

Response to public questions at Planning Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group (PDG) on 10 June 2025.

Dear Mr Moore,

Thank you for the questions you submitted to Planning Environment and Sustainability PDG. For simplicity, the responses below relate to the three main areas you covered. We welcome questions from the public, and elected members value the opportunity to hear from residents who challenge the Council about its activities and policies.

How the Council acts to reduce the carbon footprint (emissions of greenhouse gases) associated with its activities, and value for money.

It is only right that the Council spends wisely. Each year the Council will set out a [Climate Action Plan](#) to reduce its carbon footprint to support its [Climate Change Strategy](#) 2024-2028.

Proposed capital spend projects with green benefits are evaluated in the same budgeting process as any other potential investments, and must be able to deliver value for money. Projects are evaluated to enable prioritisation. The 'climate' card does not override the need for robust business cases. How much and how fast the Council cuts from its carbon footprint is bound by funding, so the Council always seeks to identify suitable finance initiatives and external funding in order to conserve and boost core service budgets.

The Climate Change Strategy sets out a pragmatic approach on how its teams can understand and focus efforts on areas that are: within its direct control; or which present opportunities to invest (e.g. facilities and tenanted properties); and opportunities to reform operations or to influence its supply chain (e.g. procurement and contract management). The majority of carbon footprint reductions are likely to be in the 'direct control' areas, set within a relatively small part of the bigger picture, and this is to be expected.

Reasons for acting to reduce emissions, and whether it makes a difference.

Beyond saving energy, money and carbon as a Council it is also important to consider the wider influence the public sector can have with the communities they serve and supply chains they do business with.

Projects compatible with a 'net zero' trajectory of change can be the best choice for a number of reasons. Environmental gains and benefits to local people overlap e.g. investing to reduce energy bills tends to cut emissions; insulation and ventilation to make homes more comfortable in heatwaves help tenant wellbeing rapidly, and also deliver long-term resilience.

Development of clean energy tech means the advantages often outweigh the old options. Electric cars and EV chargers were once rare in Mid Devon but are swiftly becoming commonplace. Regulatory drives for better efficiency (e.g. Future Homes Standard, decent homes standards) present huge potential value to local enterprises and if this can save our residents and businesses money, that's good for the local economy too.

Arguably a green local government policy direction is best placed to make the most of the 'bigger picture' getting greener. (Would 'do nothing' policies actively avoid the gains? Could rejecting a drive for sustainability be more costly than embracing it?)

Consider a review of the basis for Council's climate change policy.

A process of review, proposal and debate was carried out for the Council's 2024-2028 Corporate Plan, and this fed into a review of our strategic environment and policy priorities for the [Climate Change Strategy](#) 2024-2028, considered at PDG and [approved](#) by Cabinet.

The Council is open to scrutiny and independent audit at several levels; it has also used independent advice on policy development and evidence gathering for policy (e.g. Local Plan). The Council's environmental sustainability duties are underpinned by legislation e.g. the [Climate Change Act 2008](#) with regard to adaptation (resilience) and mitigation (emission reductions). There is also independent advice and scrutiny for UK strategic policy, strategies, guidance and legislation, such as by [the Climate Change Committee](#).

The scale and pace of the problem can be overwhelming; naturally we must question the best course of action. How do we understand local [impacts](#), the local [risks](#) and global [context](#) to then inform policies and actions that address them?

Your question noted that the Earth's climate has always changed - a fact based on a colossal body of scientific evidence that enables us to appreciate that human impacts are inducing rapid and unsustainable change. [Atmospheric CO₂](#) is reckoned to be higher now [than at any point in the last 800,000 years](#) (with effects such as a rise in ocean acidity) and human activity

produces other powerful greenhouse gases too. The Met Office just announced [a rising likelihood of hot days](#) - Senior Scientist, Dr Gillian Kay, said: "The chance of exceeding 40°C has been rapidly increasing, and it is now over 20 times more likely than it was in the 1960s."

Responding to climate change is not only mandatory, and something that makes sense, but is also mandated democratically and supported by popular views in favour of acting to address climate change and the problems linked to it. [Our Residents' Survey 2024](#) showed 81.3% of residents felt it was fairly or very important for the Council to tackle climate change.