

Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG – Public Questions and Answers (23 September 2025)

Name of Person Submitting Question	Questions
Andrew Moore	<p>My thanks to the PDG for responding to the questions raised at the last meeting. I am reassured that the Council continues the pragmatic investment strategy adopted by the S151 Officer and previous administration.</p> <p>The Climate Change Committee is cited. However, it is widely recognised as untrustworthy, except by those with blind adherence to climate alarmism. It is populated by advocates of the 'green agenda' with vested interests in green businesses. It determines government policy without democratic control. It's lost touch with reality - actual floating offshore wind prices are 7 times the CCC's naïve figures. The Met Office is also cited, yet it too has been discredited. It's used unscientific methods to create a false narrative of temperature change. 80% of its measurement sites are Cat 4 and 5 with potential errors of up to 5 degrees. It's fabricated temperature records where none exist.</p> <p>You say, 'The scale and the pace of the problem can be overwhelming.' That is categorically untrue, and the public are increasingly 'not buying it'. There is increasing evidence that many of the cited calamity events are within normal tolerances. Recent studies show that CO2 levels lag temperature - other forces are also at play. Modelling often sensationalises with extreme scenarios, even assuming mankind really understands something as complex, large and non-linear as the climate. The heart of my question was whether there is any real point in pursuing a 'Net Zero' strategy, let alone even increasing core budget as proposed. It is a weak response to state that Plans and Strategy documents are in place, and that's that. Serious questions are now being raised about the veracity of the CO2-driven climate change narrative. For a PDG not to consider these is complacent. I note that from the Update Report after 7 years of effort, the total reduction for MDDC is 361 tCO2, just 2%. It's even gone up in the past 12 months and is now above the average for that same period.</p>

Question 1

Can you please advise how much the Council has spent on its Climate Emergency initiative over 7 years (in direct and external funding including routine work and projects)?

[Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG](#)

Over the period 2018/19 to 2024/25, the Council has spent £4,231k in total on a range of projects including Solar PV and Battery Storage (BESS), Air Source and Ground Source Heat Pumps (ASHP and GSHP), Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Units, and replacing some of our vehicle fleet with Electric Vehicles (EV).

Across that same period, the Council has successfully bid for external funding totalling £2,807k through Salix / Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, in relation to the Solar PV and ASHP / GSHP at the leisure centres.

Therefore, the net spend is £1,424k on direct projects that have contributed to reducing our carbon footprint in line with the agreed Climate Emergency initiative.

The Council also spends an element of its base budget improving our operational efficiency and the service we provide to residents and customers, which also benefits our carbon footprint. For example replacing aging boilers, windows etc within our housing stock to improve living standards for our tenants. This is something we would be expected to do as a prudent local authority and is therefore not included within the figures reported above. This is demonstrated by £1,067k of the above direct MDDC contribution being spent on further Solar PV and the move to EV. £748k of that spend on Solar PV was committed to before the agreement to the Climate Emergency initiative.

Saving money is the most immediate and tangible benefit of the Council's investments to improve energy efficiency, install solar power and move to cleaner energy tech, such as at our leisure centres - where such projects serve our communities well by helping to secure a bright future with financially stable leisure services, reducing the burden on the leisure membership and wider taxpayer.

Benefits to local residents and customers, better living standards for our tenants, and healthy homes are top priorities; the best choices for our residents are also good for the environment e.g. local air quality. So it would be simplistic and misleading to suggest that any works that reduce greenhouse gases solely belong to a net zero policy.

The majority of elements in the Council's carbon footprint are not within our direct control and are therefore very difficult to alter. As highlighted within the update report on today's agenda (23 September 2025) over the timeframe since the declaration of the climate emergency, the Council has reduced the impact of elements within our control by 35% and we have affordable plans to reduce it further.

By seeking to reduce energy cost volatility, the Council's spend-to-save decisions have supported good value, financial stability and excellent service delivery.

Question 2

Given the questions around the climate change narrative, MDDC's negligible contribution, that expenditure is having little effect, and with a big forecast financial shortfall, wouldn't public money be better spent on community work / grants with an immediate and tangible benefit?

Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG

The Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group (PES PDG) considers budget setting on an annual basis and makes recommendations to Cabinet. Budget decisions are the remit of Cabinet.

Thank you for recognising the success we have had in securing the majority of the funds spent through external sources and that the Council has a pragmatic investment strategy.

Certainly the Council recognises there is great value in spending money on community grants, with Strategic Grants seeking to support the excellent work of organisations such as Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT), Citizens Advice, Mid Devon Mobility, Involve – Voluntary Action in Mid Devon, Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life, Tiverton Tourist Information Service (primarily with economic, social and health benefits) and Grand Western Canal (with similar benefits and additionally supporting the conservation of active travel and cultural and natural heritage).

Ensuring that residents are able to get information and advice through locally-delivered services and are helped to access local cultural, leisure activities and opportunities helps to reduce travel pressures and boosts co-benefits e.g. shared community transport helps community wellbeing and lessens road congestion - less air pollution is good for health, and connection to green spaces promotes active lifestyles.

Projects recommended by the PES PDG include the delivery of Green Enterprise Grants that have enabled local small and medium sized enterprises to save energy and money, and can help resilience against energy price volatility.

