

Somerset Council

Full Council  
20 December 2023



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## **Annual report of the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change**

Executive Member(s): Councillor Dixie Darch, Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change

Local Member(s) and Division: all

Lead Officer: Micky Green, Director of Climate and Place

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### **Background**

1. The Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change, takes the lead on all the services that sit within the **Climate, Environment and Sustainability directorate**. The Directorate is made up of several services. and plays a vital role in supporting the Council to: -
  - Achieve its ambitious targets in tackling climate change and ecological emergency.
  - Reducing waste and improving recycling rates, promote re-use.
  - Provide emergency response to events in the community.
  - Support communities to build resilience.

### **Updates**

2. Somerset Council remains committed to reducing emissions and transitioning to Net Zero and has been recognised as a leader in its work to respond to the climate emergency. We achieved a score of A- (“Leadership”) from the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) for our performance in 2023. This rating compares to a regional average of B and a global average of C.
3. CDP accreditation is seen as the ‘gold standard’ of environmental reporting and this is the first time the new Somerset Council has been scored by the not-for-profit charity. CDP runs the environmental disclosure system and helps organisations make their environmental impact transparent, reduce their impact, and act as environmental leaders.

The score is based on the Council’s climate-related projects, strategies and activities. These include our plans for expanding the county’s electric vehicle charging network,

our Tree Strategy and work that encourages the uptake of 'retrofit' home heat efficiency.

### **Decarbonisation programme across Somerset Council's Estates**

4. A range of green improvements for Alcombe Children's Centre are being made thanks to Somerset Council and government grants. It is estimated the revamp of the building in Minehead will deliver carbon savings of nearly



- twelve tonnes per year, contributing to the Council's commitment to creating a greener and more sustainable county in line with its Climate Emergency actions. The project is being made possible with £250k from the Council's successful bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.
5. A key mitigator of carbon emissions in Somerset is retrofitting old buildings, which are poorly insulated and heated by oil or gas. Work is underway to assess and decarbonise a variety of council owned estate assets and buildings. Additional, Somerset Council is supporting a variety of organisations including parishes and town council to aid residents to retrofit their own homes, moving off oil and onto renewables, using ground source and air source heat pumps, plus solar PV.
6. There is also work ongoing to decarb several leisure centres across Somerset including Wellington Sports Centre, Goldenstones Leisure Centre and Chard Leisure Centre. This work will help to reduce the carbon emissions across the County. The decarbonisation works are possible thanks to a successful bid to the Public Sector Decarbonation Scheme (PSDS).

### **Decarbonisation of the Somerset Council Fleet and reducing the carbon emissions from highways activities.**

7. The climate service is taking an active role is working with Fleet Operations to decarbonise and reduce the number of the fossil fuel vehicles in the Council Fleet. The project will look to introduce new electric vehicles into the fleet, whilst utilising new technology to capture data for better utilisation across the Council.
8. The Climate service will also work as part of a collaborative approach with our Highways to maximise the reduction of carbon emissions from our new Somerset highways contracts and the activities they provide.
9. The target and ambition are to reduce the emissions attributable to highways service by at least 50% from the year one baseline by the end of the eight-year term reflects Somerset Climate Emergency Strategic goals to decarbonise and become resilient to the effects of climate change. To achieve this ambitious target, we will:  
**Assure delivery:** using sustainable materials such as warm asphalt as standard and methodologies that minimise carbon.  
**Deploy a transformative approach:** that embeds sustainability in the everything we do. For carbon, this means tracking the cost and carbon of our activities using the FHRG carbon methodology and tool. It means managing wider sustainability impacts

(using tools such as our biodiversity metric), and ecosystem service value. E.g., carbon sequestration and storage, flood avoidance and air pollution removal (using iTree design).

**Improving the sustainability of the whole highways service:** by our head of sustainability establishing a climate change working group and leading the creation of a partnership-wide climate emergency plan (CEP) with short-, medium-, and long-term targets and actions for each partner. Led by the Highway Contracts Collaborative Board (HCCB), the working group will embed a sustainability culture through education and communications and track progress.

10. The overall approach will maximise our contributions to meeting the objectives of the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy.

### **Electric Vehicle Infrastructure.**

11. Somerset Council are to receive £3,783,000 of capital funding for the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure across Somerset. The Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure scheme is aimed at providing standard 7kW and fast 22kW chargepoints at locations for those who do not have access to their own off-street parking.
12. The EV team resubmitted an amended Stage 2 application for LEVI funding on 07-12-23. It looks like we are only the second application to be reviewed. Potentially, Somerset's application will be taken to their new board next week for discussion. If not, it may be the new year.
13. If we gain approval, we can proceed to procurement. 90% of the funding will be issued at the end of 2023/24, with the remainder being issued once contracts have been through an approval process and signed off, Autumn of 2024.
14. The Mendip chargepoint project has three chargepoint locations in Frome still waiting to go live. As of end of November, Badcox and Cattle Market car parks are awaiting meters and North Parade is awaiting DNO connection. Clarks Village has been put on hold due to cabling issues.
15. Dunster chargepoint has gone live, however there are issues with an intermittent signal which is awaiting an upgrade. The South Somerset Deletti project is all but complete with minor snagging and a few bays requiring painting.
16. A rapid chargepoint project has been approved by the C&P board and the non key decision has been signed by David Carter. Swarco will be installing these in the new year, there will be one rapid location at Bridgwater and one at Burnham.

