

BRIEFING PAPER

SCRUTINY REPORT – CLIMATE CHANGE PORTFOLIO

DATE: 22 JUNE 2020

TO RECEIVE A PROGRESS REPORT ON ACTIONS RELATING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Responsible Officer: Andrew Busby- Group Manager Corporate Property and Commercial Assets

Reason for Report: To receive an update from Property Services and Commercial Assets on the latest progress with the Climate Action Plan

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Introduction

The current climate crisis is a crosscutting issue that will eventually touch all areas of the Council's work. As Members are aware, a new Cabinet role was introduced in early 2020 to recognise the importance of this agenda and to help move work forward, this update is intended to share some of the current and planned activities.

The Council does not have a dedicated 'Climate Officer' and Andy Busby is currently the lead officer with some administration and research support from other officers. As this journey progresses, we are reviewing the need for additional / dedicated capacity.

We are aware that our draft action plan is just that -- a list of actions. We are therefore also creating a Mid Devon Climate Handbook to sit alongside the action plan, and which will go into detail on the thematic areas we are focusing on, as well as include FAQs and resources for further reading. We will share a draft of this at the Environment PDG in July 2020.

Scope of our work

There are actions that can be taken which will have a direct impact on our own carbon emissions and will be a starting point for action. Other actions will have more of an impact on indirect council emissions – either by influencing our partners and suppliers, or by working to support communities and businesses across the District. Actions in our plan are therefore broken down by 'scope' in the plan. Attached as annex **A** to this report is a visual that explains the scopes 1,2, 3. We have used 4 within our action plan to show where the action does not fit into one of the other scope categories.

Whilst we clearly only have direct control over our own emissions, it is still important to facilitate a district-wide move to net zero. Community conversations, partnerships and collaboration will support this – for example, we are involved in discussions about regional schemes to connect farmers and producers with local food hubs for buyers, reducing the mileage and supporting a local food system. Partnerships with car and bike share schemes, as well as electric vehicle charging companies, could also support emissions associated with private vehicles.

We attach a visual as annex **B** to show an overview of our climate journey.

Devon Climate Emergency

The Council are part of the tactical group for the Devon-wide carbon plan. The group met most recently on 9 June 2020. DCC are also business planning for the offer of a local power purchase agreement between large energy consumers in Devon and community-owned renewable energy, and we are talking to DCC about this.

More widely, the tactical group is a key link for the synchronising of MDDC's climate plans with Devon-wide plans. The Devon Climate Emergency put out a call for evidence to contribute to the Devon Carbon Plan -- the group received almost 900 submissions, mostly from individuals, and a summary of submissions can be viewed by theme here:

<https://www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/devon-carbon-plan/call-for-evidence/>

Some of the suggestions have been reviewed and incorporated into our own emerging plan, and others will need to be discussed as part of our NZAG and our Mid Devon Climate Conversations.

Net Zero Advisory Group (NZAG)

This has been set up following Cabinet approval at its meeting on the 23 April 2020. Terms of reference will be progressed for the group, membership has been confirmed and a date of the first meeting has been scheduled for the 25th June 2020 at 17.30.

Working across service areas

A series of meetings are taking place with key officers from various services to explore opportunities, connections, ideas and challenges from different perspectives and service areas within the council. We see each team representative who joins the meeting acting as a 'Climate Connector' for the council, with the intention of building a joined-up approach in our journey to be net zero by 2030.

District-wide community engagement

There were planned Devon-wide Citizens Assemblies to discuss the climate crisis and seek input from residents, but the Covid19 crisis has pushed these back to 2021. At a more local level, Cllr Wainwright had hoped to host in-person 'Mid Devon Climate Conversations' with town, parish, community group and business representatives, to encourage networking and collaboration, and to listen to ideas, questions and information. The Covid19 crisis has meant we have had to put that on hold, but in the meantime, we have planned the first of a series of online discussions instead. Content from these discussions will be documented and considered as the Council moves forward with this work, and as part of the Net Zero Advisory Group. This agenda is one that many people are interested in and have expertise in, which the council can benefit from. It is a good opportunity to improve community engagement.

We are mapping district-wide groups and initiatives that are working on the net zero carbon agenda, to support residents to connect and learn more. We will put this on our website.

Members are of course invited to be part of the Climate Conversations mentioned above. In addition, please feel free to share articles, ideas and suggestions as we move forward with

this work. It is a topic that goes beyond any one political party, and a collaborative approach will help us tackle this complex issue at a local level.

We are also exploring the potential of setting up 'Community Climate and Biodiversity Grants'; a similar scheme has been adopted at a neighbouring authority to support small-scale community projects.

