

Full Council update – September 2021

Built Environment Project Updates

Carbon calculator

You will remember that one of the key aims of our Environment Strategy was for our own estates and operations to be carbon neutral by 2030. We have previously described our carbon calculator to you that was developed to allow us to track annual energy use and progress towards this target. We need to achieve 10% reduction each year to meet our target

Our baseline year was 2018-19. Net emissions were 1650.42 tonnes CO₂ equivalent (tCO₂e). That equates to 4.68 tonnes CO₂e per FTE staff member.

Last year, 2019-20 the total was 1471.98 tonnes CO₂e (3.94 tonnes per FTE staff member). A 10% reduction which put us on target.

We can now report figures for 2020-21.

Net emissions were 998.62 tCO₂e. That equates to 2.58 tonnes CO₂e per FTE staff member.

This represents a 39% reduction on the 2018-2019 base line figures and a reduction of 32% on last years emission figures which is really significant. However this does need to be taken with a little caution as it will be skewed by the impact of the pandemic with most staff working from home, meetings and events were held via digital virtual meeting applications and SSDC leisure centres were closed. It could be questioned that the emissions have simply shifted from the workplace to home. That said there is also general acceptance that the use of energy in the home on average will be off-set by the loss of carbon produced in commuting and travel.

It is hoped that we will continue to keep emissions on the reduction trajectory next year by continuing to use virtual meetings and the energy efficiency improvements being installed via the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Funded project.

REGO switch

One of the actions in the Environment Strategy was to look at switching our energy supply to renewable energy supplies. This work proved more challenging than we thought would be the case and so a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was set up to explore the options and present some recommendations.

As a result an early win was identified within our existing contract allowing us to switch the electricity supply to the suppliers Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGO) scheme via EDF. REGOs provide some transparency to consumers about the proportion of electricity that suppliers source from renewable generation. The EDF tariff is only from energy derived from wind, solar and biomass which are all renewable energy sources.

Gas is still sourced from non-renewable supplies and the task and finish group have looked at the contract and the market research for this and the electricity supply. Conclusions and recommendations from that project are expected soon for consideration and implementation.

Energy grants updates

We currently have 2 grants underway with government funding to provide energy efficiency measures.

The first of these is a project in the community under the Local Authority Delivery Green Homes Scheme. This is the project previously reported where we are providing improvements to privately owned hard to treat Park Homes. We secured £803K in a collaborative bid with other district partners to do this. The project has not been without its challenges, in particular the complex nature of how work has to be carried out on these homes, along with supply chain issues being experienced across the building and other sectors resulting from Brexit and the pandemic. The project team have however worked hard to deliver what is possible. The project is now nearing completion and whilst we have been unable to complete as many improvements as we had hoped, by the end of September when the project closes, we should have provided improved insulation to around 40 homes. This has all been to homeowners that were assessed to be on low incomes and as a result will now not only reduce their carbon emissions but will have lower fuel costs and warmer homes with all the benefits that brings.

The second project is the Public sector Decarbonisation Scheme where we secured £3.9 million to decarbonise heating and provide additional energy savings measures across our own estate. The project will see improvements to Brympton Way, Petters, Lufton, Westlands Entertainment, Yeovil Innovation centre, John O'Donnell Pavilion, Ninesprings café, Ham Hill rangers Centre and the Wincanton, Westlands and Goldenstones Leisure centres. Works include installation of air source heat pumps, upgrading electrical heating systems, Solar PV, Led lighting and some insulation. Again this project has had its difficulties. The supply chain issues have caused delays and the detailed design work has taken longer than was anticipated. We have been given an extension to the project to the end of March 2022 which has been crucial. Works should be starting on site in the next couple of months and whilst the timeline is tight our delivery partners, Engie (now Equans) are confident they can complete. This project should make a huge impact on reducing our carbon emissions and in addition should reduce our energy costs with all the on site solar energy generation being installed.

At this point I would like to extend thanks to the project teams for both of these schemes, in particular property and procurement, who have put in an awful lot of time and energy to making this happen,

It doesn't stop there there is currently a LAD2 project underway. This is being led by the SW Energy Hub who have secured just over £1.2 million to improve energy efficiency in homes across South Somerset. EON and Happy Energy have been appointed to do this work and we are working with them to help identify homes that meet the criteria. As with previous LAD funding it is targeted at homes with EPC rating of D and below and at low income households. This fund also allocated money to support capacity building and we are currently awaiting the outcome of an application to appoint some county wide officers who can support these projects as in-house resource to do this gets quite stretched.

We also are part of a consortium bid for to the Sustainable Warmth fund. This is being led by Sedgemoor but all district are part of the consortium. We are still waiting for the outcome of the application but if successful this will give just over £2million across the county for similar improvements again split into off gas and on gas grid homes.

Finally we are talking to Abri and other partners with a view to also submitting a bid to the Social housing Decarbonisation Fund.

EV and Scooter updates – survey and extension – co-cars as well -

The DELETTI EV Charging Station network project is getting to the installation programme stage and the contract and concession agreements are being finalised for signing. Scottish Power won the DCC tender and will be providing the charging stations with their own renewable energy. We have put forward 27 car parks which may be reduced as surveys for connection viability is underway. Project installation across Devon and South Somerset car parks is due to be completed by March 2022.