### **Somerset Energy Plan**

17. Work is progressing well with Regen and our partners on the development of the Somerset Energy plan. A Scrutiny task and finish group as provided important challenge to the process and useful insight. We will be consulting on the new plan early in 2024. The plan highlights the need to develop more renewable energy across

the county, utilising solar (where possible on rooftops), wind power in appropriate locations and the use of small schemes like anaerobic digesters.

18. We are also working in partnership with UK100, who are supporting us in sharing good practice across Councils, and seeking resolution to challenges around grid connections.

### **Somerset Sustainable Food Conference**

19. A Somerset Sustainable Food Conference is planned to take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2024 at the Bath and West Showground. The conference has been formed through a partnership between Somerset Council, Sustainable Food Somerset and the Bath and West Agricultural Society. Funding of £20,000 has been committed through the farming in protected landscapes fund (FiPL) from the Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills National Landscape.

### **Natural Environment services:**

20. Local authorities such as Somerset Council are crucial to the delivery of the UK's transition to a cleaner, greener future. Now we are the new authority for Somerset, our progress needs to be accelerated in every local area if Somerset's nature restoration targets are to be met.
21. On the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2023, the Government published the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, its delivery plan for the environment and for building a greener, more prosperous Country. These changes to legislation, and an update to the 25-year Environment Plan, are not short on ambition, providing some improved opportunities for our natural environment and the diverse range of often threatened habitats and species. It remains to be seen how it translates into delivery both nationally, but also on a local level.
22. Working with Somerset Local Nature Partnership (LNP), Somerset Council is collaborating with other environmental organisations to deliver local initiatives to meet the Environment Acts ambitions. The LNP draws together collective skills, experience, and resources to lead and implement initiatives and solutions in response to the pressing local challenges, as well as the need to fulfil their own green targets and counter the ecological emergency.
23. One of the key areas of development in Environment law and policy is the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements. The Environment Act 2021 introduced a requirement that, with a few exceptions, all developments achieve Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of least 10%, to be maintained for at least 30 years. The mandatory BNG requirement is due to come into effect at the start of February 2024 for town and country planning development (2025 for nationally significant infrastructure projects). Somerset Council planning and environment officers have developed local guidance documentation for the implementation of this new requirement. Training has been provided to Council planning officers, councillors and critically, developers and agents to make all aware of the extent of these changes and

ensure that they are prepared with a route to achieving net gain, whether on the development site, through offsetting projects elsewhere or through BNG credits.

**Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills National Landscapes (Previously Known as AONBs):**

24. Somerset Council hosts the Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills National Landscapes, previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). The new name reflects their national importance, and the vital contribution they make to protect the nation from the threats of climate change, nature depletion and the wellbeing crisis, whilst also creating greater understanding and awareness for the work that they do.



View from the Mendip Hills

25. Some of the key achievements and projects this year from Mendip Hill AONB include: Farming in Protected Landscapes – £350,000 has been allocated to projects on farms that address climate issues, nature recovery, involve people and/or improve the sense of place.

AONB Management Plan – formal approval has been given by the National Landscape Partnership to notify Natural England that the review of the statutory AONB management plan is commencing in line with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Mendip Super National Nature Reserve – 31 sites across the south facing slopes of the Mendip Hills declared a ‘super’ National Nature Reserve in October.

26. Access for All – Defra announced additional funds were available this current year to remove barriers (physical and information) to the countryside. The Mendip Hills team were awarded nearly £40,000, to include consultation on ‘opening’ Cheddar Gorge

one day per month by removing traffic via an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order. The team has already been allocated £70,000 for 2024-25.

27. Nature Calling – The Mendip Hills is one of six national landscapes awarded over £500,000 Arts Council money to involve audiences from deprived areas in the landscape starting in 2024.
28. Nature Recovery Work – 7477 volunteer hours delivered on nature recovery tasks, including 275 on rebuilding dry stone walls.



Planning – 65 planning applications consulted on, 9 forestry plans, 2 national government consultations and 2 local government consultations.

Training – 70 parish councillors trained on the planning system and AONBs, plus how to involve nature recovery in their decision making.

29. Some of the key achievements and projects this year from Quantock Hills AONB include:

Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FiPL). £250,980 of FiPL has been allocated for 2023/24 by end of September. Extension to FiPL for 2024/25 confirmed with additional £252,000 funding. Headlines include nearly 1,000Ha of agricultural land now being managed through regenerative agricultural techniques, five projects increasing knowledge of carbon storage / emissions and nine projects reducing carbon emissions from farming systems, over 1.3km of new native hedgerow planted, 3,400Ha of land improved for biodiversity. In terms of engagement the programme has engaged 59 farmers of which 30 have not engaged with the National Landscape before and 27 had not engaged with agri-environment schemes previously.



View across the Quantocks National Landscape

30. Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund. Budget £163,458. 54 applications approved with £158,257 allocated. One application currently pending. Expectation that fund will be fully allocated by year end.
31. Species monitoring. Seven transects completed for bat monitoring, including 3 as part of the priority National Bat Monitoring Programme, 2 transects butterfly monitoring, adder monitoring, nightjar monitoring, dormouse monitoring, pied flycatchers, results feeding into the Quantock Hills State of Nature Report, national monitoring programmes as well as site management plans.
32. Quantock Farmer cluster formed with 19 members and four meetings / events held. Health and Wellbeing. Joint Somerset Nature Connections Project entering final year. In period 3 sets of 6-weekly courses run with 27 participants. Core Team's Working Well group – monthly volunteering group specifically for participants with low / poor mental health – continues with 6 sessions and 18 participants. Group provides pathway from SNC to other volunteering groups. Group has recently engaged with refugees currently living in Bridgwater / Taunton providing activities and tasks including social activities.  
New volunteer role – walk leader. 6 volunteers recruited undertaking lowland leader training to be able to run walk / events increasing access and understanding.  
Land Management Skills Scheme - £60,000 project to run rural skills training for long-term unemployed and NEETs.  
Hosted the Disabled Ramblers annual festival leading 3 events.
33. National Landscapes facilitated and hosted successful pilot Nature to Doorstep Project (Social Value funded) to deliver family events programme in Hamp, Wilstock and Stockmoor areas of Bridgwater. Including 12 partners from conservation, arts and sports sectors the initiative ran 12 events in summer 2023 with over 420 people attending.
34. Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (£2.6m NLHF project) (April – Sept)

