

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 15 October 2020** as a Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software.

(6.30 pm - 9.00 pm)

### **Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Paul Maxwell (Chairman)  
Councillor Jenny Kenton (Vice-Chairman)

Jason Baker	Charlie Hull	Wes Read
Dave Bulmer	Kaysar Hussain	David Recardo
Hayward Burt	Val Keitch	Paul Rowsell
Tony Capozzoli	Andy Kendall	Dean Ruddell
Martin Carnell	Tim Kerley	Gina Seaton
John Clark	Mike Lewis	Peter Seib
Nicola Clark	Mike Lock	Garry Shortland
Louise Clarke	Pauline Lock	Alan Smith
Nick Colbert	Tony Lock	Jeny Snell
Adam Dance	Kevin Messenger	Andy Soughton
Sarah Dyke	Graham Oakes	Mike Stanton
Karl Gill	Tricia O'Brien	Rob Stickland
David Gubbins	Tiffany Osborne	Lucy Trimnell
Peter Gubbins	Robin Pailthorpe	Linda Vijeh
Mike Hewitson	Oliver Patrick	Martin Wale
Henry Hobhouse	Clare Paul	William Wallace
Ben Hodgson	Crispin Raikes	Colin Winder

### **Officers:**

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Netta Meadows	Director (Service Delivery)
Clare Pestell	Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Martin Woods	Director (Place)
Richard Ward	Monitoring Officer
Nicola Hix	Director (Support Services)
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Strategy and Commissioning)
Jo Nacey	Section 151 Officer
Vicki Dawson	Lead Specialist (Environmental Health)
Katy Menday	Leisure & Recreation Manager
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Michelle Mainwaring	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)

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### **172. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robin Bastable, Mike Best, Neil Bloomfield, Malcolm Cavill, Brian Hamilton, Sue Osborne and Gerard Tucker.

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### **173. Minutes (Agenda Item 2)**

The minutes of the Council meetings held on 20<sup>th</sup> August and 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020, copies of which had been previously circulated, were approved as correct records of the meetings and signed by the Chairman.

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#### **174. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)**

Councillor Rob Stickland declared a personal interest in Agenda item 12 (1) Motion to support DEFRA's ambition to phase out the badger cull in England, as his wife was employed by the National Farmers Union (NFU). He said that he would abstain from voting on this item.

Councillor William Wallace declared a personal interest in Agenda item 12 (2) regarding the Council's response to the Government's white paper 'Planning for the Future' as he had a live planning application to be determined by the SSDC planning department.

Councillors Mike and Pauline Lock declared a personal interest in Agenda item 12 (1) Motion to support DEFRA's ambition to phase out the badger cull in England and 12 (2) Opposing the Government's proposals for Planning, as members of the NFU and local land owners with land available for development.

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#### **175. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)**

The Council were addressed by a member of the Extinction Rebellion group who asked the following questions. He said that although the Council had declared a climate emergency and drawn up a policy there was still far too little being done. The responses were provided by Councillor Sarah Dyke.

##### **Question 1**

1. You adopted a new climate change strategy a year ago this month; what progress have you made since then?

##### **Response**

An Environment Strategy update is to be given by lead officers at this meeting to cover this question in full. Vicki Dawson and Katy Menday will update all present on this matter. Our Environment team would be happy to provide more detail if you have further questions following their presentation.

In summary, some key actions to date:

1. We have now calculated our own carbon footprint and are now monitoring this year on year – we have achieved reductions already.
2. We are now involved in a project to put Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points across the district to start later this year.
3. Over 4,000 trees planted last year on our own land with more given to communities to plant. Continuing work to increase this year on year.
4. Increased community engagement for environment improvements across wider district, which has been challenging during the pandemic; but we have a network of Environment Champions and a monthly Get SuSSed newsletter to keep all updated on our actions and plans.

## Question 2

Housing is one of the most significant ways we as a community put carbon into the atmosphere. We note that none of your headline policies on housing makes any mention of changing that, and we urge you to take action. What other actions are you taking that match the actions we know we need to do, to tackle this climate emergency?

### Response

The Environment Strategy details our ambitions for the Local Plan Review policies in addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation – this includes new housing stock and the desire for zero carbon homes.

The Delivery Plan for the environment strategy provides further detail on our proposed policy approach for the next iteration of the Local Plan Review, which is to deliver zero carbon homes by 2030, consistent with the approach set out in current national policy and practice guidance. This is intended to include a balance of energy efficiency measures, renewable/low carbon energy, and carbon offsetting. Any proposed policy requirements will be then be assessed through a whole plan viability assessment. However, it is likely that our proposed policy approach will need to be adapted as the Government's response on the Future Homes Standard consultation is expected in the Autumn.

