

Report for: Environment Policy Development Group

Date of Meeting:	23 January 2024
Subject:	Climate and Sustainability Update
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Natasha Bradshaw - Cabinet Member for Climate Change.
Responsible Officer:	Jason Ball - Climate and Sustainability Specialist. Paul Deal - Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change.
Exempt:	None which are Exempt from publication under paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)
Wards Affected:	All.
Enclosures:	Biodiversity statutory duty report submitted to Cabinet 09 January 2024 .

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

To receive an update on the Climate and Sustainability Programme and the Climate Action Plan (CAP).

Recommendation(s):

- 1. That the Environment Policy Development Group (PDG) notes and accepts this report as an update on the Council's Climate and Sustainability Programme, and progress on its response to the Climate Emergency including the Climate Action Plan (CAP).**
- 2. That the Environment PDG notes that the Council's Planning Policy Advisory Group will be engaged with ongoing work for the new Local Plan for Mid Devon throughout the plan making programme.**

3. That the Environment PDG notes the Cabinet report and the requirements on the Council to act in relation to the Biodiversity Duty.

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Council’s Corporate Plan places a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability matters woven into all aspects of its work, from procurement to promoting nature recovery. The Climate and Sustainability (C&S) Specialist leads development of the Council’s Climate and Sustainability Programme, working inclusively with all colleagues and Councillors, particularly the Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change; and the Cabinet Member for Climate Change.

1.2 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and aims to be climate neutral by 2030. The term ‘climate neutrality’ describes a balance achieved, for any given period, for carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases released into or removed from the atmosphere; related to the actions taken by organisations, businesses or individuals. The goal of climate neutrality is to achieve a net zero climate impact.

1.3 The Council’s work to address the climate change crisis aligns with the climate emergency declaration across Devon, and the Devon Carbon Plan. Council actions with regard to **climate mitigation** (reducing greenhouse emissions) and **climate adaptation** (resilience to climate change risks) can be split into two work streams:

- an internal organisational / corporate focus for the Council;
- efforts to enable and facilitate actions across Mid Devon communities.

1.4 Therefore this report is divided into **corporate** and **community** items (some overlap is possible). Clearly the Council can monitor and manage matters related to our own assets and operations to a significant degree. For the wider agenda linked to the whole Mid Devon area, we will work as a partner with local businesses, organisations, community groups and residents.

1.5 This report emphasises activity and progress updates for brevity. For background details, please refer to previous reports, all [available online](#).

2.0 Performance

2.1 Aims, Priorities and Performance Indicators

2.1.1 Progress on Corporate Plan Performance Indicators (PI) is provided separately in [Performance reports to Audit Committee available online](#). Progress notes on our overall Corporate Plan aims and Climate Change priorities are also [available online](#), updated January 2024. (<https://sustainablemiddevon.org.uk/our-plan/#aims-priorities>)

2.2 The Council's Carbon Footprint

2.2.1 Annual [carbon footprint reports](#) (greenhouse gas accounting) are published on the Council's [Sustainable Mid Devon](#) website.

3.0 Community and partnership activities

3.1 Community engagement.

3.1.1 A number of Members and the C&S Specialist attended the Sustainable Tiverton's Community Forum (October) and aim to attend the February forum. The Cabinet Member and the C&S Specialist have been kindly invited to meet with Sustainable Crediton.

3.1.2 The C&S Specialist and the Cabinet Member for Climate Change liaised with a group of local landowners who aim to establish a [Natural Flood Management](#) (NFM) scheme on the River Exe and sent letters of support for their funding bid to the Defra / Environment Agency NFM Programme. This presents potential for partnership work on shared strategic aims.

3.1.3 The Customer Engagement Coordinator (Housing and Property Services), Parks and Open Spaces Officer, and the C&S Specialist, met with volunteers from Sustainable Tiverton and the Mid Devon Parish Wildlife Wardens to discuss opportunities for biodiversity benefits and community engagement with nature at Council-owned land e.g. with Tiverton Tree Team. This builds on achievements such as Community Orchards and community tree planting and the potential for further joint effort with community groups. Considering suitable tree planting locations - an opportunity to plant a new community orchard on HRA land has been identified.

