



Climate Emergency Strategy

2020 - 2030



Foreword

Councillor Duncan McGinty *Leader of Sedgemoor District Council*



"We are really lucky to live in such a beautiful green and rural area, but we cannot be complacent. As a council and working with our neighbouring councils, we have chosen to declare a climate emergency and this means we need to build on the work already achieved and embrace change, working with others, to minimise our impact on the environment.

As a local service provider and employer in the district, we have an important role to play and we will be looking at how we can deliver our services to residents in a more environmentally friendly way, while also working with staff and councillors to educate and change behaviours to work towards the ambitious target we have set ourselves.

However, we cannot do this alone and our actions as an organisation are the first steps, but we all have a collective responsibility as residents, employees or businesses to work together to tackle climate change and achieve a carbon neutral Somerset by 2030. Declaring a climate emergency was the easy part - the work now is to pool the energy, expertise and enthusiasm of residents, businesses and partners in the area and take practical steps."

Introduction

In this Strategy, we lay out the six key areas of action which will lead us towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030, outline our overarching goals and explain the scope and background to this project. It is followed by our Climate Emergency Action Plan, which details the activities involved to reach carbon neutrality and the co-benefits of these changes. The final document contains Supporting Evidence,

baselines we are currently working from, and the risks involved if we do not act on our carbon neutrality target (risk assessment). This Strategy and Action Plan are to be read in line with the Somerset-wide Climate Emergency Strategy, which Sedgemoor and the remaining Somerset councils have worked collaboratively to produce.

Background

On 20th March 2019, Sedgemoor District Council declared a Climate Emergency and agreed to set forth actions that will reduce our carbon emissions as a district. We recognise the scale and urgency of this global challenge, as documented by the Special Report of UN-established International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The IPCC published a report in October 2018 that demanded much stricter targets on climate change if substantial risks for natural and human systems are to be avoided. This far-reaching and compelling report has caused a growing number of organisations and places to declare that they are to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

The panel has recommended that the UK moves to a statutory 2050 target for climate neutrality, and, in June 2019, the UK parliament amended the 2008 Climate Change Act to confirm that change. In July 2019 the Committee on Climate Change reported that the UK was not on course even to reach the government's previous 80% carbon reduction target and recommended a suite of urgent policy changes for climate mitigation and adaptation.

Somerset County Council agreed a motion in February 2019 that declared a Climate Emergency and a series of measures to work towards carbon neutrality in Somerset by 2030. The four districts have made

similar declarations. Notwithstanding the wide range of activities and policies that help address the cause and impacts of climate change that this Council is already undertaking, we can and should do more. We cannot be complacent.

We need to work across Somerset on this issue, alongside Somerset County Council, the other districts, local partners and the community. Local government has the potential for far greater autonomy to drive economic growth, increase living standards and to play a larger role in the heart of globalisation. That is why Sedgemoor District Council is proud to contribute to the United Nation's Global Goals (SDGs) to address poverty, inequality, and climate change.

Therefore, the council has pledged to work with partners, including the Heart of the South West LEP, Somerset County Council, Somerset Districts, individuals and community groups to identify ways to make Sedgemoor and Somerset carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions.

As a result, we have produced this Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan. These documents provide the council with a guide to how we will reduce and offset (where reduction is not possible) our carbon emissions by 100% over the coming decade.



Business & Economy

This section covers the improvement of local community facilities, clean growth, corporate projects and strategies, our own investments, tourism and awareness.

Travel

This section covers active travel (walking & cycling), electric vehicle infrastructure, looking at our own fleet, agile working and public transport.

Waste

There is a focus on waste reduction, and where this is not possible, reusing waste; recycling is a last resort. This section covers recycling in council-owned buildings (for when reduction is not possible), our Single Use Plastic Strategy, incentives that reduce the need for single use plastic, increasing recycling and education on reducing waste.

Energy & Buildings

This involves delivering carbon neutral affordable housing, retrofitting existing stock and private properties, building a local workforce, moving towards renewable energy and supporting community energy projects.

Food & Agriculture

This looks at providing less carbon intensive food, supporting sustainable practice, community allotments, and engaging with businesses and schools.