Specifically what we are already doing:

- a) The SSDC Environment Strategy delivery plan has actions around reducing carbon footprint in the community as well as our own SSDC carbon footprint.
- b) In terms of new development the Environment Strategy details our ambitions for the Local Plan Review policies in addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation – this includes new housing stock and the desire for zero carbon homes.
- c) In the meantime the current local plan has policy EQ1: ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOUTH SOMERSET  
[https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/1250/j-plan\\_pol-web-site-2018-1-local-plan-local-plan-2006-2028-south\\_somerset\\_local\\_plan\\_2006-2028\\_adoption\\_version\\_march\\_2015.pdf](https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/1250/j-plan_pol-web-site-2018-1-local-plan-local-plan-2006-2028-south_somerset_local_plan_2006-2028_adoption_version_march_2015.pdf)  
*"The Council will support proposals for new development where they have demonstrated how climate change mitigation and adaptation will be delivered"* All new development must conform to national and local Planning Policy and current Building Regulations.
- d) In terms of existing housing, SSDC do not hold housing stock, and it is more difficult to influence the actions of private homeowners. We are working with the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) to provide advice to homeowners on energy efficiency measures and guide them through applying for grants that are available to them for energy improvements (existing ones as well as the new Green Homes Grants and vouchers).
- e) We also have some funding from the Warm Homes fund that resulted from a county wide bid to increase the energy case work that could be provided to help people maximise energy efficiency and also fund some first time heating schemes. Delivery of this is ongoing.
- f) We are hoping to produce a directory for communities to use to signpost them to renewable energy schemes that they may be able to benefit from.

## Question 3

In August we asked you whether you were divesting your pension fund from fossil fuel industries. Your detailed response pointed us to your membership of the Brunel Pension

Partnership, and saying you had little influence because of its size and so on. However, Brunel says in its Climate Change Policy that: “Our clients retain responsibility for their asset allocation and investment strategy, and ultimately their exposure to climate risk.” In that case, please set out what you have said to Brunel about your desire to shift your portfolio so it supports sustainable businesses that are investing in green technologies and energy, while encouraging companies involved in fossil fuels to do the same, and how has Brunel has adjusted its portfolios since setting up its climate strategy?

### **Response**

SSDC has contacted Somerset Council (as the overarching organisation) regarding this matter and they in turn have contacted Brunel and their response is as follows:

*‘Brunel is not set up to respond to employers individually, and we are not aware that any have contacted them individually.*

*Brunel will not change policy in response to employer requests, only requests made by the Funds through the agreed processes. Employers are part of the governance of the Pension Funds and the 10 owner/client Funds discuss and agree policy with Brunel under the appropriate structures that have been put in place.*

*We are not aware of any specific changes Brunel have made to their portfolios since the publication of its Climate strategy, although how the partnership (Brunel and the 10 Funds collectively) take forward our climate change goals is an ongoing and active discussion. For instance there was a recent a 2 hour on-line meeting on this very topic. We would be very surprised if changes haven’t taken place a year from now’.*

Somerset Council have offered to explore the question further for the resident if he requires it, but please be assured that the subject is live and being progressed as stated.

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## **176. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)**

The Chairman invited the Leader of Council to provide a brief update to Council on the unitary authority bid for Somerset.

The Leader of Council advised that the invitation letter from the Secretary of State to submit a unitary authority bid had been received by all the Somerset authorities the previous week. Their submission deadline was 9<sup>th</sup> December and a team of staff were working on refining the final business plan for this date. It may require Council approval again and when further information was available she would advise Members accordingly. In response to a question, she confirmed that Bath and North East Somerset Council and, North Somerset Council had also received the same invitation letter from the Government.

The Chairman reminded Members that there was a workshop on 19<sup>th</sup> October at 5.00pm to discuss the Government White Paper: Planning for the Future and he asked that they make every effort to attend.

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## **177. Chairman's Engagements (Agenda Item 6)**

The list of Chairman’s engagements was noted.