3,600 people engaged, majority from less engaged audiences over 103 events including 3 camping trips for young people / families (1 from north Taunton, 1 from Wilstock, Bridgwater and 2BU, LGBTQ+ support group)

3<sup>rd</sup> archaeological dig undertaken with 35 individual volunteers and 19 young people. Open day held with approx. 180 people attending.

Lidar Research Project. Interpretation of Lidar has identified over 1,500 potential archaeological features. This volunteer project is now entering the next phase with features being added to the HER or ground truthing if required.

Increased diversity of people working in the National Landscape sector with an events management work experience student from our Nigerian community members.



Walking group on the Quantock National Landscape

35. The work carried out by National Landscapes in engaging with minority groups and those with mental health issues have been incredibly successful, and something we wish to highlight as best practice. They have shown how the countryside is for everyone, and the positive impact it has on health.

### **Somerset Ecology Services:**

36. Somerset Ecology Services offer a range of professional ecological services providing comprehensive support for projects from inception to conclusion. From initial desk top studies and preliminary walkover surveys to more in-depth surveys for protected species, practical help with planning applications and implementing cost-effective measures on site. Our ecological team provides high quality ecological advice and expertise. The services offer biodiversity solutions tailored to the specific needs of a range of council services and provides:

- Ecological advice



- Wildlife surveys
- Legally protected species surveys and support
- Management planning
- Training
- Particular specialisms: -
  - Ecology and the planning system
  - Protected species licences held for Bats, Dormice, Barn Owls and Great Crested Newts
  - Badger licence applications
  - Habitats regulations assessments
  - Biodiversity off-setting calculations
  - Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

37. Somerset Ecology Service have been instrumental in the development of BNG guidance and the future assessment of sites that have and will come forward for BNG S106 obligations.

38. The service is currently developing a business plan to see how we can meet the growing internal needs of Somerset Council services as well as establish income generating opportunities.

**Green Estates Services: Woodland creation team, Countryside management and Habitat creation teams.**

39. The teams deliver against several service plans which include broad habitat management and creation works, whilst also focussing on securing and delivery of grant funding for development projects.

40. Significantly the approval of the National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of 1.6million allowed the Ham Hill project to enter its delivery phase in February 2023. Since that time a new Assistant Countryside Ranger, and Engagement Ranger have started with the team, and are playing their parts in delivery of the Landscape, Activity and Interpretation plans for the three-year project. The project team are working with the appointed contractor to deliver the new visitor centre (opening early 2025) and an interpretation consultant to deliver the new permanent exhibition in the visitor centre, whilst also exploring solutions to explaining the complex wider landscape of the country park to visitors. The grants from the Heritage Fund, Wolfson Foundation, Fine Family Foundation and others, are also covering the purchase of new site equipment, a new tramper mobility vehicle, stone for dry stone walling repairs, purchase of plants to deliver habitat enhancement in woodlands and hedgerows for protected dormice populations, and to improve field margins for the shrill carder bee.



A photo of Ham Hill

41. Partnership projects continue to deliver great outcomes for nature and at Yeovil Country Park the Yeovil Rivers Community Trust secured £200K of funding to carry out a range of in channel improvements along the length of the Dodham Brook that runs through the site. The Green Recovery Challenge funding enabled berms and fishes passes to be installed along an important length of the brook, improving the channel for invertebrates, fish and the existing population of water voles. The Trust, countryside rangers and volunteers also created panels to explain the works and have been delighted with the early signs of recovery in the brook – from an eel sighting to freshwater sponges.
42. Some of the key achievements and projects from the Countryside team this year include:
43. Over 2,000 volunteer days donated across all three sites (Ham Hill, Chard and Yeovil Country Park), equivalent to additional 5.5 FTE rangers. Volunteers take part in a range of activities across the sites including wildlife recording / dry stone walling / site patrols / practical conservation and site maintenance / event assistance / school group assistance.  
Wildlife training days have been delivered for staff and volunteers; Bumblebee Conservation Trust led a bumblebee ecology and identification workshop for our wildlife recording volunteers and how to deal with difficult customers was delivered for Roaming Ranger volunteers.
44. Friends of Ham Hill have secured £11,500 from the Banister Trust towards the Ham Hill Heritage Fund project and £1,700 from Co-Op towards Woodland Wellbeing sessions delivered by the Community Ranger. Friends of Yeovil Country Park have secured over £3,000 of funding through public events, £2,000 through the

Wildscapes Grant and £500 from Woodward Charitable Trust for community ranger activities.

45. 54 public events delivered by the rangers with over 3350 participants. These events are designed to be educational and include activities such as bat walks, pond dipping, geology themed and historical. The teams have also facilitated other externally delivered events including Ham to Lyme Running Race, Park Yoga, Chill on the Hill, Yeovil Does Pride and Ham Hill dog show, with a further 5,000 attendees across these events.

