all things that a Citizens Assembly (CA) could consider in more detail and provide guidance on to Council.

Q. So Fran, could you tell us a bit more about CAs and why you thought one was needed?

Big subject. We were facing a challenge of unprecedented change in an unprecedented time frame. Human nature was what it was, and most people disliked change. But what we did or didn’t do over the next ten years would determine whether we could slow the acceleration of destruction sufficiently to pull us back from the brink, or whether the snowball of runaway climate change would just speed us exponentially towards an unliveable future.

Q. So you saw Citizens Assemblies as a way of overcoming public resistance to change?

Yes, there would almost certainly be some discomfort in and even resistance to the initial changes. I was on the advisory panel around public spaces and the closing of St James Street and experienced at first hand the initial kick back for that scheme. It was crucial that time was not lost in multiple protracted internal meetings, and that the issues were instead properly presented to a wide-ranging group of citizens, with the potential gains being understood and supported by the

public as a result. That could be achieved through the use of a Citizens Assembly.

Q. And how would a Citizens Assembly actually work to achieve that?

Well, it would demonstrate the Council's willingness to engage in deliberative democracy, by inviting ordinary people to learn about good deliberative practices, to hear from experts and stakeholders, and to be led by trained and experienced facilitators, from an independent body, and to come to decisions in a thoughtful and timely manner. Then to vote on options, which would be put to Council and if above a certain percentage, duly adopted. Of course it made sense for that to be done at a County level also, and discussions were ongoing with Somerset County Council about that, but SWT could set a lead by example.

Q. And what sort of shape or structure might a CA have?

Precise models for CAs varied, in size, scope, and potential cost, and we were more than happy to meet with Council representatives in January 2020 to discuss possible formats and approaches in more detail. One possibility might be to run a smaller version of a CA: sometimes referred to as a Citizen's Jury. That would work in the same way as a CA, but would take less time, money and people.

Q. What other benefits might a CA have?

This isn't just about a need to address the climate and ecological crisis, it was also an opportunity to address the deep malaise that affected our existing democratic system, and to give people a sense that their views and experience count, not in a polarised way but in a rounded and thorough way, going beyond just putting issues out for consultation. Our contention was that, based on the positive existing examples of deliberative democracy practices both from in this country (e.g. Camden Borough Council, Devon County Council, Oxford City Council and the Welsh National Assembly) and across the world (e.g. Ireland, Belgium, Poland, France and Spain), it wouldn't be just what we did in addressing the challenges of the climate and ecological crisis that got remembered but the way that we did it.

Well, thank you Fran for all that information. It's a lot to take in and there was of course a lot more that could be said, however we're running out of time. Thank you for listening and we hoped SWT could now rise to the challenge and act appropriately on the proposals set out in our Petition, in summary:

- 1) Be bold and implement policies aiming at net zero by 2025, not 2030
- 2) Put carbon emissions and consumption levels at the heart of policy and all decision making, and
- 3) Got the public mandate to agree the urgency for action, and the bold steps needed through a Citizens Assembly: active participation not just passive consultation.

The following comments were raised during the discussion:-

- Councillors supported the move towards carbon neutrality and the implementation of new policies to work towards that, but were unsure that a CA was the best way to achieve that.
- Concern was raised that if Councillors agreed to set up a CA that it would take away resource from the work needed to create new strategies.
- Councillors highlighted that SWT had already confirmed their commitment to climate change and raised concern on the CA model being used and that it would not give any added value to the work needed.

- Councillors welcomed the petition because it provoked a debate on climate change.
- Councillors highlighted that it had been a challenging year and were thankful for all the projects that had already been achieved so far.
- The Leader confirmed she would be happy to meet with the members of Extinction Rebellion in 2020 to discuss the options.

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

**Resolved** that the press and public be excluded during consideration of agenda items 9 and 10 on the grounds that, if the press and public were present during the item, there would be likely to be a disclosure to them of exempt information of the class specified in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended as follows: The items contained information that could release confidential information that related to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). It was therefore agreed that after consideration of all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

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

**Resolved** that Full Council:-

- 1) Approved an increase to the Supplementary budget within the Capital Programme to enter into a JCT design and build contract with the main contractor to build out:
  - a. Two light industrial units to the east of the site, as per planning permission 3/21/18/021 (and previous November 2017 resolution); and
  - b. The common infrastructure elements of the site, (thus enabling future development of the residential scheme), prior to completion of the sale of the residential plot.
- 2) Noted the application for Homes England small sites fund grant for infrastructure works;
- 3) Delegated authority to officers to explore design changes to industrial unit no.2 to increase let-ability, subject to planning permission, whilst remaining within the current budget and business case; and
- 4) Delegated authority for the Director of Housing together with the S151 Officer and Asset Management to progress options for development and/or disposal of remainder of site.

93. **SWT Commercial Investment Strategy**

**Resolved** that Full Council approved the Commercial Investment Strategy as per the confidential recommendations included with the report.

(The Meeting ended at 9.40 pm)