

North Somerset councillors debate net zero ambitions

21st September

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL

By **John Wimperis**
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 LDR reporter



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The district is not set to achieve net zero for another 85 years at current rates, despite a target of 2030, according to a report which went before full council on September 19.

Some councillors were sceptical about the measures proposed to hit this target — and even whether climate change was a man-made process.

But council leader Mike Bell said: “It’s hard to be upbeat when you have a sobering report and when you hear from some members who remind you that dinosaurs are not completely extinct and are still rampaging around the council chamber from time to time.

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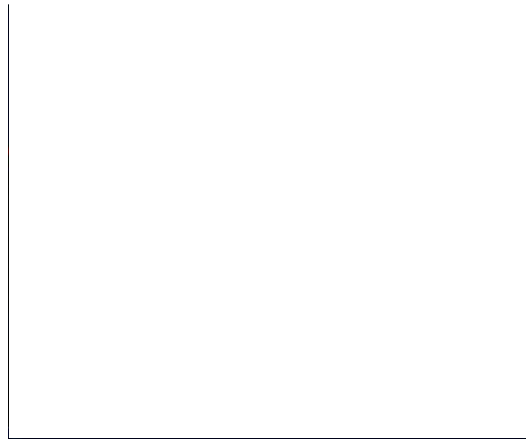


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“But, being more positive about this, what people don’t realise is that this is actually in our interest.”

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He said: "So actually this is good for North Somerset Council, and it is good for the residents of North Somerset."

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Meanwhile, Annemieke Waite, the council's executive member for climate waste and sustainability warned: "24 per cent of North Somerset lies below sea level, so the prospect of sea levels rising and the increasing risk of flooding should ring all our alarm bells."

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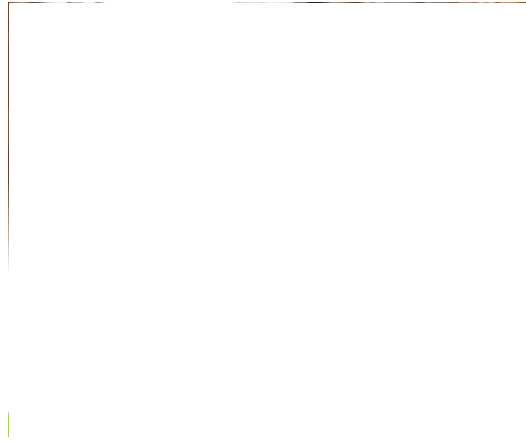
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The report warned this was necessary because of the extremely short timescales to apply for this funding — with some rounds of funding only open for 20 minutes.



Councillor John Crockford-Hawley voted in favour of the measures, but warned the council: “We are being asked to give the section 151 officer and one executive member delegation to commit the council to a potential £5m expenditure — and yet, at the current rate of CO2 reduction in North Somerset, we will be on target to reach net zero in **85 years time.**”

Councillor David Shopland added that children were being “frightened” in school by the discourse on climate change.

He said: “Climate change has happened through the ages. [...] Yes, we can clean up our act, that is obvious.

“But in the end we cannot affect climate change if it is going to happen.”

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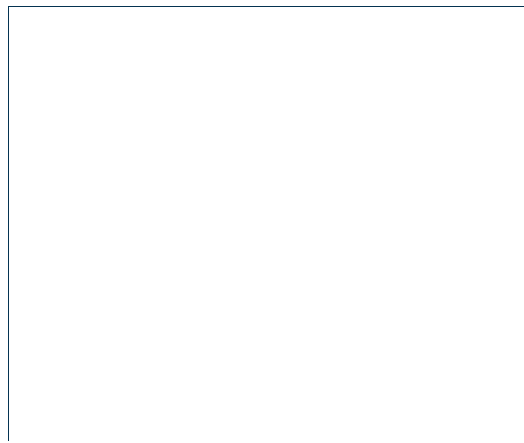
"We cannot go bankrupt because we will all suffer, so this is a gradual process which will take time.

"And I think, quite frankly, that 2030 is an unrealistic target date, if there should be a target date."

But deputy council leader Catherine Gibbons said: "I don't think they are frightened; I think they are passionate.

"I think they care and they know a great deal about this issue and they are challenging us constantly."

She added: "I think we would be failing future generations if we don't at least stick to this aspiration and do the best we can to try and ensure that we, at least, slow the progression of climate change.



"I accept we can't do everything alone but that doesn't mean we should do nothing."

Another councillor who said he could not support the proposed measures was former council leader — now leader of the Conservative opposition — Nigel Ashton.

He warned against committing more funding that would need to be borrowed or come out of other services.

He said: "Let's face it, when North Somerset is absolutely at zero, it won't make a damn bit of difference in the country let alone the world, but it's the right thing to do because if everyone did that we could actually get somewhere.

"So we should do what we can but not at the expense of other services. It should be in support of other services"

Mr Bell called this "nonsense" and said that decarbonisation funding would reduce the council's spending on energy.

The UK government has set a target of 2050 to achieve net zero, but North Somerset — like many other local authorities — set the goal of achieving this by 2030 when it declared a climate emergency in 2019.

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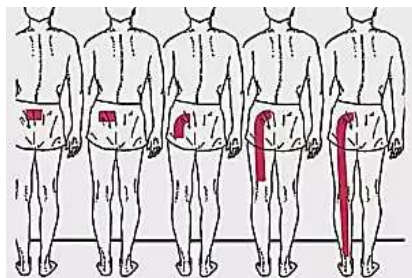
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