

# Environment Policy Development Group Annual Report – 2020/21

## Climate Change

Throughout the year the PDG received regular updates on climate change and net zero activity within the Council. The PDG reviewed and approved the MDDC Climate Change Handbook and the Climate Change Strategy – looking at the various work streams and how they would be tracked via the action plan.



With the elevation of Cllr Elizabeth Wainwright to Cabinet Member for Climate Change, the PDG agreed in March that our Net Zero Working Group format should be amended. The PDG recommended that a Net Zero Advisory Group be formed that reports through the Environment PDG, and that comprises eight Members. The Advisory Group has met regularly and has held discussions on: active travel and how to progress walking and cycling in the District; car share schemes; the Culm Garden Village and the NZAG role within it; and the dedicated MDDC climate website.

Discussions throughout the year within the PDG have considered a range of issues in relation to climate change, including: installation of domestic solar panels on council houses; electric car charging points; tree planting schemes; and promotion of sustainable farming.

In January the Group also considered the Interim Devon Carbon Plan. The Group put forward issues for consideration in the Council's response to the plan, including: consideration of issues around Anaerobic Digesters; that costs need to be explained and affordability taken into consideration; and that there needs to be a bigger involvement with the farming community.

Outcome: We continue to monitor progress on the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, and receive regular updates on the activity of the Net Zero Advisory Group. A local farmer and cheese producer will address the Group from her perspective.

### **Education and Enforcement policy – (March)**

The Group considered various policies, and the need for new policies, to give powers to the Street Scene Education and Enforcement team. The Group raised questions as to the protection and safety of Enforcement Officers including consideration of Anti Stab Vests and Body Cameras. Notably, the Group recommended: that fixed penalty notices for fly tipping be increased from £200 to £400 and the powers to use CCTV footage be adopted to assist with fly tipping; that new powers set out in the Littering from Vehicles Regulations (Policy) 2018 be adopted; that changes to the Council Compulsory Recycling Policy be adopted; that the amended Abandoned Vehicle (Act) legislation be adopted which will enable Officers to investigate vehicles within the 'open air'; and that the Stray Dog Policy be updated.

Outcome: the recommendations of the PDG were agreed by the Cabinet.



### **Local flood risk management strategy (September)**

The Group discussed the consultation on the updated Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for Devon. The Group looked at how the risk of flooding to property and infrastructure would be managed and reduced; how plans for a flood alleviation scheme could be developed and how communities could increase their resilience against flooding and the impact of climate change.

The Group identified a number of issues to feed into the Council response, including: the need for the strategy to explain why Cullompton and the Culm Valley area had not been identified areas of flood risk; possible inappropriate developments on floodplains in the District; and water overflow onto farmers land and then the landowner being responsible if flooding occurred on local highways.

### **Connecting the Culm (September)**

The Group discussed the Connecting the Culm Project, heard about the main themes of the project and how the co-creation approach is empowering communities to take ownership, identify local issues and develop solutions. The project is looking at how resilient the area is to changes in the climate and the Group discussed how to involve schools, work with partner agencies, soil structures and flooding issues on low ground.

## Public Spaces Protection Order – Dogs

Over the course of the year the Group considered widening enforcement powers in order to deliver a cleaner and more sustainable environment across the District and to replace current dog control powers which were due to expire in October 2020.



Early in the process (March) the Group agreed that the fixed penalty for breach of the order be set at the maximum level permitted of £100, and that authority be given to consult with members of the public to introduce a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO).

In October we held a special meeting of the PDG to discuss the PSPO, to hear the feedback received from the public consultation and to consider the revised PSPO to be made in response to the consultation.

After advice from the Legal Services Team on options available, the Group discussed the impact of not having a PSPO for a period of time and that the PSPO must have considered all the responses to the consultation. The Group agreed that the Chairman and the Cabinet Member for the Environment would work with officers to bring forward a revised PSPO. The Group recommended that the PSPO be redrafted to take account of the consultation responses received before further public consultation on additional areas proposed, and a revised PSPO considered by the Environment PDG.

Outcome: in April the Cabinet agreed to set the fixed penalty at the maximum level permitted of £100 and to consult on a PSPO. After the Special Environment PDG meeting the Cabinet agreed the recommendation not to approve the PSPO, given the concerns regarding the maps and other misgivings of Members. The work on the PSPO is ongoing, the Environment PDG will review the Second Revised Draft PSPO in the coming months before a further consultation period in May/June, after which the responses will be prepared and sent to the Environment PDG and to the Cabinet for final approval of the PSPO.

### **Refuse Waste Options – (November)**

The Group considered options for future Waste and Recycling collection arrangements and the need to increase recycling in the District. The Group discussed the benefits and pitfalls of moving to a three weekly residual waste collection, and recommended a trial to a limited number of households for a minimum of three months.



Outcome: the Cabinet approved the PDG recommendation to initiate a trial for a three weekly residual waste collection in order to increase recycling in the District. Discussion is taking place about when the trial will begin.

### **Resource and waste management strategy for Devon – (January)**

The Group reviewed the Resource and Waste Management Strategy for Devon. The Group discussed: that the super aligned collection service is something the Council aspires to; where the dry waste is sent to; how East Devon District Council increased recycling rates; and how to increase communications to residents around recycling. The PDG then recommended that the Council approve the draft Resource and Waste Management Strategy and proceed to public consultation.

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

I am coming towards the end of my second year as Chair of this influential Group and it continues to be a pleasure. With Cabinet changes the member makeup of the committee has changed slightly and we have had to say farewell to some and a warm welcome to other members. We have continued to maintain a good team with our diverse political makeup and a broad spectrum of experience and interests. All our meetings have been virtual and we miss the close interaction of all being in the same room. Our more remote members probably do not miss the two hour round trip to Tiverton.

The technology has been a challenge for some and our abysmal broadband in some areas has caused the odd frustrations. Despite this we have still done our bit and managed to enjoy some appropriate humour at time. The appearance of the occasional cat, dog or young child on screen during a meeting has all added to the rich tapestry and humanity of life.

We have been supported by a good team of officers who have had to change their own working practices by working from home in many cases and coping with home schooling and childcare. I have had emails from some at some very funny hours but they have kept the wheels in motion. Thank you all. A special thank you must be said to two officers in particular - Mrs Carole Oliphant as our Clerk for keeping us [especially me] in order and to the support Clare Robathan gives to us and again me in preparing this report.