

MENDIP DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on Monday, 9 November 2020 held online via Microsoft Teams commencing at 6.30 pm.

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Councillor Nick Cottle (Deputy Chair),
Councillors Rob Ayres, Alison Barkshire, Eve Berry, Adam Boyden, Shannon Brooke, Josh Burr, Simon Carswell, John Clarke, Shane Collins, Jon Cousins, Michael Dunk, Drew Gardner, Peter Goater, John Greenhalgh, Philip Ham, Francis Hayden, Bente Height, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper, Edric Hobbs, Damon Hooton, Chris Inchley, Helen Kay, Garfield Kennedy, Tom Killen, Liz Leyshon, Barbi Lund, Lindsay MacDougall, Matt Martin, Janine Nash, Barry O'Leary, Sam Phripp, Richard Pinnock, Mike Pullin, Lois Rogers, Tom Ronan, Heather Shearer, Alan Townsend, Lucie Taylor-Hood, Laura Waters, Nigel Woollcombe-Adams and Ros Wyke

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Tracy Aarons	Deputy Chief Executive
Richard Bates	Section 151 Officer
Stuart Brown	Chief Executive
Dave Burn	Interim Democratic Services Manager
David Clark	Group Manager, Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Claire Dicken	Democratic Services Officer
Claire Malcolmson	Group Manager, Community Health
Ben Sugg	Democratic Services Officer

Agenda Item	Subject	Actioned by
1	<p>Chair's Opening Comments and Thought of the Day</p> <p>The Deputy Chair began by welcoming participants to the meeting noting that the established rules for virtual meetings.</p> <p>Thought of the Day: It was a different sort of remembrance this year as we think of all those who have lost their lives. We remember all of those affected, including those living where there is conflict and all people, communities and animals and the environment, all of which have been impacted by modern conflicts.</p> <p>We also pause to remember those living without the basic freedom of speech and freedom of thought that we sometimes fail to cherish ourselves.</p>	

2	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Councillors Caroline McKinnell, Michael Gay, Steve Henderson, Terry Napper and Helen Sprawson-White</p>	
3	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>None</p>	
4	<p>Recent Chair's Engagements, Communications and Announcements</p> <p>The Deputy Chair advised that the Chair of the Council was unable to attend the meeting due to illness. He wished her a speedy recovery and said that details of her engagements would be sent to members separately.</p> <p>The Deputy Chair informed Council that since the last meeting the Chair had attended a remembrance Sunday service in Frome and that he attended a remembrance Sunday service in Glastonbury.</p>	
5	<p>Public Participation</p> <p>The Deputy Chair advised that he had been made aware there had been additional requests to speak in relation to the Cabinet's decision on 2 November 2020, on the provision of affordable housing, specifically relating to Easthill, Frome. As this item was not on the Full Council agenda there would be no debate about the matter by Full Council. He added that in view of the fact the decision had been called in by the Scrutiny Board, it would be inappropriate to discuss the matter ahead of the meeting of the Scrutiny Board.</p> <p>a) Items on the agenda</p> <p>Robin Horton had requested to speak on the topic of climate emergency and flooding. He said that photographs illustrating the problems of flooding in Shepton Mallet had been sent to members ahead of the meeting. He said it was distressing to find sanitary ware in the road as a result of the flooding. He said that the drainage infrastructure in Shepton Mallet was at its capacity and needed urgent attention. He was concerned that the drainage infrastructure needed improvement before the town could accept any new development.</p>	

Bharati Pardhy was invited to speak. She wished to speak about climate change and the possible development of Easthill in Frome. She was concerned that wildlife, including insects, was in decline and there was an ecology emergency. She said it was important to take action locally to protect green space. For example, the land at Easthill, Frome which was rich in bio-diversity. She disagreed with the Council's report which had stated the development would present no implications for climate change. She urged the Council not to allow the land to be built upon. She asked that the Council commission and publish a full ecological impact assessment of the land.