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**178. Presentation on the progress of the South Somerset Environment Strategy (Agenda Item 7)**

The Leisure and Recreation Manager and Lead Specialist – Environment provided Members with a power point presentation on the progress of the SSDC Environment Strategy. They confirmed that:-

- During the pandemic the Environment Community of Practice meetings had continued on-line to deliver the strategy.
- The SSDC Carbon Footprint had been calculated and the Council was progressing towards being carbon-neutral by 2030.
- An energy audit of the council's building had been calculated to identify how energy use could be reduced (gas and electricity).
- 25 Electric Vehicle Charging points were to be installed across the district in SSDC car parks.
- A 12 month e-scooter trial was due to commence in Yeovil to encourage low carbon transport.
- Community engagement had progressed through social media, over 50 Environment Champions in parishes and a monthly Get SuSSed newsletter.
- An on-line South Somerset Green Directory would be created to promote renewable energy, insulation grants and funding to help the public make informed renewable choices.
- 61 parishes had planted 3,050 trees across South Somerset the previous winter under the Great Parish Tree Giveaway and this would be launched again for 2020/21 shortly.
- Three submission were made to the Urban Tree Challenge and the Martock application had been successful while the outcome for Chard and Yeovil were awaited.
- An Open Spaces Strategy was being drafted so that by 2030 South Somerset would be recognised for the high quality and accessibility of its open spaces, championing biodiversity and community resilience, promoting economic prosperity and healthy lifestyles.
- Joint working with partners was helping towards a more resilient district to act against climate change and were working towards a cohesive and connected plan.

In response to questions from Members, the Leisure and Recreation Manager and Lead Specialist – Environment advised:-

- The impact of SSDC staff working at home would impact on the 2020/21 carbon footprint calculation.
- E-scooters would be booked through a phone app and the cost would be around £2 per use. More details on the scheme would be circulated shortly. Hirers would need to have a provisional or full driving license.
- The top-speed of the e-scooter was 15mph but they would be restricted to 12.5mph in the trial and there would be some slow zones where they would be limited to 5mph.
- On-street electric vehicle charging provision would be investigated as the next phase of the project.

- Open Spaces Strategy would have a significant delivery plan and a number of actions including assessments of the Council's current land holdings, and the Council's acquisitions and disposals policy would be linked in with this.
- The Economic Development team were helping local businesses to look at conducting at their own energy audits and their carbon footprints and help to identify funding options for energy reduction.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment thanked the Leisure and Recreation Manager and Lead Specialist – Environment and their teams for the work in helping to make SSDC carbon neutral by 2030.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked the Leisure and Recreation Manager and Lead Specialist – Environment for their comprehensive update on the progress of the Environment Strategy and for responding to Members questions.

**RESOLVED:** That Council noted the presentation updating them on the progress of the SSDC Environment Strategy, including the update on the Council's carbon footprint work.

**Reason:** To note the progress of the SSDC Environment Strategy.

#### **179. Membership of Committees - Appointment of New Councillors to Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 8)**

The Leader of Council advised that due to two resignations and some changes in political parties, it was necessary to appoint three new members of the Scrutiny Committee. She proposed that Councillors Louise Clark, Oliver Patrick and Linda Vijeh be appointed to the Scrutiny Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Peter Seib and agreed by Members without dissent.

**RESOLVED:** That in accordance with Section 16 (1) Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the duty therein to give effect to the wishes of the political group to which seats on any committee are allocated, the Council confirmed that:-

- a) Councillors Louise Clark, Oliver Patrick and Linda Vijeh be appointed to the Scrutiny Committee

**Reason:** To confirm amendments to the Scrutiny Committee membership following the appointment of Councillors to various committees and working groups at Council on 21st May 2019.

*(voting: agreed without dissent)*

#### **180. Report of Executive Decisions (Agenda Item 9)**

The report of Executive Decisions was noted.

### **181. Audit Committee (Agenda Item 10)**

The Chairman of the Audit Committee noted that they had received an informal briefing from the Director for Support Services and the Section 151 Officer on the Council's finances followed by questions which had been very informative. The next meeting of the Audit Committee would be held on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

The report of the Audit Committee was NOTED.

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### **182. Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 11)**

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised that the Council Tax support scheme task and finish group had commenced their annual review of the scheme and other task and finish group meetings would be starting very shortly.

The report of the Scrutiny Committee was NOTED.