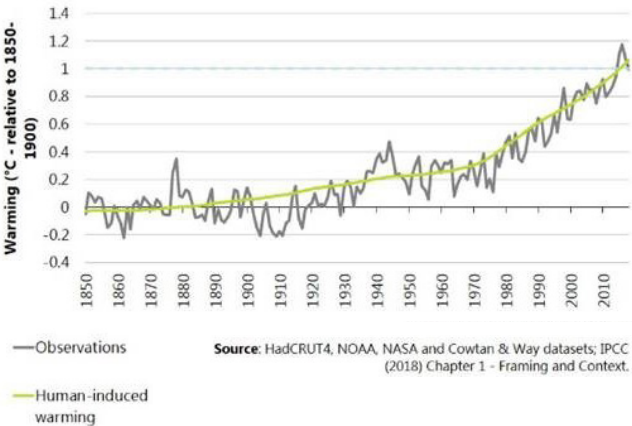
Nature & Adaptation

This section combines two elements: actions that utilise our natural environment to neutralise our carbon emissions, such as planting trees for carbon sequestration, and actions that prepare the community for future climate change, such as flood planning. It will draw on our Tree Plan and the Somerset County Council Pollinator Action Plan, laying out how we will begin to sequester carbon in the local area, improve air quality and biodiversity in the region. This section also covers actions that prepare for the effects of climate change and promote community resilience, utilising strong community resources to be best prepared for unavoidable climate change and resulting extreme weather events.



Why we need to act now

In December 2015, the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change reached an agreement to intensify actions needed to establish a low carbon future and formed the Paris Agreement. This aims to strengthen the global response to climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C.



At present, the world is on track to overshoot the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C limit before 2050. In order to reduce the chance of runaway global heating and limit the effects of climate breakdown, it is imperative that we as a species reduce our CO2eq (carbon equivalent) emissions from their current 6.5 tonnes per person per year to less than 2 tonnes as soon as possible.

Risks associated with missing this 1.5 degree threshold will be devastating for the local environment in Sedgemoor, as well as for communities around the world. The irreversible effects of climate change include sea level rise, species extinction, mass human displacement, coral reef loss, and extreme weather events such as mass flooding, draught, and heat waves. In Sedgemoor, we saw the destruction caused by the 2013-2014 winter flooding on the Somerset Levels. We know all too well the cost of not acting, which is why it is imperative that we implement this Action Plan and begin reducing our carbon emissions immediately.

The Action Plan

This Action Plan will provide guidance addressing climate change from the following areas: Travel, Waste, Energy & Buildings, Business & Economy, Food & Agriculture, and Nature & Adaptation. We have also been working closely with other local councils to form the Somerset-wide Climate Emergency Strategy, which has helped to inform this document and the actions included. Ours will work in conjunction with the Somerset-wide Strategy by filling in the gaps in activity that a local council is best placed to achieve.

This Action Plan is designed to be ‘living and breathing’ as we face new challenges and as new solutions come to light. In particular, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has posed new issues for the district, including a focus on the local economy, public transport usage and the role of green spaces. Now more than ever, our communities need to be as self-sustaining as possible. We have hopeful visions for residents in Sedgemoor moving towards an increased use of local renewable energy and food grown by regional producers and in our own back gardens. This change

in circumstances brought on by the pandemic is beginning to be reflected in this Action Plan, and we expect it to grow and adapt as new developments come to light. Ultimately, we want to build back a resilient Sedgemoor that is greener, cleaner and more connected than ever before.

We recognise that there will be difficult decisions to be made during the implementation of this action plan. We have high ambitions for bringing about many of the proposed actions and acknowledge the urgency of reducing our carbon emissions as quickly as possible, while recognising that each will have a range of impacts on our services and on Sedgemoor residents. We have highlighted the positive impacts that each action will bring and will need to balance this with the costs and potential challenges. It is therefore key that these proposed actions are assessed for their carbon reduction and social value effects. We will embrace extra opportunities as they arise, both scientific and situational, and look forward to the new and exciting possibilities that lie ahead.

Consultation

Initially, feedback on the Somerset-wide Climate Emergency Strategy, completed by the Somerset Climate Action Network (SCAN), shaped the contents of our Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan.

According to this consultation, priorities for residents of Somerset are transport, the built environment and energy. We have therefore prioritised these areas in our own Action Plan. Furthermore, the feedback shows that residents recognise how they can do more themselves to address climate change, such as switching to ultra-low emission vehicles, shopping for local produce, generating renewable energy through community schemes and on their own, and planting trees. We have therefore placed emphasis on how we can work with residents and community groups to collectively reduce our carbon footprint as a district. The majority of respondents saw the environmental agenda as a priority, with 78% stating they were “very” concerned about Climate Change. Finally, one of the key findings of this research was that residents recognise the need for urgent action, which is why this Action Plan is ambitious, and requires us to act now.

Additionally, in December 2020, SCAN was

commissioned to undertake a public consultation on our own Action Plan. This consisted of five surveys that took place during November-December 2020. The objectives were to give residents an opportunity to comment on our environmental plans, to understand which climate actions residents see as a priority, and to learn what further climate action residents want to see from the council.

