

BRIEFING PAPER

ENVIRONMENT PDG– CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

DATE: 9TH MARCH 2021

Responsible Officer: Andrew Busby- Corporate Manager Property, Leisure & Climate Change

Reason for Report: To receive an update from the Cabinet Member for Environment

Contact for more Information: Andrew Busby Group Manager Corporate Property and Commercial Assets

Introduction

The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and aims to become carbon neutral by 2030. Carbon neutrality is a term used to describe the aim of actions that organisations, businesses and individuals can take to remove as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as each puts in to it. The overall goal of carbon neutrality is to achieve a zero carbon footprint. To become carbon neutral we needed to accurately measure our carbon footprint and create a baseline against which future changes can be measured. The assessment needed to establish a baseline from which to measure the reductions that we plan to make via our action plan and make informed recommendations to Members.

Following the recent climate change declaration by Councils across Devon, there are now two emerging work streams; an internal organisation focus on reducing CO₂ emissions to (net) zero; and the wider agenda looking at enabling the reduction of emissions across the whole Mid Devon area. Clearly, the first of these is a process that a) the Council can manage/monitor/influence; and b) can control to a significant degree, as it relates to our own assets and operational base. For the wider piece linked to the whole of the Mid Devon area achieving net zero emissions, this is work that DCC will be initiating linked to baselining work being undertaken for the whole county. However, as a District we will work as a partner with local businesses, organisations, community groups and other residents to support the District's journey to net zero. As we learn figures for the whole District's CO₂ footprint, we will be able to do this more effectively.

The definition of a carbon footprint is the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as a result of the activities of a particular individual, organisation, or community. A carbon footprint is measured in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e) and CO₂e is calculated by multiplying the emissions of each of the greenhouse gases (GHG) by its 100 year global warming potential (GWP). The Carbon Footprint of the Council's own gross emissions were 20,402 tCO₂e for the reporting period 1st April 2018 to the 31st March 2019. The Council should be in receipt of the carbon footprint data for the period between 1st of April 2019 to the 31st March 2020 during March 2021.

Having a net zero carbon footprint refers to achieving net zero carbon dioxide emissions by balancing carbon emissions with carbon removal (often through carbon offsetting) or ideally, by eliminating carbon emissions altogether (the transition to a post-carbon economy). It is used in the context of carbon dioxide releasing processes associated with transportation, energy production, agriculture and commercial/industrial processes.

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). Taking one example, 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. Other planning policies have links to maintaining or improving biodiversity and these will be listed and signposted on a Council climate change website.

Devon Climate Emergency

The Council are part of the tactical group for the Devon-wide carbon plan. 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 our 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 by theme can be viewed here:

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

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

Devon Carbon Plan:

This is a Devon-wide piece of work which aims to put Devon on a path to a clean, healthy and sustainable low-carbon future. MDDC's Environment PDG discussed the plan at length in its January 12th meeting, and feedback was passed on to Cabinet, and ultimately was shared as part of the consultation on the plan. The plan was open for consultation by partners as well as residents. Some sections of the plan are more controversial than others, and a Citizen's Assembly is planned in summer 2021 to explore and find a way forward on these areas. The plan will then be updated and revised, and a second public consultation will follow. Some areas of the plan are more relevant to Mid Devon than others and will help inform and revise our own Climate Action Plan, e.g. on topics like the built environment, economy, and energy supply.

Mid Devon Climate website

This will go live in the Spring. Its purpose is to 1) share updates on MDDC's carbon reduction work; 2) provide good information to residents, businesses, members and others; and 3) signpost opportunities, events and local groups that are working on the climate and biodiversity agenda locally and regionally.

Net Zero Advisory Group (NZAG)

This has been set up following Cabinet approval at its meeting on the 23 April 2020 and continue to meet to discuss work streams including but not limited to carbon reduction, biodiversity measures. A request has been made to research other structures for this group that will give it more weight, and allow public participation.

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. Our new Climate and Sustainability Specialist will arrange these meetings going forward.

District-wide community engagement

There were planned Devon-wide Citizens Assemblies to discuss the climate crisis during 2020 and to seek input from residents, but the Covid19 crisis has pushed these back to later this year. At a more local level, we 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 have had little capacity to manage these meetings to date, that will need to be formalised and developed by our Climate and Sustainability Specialist.

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 continue to explore 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 continuing to be developed. 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 the Council's emission reduction. Some projects will need extra budget / capacity. The plan will also be shared with the Net Zero Advisory Group for review. In addition, input from our 'Mid Devon Climate Conversations' will help shape our plan.

The Council has secured £18k for assistance with developing a Heat Decarbonisation Plan to 2030 with an additional £20k for skilled project support on developing our Carbon Action Plan.

Summary of recent work:

- Funding obtained to decarbonise Mid Devon leisure centres (circa £311k)
- Extended the solar array on our recycling centre Carlu Close
- 'Climate Conversations' to increase connection and information-sharing in Mid Devon (NB -- make engagement a key work stream in revised climate action plan)
- Solar Together scheme -- invitations to Mid Devon residents – 37 private residents have signed up to install solar panels with a further 8 private residents signing up to install retrofit battery solar pv systems
- Input to Devon Carbon Plan process
- Replacing ageing boilers (General Fund and HRA assets)

Current work / discussions

- New Mid Devon climate website soon to go live (purpose -- to share updates, create connections, and signpost good information and opportunities)
- Energy procurement options
- Hydroelectric scheme
- Possibility of bringing funded rapid charge points to towns in Mid Devon (in discussions with Rapid Charge Exeter and CoCars)
- Evolution of the Net Zero Advisory Group

Future work includes

- Our new Climate and Sustainability Specialist Jason Ball, is starting on March 1st 2021. Regular quarterly reports against our targets from then on.
- Jason to review and deepen our Climate Action Plan, with updated costings and timelines
- Carbon literacy / climate / biodiversity training for all members and officers
 - Review and revise our procurement processes, to reduce Scope 3 emissions. Due for review -- bring forward.
- Community climate / biodiversity fund, and wildlife wardens
- Roll out tree-planting in Tiverton and beyond

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