30 school visits have been delivered throughout the year, with over 700 pupils engaged in these activities.

46. Protected species have been monitored and work carried out to maintain and improve their habitats. Species include great crested newts, dormice and water voles. Habitat management work continues to improve biodiversity and over 10,000 orchids of 5 species estimated across Ham Hill and Chard Reservoir LNR.

47. Over 700 trees have been planted to increase canopy cover, create new hedgerows and improve biodiversity in existing woodlands.

48. 29 community group activities were delivered to over 1,900 vulnerable people with groups such as Yeovil Families, Yeovil ADHD, Martock Community Services, Fiveways School and Cambian College.

49. The ranger team have worked with stakeholders and partners to deliver events and activities for the community including Chard Museum, South Somerset Heritage Collection, Yeovil Arts Space and Somerset Wildlife Trust.

### **Somerset Tree Strategy and the Woodland Creation Team:**

50. Somerset Council has adopted (June '23) and implemented a ten-year plan to enhance and protect Somerset trees and woodlands (Appendix A Tree Strategy). Amongst its ambitious aims, the strategy sets out a plan for planting 240 hectares of new trees and woodlands each year across the county until 2033.

51. The tree strategy recognises the Council's role in helping tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss and has been developed in partnership with the Environment Agency, Somerset Local Nature Partnership (LNP), Exmoor National Park, Quantock Hills, AONB Partnership, the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust.

52. Built around five themes, the strategy seeks to strengthen the County's bond with its trees, creating a 'wood culture' where the people of Somerset can access and be part of caring about Somerset's woodland.

53. The Strategy has created three posts, funded through a successful bid to DEFRA's Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund. With tasks including supporting tree groups and encouraging new ones, the Woodland Creation Team have started in the Summer of 2023 implementing a range of initiatives, identifying opportunities and establishing actions within their service plan.

54. Projects currently within the service plan include:

- GIS surveys for urban tree planting sites to be used to support a bid for the Urban Tree Challenge Grant.

- Project confirmation and funding confirmed for tree planting in temperate rainforest zone in Exmoor National Park
- Project confirmation and funding confirmed for Chewton Mendip Woodland Creation Project (approximately 2500 trees)
- Community Project with the School and Parish Council of Meare (6 Orchard trees + 300 trees)
- Draft application in partnership with Ham Hill Country Park to create a 7.1 Hectare Woodland expansion on their site.
- Funding confirmed to create a new woodland on our own Council Land (sites currently being identified)
- Development of a new Creation of a Tree / Woodland Information hub

### **Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

55. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are ‘a new, England-wide system of spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature’s recovery and provide wider environmental benefits’, as set out by Government in the Environment Act 2022.

56. The Secretary of State has appointed Somerset Council as the Responsible Authority to develop the LNRS in conjunction with Supporting Authorities and all other interested stakeholders, especially landowners and managers. Somerset Council is working in partnership with the Local Nature Partnership, the approach to the strategy is very much one of partnership.

57. As well as having a role in the planning system and directing public funding for nature recovery, LNRSs will inform the delivery of ‘nature-based solutions’ for outcomes such as flood management, carbon sequestration and improvements in water quality.

Completed work to date:

- Developed a governance structure.
- Created the Steering Group.
- Produced our baseline map of nature for Somerset.

Work in progress: Collate views on habitats, species and nature-based solutions:

Evidence gathering from environmental practitioners and farmers / landowners (May 2023 - April 2024)

Engagement with public and wider stakeholders (December 2023 - April 2024)

58. Formal consultation and sign off will take place from August until November 2024, with the document being published in December 2024.

### **CO-ADAPT (2019- June 2023)**

59. Somerset Council (and previous Somerset County Council) led an international consortium of partners to bid for funding via the INTERREG 2 Seas programme. Co-

Adapt had 13 partners from four countries. CO\_ADAPT was a 4 year, £6.5M project, and we had three projects funded in Somerset.

**60. Adapting the Levels (SCC / SWT / FWAG SW)**

The learning, thinking and co-creation elements of this challenging project funded by Co-Adapt have inspired positive change within the next generation of landscape scale projects within Somerset.

**61. The projects have had many positive, long-lasting impacts, some of the key pieces of work are: -**

Creation of a web-based Community Climate Adaptation Toolkit, which will enable communities to co-create plans to prepare and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Copies of the toolkit will be sent to every Parish and Town council in Somerset.

**62. Development of Moor Associations - provides bottom-up organisational structure, a common platform on which co-created designs can be developed and implemented. All landowner stakeholders within two complete "whole moor" hydrological blocks (35-40 landowner stakeholders/block) participated in a winter floodplain connectivity trial, aimed at reducing the pressure in high-risk areas, such as towns and villages.**

**63. Riverlands: Porlock Vale (National Trust)**

64. National Trust (NT) has delivered a wide range of Nature Based Solutions. The project has improved the natural function of two entire river catchments, the Aller and Horner. It has contributed to adoption of innovative river restoration projects that will impact a significant area of river catchment regionally and nationally and informed the debate on wild release of Eurasian beaver which will impact rivers systems nationally into the long term.

65. The project has also implemented innovative floodplain reconnection, the 'Stage 0' approach, for the first time in the UK, and planted over 70,000 trees, including woodland expansion and connectivity corridors, in field, trees, silvo-pasture and traditional orchards.

5km of new hedge has also been planted, including cross flow hedges.

66. The results from the project have shown a 10% reduction in peak flows due to increased surface roughness and more complex flow paths. The NT work undertaken will help to reduce the impact of extreme weather on over 200 properties with a combined insurance value of over £100m.