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### **183. Motions (Agenda Item 12)**

#### **Motion 1**

Councillor Oliver Patrick said that badger culling had been happening for many decades and was felt necessary to control bovine TB (bTB) which caused hardship to farmers who were constantly guarding their cattle against it. He mentioned previous control methods which he said were all short-term measures as Somerset was still considered a high risk area. He said that farmers deserved a better solution and that was mentioned in the Godfray Review commissioned by DEFRA, which said it would implement an exit strategy from culling by the mid 2020's. He concluded that his motion was proposed to ensure that DEFRA honoured their promise

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Sarah Dyke.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- The policy of culling should be conducted to its conclusion by DEFRA to monitor its effectiveness in the reduction of bovine TB.
- Until the vaccination programme is properly implemented there is no other option but culling. Hopefully the vaccine would be available by the mid 2020's.
- The loss of a herd of cattle to TB can have a profound effect on farmers and their families.
- The farming community deserves a long term solution to TB which the badger cull programmes does not provide.
- DEFRA also had areas where they were testing the vaccination of badgers as a comparison to the culling. Writing to DEFRA would only interfere with their programme which was put together by experts.
- Culling is a repugnant and haphazard way of dealing with the disease.
- Pleased to hear that DEFRA are to phase out culling.
- Every mammal including deer, stoats and weasels all carried TB.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder for Environment confirmed that SSDC did not allow any badger culling on its land. She confirmed that a relative's cattle had

recently tested positive for bTB and that would have a great impact upon them. The badger cull was not working and it was clear that a different strategy was required.

At the conclusion of the debate, a vote was taken and the motion was carried by 37 votes in favour, 8 against and 4 abstentions.

**RESOLVED:** That Full Council agreed to ask that the Chief Executive:-

- a. write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to:
  - inform him of SSDC's support for DEFRA's ambition to phase out the badger cull, and that the Council are opposed to repeated badger culling in Somerset
  - offer access to SSDC owned land as part of a coordinated badger-vaccination programme
- b. continue to refuse permission to cull badgers on SSDC land, and to write to all Town and Parish Councils in South Somerset to encourage them to do the same;
- c. engage at the appropriate level with other councils across Somerset to ascertain what steps, if any, that our partners in local government are taking in relation to the issue of bTB;
- d. publicise the Council's resolution to support DEFRA's ambition to phase out the cull;
- e. provide councillors with an update regarding all of the above at least prior to the next badger cull due to commence in autumn 2021.

**Reason:** To support DEFRA's ambition to phase out the badger cull in England as a method of controlling the spread of bovine tuberculosis (bTB).

*(voting: 37 in favour, 8 against, 4 abstentions)*

## **Motion 2**

Councillor Mike Hewitson advised that the consultation deadline was 29 October and this was the only opportunity for Full Council to debate the issue prior to the response being sent. The planning workshop due to be held the following week could add more detail to the response but he felt it was correct for it to be debated in a public forum. He said that although the planning system needed reform, the proposals in the white paper were inadequate. He felt it would silence local communities on contentious planning applications and take away their ability to comment which was undemocratic. He also referred to the loss of affordable houses brought about by Section 106 funding as well as contributions towards community facilities. He urged Members to support his Motion.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Crispin Raikes.



During discussion the following points were made:-

- Section 106 agreements are not working as developers find ways to avoid them.
- The white paper was a broad brush approach and would not take account of local biodiversity, archaeology, flooding or contamination.
- Democracy must have its say in what and where development takes place.
- The Government were not considering the effect of the environment or house building on peoples mental health.
- Polls show that 61% of Conservative MPs oppose the proposals in the White Paper.
- Affordable housing is currently agreed for a variety of projects but applications to planning inspectors and the district valuer to say they are no longer viable mean that developers avoid having to build them.
- Measures should be taken to stop developers from land banking.
- The Motion is premature and Members have not had the opportunity to be fully informed yet.
- The White Paper would mean that Neighbourhood Plans were worthless.

Councillor Mike Hewitson concluded by thanking Members for taking part in the debate which he hoped would inform the Council's final submission to the Government consultation.

At the conclusion of the debate, a vote was taken and the motion was carried by 37 votes in favour, 5 against and 2 abstentions.

**RESOLVED:** That Full Council agreed to:-

- a. write to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and to our local MPs to express concern over the proposals in their White Paper: Planning for the Future;
- b. reflect the strength of concern across the Authority in its official consultation response;
- c. highlight South Somerset District Council's concerns over these proposals with the public at every suitable opportunity;
- d. provide Councillors with an update on the progress of these proposals at regular intervals;
- e. work with partner organisations such as social housing providers to understand the impact of these proposals on the delivery of affordable housing in South Somerset;
- f. work with partner organisations such as Somerset Wildlife Trust to understand the impact of these proposals on our biodiversity and habitats.

**Reason:** To express the Council's concerns on the Government's consultation 'Planning for the Future'.

*(voting: 37 in favour, 5 against, 2 abstentions)*

**184. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 13)**

There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.

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**185. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)**

Members noted that the next meeting of the Full Council would be held on **Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020** as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting software **commencing at 6.30 p.m.**

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Chairman

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Date