

SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 25 January 2023

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Simon Coles, Ed Firmin, Roger Habgood, John Hassall, Dawn Johnson, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Pritchard, Ray Tully and Vivienne Stock-Williams

Officers:

Also Present: Councillors Marcus Kravis, Brenda Weston and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

64. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Tom Deakin (subs Ed Firmin), Cllr Richard Lees (subs John Hassall), Cllr Steve Griffiths and Cllr Andy Milne.

65. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee

A request was made by Cllr Dave Mansell to have an update on the confidential item from the last meeting.

Otherwise the Minutes were approved as a correct record.

Prop: Coles / Sec: Lloyd Unanimous

66. 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 S Coles	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Arundel		
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

67. **Public Participation**

No items for public participation had been received.

68. **Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

The Committee noted both the Written Answer and Recommendation Trackers.

69. **Community Scrutiny Forward Plan**

The Chair advised that the Community Scrutiny meeting to be held on the 22nd February would be the final one. Due to administrative process, and the requirement to get all minutes signed off at the last full council of SWT, there would be no meeting in March.

The meeting of the 22 February would be very busy and would round up those requests made by Councillors in preceding months. There was no room to add any additional items.

The Committee noted the Forward Plan.

70. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plans**

The Executive and Full Council Forward Plans were noted by the Committee.

71. **Annual Update of Progress of the Climate Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan**

Cllr Dixie Darch presented the report which was the second and final update of the Climate Neutrality and Resilience Plan.

It is divided into 8 workstreams: Built environment, energy, industry, farming and food, natural environment, waste, water and transport. Only 50% of the outcomes in the report are under the control of Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT), so partnership working with other agencies, public sector and stakeholders are key to delivering on the strategies.

Some good news stories included:-

- Built Environment – 117% reduction on carbon emissions at Wellington Depot. Essentially the depot is putting electric back into the grid through use of solar panels.
- 1.5million decarbonisation funding received from Central Government to allow improvements to the Wellington Depot and Alcombe Childrens Centre, Minehead. (This will include a move to greener energy sources, as the gas boilers as these sites are coming to end of life).
- EON – 20million eco-funding received to enable whole house retrofit (holistic approach) on the least energy efficient council housing.

The committee welcomed to the report and comments and questions were raised on the following points:-

It was asked whether the EON funding would bolster existing retrofit budgets, or whether this would be a new fund? *The Council Housing Retrofit plan does have a budget, but this is a long-term plan which relies on drawing down external funding from other sources as and when it becomes available. One of the aims of the strategy is to identify those energy companies (and other funding sources) in order to maximise those opportunities when they arise.*

Tree planting on Exmoor National Park (ENP)– This partnership approach was working very well, and it is hoped that it will be extended to other parts of the County. 110 hectares of ENP land had been identified for tree planting, and an employee of SWT was working with the park to physically plant and manage the trees. Bi-monthly meetings were taking place, and the employee had good knowledge and education on tree planting, woodland management and layout and types of trees required to meet the needs of various sites. It was enabling the planting of trees efficiently and more importantly allowing for good after care to enable the junior trees to flourish. (Last year due to the drought, 50% of trees planted by SWT did not survive their first year). ENP has a much better survival rate with 70/80% of trees surviving. This has been attributed to the after-care and initial thought going into the types of tree at site specific locations. SWT maintains its 3:1 ratio of replanting following removal of a tree.

Fruit Trees – Can these be planted? *It was agreed that fruit trees are included in the re-planting schedules, but these need to be the right tree, in the right location and properly managed to ensure they flourish.*

The Committee recognised that good work had been done to secure funding bids to progress the energy plans, especially in respect of carbon retrofit to Council Housing. It was asked what help private homeowners could access as this was an area where SWT seemed to fall short? *On average 20% of dwellings in Somerset fall below E in the energy rating, but in the districts of Sedgemoor and SWT it is in fact 50%. It was suggested that homeowners could look to the [Centre for Sustainable Energy](#) to see if they had any grants available, and the monthly [Climate Newsletter](#) also included helpful links.*

It was questioned whether signage was put up in areas where SWT was not cutting grass to reduce the number of complaints? *QR codes were put in these places so that someone with a smartphone could click on it and see what the*

policy for grass cutting/re-wilding was in that area. In general, amenity land which was used regularly such as parks and play areas would not be left to grow. (If the grass was longer in those areas, it was most likely because the localities worker was behind on the cutting schedules). Areas that were being left, would be clearly designated.

