

Wells Town Council 4th July 2019

Good evening,

Sarah has asked if I would give a quick update on what has been happening at Mendip following the local elections... with regard to the climate emergency motion.

Strategic Policy and Climate Change is a new portfolio for Mendip District Council and was set up in response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency motion that was passed at full Council on 25th February this year. The decision to create this portfolio was taken by Ros Wyke the Lib Dem Party leader and I am grateful to have been asked to be the portfolio holder.

Over 100 UK Councils have now declared a climate emergency, including Somerset County Council and all four of the Somerset district councils and of course Wells did so too in March.

One of the main points of councils declaring a climate emergency in my opinion is so that all actions and decisions taken by a council can then be judged and assessed on their environmental impact with respect to climate change. Bristol were the first council in the UK to declare and that was only 8 months ago so it is all still very new territory and there is no tried and tested blueprint of required actions established yet.

We have decided that the best way forward is to set up a cross party, non-political group to ensure that the requirements of the Climate Emergency are met, the central requirement being that Mendip District Council make every effort to enable the district of Mendip to be carbon neutral by 2030.

The Climate and Ecological Emergency Group (CEEG) will have 10 members, 6 Lib Dems, 2 Conservatives and 2 from the Green party. We have officer support from Julie Jackson, Sara Skirton and Tracy Aarons who have all helped us draw up the group remit and the terms of reference.

Part of the remit states that "the group will work with portfolio holders and across council departments to ensure Mendip's 2030 carbon neutral target is central to all decisions made by, or on behalf of Mendip District Council." This is going to be vital to the success of the climate emergency group because with the support of the other portfolio holders I am sure that we can effect some very important changes in Mendip Council policies. Also in the remit it states that we will prepare

".. a climate and ecological sustainability strategy, setting short, medium and long term carbon reduction targets in areas such as Housing, Food and Nature, Transport, Waste, Investment and Energy." This will be one of the main agenda items in our first group meeting that takes place on the 18th July. We will need to draw up a draft strategy document and also a draft action plan. Then we will need to develop this action plan before sending it to the Scrutiny Board and the Cabinet for approval.

As part of the motion passed in February there was agreement to commit £100,000 to fund action in the scoping and delivery of the District's Climate Emergency 2030 commitment to being carbon neutral. Much of this budget will be spent on a dedicated Climate Change and Resilience Officer who will lead preparation and delivery of the action plan. The role will be advertised internally on 5th July for a week and then if no-one suitable applies it will be advertised externally. This process has taken a while but it is very important that the right person is taken on for this crucial role.

There is also a Somerset wide task and finish group being set up with 2 members from each District Council and two from the County Council. The work of this task and finish group will be to establish the Somerset Councils Climate Change Strategy. This group will hopefully reduce any duplication of effort and instead make sure that all ideas are explored and best practice followed.

We also need to work collaboratively with all the parish councils including yourselves here at Wells Town Council. We also aim to work closely with local and national environmental groups and also with schools and colleges. Tracy Aarons has suggested a large public meeting in the Council Chamber at Shepton sometime in August. As soon as we have confirmation of the date I will let you know.

At Mendip one of the first things that the CEEG need to do is to organise a carbon audit of the council and of the whole Mendip district so as to establish a baseline. Then we need to set achievable targets over the next four years and beyond. We also need to consider both climate mitigation (reducing emissions) and also climate adaption (adapting to the effects of climate change). It is important that the council itself shows leadership in making any changes that are required and we need to review all Mendip policies and practices and to carry out a "sustainability appraisal" of key council proposals and strategies.

We are hoping to put on some zero carbon training for members and officers. There are many outside groups such as Somerset Climate Action Network who have indicated that they would be happy to come in and provide this type of training.

This new portfolio covers a wide variety of activities and areas of concern and prioritising the work effectively will be very important.

There seems to be huge enthusiasm from the Officers to assist the group and I am very grateful for their help so far.

The group will be reporting to full Council on 23rd September and every six months thereafter.

In the 2018 IPCC report it says that "Limiting warming to 1.5 degrees is possible within the laws of chemistry and physics but doing so would require **unprecedented** changes."

It is important that **everybody fully understands that and acts accordingly**. Also that we all **accept that business as usual is over and that some very difficult decisions are going to have to be made in the near future**.

I sincerely hope that Mendip District Council is able to play it`s part in making the vital changes needed.

And I wish your group here in Wells every success.

Thank you

Tom Ronan