

CLIMATE EMERGENCY MEETING AND WORKSHOP FOR PARISH COUNCILS



Timberscombe Parish Council hosted a gathering of 30 representatives from a dozen West Somerset Parish Councils on November 26th to discuss the Climate and Environment Emergency. The presentation and workshop was led by ecologist Mark Ward, from the community group West Somerset Together.

The evening began with a practical exercise for people to identify where they stood (literally – people were

encouraged to move around the room) with regard to the issues. Then a brief clip of Greta Thunberg's powerful address to world leaders at the recent UN Climate Action Summit in New York, in which she challenged the folly of continuing with 'business as usual', was followed by a series of slides showing the scientific evidence of rising global temperature, diminishing biodiversity, and increasing pollution. Various predictive scenarios were portrayed, showing differing likely global outcomes according to humanity's ability to change attitudes and actions. Locally, a 1.5 degree increase in temperature would see large areas of Somerset disappearing under marine and inland flooding, and farming affected by extreme weather and a reduction of pollinating insects.

The Climate Change Act of 2008 has committed the UK to reducing carbon emissions, and the Committee for Climate Change was created to support this commitment. Parliament declared a Climate Emergency in 2018; many County and District Councils have followed suit, including our own local councils and Exmoor National Park Authority. Somerset Climate Action Network has been set up to advise the councils. Parish Councils wishing to sign up to the Climate and Environment Emergency Declaration could pledge to support the aim of reducing carbon emissions, initiate community projects and link up with neighbouring parishes to promote environmentally positive activities and strategies. The message came across clearly that it's not just making a statement of intent, it's creating a strategy and revitalising local democracy to involve the whole community.

The third part of the evening was a workshop, with small groups discussing what might work well in their own parishes. Among the themes that emerged, it became evident that a good starting point would be to hold neighbourhood meetings, including Climate Change workshops such as those offered by West Somerset Together, and conduct surveys, including wildlife and biodiversity surveys, to come up with Community Plans tailored to each particular community's needs and resources.

The meeting ended with participants buzzing with information and ideas to take back to their own councils and communities.