

**MINUTES of a MEETING of the PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY
POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 11 March 2025 at 5.30 pm**

Present

Councillors

B Fish (Chair)
G Cochran (Vice-Chair), C Adcock,
C Connor, G Czapiewski, A Glover,
C Harrower, L Knight and G Westcott

Also Present

Officer(s):

Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Paul Deal
(Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Jason
Ball (Climate and Sustainability Specialist) and Angie
Howell (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online

E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski, S Keable, J Lock and
D Wulff

Officers Online

Tristan Peat (Forward Planning Team Leader)

1 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Members were reminded of the need to declare any interests where appropriate.

No interests were declared under this item.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Paul Elstone asked the following questions in relation to Agenda Item 9.

Question 1

It is noted that a Member of this Committee has raised a Scrutiny Committee proposal and linked to planning application Agricultural Land use concerning Anaerobic Digesters and Solar Farms.

A year ago, I asked questions about Anaerobic Digester (AD) and Solar Farms including questions about numbers and land usage. When I asked my questions the answers, I received very clearly indicated that Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) had no clear idea of not only land usage but also of power generation capacity and number of installations.

That MDDC were placing reliance on data from various sources but there were no definitive results. Having looked in detail at the data sources used by MDDC the data is seriously incomplete. I am being polite. I am more than happy to validate that statement.

Will this Committee revisit the requirement to have a complete data set showing land usage and power generation capacity for each AD and Solar Farm in Mid Devon?

Information that is readily available and simple to collate, this if you know where and are prepared to look. It is not time consuming to do so.

Question 2

In terms of AD land usage are this Committee aware that one AD in Mid Devon requires over 300 hectares or nearly 750 acres of agricultural land to grow what are called power crops such as maize this to produce 1 megawatt an hour of electricity for 365 days of the year.

That a solar farm with battery storage would require just 20 hectares to produce the same electrical energy over the year.

Question 3

Are this Committee aware of the extent of Greenhouse Gas emissions associated with AD's?

That AD's are nothing like as green as many wish to project. This where power crops are the major source of feedstock, unlike food waste, cow slurry or chicken litter.

Available data indicates that around 3 tonnes of CO₂ can be released for every hectare of land ploughed.

It is estimated that the tractor movements for one AD in Mid Devon to be as high as 40,000 miles per year. That typical tractor fully laden can consume around one litre of diesel per mile. Therefore, adding around 116 tonnes of CO₂ to the atmosphere. Not including CO₂ emissions for harrowing, tilling, spraying and harvesting plus spreading of digestate.

Time prevents me from listing all the greenhouse emissions related to an AD, but it should never be forgotten the amount of CO₂ produced due to the manufacture of the AD itself plus deconstruction and that for every tractor trailer and tanker associated.

Bottom line 2 of the 3 ADs in Mid Devon are very far from being as environmentally green as the operator's project.

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The Chair confirmed that a written answer would be supplied within 10 working days.

Paul Elstone confirmed that he would not expect an answer with regard to the last 2 questions.

4 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 November 2024 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

5 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair had no announcements to make.

6 **EXE VALLEY SHARED PATH SUPPORTERS GROUP**

The Group received a presentation by Richard Sommerwill from the Exe Valley Shared Path Supporters Group (EVSPSG).

A summary of the information provided was as follows:-

- The Exe Valley Shared Path Supporters Group had developed over the past few years as the Tiverton to Exeter railway line had been used for years and had massive potential.
- Support had been received from Bickleigh Parish Council and Tiverton Town Council as well as support on social media.
- In the late 1990's Devon County Council (DCC) had looked at this route although buying land from farmers was found to be difficult.
- In June 2020 DCC were asked to support the scheme but unfortunately it was not a current strategy.
- The Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan which was published in 2024 did not feature the railway line.
- The EVSPSG wished to propose development of the route in stages.
- There would be huge benefits to the scheme in terms of reducing cyclists on the roads, improving the health and wellbeing of the populations, reducing car journeys and carbon emissions and a huge boost to tourism.
- There was hope to raise funding through sponsorship and crowdfunding.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- How Mid Devon District Council could help to support the scheme. It was explained that support from District Councillors would be required to help take the scheme forward to DCC.

The PDG thanked Mr Somerwill for his presentation.

7 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD QUARTER 3

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, a *slide showing the Performance Dashboard for Quarter 3 2024/2025. The following was highlighted within the report:-

- The overall performance was presented in a pie chart and combined RAG (red, amber, green) ratings from both performance and finance measures to indicate overall performance.
- Building Control Income was slightly below budget due to the depressed housing market.
- Two indicators related to capital projects were shown as red
- There had been an underspend due to a slippage on installation of additional EV charging over and above the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) scheme run by Devon County Council.