3.1.4 Tenant Engagement. The wildlife area at Willand is complete, a local tenant has planted an array of bushes, trees and wildflowers. Hedgehogs occur at the site and we are excited to see how the space develops. Wildflower plugs have been grown and planted by Bickleigh residents on the HRA land grass verge at Bell Meadow. Newton Environmental Wellbeing Group continue to successfully look after the orchard planted last year.

3.1.5 Further engagement over potential opportunities across the district will be considered around the 2024 State of the District debate with Parish and Town Councillors.

3.1.6 Since the Council's Bin-It-123 waste collection cycles were launched in October 2022, household recycling rates have improved by circa 2% and residual waste volumes reduced - both of which cut the district's greenhouse gas emissions. Average residual waste per household dropped from 364.5 kg (2021/22) to 327 kg (2022/23).

3.2 Partnership work.

3.2.1 Blackdown Hills National Landscape (BHNL). Mid Devon's only 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' was rebranded as a National Landscape in November, in line with all England and Wales AONBs. A review of the Blackdown Hills Management Plan is under way (officers and Members will be encouraged to engage). Grants are available for tree planting, flood alleviation and enhancing biodiversity, particularly on hillside areas around the Upper Culm. Engagement with the Blackdown Hills Parish Network and participation in the BHNL Joint Advisory Committee is ongoing.

3.2.2 Private sector housing. The Council has proactively established support for [energy efficiency grants and advice](#) and the [ECO4](#) grant schemes.

3.2.3 The Council is on the Energy Saving Devon Partnership - active on interconnected issues such as healthy homes, trading standards, grants and local advice services available. Visit www.energysavingdevon.org.uk for free guidance and resources.

3.3 Promoting local events, exemplars and projects.

3.3.1 Online promotion continues through the Council's social media channels, engagement platform and the [Sustainable Mid Devon](#) website.

4.0 Corporate activities

4.1 Statutory duty: Biodiversity.

4.1.1 The Council's statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity (habitats and species) is set out by the Environment Act 2021 and the amended Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act). This is known as 'the biodiversity duty'. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) has published [guidance](#) on purpose and compliance.

4.1.2 The first consideration of action to take with regard to this duty has been carried out prior to the 01 January deadline and a [report](#) submitted to [Cabinet](#). The next step is to develop a policy framework and action plan, in consultation with committees and teams across the Council.

4.1.3 The Council must:

- a) Consider what it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- b) Agree policies and specific objectives based on its consideration.
- c) Act to deliver its policies and achieve its objectives.
- d) [Report on its biodiversity duty actions](#). (Defra has [guidance](#) on this.)

4.2 Sustainability in Corporate Culture and Operations

- 4.2.1 The Council has now switched to REGO-backed renewable electricity for all sites and this will continue through its 2024-2028 energy supply contract.
 - 4.2.2 The Council has announced completion of the [decarbonisation projects](#) at Lords Meadow Leisure Centre (now completely off gas) and Exe Valley Leisure Centre. Heat pumps capture free heat energy from the air and ground, assisted by renewable power from solar panels. This transition to sustainable energy and smart integrated management systems marks an important milestone on the Council's journey to Net Zero.
 - 4.2.3 The Council continues to install electric vehicle chargers for its fleet (own use only) at its bases and leisure centres. We secured funding of up to £350 per socket under the [Workplace Charging Scheme \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).
 - 4.2.4 A focus on environmental benefits in our parks and open spaces management has achieved a number of no-mow zones and a hierarchy of mowing regimes – 2 cuts per year (14 nature conservation areas), 7 cuts per year (most areas including Housing) or 12 cuts per year (Amory Park sports field and formal parks at Westexe, People's Park, Newcombe's Meadow).
 - 4.2.5 The 2023 Staff Engagement Survey saw an excellent level of responses to questions with environmental, social and governance (ESG) topics. Over 50 responses were received for the question: "What one thing do you think Mid Devon District Council could do to help with Climate Change?" – and these will be used to inform further, participative engagement during 2024.
 - 4.2.6 Energy Champions staff engagement continues as a way to maintain a proactive energy saving culture. Activity has included raising tasks to address concerns e.g. lights left on, proactive exploration of best practice e.g. screens on standby vs switch off, and shared learning e.g. site tours. Group discussion led to themed activity in December 'woolly jumper week' to raise awareness on keeping warm and healthy and saving energy (Leisure teams also collected donations for local food banks).
 - 4.2.7 Climate and Sustainability Statements. Cabinet approved the corporate guidance submitted via the Environment PDG, and this has now been adopted into report-writing and project business case methods.
- ## 4.3 Sustainability in the Local Economy, Planning and Development.
- 4.3.1 The Environment PDG is advised to note that the Council's Planning Policy Advisory Group will be engaged with ongoing work for the new Local Plan for Mid Devon throughout the plan making programme, and will be responsible for making recommendations to the Cabinet over the coming months at key stages in the plan's preparation. All Members are welcome to attend