Susannah Clemence had requested to speak on the topic of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. She called on the Council to look at what it could do to support resident's efforts to reduce their reliance on car journeys. Specifically she asked that Glastonbury become a low traffic area, the Council identify ways they can support the project materially, for instance the use of improved signage, and also help to make it easier for residents to get from Glastonbury to other towns and villages without a car.

b) Items not on the agenda

Andrew Pope had requested to speak on the topic of "The Seven Principles of Public Life". He said he was Leader of the Somerset Independent party. He set out the seven principles of public life. He said that the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer at Mendip District Council had confirmed the Nolan Principles underpinned the Code of Conduct at Mendip District Council, but they were not part of the Code. He said it was very important that all Councils should include the seven principles of public life in their Codes of Conduct. He was particular concerned about the Council's openness and transparency when it came to investments.

Susie Vowles had requested to speak on the possible development of Easthill, Frome. She said that whilst there was a lockdown situation it felt ill-timed for the Council to consider developing the land. She complained there had been very little public consultation about it. She pointed out that the land was a thriving haven for wildlife and a brownfield site. She felt it would be a travesty to destroy the site and develop it for housing.

The Deputy Chair thanked the speakers for their contributions.

6	<p>Previous Minutes of the Council</p> <p>It was moved by Councillor Josh Burr and seconded by Councillor Barry O’Leary and</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2020 be approved as an accurate record. .</p>	<p>Claire Dicken</p>
7	<p>Leader’s Update</p> <p>The Leader of the Council asked members to fall silent for one minute to reflect on those that had fallen in conflict.</p> <p>She went on to say it was good to reflect that Councillors had more which could unite them than that which could divide them. She said without doubt the second lockdown would be a challenging time for many. She said many volunteers, including Councillors, were stepping up again to help the vulnerable and those who needed help. She listed many of the services, such as the NHS, the military and Council services, which needed to continue with business as usual as well as COVID support work.</p> <p>She noted that support was needed for businesses, as well as those who found themselves homeless. She thanked officers for the work they had done to support the community.</p> <p>She said it was important to put people first. Residents should feel that the Council was focussed on them.</p> <p>She wished for a peaceful and positive few weeks during the second lockdown.</p> <p>She commended the public comments earlier about the need to support residents’ efforts to reduce their reliance on car journeys. She also acknowledged the comments made by speakers about the Easthill site and she and her colleagues would bear them in mind going forward.</p> <p>Councillor Tom Killen was invited to speak as the Group Leader of the Conservative Group. He also thanked those who had worked hard to support others during the pandemic.</p> <p>He reminded Council that his group had asked questions about the planning issues arising from the Natural England Guidance relating phosphates on the Somerset levels and potential development pressures in the west of the district as a result. He said the impact of the guidance was having a detrimental impact on development in the area. To date, he</p>	

had not received answers and said he would appreciate an update on the issue.

Local Plan Part 2 hearings would be held at the end of November 2020 and there was concern about large developers applying for permissions for large developments in parts of the district. He asked that the Council take a robust approach at such hearings.

He was concerned about the possible sale of some of the Council's car parks and the land at Easthill, Frome. He asked that a proper assessment be made to see whether it was appropriate to develop such land, including whether it would be better to develop the plots for mixed use developments.

He said his group continued to support the provision of affordable housing but selling such assets was a one-off opportunity. He asked that the Council pause and give time for more work to be carried out on the proposals.

Also, he said it was very important that business be helped during the difficult periods in order to secure individuals' futures. He asked that all government initiatives in this regard be taken up. He asked for detail of the recovery programme for supporting rough sleepers.

Further, he asked whether there would be an extended period of free parking at the end of the lockdown and over the Christmas period.