**67. Connecting the Culm (Blackdown Hills National Landscapes)**

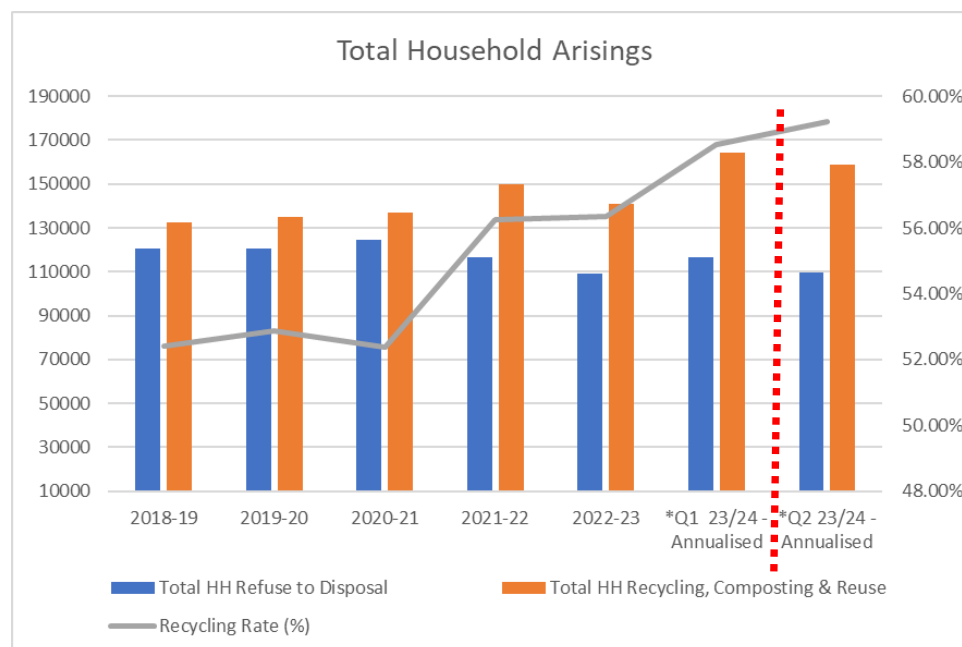
68. The Connecting the Culm project has worked with nature and local communities, to help make the river Culm and its catchment better for wildlife and people, and more resilient to flood and drought. The project saw the developed a 'Blueprint for the Culm' - a long-term management plan. It is the culmination of a 3-year process of evidence-gathering, research, piloting and discussion that has been co-created by a broad range of people. The results have meant a decreasing Flood Risk - Peak flow reductions in all sub catchments of between 6% and 20%. This equates to an annual average benefit of £96k, or £2.9m over a 100- year appraisal.

**Waste and Recycling Services:**

## Total Waste Arisings

69. The last financial year was the first year where Recycle More has been fully implemented across the county. The scheme has helped to drive total recycling rates up from 52% in 19/20 (pre-Recycle More) to 56% in 22/23 across all waste streams that the Authority handles. The positive trend continued during the first two quarters of 23/24 total where Recycling Rates across the entire authority function reached an impressive 58%.
70. Total waste arisings in 22/23 have dropped significantly, with around 4,500 less tonnage than previous years. We estimate that around 1,000 tonnes of this reduction are attributable to a reduction in garden waste that is dependent on weather conditions, the remainder of the reduction indicates a positive trend to more sustainable waste practices amongst Somerset residents.
71. Total household Refuse for disposal reached 109,125 tonnes in 2022/23. This represents a reduction in tonnage of around 12,500 tonnes a year compared to 2018-2021 average, with around 3,500 tonnes being diverted to dry recycling and reuse and a further 4,500 tonnes to food waste recycling since the introduction of Recycle More.
72. The positive trends continue in Q1 and Q2 for this financial year noting recycling rates above 58% in the period:

