

Full Council Meeting – 7 February 2023

Portfolio Holder Report for Climate Change – Cllr Dixie Darch.

Electric vehicle charge point infrastructure

Increased usage of electric vehicles

Recent Department for Transport figures show there was a 19% increase in the number of electric vehicles registered in Somerset. Since July 2022, this has risen from 4,344 to a total of 5,173 vehicles.

Between October and December, Somerset West and Taunton district has seen an increase of 8.69% to 1,238 electric vehicles registered in the district.

Crescent car park refurbishment to include electric vehicle charging points and a secure cycle shelter

As part of Taunton's Crescent car park upgrade there will be 19 electric vehicle charging points to encourage uptake of electric vehicles. It will also provide a secure cycle shelter to promote cycling as a sustainable means of transport, supporting healthy lifestyles and environmental improvements with trees being introduced.

Trees

Somerset Tree Strategy

The Somerset Tree Strategy is a collaborative project involving all 5 councils, the Quantock, Blackdown and Mendip AONBs, Exmoor National Park, Somerset Wildlife Trust, the Forestry Commission, the Environment Agency and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. With feedback from the public survey on the tree strategy now complete, the consultants, *Evolving Forests*, have issued the first draft of the strategy for stakeholder feedback. This is a really exciting project which will ensure a joined up approach to the future of Somerset's treescapes.

Urban tree challenge

We are keen to make a bid to the next round of the Urban Tree Challenge, which supports the establishment of trees in urban areas in England.

Areas that qualify for funding within the SWT district are Taunton, Wellington, Williton and Minehead. We have reached out to stakeholders in those areas to discuss a joint bid.

The fund has criteria which need to be met, including proximity to schools, healthcare and areas where deprivation indices and air pollution is high.

We are being supported on the bid via our Exmoor National Park Authority partnership

Built environment

We are starting to see decarbonisation projects come to fruition following completion of decarbonisation surveys on all our main buildings last year. We now have a full set of surveys which provide a costed pathway to decarbonising our assets, and these will be fed into the LGR Asset Optimisation work.

Wellington Depot solar panels and battery storage

Installation of solar PV and battery storage is scheduled for the Wellington Depot at Chelston Business Park. The decarb survey suggested a 117% reduction in grid electricity usage by installing PV. This project has been funded by the CNCR budget.

Successful funding bid for decarbonisation of Wellington Sports Centre and Alcombe Children's Centre

SWT's application to Phase 3b of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) through SALIX Finance has secured £1.5 million towards the decarbonisation programme of both Wellington Sports Centre and the Alcombe Children's Centre in Minehead. This is an increasingly competitive funding process and we are delighted to have been successful.

Both projects include the replacement of end-of-life gas heating and water systems, together with a range of 'fabric first' measures to ensure energy efficiency, greater thermal warmth and an improvement in energy costs. ASHP will be installed to replace gas boilers, solar PV panels will be installed on both buildings, LED lighting for the ACC and Glazing for WSC. The Wellington Sports Centre project also includes the replacement of the air handling units and roof materials within the building and the systems for heating the swimming pool water and installation of underfloor electric heating in the sports hall.

CNCR Plan Progress Review to Community Scrutiny

SWT's Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan will come before Community Scrutiny on 25 January 2022, providing a second update on progress on our climate change actions.

Moving towards Unitary

Officers across all five councils continue to work together to bring individual climate action plans together in preparation for vesting day. Officers are continuing to work on our carbon emissions baseline for the new authority.

All councils have contributed financially to preparatory work for a **Local Energy Plan**, exploring options for renewable energy sites and heat network zones across Somerset. This is a key piece of work for the county to meet renewable energy generation targets within the CNCR.

The plan will include a high-level assessment of renewable energy generation opportunities, identifying suitable sites to support the development of the new Somerset wide Local Plan and outlining how to work alongside community energy organisations, the private sector and various other stakeholders to invest and grow

renewable energy generation in Somerset. This will ensure the necessary evidence is in place to allow the new Somerset Council to take opportunities forward directly or in partnership, and have the evidence available to bid for potential future funding.

Technologies assessed will focus on Solar PV and thermal, wind, run of river hydro, heat pumps, geothermal, heat recovery, storage batteries, hydrogen and anaerobic digestion. A general overview of tidal & wave and the potential overlap this may have with terrestrial land use and planning is included.

Although this work will provide a planning evidence base, it will also enable the proliferation of renewable energy in Somerset more generally. The energy system in the county requires holistic consideration to facilitate electrification of transport and heat. Although beyond the traditional remit of local authorities, it is important that we act as an enabler for bringing the different bodies together to meet renewable energy targets.

CIlr Dixie Darch, Executive Member for Climate Change