In response, the Leader of the Council said the issue of the phosphates on the Somerset Levels went beyond the district. She said that Council would be learning from other parts of the country that had been effected by such an issue. However, she pointed out that all members had already had three updates about the issues, and that as soon as there was definitive information from Natural England it would be shared. She agreed it was unacceptable for residents to face delays in their plans because of the situation.

In terms of the Local Plan Part 2 the Council will continue to be robust in support of the plan. Mendip had already helped one Parish to defend its Neighbourhood Plan.

She pointed out that the decision to apply for land release funding had been taken by the previous administration. There was still a considerable amount of work to be done on the project. Cabinet had been considering the principle of the project, and the principle to release land for such projects had also been established by the previous administration.

	<p>In terms of business support, she confirmed there was work being done to help businesses prepare for Brexit as well as survive the pandemic.</p> <p>Finally, the Council would look at car parking during the small business weekend and over the Christmas period.</p> <p>She said she would formally respond to the questions that had been raised.</p> <p>Councillor Shane Collins was invited to speak as Leader of the Green Group. He said that test and trace had been an issue. He hoped that local people could support local, not for profit, NHS run contact tracing. He was pleased to note that the furlough scheme had been extended. Mendip was well behind the curve of infection rates. However, our residents were facing issues of isolation and mental ill health. He said that the Frome Hoedown Group had been a good example of one way to help combat isolation and improve mental wellbeing.</p>	
8	<p>Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Policy and Climate Change set out a report about the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy which had been developed by the Councils in Somerset and their partners.</p> <p>During the period of development representative Councillors, nominated by Scrutiny Board last year, had met regularly to oversee the development, check and challenge the work being carried out and the areas of focus. This had been reported back to Scrutiny Board at meetings and updates on progress had been provided to Full Council as part of the six-monthly report by the Portfolio Holder.</p> <p>The Strategy was the key Somerset document to help the Council take forward mitigations and adaptations for climate change. Without this Strategy there was a high risk that the more significant areas of focus, which required actions from partners as well as the District Council, would not be actioned due to diverging priorities amongst the partners.</p> <p>By coming together to deliver this single strategy there were significant opportunities to deliver positive outcomes more efficiently and at a greater pace. The adoption of a single strategy would also ensure duplications were removed and that greater resources could be applied.</p> <p>The Strategy stated that climate change, and its impacts on the world we live in, was one of the most significant issues</p>	Tracy Aarons

facing us all today. The human effects on global warming were well publicised and pressure was mounting for governments to act.

In response to the overwhelming evidence, and growing concern from local communities and residents for urgent, decisive action, each of the 5 Somerset Councils had passed resolutions declaring or recognising a climate emergency. Each declaration aspires to:

- A Carbon Neutral Somerset by 2030
- Building our resilience for, or adapting to, the impacts of a changing climate

The Strategy - 'Towards a Climate Resilient Somerset' - was Somerset's response to the Climate Emergency declarations. Led by Somerset's 5 Local Authorities, with support and guidance from a range of organisations and individuals with sector expertise, the Strategy would serve as:

- An evidence base, setting out how our climate was changing and the challenges and opportunities we faced.
- A policy document, outlining our goals and ambitions for tackling climate change in Somerset, and
- A high level action plan, setting out the critical actions needed to deliver our goals, enabling us all to adapt and thrive in the future.

The 5 Local Authorities agreed to work together to develop a shared Climate Emergency Strategy for Somerset built around these 3 goals:

- GOAL 1: To decarbonise Local Authorities, the wider public sector estates and reduce our carbon footprint
- GOAL 2: To work towards making Somerset a Carbon Neutral County by 2030
- GOAL 3: To have a Somerset which was prepared for, and resilient to, the impacts of climate change

Work began to understand where Somerset's carbon emissions were generated, identifying 9 sectors which had a major impact upon our ambition to become a carbon neutral county by 2030.