**Figure 1 – Total Household Arisings**

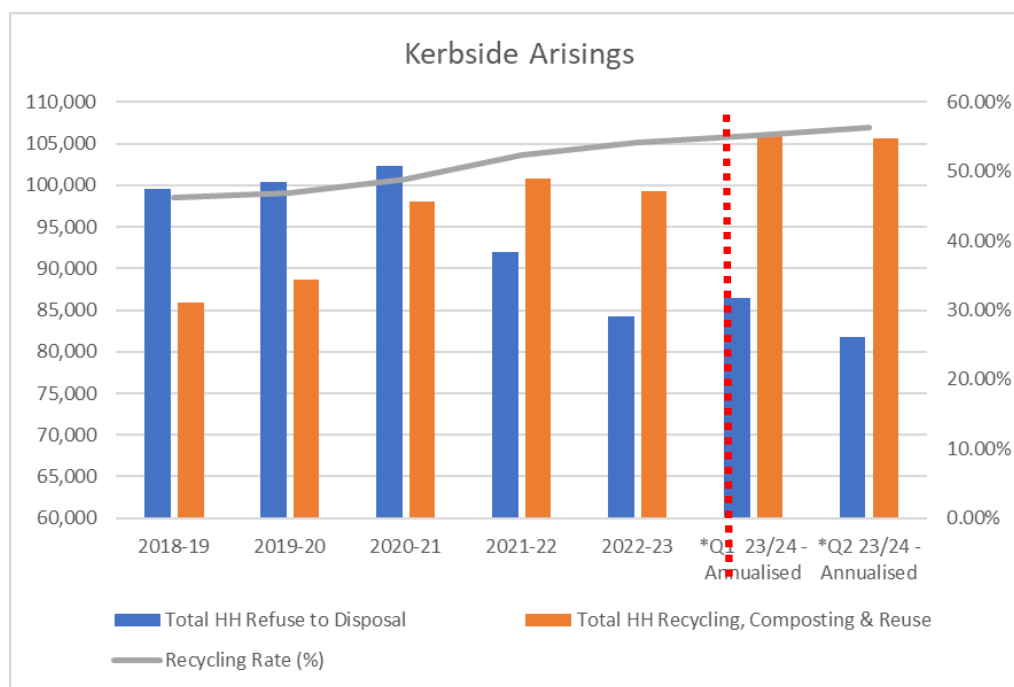


## 73. Kerbside Waste Arisings

74. The kerbside collection service continues to perform well with recycling rates on the service at above 54% and with Q1 and Q2 23/24 above 55%. The introduction of Recycle More continues to influence and encourage Residents to engage with the service in a positive manner. A very significant change in waste arisings from the kerbside has been noted with far less refuse being presented for disposal on the kerbside service since Recycle More has been implemented (15,000 tonnes reduction from 2019).

75. During Q1 23/24 a slight adverse position on refuse tonnage was noted, the rise is attributed to an unusual amount of bank holidays and reliability issues on the waste collection services. Q2 indicates a return to anticipated levels.

**Figure 2 – Total Household Arisings**



## 76. Participation/Composition Analysis

77. Participation and composition analysis was undertaken on the kerbside services this year revealing encouraging shifts in resident behaviour compared to the previous study undertaken in 2018.

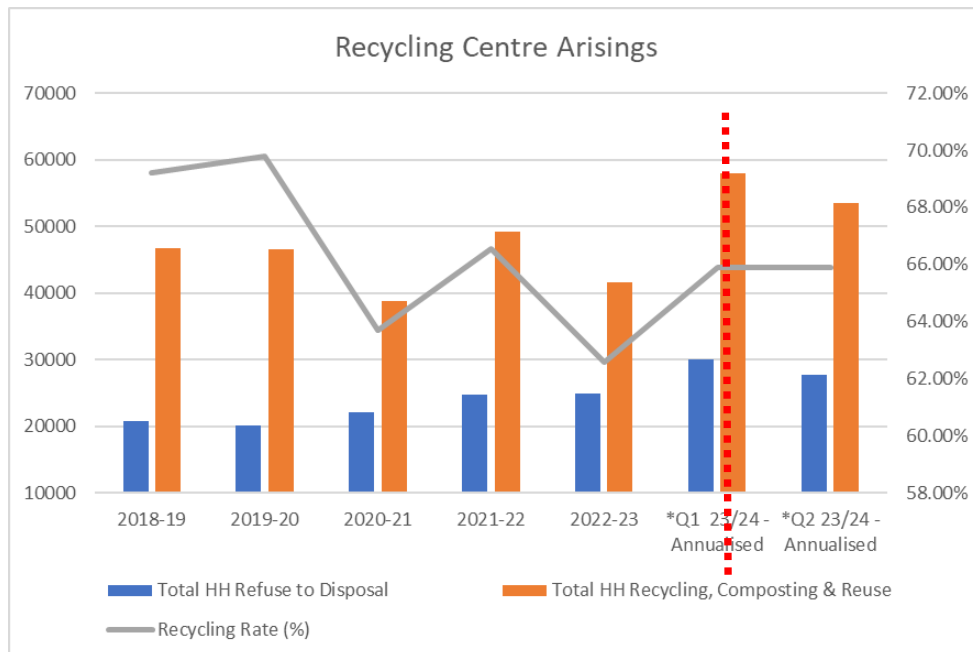
78. Household participation in the kerbside recycling service has increased from 85% to 91% over the past five years. During the same time the number of households presenting food waste for collection has increased by 10% to 72%

79. Delving further into the composition of discarded items, whilst the analysis showed a very positive reduction in the number of recyclable items in the rubbish bin dropping by 10% (from 51% to 41% in five years). The study also showed that half of the recyclables being discarded into the black waste bins was food waste. Furthermore, it was revealed that over 60% of the discarded food waste is packaged. This demonstrates the need for further resident engagement and behaviour change, and we will look to focus on this over the coming year. Aside from Garden Waste and Pet Bedding (7%), each category of recyclable material comprises a relatively small proportion of the total discarded material.

## Recycling Centre Arisings

80. The data from Recycling Centres shows a, shifts in tonnage patterns are closely linked to changes in resident behaviour, a trend influenced by COVID-19 pandemic.

81. During the first quarter of 23/24 Recycling Centres experienced an unexpectedly high levels of residual waste, attributed to the abundance of bank holidays during that period and disruptions to waste collection services stemming from the Kings Coronation. Despite the challenges, recycling rates from the service area have achieved 66% in Q1 and Q2 23/24

