

## **Chairman's Report: Planning, Environment & Sustainability Policy Development Group (PDG) 2024-2025.**

This new Committee superseded the Environment PDG in June 2024 with the following terms of reference – “To be a leader and pioneer of best practice so new innovation and thinking is at the heart of the services we deliver and informs our planning policies”

I was honoured to be elected as Chair by Members of the Council to build upon the excellent work of Cllr Matt Fletcher and his predecessor Cllr Josh Wright who played a pivotal role in building the influence of this important area of focus.

I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of Jason Ball, Angie Howell, Paul Deal and the Management Team at Mid Devon District Council not just in facilitating and supporting our meetings to date but in grasping our ideas and wishes and putting them into practice. I also very much appreciate the support of my Vice Chair Cllr Guy Cochran and the Members of this Committee, along with the input of Cllr Natasha Bradshaw, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.

The work of this Committee is core and fundamental to the impact of the work undertaken by this administration, our efforts, I hope, will serve to support Mid Devon communities for decades to come. We have had widespread support from across the Members of the Council and as such have tried to grasp the opportunity to really make a difference with full support.

Taking on climate change, turning off the carbon “gas tap”, encouraging people to be living in harmony with our beautiful environment here in Devon, protecting our incredible landscapes, wildlife and rivers are precious and valiant aims we all share.

As a Committee our challenge has been to ensure that we build a widely understood “dashboard” of key indicators that enable us to see where we stand as a District Council. Thus we very much appreciated the establishment of the Climate Action Plan 2024 which has brought together this information and guidance to ensure that we continue to reduce our carbon emissions footprint each year. This report confirmed a reduction of 1.2k tCO<sub>2</sub>e before adding offsetting over the last year. Whilst this is a small step to reducing over 16k tCO<sub>2</sub>e, having a plan is vital. We can now see what it looks like and measure our success.

As a Committee we engaged in a wide range of topics. These included:

- Establishment of 2 habitat banks to ensure local developments can meet at 10% minimum threshold.
- Supported development of the budget.
- Set out to extend officer capacity to support wider engagement with community groups such as SASSY (Serious about a sustainable society and led by youth).
- Supported the establishment of new EV charging stations in Tiverton, Crediton and Cullompton.
- Assisted the build out of Climate Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plans.

- Recommended further development of Green Enterprise Grants.
- Made input to MDDC's submission to the National Planning Policy Framework.

In tandem with this PDG an informal Committee called Net Zero Advisory Group (NZAG) has also been meeting under my continued Chairmanship. Here we have focused upon building out a user friendly dashboard that shows how the Council is performing in key climate change areas so we can clearly measure and target future achievements. Having pinpointed a number of key areas we have appointed "Champions" to act as knowledge experts and to help us further our aims in each area ie Planning Policy. We have established key areas of engagement such as community engagement that have subsequently be taken into the Policy Development Group.

I would also like to thank all fellow Members for their contribution to the NZAG debates this year, and officers for their professional support and guidance.