These 9 sectors were:

- The **Energy** we use, the emissions produced from its use and the types of energy we will look to harness in future

- Our **Transport** networks - when and where we travel, and the means we choose to make these journeys
- The **Built Environment** - where and how we live and work, the types of homes we live in, our commercial and industrial buildings and what we want for buildings in the future
- Our local economy - specifically our **Business, Industry and Supply Chains**
- Our **Natural Environment** - how we can protect it and utilise it to reduce the harmful impacts of Climate Change
- Our **Farming and Food** - what, where and how we produce our food and crops, vital to the rural economy of Somerset
- Our **Water** resources - how they are managed to minimise the impacts of flooding and drought on our residents, buildings and landscapes
- The management of our **Waste and Resources** - how we handle and treat our waste
- How we **Communicate** and Engage – with Somerset’s citizens to enable us all to make life choices which reduce our impact on the environment locally, nationally and globally

Specialists had led work on each of the 9 sectors, analysing and prioritising current and future issues, considering local and UK Government policy implications, and identifying a series of actions needed to minimise emissions and build resilience within each area of work.

An Action Plan had been appended to the Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Policy and Climate Change noted that some believed that the Strategy was not ambitious enough and that it did not give a sense of urgency. However, approving the Strategy and getting it adopted throughout Somerset was just the first step. He felt the strategy would get stronger and ask more of everyone over the next few years.

He said public consultation had given a clear picture that the public believed the councils were focusing on the right issues in the Climate Change Framework.

The report requested that Council approve the Strategy and supported its active delivery.

During the discussion that followed a number of points were raised:

- The climate emergency impacted on every living thing, including living creatures and water.
- This was a Strategy document and as such was designed to act as an overview.
- The climate emergency was not only about reducing carbon.
- Some members were surprised to see Hinkley Point C highlighted in the document as a low carbon energy plant.
- It was unknown when the Hinkley Point Power Station would start to generate power.
- Members noted that the Strategy had been thoroughly debated at the meeting of the Scrutiny Board.
- However, some Members felt the timetable had been too tight for it to be possible for the Scrutiny Board to make any changes to the Strategy.
- As action plans and work streams commenced more detail would be shared with Members.
- Members said it was important to ask the government to make changes in order to support local councils make such strategies work.

Councillor Shane Collins, Leader of the Green Group said he was concerned that the Strategy needed to make even more clear that the climate faced an emergency. For instance, the word “extinction” only appeared once within the document.

He was disappointed on the reliance which the document appeared to put on Hinkley Point.

He said it was unclear what green edits had been included in the Strategy. The Green Group throughout Somerset had produced their own climate emergency strategy “A Green Climate Strategy for Somerset” a copy of which had been circulated to members earlier in the day.

The Leader of the Council said the project had come a long way. The Strategy was not just about the reduction of carbon but that it was also about ecology. She said it was a “live” document which would continue to change as the Strategy was taken forward.

Members thanked the Portfolio Holder and Officers for their work in getting the Strategy to this point.

Councillor Tom Ronan proposed that the Council approves the Strategy. Councillor Ros Wyke seconded this proposal.

	<p>Councillor Shane Collins moved and Councillor John Clarke seconded the following amendment:</p> <p>That any review and monitoring arrangements through the outlined governance body must be at pace and reflect the urgency that is required to reach the net zero-carbon target of 2030.</p> <p>The amendment was put to the vote and carried unanimously.</p> <p>Councillor Tim Ronan moved and Councillor Ros Wyke seconded the substantive motion. The substantive motion was put to the vote and it was carried.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy be approved. 2. That any review and monitoring arrangements through the outlined governance body must be at pace and reflect the urgency that is required to reach the net zero-carbon target of 2030. 	
9	<p>Motions to Council</p> <p>None</p>	
10	<p>Questions from the Public</p> <p>None</p>	
11	<p>Questions from Members</p> <p>None</p>	
12	<p>Urgent Business</p> <p>None</p>	

The meeting closed at approximately 8.30 pm