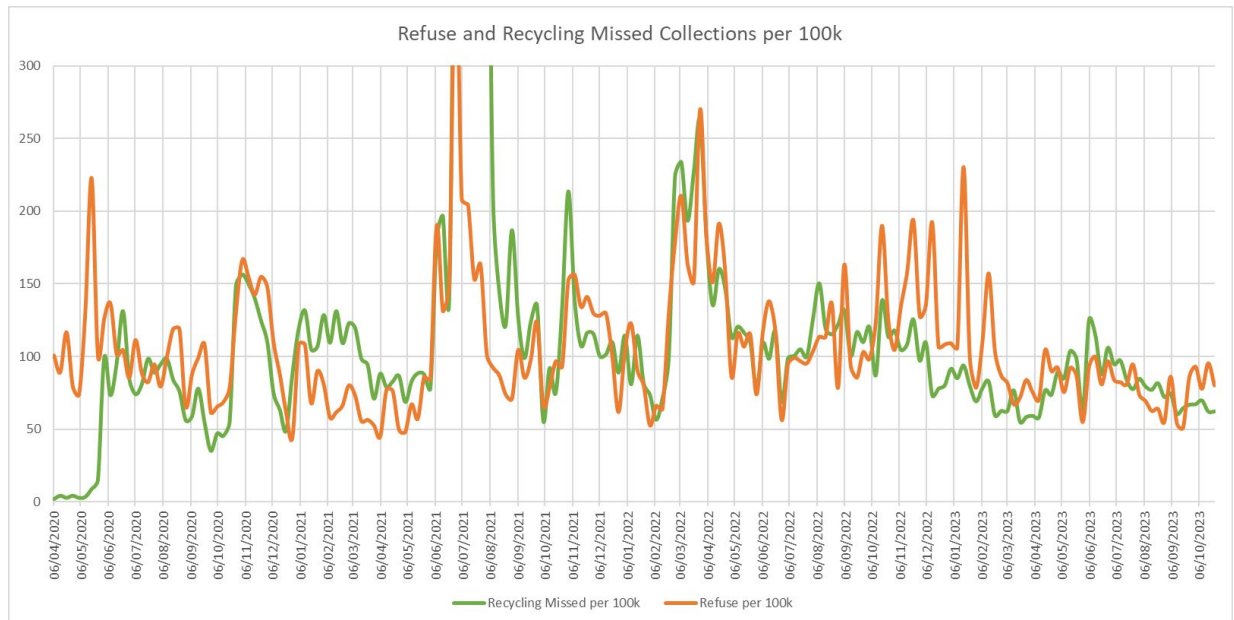


### Collection Contract - Highlights

82. Suez have achieved sustainability over the period with a focus on ensuring that a stable staffing platform has been achieved. Their concerted efforts have resulted in a consistent decrease in agency headcount, improved management of sickness/absence levels and a strategic approach to minimising staff turnover. The major transition activities related to contract mobilisation and service change undertaken in previous years have also come to an end.

83. As a direct outcome of these initiatives the occurrence of missed collections and customer complaints within our service has demonstrated stability, and not been subject to historic variability as we have seen previously. While the Contract target of 45 missed collections per 100,000 has not been uniformly met, it is noteworthy that a tangible improvement in the reliability of our services has been achieved and provides a stable footing to enhance the standard of service delivery in future.





84. A successful trial of flexible plastics has been delivered in the Frome area to 3,500 properties since Apr 23, this scheme has been well utilised by the participants and 65% of residents engaging with the scheme on a regular basis. Following the success of the trial FPF have agreed, in principle, to extend and fully fund the trial to 20,000 properties from next spring.

85. During the Summer industrial action was narrowly avoided, much work was undertaken to ensure that the public and stakeholders were prepared, and that mitigation was in place.

### Recycling Centres and Waste Treatment

86. Several Key changes have affected the operation of the Recycling Centres this year, including the collection of material containing POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants). To achieve compliance with the new legislative requirements, separate disposal points at the recycling centres have had to be implemented. This has led to a reduction in haulage efficiency due to the lower volume of the material and reduction in Biffa's ability to segment the fraction into its recyclable contents. In the new year, the Controlled Waste Regulations are changing, preventing the Authorities ability to charge for Non-Household Waste (Plasterboard, Asbestos and Hardcore) at Recycling Centres. As Somerset Council historically exercised this option, this change represents a significant additional financial pressure to the Authority.

87. On a positive note, recent upgrades to the Recycling Centres' CCTV system have expanded webcam coverage. This enhancement enables customers to better identify busier times. Additionally, the ANPR system has undergone an overhaul, resulting in more reliable user data. This improvement strengthens our ability to identify and address site abuse, track visitor numbers accurately, and gain deeper insights into customer behaviour. Some Recycling Centres are also having engineering work undertaken to reduce the requirement to close the sites when waste compaction activity is being undertaken. The objective of this is to ensure that queuing times are

reduced to a minimum and to increase customer satisfaction. Also, a trial is also taking place at Highbridge and Taunton Recycling Centre to recycle UPVC.

88. Engineering Amendments have been made to Walpole Anaerobic Digestion plant, with the aim to achieving PAS110 accreditation to increase the options for the onward use of this material.

## Working with Communities

89. The Schools Against Waste team have reached over 2,500 children with waste themed assemblies and workshops. Since the start of the programme in Feb 2018, 373 visits have been provided across 193 primary schools. The team continues to achieve a 95% excellence rating in feedback surveys. Since the commencement of the scheme in Feb 2018, over 55,000 children have reached through 365 school visits.

90. Since its launch in May 2022, Fixy has spoken to nearly 4000 people and received nearly 2,000 smart tech items, weighing nearly 4 tonnes, which have been transferred to Donate IT to data wipe and refurbish. Fixy now has its own Facebook page @Fixyproject to share opportunities, highlighting Fixy's whereabouts and how to find local community repair groups (see Somerset's Repair Network).



91. Our Facebook following continues to grow up 4.3% from last year to 20,423, with 1103 posts. The interaction within our digital space remains vibrant, evidenced by a tally of over 21,000 likes, shares and comments. From a standing start we've successfully cultivated an impressive 71,000 Next Door followers.

