

Chairman's Report: The Environment Policy Development Group (PDG) 2023-2024.

In my first term as an elected member of Mid Devon District Council, I've had the privilege of chairing the Environment Policy Development Group (PDG), a role aligned with my deep passion for environmental issues.

Since the change in administration in May 2023, the Environment PDG has effectively embraced its responsibilities.

The Environment Policy Development Group (PDG) acted to further environmental sustainability in the round, influencing both the Council's operational practices and its broader responsibilities to Mid Devon's communities.

The Environment PDG has shaped, scrutinised, and recommended important initiatives brought forward by officers, such as:

- Regular Climate Change and Sustainability Updates.
- Revenue and Capital Outturn Reports.
- Environment and Enforcement Policy.
- Waste and Recycling and a review of the Bin It 123 Scheme, including education for residents in relation to reducing side-waste from the Environmental Enforcement Team.
- The MDDC draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan to support the council presenting a balanced budget for the financial year 2024/2025.
- Management of Himalayan Balsam & other invasive species.
- Corporate Performance.
- Amendments to the Fly Tipping Policy for a proactive reduction in fly-tipping incidents.
- Green Standards in Planning including renewable and alternative Energy, Energy efficiency and Community Energy Projects.
- Renewable Energy in Mid Devon District Council.
- Support for the council's biodiversity duty.
- Staying up to date with the Climate Action Plan.

Our Environment Enforcement Team has excelled in enforcing best practices, handling diverse cases such as abandoned vehicles, fly-tipping, environment enforcement, and parking. By patrolling town centres, car parks and other key areas of the District to proactively identify any arising issues or concerns. Their efforts have played a pivotal role in our Continuous Improvement program, addressing concerns raised by elected members to maintain the cleanliness of our district.

Our District Officers have been instrumental in transitioning to three-weekly bin collections, resulting in Mid Devon District Council coming within the top 10% of all Councils for our recycling rate and reduction in residual tonnage. I would like to extend my utmost congratulations to all staff and residents that have helped us achieve this.

One of the first actions of the Environment PDG was to reconstitute the Net Zero Advisory Group, which has been expertly chaired by Cllr Beckett Fish as we strive to achieve our Net Zero objectives.

NZAG has been re-established in order to support the Environment PDG identify the most effective ways of achieving zero carbon output in Mid Devon. Members from all PDGs participate in the Net Zero Advisory Group (NZAG) which has helped explore and steer activity on a wide range of topics.

NZAG have identified a number of ways of building reports on the status of carbon output across Mid Devon and are bringing together a number of metrics for regular review so we can track our performance.

The discussions have looked at a wide number of pathways to furthering the council's achievement of net zero, we have looked at these routes against the amount of impact they will have, the time taken, any cost and just how achievable the plan is.

Areas that are being focussed on include:

- "Greener" policy planning.
- Energy saving and decarbonisation.
- Developing more "green" spaces.
- Rivers partnership.
- Council & Communities Action Plan.
- Supporting local energy projects.
- Supporting local food growing.

NZAG are targeting greener policy planning and energy saving/ decarbonisation as areas where we can make the most traction in the shortest time.

We would like to express thanks to officers Jason Ball and Paul Deal for their assistance as we develop our plans. Also to all members who have contributed to our discussions particularly Cllr Josh Wright and Cllr Natasha Bradshaw.

I would like to thank fellow members for their contribution to the debates this year, and officers for their guidance, support and professional recommendations. Particular thanks also goes to David Parker for organising agendas, report packs, and ensuring everything runs smoothly. Your help and support is really appreciated.

As Chairman, it has been an honour to serve, and I look forward to continuing my commitment to the committee. Balancing tight budgets, increasing demands on public services, and fostering sustainable communities remains our generation's greatest challenge. I look forward to being part of the discussions and debates that help that future.