meetings of the Planning Policy Advisory Group and participate in the discussions about the new Local Plan.

- 4.3.2 Zed Pods are now fully installed at Cullompton, making 6 new homes. Tiverton's Shapland Place has 8 new Zed Pod homes being installed.
- The Council's Zed Pods are superbly insulated and energy-efficient to enable Net Zero carbon living, fitted with solar panels, heat recovery systems to help warm or cool the home, and water-saving features.
 - Constructed off-site and installed with the help of local contractors.
 - Such high standard projects demonstrate the feasibility of green homes and help set higher expectations for future developments in the district.
- 4.3.3 The Council won the "Partnership Initiative of the Year" category in the British Construction Industry Awards 2023 for these first Zed Pod projects.
- 4.3.4 The government's Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF2) has awarded the Council [£660k](#) for an extra 50 Zed Pod homes at 6 locations.
- 4.3.5 Central government has pledged funding for the [railway station](#) and the [motorway](#) junction improvements at Cullompton.
- 4.3.6 Planning teams have attended a training workshop on Biodiversity Net Gain with Devon County Council's Principal Ecologist. Defra funding supports in-house capacity and service support as teams prepare for the new scheme.
- 4.3.7 As Defra finalises details of [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) (BNG) legislation, work is under way to officially register 'biodiversity banks' in the district. These private land assets, if suitably assessed and registered, potentially offer gains where on-site gains are unachievable (developers can buy BNG units).

Financial Implications. The financial implications associated with this report are the overall costs of the Climate and Sustainability Programme, budgets linked specifically to the Council's Corporate Plan, Climate Strategy and CAP.

Legal Implications. The Council's environmental sustainability duties are underpinned by legislation e.g. [Environment Act 2021](#). All local authorities have obligations under the [Climate Change Act 2008](#) with regard to climate change adaptation (resilience) and mitigation (emission reductions). [Full Council declared a Climate Emergency in June 2019](#).

Risk Assessment. Progress on Performance Indicators (PI) provided separately by Performance and Risk Reports. There are 2 main risks (to the Council): 1) that the Council does not take sufficient actions to enable it to meet its Climate Emergency declaration ambitions; and 2) that the financial implications of Climate Change are not adequately measured and reflected in the Council's decision making.

Impact on Climate Change. The role of the Climate and Sustainability (C&S) Specialist in support of the corporate officer team is central to the Council's Climate and Sustainability Programme by actions such as the development of strategic positions and delivery of projects through internal, community and partnership work.

Equalities Impact Assessment. There are no equality impacts associated with this report. Specific projects and policies are subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty. (Assessing the equality impacts of proposed changes to policies, procedures and practices is not only a legal requirement, but also a positive opportunity for authorities to make better decisions based on robust evidence.)

Relationship to Corporate Plan. Please refer to Section 2, paragraphs 2.1 - 2.2.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off / mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151.
Date: 12 Jan 2024

Statutory Officer: Philip Langdon
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer.
Date: 15 Jan 2024

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh
Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director.
Date: 12 Jan 2024

Performance and risk: Steve Carr
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager.
Date: 09 Jan 2023

Cabinet member notified: Yes.

Report: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No.

Appendix: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Jason Ball, Climate and Sustainability Specialist: Email: JBall@MidDevon.gov.uk Tel: 01884 255255.

Background papers: The previous report was provided to the [Environment Policy Development Group](#) on [10 October 2023](#). Biodiversity statutory duty [report](#) submitted to [Cabinet 09 January 2024](#).