In collaboration with Hope-Stone Research, SCAN analysed the findings and provided recommendations to the council on the action plan. Overall, it was found that residents agree with the actions in the Action Plan and support the climate change work the council is doing. SCAN also felt that the responses indicated a need for more education on carbon neutrality and which actions have the most positive impact. Results also showed a need for the council to lead by example and to draw on the positive behavioural changes that have resulted from the pandemic (e.g. shopping locally, working from home). We will therefore consider this in the prioritisation of the action plan and build stronger communications and connections with the community around carbon reduction activity.

The scope

We have identified three types of action that we as a district council are able to implement. The first is changing the way we function as an organisation and internal alterations to our own business plan. The second regards our own planning and policy and ways in which we can directly influence external partners through elements such as our procurement strategy. The third is areas that we can influence, but not directly control, such as lobbying government for funding and policy change from the top and working with other external authorities such as Somerset County Council.

There are areas that are already being addressed by the Somerset-wide Climate Emergency Strategy, which has been drawn together by the five Somerset Local Authorities. We are proud to have contributed to this extensive piece of work and are keen to begin working collaboratively on the changes proposed in

that strategy. To supplement the work being done in partnership with the other local authorities, this Action Plan outlines the actions Sedgemoor District Council plans to take to meet our own carbon neutrality target. Areas that are being addressed by the Somerset-wide Strategy have been highlighted throughout in order to avoid gaps and to outline our role in the wider strategy.

1. Internal: the way we function as an organisation and internal alterations to our own business plan
2. Direct action: our own planning and policy and ways in which we can directly influence external partners through elements such as our procurement strategy
3. Indirect: areas that we can influence, but not directly control, such as lobbying government for funding and policy change from the top and working with other external authorities such as Somerset County Council.

The co-benefits

Alongside each action, we have identified the related co-benefits. We have found that with almost every proposed change, there are a number of positive effects to individuals and the community beyond the carbon neutrality goal. For instance, through alternative, active travel options, individuals will notice an improvement to their physical and mental

wellbeing, as well as to the local air quality. There are also benefits to the local and national economy of many of these actions, increased employment opportunities and reduced fuel poverty, as well as adaptive measures that help prepare the region for inevitable climate change while also sequestering carbon.

What is already being done?

There are some areas of work that are contributing heavily to Sedgemoor's carbon neutrality targets, and indeed that of the UK, that have not been explicitly mentioned in the Action Plan, as they are already fully under way. For example, we are home to the first of a new generation of nuclear power stations in the UK. Hinkley Point C will generate enough low carbon electricity to power more than 5million homes, which meets 7% of the UK's electricity needs. There are ongoing discussions over the carbon impact of power stations due to the preparation and construction process, in which carbon is emitted through the mining and separation of uranium. However, despite these

indirect carbon contributions, nuclear power does not directly produce carbon dioxide emissions.

Furthermore, the residents of Sedgemoor are already working hard to reduce carbon emissions in the area and combat the impacts of climate change. There are a number of community projects already under way, which are mentioned in more detail in the Supporting Evidence document. Throughout the Action Plan, we intend to work with these community groups and hope to create new connections and consistently provide support to allow residents of Sedgemoor to take ownership of carbon reduction and climate adaptation.

Who will oversee this?

We will instate a Portfolio Holder with sole responsibility for our Climate Change Strategy and Action plan, who will oversee the implementation of the action plan. They will work alongside the Climate Emergency working group, which is made up of

officers, including the Chief Executive and Strategic Director, and cross-party members, including the head of council. The working group will present a report to community scrutiny committee regularly to ensure democratic overview.

How will success be measured?

This is where we will need really active input from residents and community groups in Sedgemoor. We need the public to hold the council to account for our pledge towards carbon neutrality. As mentioned above, this is a 'living and breathing' Action Plan. That means that in the process of implementing these actions, we may face new challenges and new discoveries may be made about the technology and solutions available to help us towards our goal. This also means that the democratic process must be

constantly involved to ensure we stay on track and meet our targets.

In the Action Plan, we have identified the officers and departments who will oversee each action, and a date for completion. Every 6 months, the Climate Emergency working group will review our progress against these dates and include the public and elected members in this process.

Supporting evidence

This outlines additional information about each set of actions, including the background to why we have chosen these actions, what is being done by associated organisations such as Somerset County Council and national government, and the rationale behind these actions. We have also used this section to

begin drawing out our baselines for each area. Finally, this section includes risk assessments to outline what could happen with predicted future climate change, and mitigating actions to help prevent catastrophe as far as possible.

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