Note: * Performance Dashboard previously circulated.

8 WILLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Group had before it a report * from the Director of Place and Economy considering the Willand Neighbourhood Plan.

The report was presented by the Forward Planning Team Leader and the following was highlighted within the report:-

- The outcome of the recent Local Referendum held for the Willand Neighbourhood Plan on 27 February 2025.
- There was a requirement for Mid Devon District Council to make a decision regarding the adoption of the Plan.
Those eligible to vote were asked the following question “Do you want Mid Devon District Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Willand to help it to decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area”?
- The results of the Referendum were published on the Council’s website and were as follows:-
 - (i) The number of votes cast in favour of a yes was 269.
 - (ii) The number of votes cast in favour of a no was 29.
 - (iii) There was one spoilt ballot paper.
 - (iv) The total number of votes cast was 299.
- The outcome of the vote was that 90% of voters were in favour of the Willand Neighbourhood Plan which meant it had obtained the same legal status as a Local Plan.
- As a result of that, the Neighbourhood Plan had become part of the Statutory Development Plan for the area.
- This meant that applications for planning permission must now be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, including the Willand Neighbourhood Plan, unless material considerations indicated otherwise.
- The Council must now formally adopt the Plan as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 8 weeks from when the Referendum was held.

- The Council may refuse the Plan if it considered that making it would be a breach or would otherwise be incompatible with any remaining EU obligations or any human rights obligations.
- Mid Devon District Council officers held the view that the making of the Plan would not breach those obligations.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:-

1. The Willand Neighbourhood Plan (Appendix 1) is 'made' (adopted) and brought into force as part of the statutory development plan for the Willand area;
(Proposed by Cllr L Knight and seconded by Cllr B Fish)
2. The Willand Neighbourhood Plan Adoption Decision Statement (Appendix 2) is published to meet the publicity requirements in the Regulations.
(Proposed by the Chair)

Note:-

- (i) Cllr C Harrower and Cllr G Westcott abstained from voting as they were not present for the duration of this item

Reason for the decision

As set out in the report.

Note *Report previously circulated.

9 **CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** a report* from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change which was presented by the Climate and Sustainability Specialist Officer.

The following was highlighted within the report:-

- Mid Devon District Council had recently recruited a Project Manager who would be helping to deliver on the green projects.
- A total of 1810 trees had been planted this season which was three times above the Council's target.
- Green Business Grants were about to be launched and would be publicised.
- The Council were building on community engagement in relation to the Climate Change Strategy.
- Efforts were underway to consider how to support or enhance the status of the Grand Western Canal.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- The various designations which may help to enhance and protect the Grand Western Canal.
- The planting of trees and that free trees could be obtained from the Devon Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.
- The protection of trees once they had been planted.
- The Sustainable Tiverton Share Shop and how this could be better accessed.
- Free parking in the town centre for volunteer workers or the ability to pay “by the hour”. It was explained that parking meters had set time frames.

It was **AGREED** that the Head of Finance, Property and Climate Resilience would investigate parking charges further with the Council’s Parking Services Team and report back to this PDG.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

10 PLANNING SUMMARY REPORT

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** a report* from the Director of Place and Economy summarising activity undertaken in relation to planning matters. The following was highlighted within the report:-

The report summarised the actions from the proceeding months in relation to planning matters. The following updates were included within the report:-

- (i) New National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- (ii) New Local Plan
- (iii) Development Management Policies
- (iv) Development Management
- (v) S106
- (vi) Conservation
- (vii) Building Control
- (viii) Planning Enforcement

The following was highlighted within the report:-

- The various proposed changes to the planning system such as the housing delivery targets.
- The Planning and Infrastructure Bill had been presented by Government today and it appeared that this would propose or introduce significant changes to the way the planning systems worked in the UK and how development would come forward in the future.
- Local fee setting would be delegated to Local Planning Authorities to allow costs to be covered.
- Nationally, planning application volumes were down by approximately 2%.
- An advertisement for a Planning Enforcement Officer was now live on the Council’s website with a closing date of 28 March 2025.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

11 CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Group had before it and **NOTED** the * Chair's Annual Report for 2024/2025.

The Chair stated that the Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group would bring life to the ideas of elected Members with the support of officers, input from local constituents and local organisations to continue to build, enhance and preserve the beautiful Devon landscape against the effects of climate change.

There were a huge number of routes to be pursued to make the most impact and to leave a lasting legacy. Steps taken would make a real difference to the community in the years ahead.

This report along with all other Chair's reports for 2024/2025 would be presented at full Council on 23rd April 2025.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

(The meeting ended at 18:59)

CHAIR