Scooter trials with the DfT are going well in Yeovil, Chard and Crewkerne. The DfT are to extend the trails to complete end of March 2022 to capture further user data less impacted by Covid19. We sent out a survey to members to gauge how these trails are going and if there was support for the DfTs extension. Yeovil is the first to be extended but a decision has not yet been made on Chard and Crewkerne. The latest report on the trials usage data from the operators Zwings shows 22,000 rides over a distance of more than 78,000kms with an average ride of 3.51 km – SSDC trials are one of a few rural trials and its showing great data that the scooters are being used and for a further average distance than has been shown elsewhere. Due to its continued success and the demand in Yeovil, the number of scooters and bays has continued to expand.

A survey went out to the public from Co-cars, to gauge whether there was an interest in electric car share schemes. The results showed there is a desire for EV car share schemes in South Somerset but as any scheme would require on-street charging this would need support from SCC Highways team. The results have therefore been shared with them but as yet there is no programme to deliver this. However, the data on the interest in an e-bike share scheme has promoted a county wide feasibility study into an e-bike share scheme and charging infrastructure strategy being drafted by SCC. Co-Cars has engaged with some developers in South Somerset to include e-car share as sustainable transport options for new developments.

Carbon literacy training

Carbon literacy can be described as ‘An awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis.’

As part of our efforts to engage with staff and improve awareness of climate emissions we wanted to roll out carbon literacy training to all our staff. The Centre for Alternative Technology is leading a Carbon Literacy Training course during COP26 and we have secured 30 places on that training.

Those that are trained will disseminate the training across the whole council to enable all

to understand the impacts of what we do and the decisions we make on the climate and ecological emergency. It will help everyone understand what we can all do in our work (and home) to reduce emissions and help reach our carbon neutrality target by 2030

Business survey – addressing the climate and ecological emergency

Our business sector plays a critical part in our ambition to work to achieve a significant reduction in emissions and improve carbon offset rates across the geography of South Somerset

The eighteen months have been difficult for a lot of the business sector and specific activities around the Environment Strategy and this sector have been paused. However, we know that the Climate Emergency is something that businesses will be very aware of and many will have actions in place themselves. We were interested to know if our business sector had themselves declared Climate Emergencies or made other similar declarations, and we felt the time was right to make some enquiries into that sector. We have therefore been working with our colleagues in Economic Development to produce a Business survey to understand what they are doing, if anything, to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency. We are planning to send this survey out across a range of media at the end of this month. Results will not only help us understand what is already happening, but will also help us and ED know what help and support is needed so that we can target our efforts. We hope to be able to report the results at our next briefing.

Natural Environment Project Updates

Our new Climate Change Case Officer Laurence Copleston has brought new capacity to the team and one of the first jobs Laurence completed was to capture, in a succinct case study, the great work of the team at Yeovil Recreation Centre. The greenspace aims to demonstrate that sports and leisure management can also encompass sustainable and ecological principles. By creating and sharing the case study, we hope to encourage ecological management of other local recreation grounds, with even small changes making big gains for nature. The site was judged by the RHS for In Bloom (results late this year) and the judge suitably impressed with the approach to management. Next we are looking at a rainwater harvesting system for the building roofs to enable watering and green keeping to become even more sustainable.

No Mow

We have now completed our no mow trial for 2021. The 15 selected sites (Ilminster (6), Castle Cary/Ansford (4), Cucklington (1) and Milborne Port (4)). saw observational increases in invertebrate numbers in all no mow areas and further details regarding flowering/meadow species found in the those areas will soon be returned from the surveys being completed by various community groups. Once all data has been returned we will have a stronger and local case to communicate across our parishes to see which areas would like to be involved in 2022. The intention is to ensure participating areas have floral surveying training and appropriate communication tools to ensure the whole community knows what is happening in their spaces. Several of the spaces have now been cut and removed having allowed pollinator and other invertebrates to flourish. Generally, feedback has been good and we have seen some interesting acceptances of the scheme even from initial dissenters. Cllr Dyke has been asked to speak at a PlantLife seminar in November about the trials.

Parish Wildflower Giveaway

To complement No Mow we will be replacing the Tree Giveaway in the coming months with a Wildflower seed Giveaway. Steve Fox and Josh Bennett are working up guidance on how grasslands can be improved and our parishes and champions will be invited to attend short practical workshops (probably at one of our own green spaces) to see how the ground can be prepared for best results. A communications pack will also be shared to help parish leads communicate with their residents as to what is happening and why. The actual seed mix is being finalised and the packs will be ready for advertising and then distributing later this year / early next year. Floral surveying training will also be offered to each group so they can map the progress of their spaces and any further lessons learnt from this year's trial included in the overall project roll out.

