

# Environment Policy Development Group Annual Report – 2019/20

## Climate Change

On 26 June 2019 the Council adopted the Devon Climate Change Declaration, and directed the Environment PDG to Act as the owner of this policy activity. In order to formulate a strategy for the Council, the Group agreed to set up a Net Zero Working Group to define this.

In December 2019 the Group reviewed the Council's Carbon Footprint Baseline calculation. The Group were pleased with the joined up approach with other District Councils on the scope of establishing a baseline, and that the Council was the first of this group to obtain a draft figure.



## Net Zero Working Group

Once it was agreed within the Council where responsibility for the Climate Change Declaration would sit, the Group agreed to establish a working group to define the Council's actions and adopted four Members onto the group.

The first meeting of the Group took place on 28 October 2019. It agreed that the Group would have two main themes: the first being to establish how the Authority could reduce its own emissions; and secondly how the Authority could facilitate net zero carbon initiatives across the District.

To date the Group has successfully launched a new web page on the MDDC website to update the public on actions taken by the Council. The Group plan to look at additional content to assist community groups and the public.

The Group now intend to look in detail at the Council's Carbon Baseline report and what further could be achieved, before putting together an Action Plan for the consideration of the Council.

## Use of Netting on Hedgerows

Concern about the growing trend of developers using netting over hedgerows and trees at development sites was raised. This stops birds nesting and other wildlife using the hedges and trees.

The Group noted that the RSPB had issued guidelines for developers which could be utilised in planning policy amendments. The Group recommended to Council that the Motion to ban developers from using netting on hedgerows be supported.

*Outcome:* The Motion was carried in Council in July 2019.

## Connecting the Culm Project

The Group heard that the Blackdown Hills area of natural beauty management team had secured £700k EU funding towards the Connecting the Culm project. The Project is in partnership with MDDC, DCC, the Environment Agency and the National Trust, looking at the resilience of the Culm to climate change.

Members discussed the role that agriculture and in particular soil compacting played on the flood risk of local developments.

It was confirmed that the project would be looking at hydroelectricity solutions but that the flow in the Culm was small.

## Planting of Trees to Reduce Carbon

Given the effect planting of trees has in reducing carbon, a Motion was presented calling for use of land within the ownership of the Council that is not suitable for development, for the planting of native British trees.

Following a discussion around: planting of 'suitable trees'; fitting with the Council's Open Spaces Policy; and what 'land not suitable for development' meant, the Group recommended to Council that the Motion should be supported with some wording adjusted. During Council meeting on 08 January 2020 the Motion was carried.

*Outcome:* The Council are now looking to identify areas of land suitable for planting trees, and the Group will shortly receive a report showing maps outlining these areas.



## Single Use Plastics (SUPs)

Following a previous Motion, the group requested an update on how the Council had reduced its use of SUPs, and how it had been working with suppliers to reduce their own plastic waste.

The review confirmed that the Council has removed all plastic from its meeting rooms, as well as moving towards plumbed water coolers in 2020. Leisure Centres have reviewed all use of SUPs with suppliers, and MDDC procurement tools will now be updated to include reference to SUPs. Events on Council land do not allow the use of SUPs and advice is provided through the Safety Advisory Group for all public events.

## National Assistance Burial Procedure

Where there are no suitable arrangements for the burial of the deceased, the Council have a statutory duty to bury or cremate any person who has passed away or been found deceased within the District. Following the three yearly review of the National Assistance Burial Procedure, the group recommended to the Cabinet that the revised Policy be adopted.

*Outcome:* In June 2019, the Cabinet resolved that the recommendation of the Group be approved.

## Fly tipping

The Government have introduced new financial penalties to help fight waste crimes. Following discussion, the Group recommended that fixed penalty notices be increased from £200 to £400 for fly tipping; and that powers to use CCTV, subject to investigation into the powers allowed under regulations, to assist with fly tipping fixed penalty notices be authorised.

## Play Area Safety Inspection Policy

A report of the Play Area Risk Assessment and Safety Inspection examined whether the number of weekend inspections of play areas be reduced.

Following discussion, the Group recommended:

1. That the current risk assessments and proposed reduction in safety inspections were considered adequate to meet the Council's responsibilities and for individual pieces of play equipment to be identified on the Risk Assessment Forms.
2. That digital transformation of the current inspection methods would make the task more efficient and that the implementation of a process would be expedited.

*Outcome:* In August 2019 the Cabinet resolved that the recommendations of the Group be noted.



## **Waste and Recycling Annual Update**

The Group received the annual Waste and Recycling update. Discussion took place around: the frequency of collections and impact on amount of recycled waste; the roles of supermarkets in single use plastic; and whether everything sent for recycling was actually recycled.



## **Car Charging Points in New Developments**

With the UK target to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2040, the Group heard options for the introduction of home electric vehicle charging points in new build properties across the District. The Group felt that the timeframes presented were too long and that the Council should show leadership by speeding up the installation of vehicle charging points.

The Group agreed the Council should seek a requirement for electric vehicle charging points in all new build properties through the preparation of the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) and included in the public consultation document.

*Outcome:* Work is now progressing on the preparation of a draft options paper for the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan, which may provide an opportunity to include policy for electric vehicles.

## **Chairman's Words – Cllr Barry Warren**

This is my first term as an elected member of MDDC and to be asked to Chair this influential Group was an unexpected, but willingly accepted, honour.

I am fortunate to be working with a group of members with diverse interests and experience which include the former Chair and Vice-Chair of the Group. Their support and advice has been much appreciated. We have members from all the elected parties and I thank them all for their work and support. We have been able to work as a team without party politics coming between us. Councillor Ms Elizabeth Wainwright has been 'taken' from us to fill a Cabinet post to lead the Council Climate Change programme. I anticipate our Group continuing to work with her on this important project as it develops.

I thank all the officers who have contributed to the work of the Group with their reports and advice. I wish to particularly thank Mrs Carole Oliphant for acting as our Clerk and trying to keep me in order. I also thank Ms Clare Robathan for coordinating and making sense of our discussions on climate change and for assisting me in preparing this report.