It was asked whether SWT was offering funding to assist private homeowners who were suffering fuel poverty? *Not to officer knowledge within SWT, but there are several agencies who can assist – Somerset County Council, Somerset Community Foundation and Community Council for Somerset.*

Active Travel – Some comments that were made included:

- The infrastructure on existing pathways and access routes in Taunton such as Longrun Meadow needed to be upgraded and maintained. Resurfacing would enable better cycling and pedestrianisation and benefit the safety of the Parkrun at this location. *Longrun Meadow was a recognised flood plain, so that will always present challenges in this area. The main access point through the Meadow would be maintained to the required standard.*
- The Steam Coast Trail – had a resolution been found to link up the various routes, especially at Blue Anchor by the chalets? *Sarah Ellwood, the project officer for this has now moved to SCC, but SWT is continuing to work with all agencies and land-owners to try and find a workable solution. The value of the Steam Coast Trail as an alternative route for walkers and cyclists is recognised. Work is still ongoing to extend and maintain these trails.*

The Committee then expanded the conversation to include the PFH update.

72. **To consider Reports from Executive Councillors - Councillor Dixie Darch**

Partnership working is extremely important in the delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan, especially as SWT moves towards incorporation into the new Somerset Council. Building on existing relationships and forging new ones with parish councils, will be a cornerstone in tackling the bigger climate change issues. It will also be easier to share resources and learning once the five councils combine, especially around the weightier areas of highways, transport and built environment.

Cllr Tully said it was important that the Somerset Council contacted the parishes and didn't isolate them from the issues. He had particular areas of concern in Monkton Heathfield around the canal and associated attenuation ponds. Any foreseen work should be discussed with the parish council, so that they could inform residents and offer insight into local issues.

Cllr Mark Lithgow said that he had read concerns about the increased weight of electric vehicles affecting the stability of levels in multi-storey car-parks. The battery engine was much heavier than traditional car models and would increase the weight lode on each floor. Was this something that was being factored into future engineering plans and or was there a contingency being drawn up to

mitigate this? *At the present time, it was not being explored, but no doubt as electric vehicles become more popular it may have to be looked at in the future. There has been an increase of 19% in the take-up of electric vehicles in the last year.*

Cllr Brenda Weston – How will terraced housing with no off-street parking deal with electric vehicle charging in the future? They are at an obvious disadvantage, because they would have to run cabling across pavements and streets. *A trial is taking place in another part of the country to address this issue. Gullies are being dug through the pavement so that the cable can be sunk and not provide a trip hazard. Some government funding has been made available to specifically address the problem of those properties which have no offstreet parking (LEVI fund).*

Cllr Dave Mansell – SWT has been very progressive in promoting cross party working and allowing other members to work with officers to participate in the formation of policies and practice as part of the main administration. Will the new Somerset Council administration allow for this? *Cllr Dixie Darch felt that this was a political question rather than an operational one and said that she would feed this request/question back to the Somerset County administration for comment.*

Cllr Whetlor asked how the National Grid will cope if there was suddenly an upsurge in electric vehicle take-up? There are lots of different types of charger with different wattage and this could put undue pressure on the electricity supply in specific areas. *7Kilowatt is sufficient for overnight charging of a domestic electric vehicle and would not overload the grid. The danger comes when everyone plugs in at the same time on a higher wattage, which would have a similar effect to several households boiling a kettle at the same time. It is important that the infrastructure is in place to protect the source.*

(The Meeting ended at 7.38 pm)