Trees and Woodlands

Preparation for autumn / winter planting is well underway across a number of projects. This coming planting season we are focusing on standalone projects as we feel the community Great Parish Tree Giveaway has fulfilled its original purpose. Parishes are always welcome to contact the team to discuss areas of land they wish to plant for advice and support. Josh has been supporting a bid to the TreeScapes fund with SCC as the lead authority; if it is successful, there should be a strong element for South Somerset.

Yeovil Rotary Club wish to sponsor the planting of a copse to mark the occasion of their centenary. Appropriate locations are being sought in the Yeovil area to support this project and the current thinking is to make a feature of an edible woodland. The Ham Hill team are looking to extend the size of the sites woodland and link currently isolated annexes of woodland by planting 6,500 trees across 5.82 Ha of land off the hillfort in Witcombe Valley. With the environment teams help we will be applying to the Forestry Commission for a woodland creation grant in September this year to plant early next year.

Open Spaces Strategy

The Open Spaces Strategy is behind schedule, due to officer workload. We do however have a good proportion complete to start consultation upon and are now awaiting the data from the current play space audit being conducted. These results are pivotal to inform the setting of new standards within the strategy. In the coming weeks we will also launch a survey to understand how our residents feel about their greenspaces now and how they would like them to develop. We hope to be consulting Members on the draft strategy early next calendar year.

Comms and engagement

New website

We are delighted to be able to tell you that we have now launched our new South Somerset Environment website. This has been set up as microsite under the main SSDC site in a similar to way to sites such as the Refresh ones. The aim of the site is to provide a one stop shop for people to find out what we are doing, get helpful information and for our Environmental Champions to be able to interact with each other. Particular thanks go to the Comms team for helping with this work.

A soft launch of the site took place through August's edition of Get SuSSed and we had 95 Unique visitors as at 7.9.21. The soft launch has allowed time to gather feedback about any tweaks that may be needed. We are now happy that we can go ahead with a full launch.

The next step is therefore to promote the website much more widely through social media and SSDC internal comms this week. As with all websites this is an evolving site and we would welcome any feedback. The site can be viewed at this link:

<https://www.southsomersetenvironment.co.uk/environmentstrategy>

Get SuSSed

You all receive our monthly publication which continues to evolve and increase reach now going to 674 recipients, subscribers, members, staff and parishes (many of whom onward share). We have had some great feedback and generally it is a very well received publication.

We have promoted Get SuSSed on social media and directly mailed Parish Council's to encourage subscription in the wider community. Since 1st September promotion we have received 35 new subscribers. We'll continue this initiative to increase reach.

The average open rate (over last 6 months) is 33%. The industry average for a local authority newsletter is 21.84% so this is really positive.

Examples of some of the most popular features are the Yeovil Recreation Centre sustainable land management and the links to volunteering opportunities.

In the news

The team continues to generate and release local environmental stories. From social media to press releases we were particularly pleased to have the Ham Hill bin removal story picked up by Points West and the team are now well versed in the use of film to support messaging around projects like No Mow.

Parish Champions

The parish champions scheme continues to develop with a further 11 champions nominated since our last update in April. We now have 68 champions. The team have organised events around recycle more and later this month speakers from PlantLife will help kick-start an autumn series of events. These events will also lead to further opportunities for champions to pick up surveying training in both floral and aquatic species monitoring. The champions will now also be able to share and discuss projects and ideas on a bespoke forum on the new web pages.

School and Parish Council Packs

Two new packs are currently under development. The schools pack is due to launch in November to coincide with CoP26 as a way to provide information and suggestions for our schools, but with a local flavour. The team are currently contacting schools to gather short case studies on existing environmental good practice, as a way of demonstrating what is happening locally. Alongside this we are pulling together a parish council advice pack. This was suggested by a champion in a parish as a way to help parishes both understand their obligations towards nature conservation and to provide sign posting, support and again positive local case studies on best practice. Small changes on the ground, across a large area, could make a significant contribution towards improving our networks for nature. We will seek feedback from some local parish council champions and clerks before circulating.

Community and Business Grants

Overall the community grants programme has been quiet this past six months, but we are pleased to confirm that three grants have been issued through MTIG's environmental funding programme for an electric street sweeper in Chard, an air quality monitoring unit for Crewkerne and an EV charging point in Somerton.

Countryside Events

This summer the countryside team have sought to provide varied activities, which have been really well received. Covid has seen a remarkable increase in use at all our natural greenspaces and the team were keen to ensure that residents continued to access nature for its physical and wellbeing benefits. An enhanced events programmes called "Summer of Play" included diverse opportunities from woodland storytelling, bat walks, axe throwing to tree climbing. We are just compiling numbers and participant feedback as an evaluation, results will help inform future events and recovery efforts. Overall, 30 events were delivered over the 6 weeks with 1900 participants.

Overview

Our current strategy was adopted in October 2019 and at the time, we committed to review it in two years' time. The team have started thinking about the strategy review, engaging the CoP and wider partners and we are working with the strategy and commissioning team with a view to organising a series of workshops, we will provide more information in due course. Of the many actions delivered across the past two years we are most pleased that we have managed to achieve; managing our carbon footprint, securing funds towards decarbonisation, exceeding our tree planting targets and progressing a community champions scheme.