Climate Action Plan

The first version of our Climate Action Plan is developing and is attached to this report as annex C. The action plan draws on input from various reports, research, case studies and conversations, and is very much a work in progress. It will include a Red / Amber / Green status marker to identify which proposed actions and schemes have a high, medium or low impact on reducing our carbon footprint. There are current projects within our Capital Medium Term Financial Plan (CMTFP) that present opportunities for reducing our carbon footprint. For example, replacing ageing boilers and reviewing the Combined Heat Plant (CHP) at Exe Valley Leisure Centre (EVLC). Taking the boilers and CHP at EVLC as an example, these assets run on gas, and the Council will review these schemes to see if we could reduce the carbon emissions further to a straight replacement for a modern alternative. As well as existing projects within the CMTFP, the plan will also include strategic and larger projects such as the hydroelectricity scheme in Tiverton that would have a high impact on MDDC's emission reduction. Some projects will need extra budget / capacity. The plan will also be shared with the new Net Zero Advisory Group for review. In addition, input from our 'Mid Devon Climate Conversations' will help shape our plan.

Where needed, external funding will always be considered before the use of internal Council funds, and the Property Services team and the Corporate Management team will work together to help facilitate and maximise the funds available to the Council. Joining up the approaches of various council service areas more widely could also provide cost savings and efficiencies. Some projects may be suitable for funding from climate/energy efficiency related funds that are created to help the transition to a low carbon economy.

The draft plan now includes a visual to show the impact of our actions on our carbon emissions, and the trend towards our 2030 target. The actual carbon saved will be verified as part of the annual review exercise that is carried out independently.

Andrew Busby will explain the draft plan at the meeting and will welcome any feedback.

Solar Together Devon Project

The Council will be part of the Solar Together Devon project for residents and not on Council assets. To support the region's energy and climate strategies DCC is looking to incentivise a solar PV collective purchasing scheme for the residential 'able-to-pay' sector. The project would be called 'Solar Together Devon' and delivered by iChoosr. DCC will manage the project and cover all costs. The procurement process and implications post the Covid-19 crisis have now been resolved and in late July 2020 the signposting and promoting will commence with the procurement of a local installer starts around October 2020 and then installations happening between January and May 2021.

iChoosr estimate the project will deliver a 20% reduction in installation prices for residents and achieve 800+ installations, 793 tonnes of CO2 saved in first year and 3MWh total generation capacity. In the UK they have run successful schemes with the Greater London Authority, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Essex, Norfolk and Sussex councils. Local installers will be encouraged to bid for the works.

Communication with Distribution Network Provider

The Council are also in communication with Western Power Distribution (WPD) who are currently in the process of building its plans for the next regulatory period as determined by the Energy Regulator, Ofgem. A key aspect of this will be the crucial role WPD has to play in meeting the local energy needs of the communities they serve. The UK Government has set targets for decarbonisation, including achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. WPD are already seeing significant shifts in the way their customers use and generate power, including increases in low carbon technologies (such as solar panels and heat pumps), electric vehicles and energy storage connecting directly onto the local electricity distribution system. This is set to increase further as other local authorities, such as our own, set their own net zero targets and build energy plans bespoke to the needs of our region. Council Officers from Property and Planning will participate in a meeting to work together to build a joined-up energy plan.

Biodiversity

Impacts of climate change on our wider ecosystem also needs to be considered as part of our climate change journey (i.e. availability of water, changing natural habitats and landscapes). The Council prepared and consulted upon a draft Green Infrastructure Plan (GIP) in 2011, the Green Infrastructure Assessment (Section 2 of the GIP) was then revised to take account of comments from residents and other stakeholders. The GIA is part of the evidence base for the Local Plan. Strategic objectives in planning for green infrastructure include safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity.

Background information can be found here: <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/planning-policy/adopted-local-plan-evidence/green-infrastructure-assessment/>

A vision for green infrastructure was then produced that can be reviewed as part of our journey: <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/114235/vision-and-strategic-objectives.pdf> .

As part of our Local Plan review on sustainability appraisal dated January 2017 can be found here: <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/342723/sustainability-appraisal-update-2017.pdf> this also links into biodiversity across the District.

Grass verge cutting:

The Council needs to consider the issues of safeguarding the environment and promoting biodiversity and bring forward a report to the Environment PDG to establish what our approach to managing road verges on our own estate should be to encourage and protect biodiversity. One result of the lockdown has been that verges across our estate had been left to grow and in some areas, this has resulted in steep banks and verges having wildflowers. It is suggested that we should continue to leave these particular verges this session in order to assess the full impact that will inform a future report. This resource from Plantlife provides good background information -

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/about-us/news/road-verge-management-guide>

The existing design principles allow us to review and designate areas for wildflowers or naturalisation. Naturalising areas is very different to planting wildflower seeds and allowing them to grow in areas that have been prepared for this. A trial took place in 2016-2017 and at the time we did receive complaints regarding the appearance in these areas.

We have also sowed wildflowers in some areas over the last couple of years; this included in Tiverton and Crediton. This has been viable, as the seeds have been predominantly sown in

areas that previously contained bedding, we have also trialled areas within Crediton and Tiverton to ascertain response and viability, and that had been well received.

There is an additional cost associated with the maintenance and sowing, however we are also looking at our own grass banks that we can naturalise with very limited maintenance once flowered and self-seeded, such as Linear Park in Cullompton.

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