

Council – 6th September 2022

Climate Change Portfolio Holder Report – Cllr Dixie Darch

Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan

The Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan was supported unanimously at Full Council on July 5, 2022. This has been the culmination of work since November 2021 incorporating Member involvement from both SWT and Sedgemoor District Councils, as part of our Climate Change partnership. It gives a clear route forward for tackling the ecological emergency and it is hoped it will be adapted for use across wider Somerset when the unitary council comes into being.

The vision and action plan are currently being produced for public issue and once complete will be available to download from our website.

Water

We are using the Climate Change newsletter to promote tips on saving water during the dry period.

The free to use water refill station is now up and running in Wellington, situated outside the Post Office sorting office. This complements the refill stations already in use in Taunton and Minehead. These are a collaborative initiative with Wessex Water. The refill stations are designed to reduce the use of disposable plastic water bottles, an estimated 7.7 billion of which are used every year in the UK, a large proportion ending up in waterways.

Wessex water also provided water refill points at the Taunton Pride festival, preventing the use of the significant number of single use plastic bottles. They will also be attending the Somerset County show in September.

Somerset Business Climate Summit

The Somerset Business Climate Summit to be held on 21 September at Queens College between 10am and 1pm will be an opportunity for businesses to showcase best practice and raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges of moving towards a low carbon economy. The summit is a collaboration between all five Somerset councils.

Recycling on the Go poster competition winner

14 year old Evelyn Stead from Court fields School in Wellington was the winner of the SWT Recycling on the Go poster competition. The competition was designed to raise awareness of the 130 new litter bins throughout the district which enable plastic bottles and aluminium and tin cans to be deposited separately. Evelyn received a cheque for £500 towards her school, along with her poster, mounted and framed, the image of which is now being used in SWT communications promoting the *Recycling on the Go* campaign.

Upgraded cycle storage at Deane House

Upgraded cycle storage at Deane House has now been completed. This is part of a scheme to promote active travel and reduce car use with internal staff and across the district. This complements the cycle to work scheme and includes a number of council pool bikes which staff can use where meetings are held in locations which are not walkable. The old storage unit has been relocated to our Westpark Depot in Wellington to store sandbags.

E scooter trial

In June this year the Dept. for Transport announced the extension of the e scooter trial until May 2024. The previous end date for the trial was November 2022.

The Taunton trial is approaching its two-year anniversary and the scheme has matured well and is proving to be very stable. Based on this it is our intention to extend this part of the trial to the new end date.

The Minehead trial has been operating for just over a year and is very different to Taunton. Minehead is a coastal town with different demographic. It's also home to Butlins, and at the height of the of the summer season the town's population is significantly increased by an influx of tourists into the area on a weekly basis. There are also out of season events scheduled throughout the year which bring additional visitors into the town.

These means the trial in Minehead has not had the opportunity to mature and stabilise in the same way as Taunton. Due to large numbers of new users every week.

We have been asked to engage with the public on their views and will launch a public survey specifically for Minehead at the end of August.

Taunton Flood Alleviation Scheme consultation on Firepool Lock and Obridge

Two short term projects – the Firepool Lock to Obridge scheme and another to improve flood defences along the left bank of the River Tone between the Town Bridge and Frieze Hill - are going through the designs, consent and permissions phase. These projects will bring flood alleviation to the Firepool regeneration site and North Town area. The plan is to raise Firepool lock gates and the area around them and create defences between the River Tone and the Bridgwater to Taunton Canal, from Firepool to the A358 Obridge viaduct. They are part of the wider Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements scheme which was approved by SWT in February 2020.

The River Tone Left Bank Defences scheme involves a collaborative agreement between SWT and the Environment Agency, with Binnies appointed as contractors for the detailed design, consents, and permissions work. Ecological surveys, land and visual impact assessment and topographical surveys have since been completed, with a planning application due to be submitted during Quarter 2 of this financial year. Approval will enable construction to commence to the original timetable of 23/24.

The Firepool Lock Gate scheme is managed by SWT, with support from the Environment Agency and J Price Consulting. The contract for detailed design, consents and permissions was let to WSP in August 2021. They completed preliminary studies (ecology, heritage, landscape, etc.) during spring 2022 to support the scheme, and outline design work started in April 2022. All project milestones have been met to date, and granting of planning permission is timetabled for Quarter 3 of 2022. This would see commencement of construction in 2023, in line with the initial schedule. The public consultation has run from 11 July to 7 August and officers are now reviewing all responses.

Electric Vehicle Charging Points – SWT Car Parks

We have now completed the installation of all our electric vehicle charge points with Swain Street in Watchet now live.

We have installed a total of 16 double sockets 22kw charge points across 9 car park locations, all of which are registered on ZapMap.

Free Tree Give Away 2022/23

SWT is once again offering Parish and Town Councils across, and community groups across the district free trees as part of its commitment to work towards carbon neutrality and climate resilience by 2030.

The scheme opened on 01 August, and you are invited to place your request ready for National Tree Planting Week.

[Free trees \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

Local Governance Review and county-wide projects

Staff from all five councils meet regularly as part of the relevant LGR workstream to bring individual Climate Action Plans together into one county-wide revised strategy as we move towards Unitary. The Climate Emergency Implementation Board has officer and member representation from all five councils and met on 28 July to review progress of projects. The agenda included updates on the LGR Climate Change subgroup, the Climate Emergency league table as well as a presentation on the Transport workstream.

Cllr Dixie Darch, Executive Member for Climate Change