92. Waste Services provides talks to community groups about our services subject to capacity. So far this year, we have engaged over 90 people with a 45min-1 hour talk about what happens to your recycling, with confirmed bookings in spring likely to reach another 155 people. These talks emphasise the importance of what goes where in the recycling containers, explains what happens to it after it is collected, how well Somerset is doing, and gives confidence by sharing the recycling tracker. This face-

to-face contact is a great way of gaining valuable feedback on areas of confusion, concern and interest, which can be used to shape wider communications.

## **Customer Experience**

93. The transition to Vesting Day posed several challenges for our Customer Experience teams. Integrating our My Waste Services platform (MWS) into the newly structured Somerset Council Customer Services teams required substantial effort. Technically, the system had to seamlessly operate, undergo a rebranding to reflect the new Somerset identity, and ensure the migration of all historical data and maintain compliance with data retention requirements.
94. To prepare for Vesting Day, a program of training, guidance, and support was developed for Customer Services staff. This proactive approach ensured that all staff members were fully familiar of our service and capable of system use on vesting day. Our web presence underwent a significant overhaul and seamlessly integrated into the new Council digital platform. We collaborated closely with the web teams to streamline and migrate all content in alignment with vesting day.
95. Throughout the year, we've successfully implemented several subtle yet significant enhancements., one of these changes has seen the development of a system which allows customers to check the expiry dates of their garden waste subscriptions.

## **Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU)**

### **Community Resilience**

96. CCU continue to provide the chair and secretariat for the Somerset Prepared partnership. This lively partnership of twelve public and third sector organisations exists to promote and support communities to be more resilient to disruptive challenges. It provides advice, information, training and access to small grants. So far this year, grants have been awarded to five communities to purchase resilience equipment. Communities are Winsford, Combe Flory, Combe St Nicholas, Kilve and Oake.
97. Highlight for 2023 was the Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Conference held on 5<sup>th</sup> October. Over 100 community volunteers attended the Day. It was a hugely successful day filled with informative talks, engaging workshops and equipment demonstrations. Attendees were able to learn from experts on various aspects of preparedness, covering topics such as writing your community plan, community organisation and communication. As well as having the opportunity to engage in interactive workshops and 'hands on' experience of how to correctly use a throw line for people stuck in water alongside experiencing situational understanding via VR goggles, both provided by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service.
98. The event also hosted the presentations of the prestigious Community Resilience Award. In its second year, this accolade recognises exceptional individuals and community groups who had gone above and beyond to make their communities more

resilient. The Awards were presented by Lord-Lieutenant Mr Mohammed Saddiq and the winners were:

Group Winner: Kingston St Mary Good Neighbour Volunteer Scheme.

Group runner up: Avon and Somerset Search and Rescue Group

Individual Winner - Rev Deborah Perreau of Combe St Nicholas

Runners Up - Ian Upshall of Stoke St Gregory and Kate Symmonds of Moorland Ford Gate and West Yeo



## Incident Response

99.CCU and Emergency Planning officers have supported the response to three Major Incidents in Somerset since April 2023. These include the flooding events in May and September and Storm Ciaran in early November. Duty Civil Contingencies Officers have responded to about 40 alerts, notifications or incidents since 1<sup>st</sup> April.

## Planning and Preparedness, Business Continuity, Training and Exercising deliverables

Deliverables in the year have included:

- New Strategic on-call rota and training.
- Corporate Strategic business continuity exercise.
- Hinkley DEPZ decision.
- Somerset risk assessment and review of capabilities.
- Draft service plan and work programme.
- May and September flooding recovery.
- Glastonbury Festival.
- Hinkley Off-site plan updated.

## Flood, Water and Coastal Management Team:

Within the first year of the Flood and Coastal Team, the focus has been on integrating the previous Flood and Water Team from County into a holistic, sustainable team that incorporates the significant additional oversight of the Coastal responsibilities previously held at District level.

Consideration of team function can be divided across:

- Planning Referrals
- Asset Management
- Technical Services
- Community Engagement and Queries
- Programme Management

100. By utilising consultant and secondment resource our statutory duties have been met in reference to Planning Referrals, Land Drainage Consents and Public Queries, alongside our duties to undertake investigation into flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. The May 2023 flood events were the worst to impact Somerset since the 2013/14 floods, and subsequent flood events in September and November have demonstrated the importance of Flood Risk Management and Response within the County.



*Figure 1. Flood Damage, Milverton, May 2023*

101. We have a significant programme of works ahead into 24/25, including the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvement Programme and the Chard Reservoir Measures in the Interest of Safety.
102. We are working closely with partners to develop a strategic approach to flood and coastal risks, by working more collaboratively we have been able to improve outcomes for our communities for example the Chard Flood Alleviation Programme, the Minehead Flood Action Plan and, going into 2024, the Taunton Flood Action Plan. We recognise we can achieve much more with partners and will continue to strengthen these relationships to support better value in delivery, ensuring efforts across the sector are complimentary.
103. During 2024, we will develop an up-to-date the Flood Risk Management Strategy

(a statutory document, defined within the Flood and Water Management Act 2010) which will form the basis for our ongoing strategic planning of Surface Water Management in Somerset. Following this, a Shoreline Management Strategy will be undertaken, both documents informing the further Land Plan and ensuring that the unique Flood and Coastal characteristics of Somerset are included within that document.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst huge amounts of work have gone on this the Council became a unitary in April 2023, Somerset Council acknowledges there is still a much to do, to combat climate change, the ecological emergency and promote community resilience. We also understand the only way progress will be achieved at pace is by collaborating with our partners and communities, something we will continue to focus on over the next year and beyond.