The Council is also working in partnership with organisations that have excellent track record in community engagement around farming, food and the living landscapes on Mid Devon e.g. *Connecting the Culm* - a project run by the team at the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, who work closely with farmers, foresters and other stakeholders.

Question 3

Will this PDG amend planning guidance to prioritise food security, the natural environment, and the beauty of Mid-Devon over conflicting solar and wind development proposals?

Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG

Planning guidance is outside the remit of the PES PDG.

	<p><u>Question 4</u></p> <p>Will this PDG commission a study into the evidence counter to the standard climate change narrative better to inform its strategy for the future?</p> <p>Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG</p> <p>The Council has used independent advice and evidence to inform its work e.g. Local Plan policies and had provided links to academic papers and independent data in its Climate Change Strategy. The PDG was interested to know whether you cited academic sources to support your assertions.</p> <p>Responding to address climate change is democratically mandated and has popular support. <u>Our Residents' Survey 2024</u> showed 81.3% of residents felt it was fairly or very important for the Council to tackle climate change. At the same 23 September PDG meeting where your questions were presented, three other members of the public presented questions with a different perspective and spoke of concerns about greenhouse gas pollution and other impacts of practices around waste and energy.</p>
Sarah Coffin	<p>As stated in the officer's report Farm-fed Anaerobic Digesters (those under Mid Devon control) can have either negative or beneficial impact, dependent on three fundamental operational principles:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustainable access to appropriate land to provide sufficient crop feedstock and provide safe spreading of manures and approx. 90% digestate residue, as a benefit fertiliser in accordance with WRAP/EA Rules and restrictions. Otherwise, they are classed as "waste" and require more costly disposal. 2. Sufficient secure storage of odorous feedstocks and manures/digestate to reduce emissions to air and pollution of soil and water utilising the best available techniques.

3. All industry and commerce have to be commercially viable to maintain its existence, however those that are supported by public money and purporting to be “green energy” are required to also prove they are “renewable and sustainable” in an environmentally beneficial way. I respect suggest there can be no integrity in such similar future projects, without serious assessment and full consideration of past failings as described in Motion 608.

Question1

Can I therefore request that whichever of the stated options Members choose it will include consideration of the following for all large/industrial livestock/energy projects:-

- a) Increased use of the already existing S106 or similar legal agreement, whereby approved applicants confirm acceptance and the capacity to comply with all approved planning material and mitigating conditions, as well at WRAP/EA Farming Best Practice Rules and restrictions.
- b) Identify and evidence showing all land versus seasonal or business let third party lands. Particularly relevant given the 2025 legal precedent set via 3 court cases: NFU v Hertfordshire Council & Ors EWHC 536 (Admin); Methwold Borough Council West Norfolk Refusal of Industrial Factory Chicken and Pig farms (citing UK Supreme Court ruling Finch v Surrey County Council) establishing the need for LPAs to fully account for both direct and indirect climate emissions; finally R (Caffyn) v Shropshire Council EWHC 1497 (Admin) Mr Caffyn’s successful claim that Council approval for £200k intensive poultry unit had failed to lawfully assess the full in-combination effects of manure and digestate spreading on third party lands.
- c) Full inclusion of all relevant historical Scrutiny Committee reports (2017/18) relating to Anaerobic Digester complaints.

[Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG](#)

The information contained within the public question/statement will be noted and addressed, where possible, through the further work to be commissioned.

Nick Govier	<p>As part of the Full Council meeting on 23 July the decision from that meeting confirmed in the minutes was for the motion to be referred to this Committee before returning to Full Council. The initial recommendations which this Committee is seeing this evening as part of those minutes. It also stated, and I quote the questions received from the member of public would be considered at the Planning, Environment and Sustainability PDG.</p> <p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>Can this Committee please confirm that all attendees have seen those questions raised by the member of public? Have they been circulated in advance and will they be considered as part of the recommendation contained in option 3 including how they will be incorporated in the scope of any further document. Turning to the recommendation, I am not naïve to the challenges of funding and resource capacity, which have been outlined in the paper and also how any developed document can only provide guidance as opposed to defined policy.</p> <p>Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG</p> <p>Members would have full access to public questions raised at the Full Council meeting. These questions will be considered in progressing further work relating to AD plants.</p> <p><u>Question 2</u></p> <p>Can I ask this Committee to ensure that any such document developed incorporates the following:- How we develop subject matter expertise in the planning function for assessing future and existing AD applications to reflect the disproportionate share of AD plants located in Mid Devon. This will negate the need for ongoing consultancy costs to review such cases.</p> <p>Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG</p> <p>The question/statement is noted. It is intended that any additional document produced will be useful to all Council officers in dealing with AD plants.</p>
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	<p><u>Question 3</u></p> <p>What knowledge and training investment can be recommended for a small cohort of planning officers? This can be sourced locally in view of the highly respected expertise in Devon in AD plants all located within close proximity to this building.</p> <p>Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG</p> <p>It is intended that any additional information/guidance developed will be available to all Council officers – thereby supporting upskilling and knowledge development in relation to AD plants.</p> <p><u>Question 4</u></p> <p>How can the applicant be mandated to support future AD applications by bringing greater transparency to the complete view of net zero impacts when submitting any future AD applications.</p> <p>Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG</p> <p>The LPA cannot introduce new planning policy or requirements in relation to AD plants through any supplementary planning document or guidance note, however the Authority can and will consider how applicants can be encouraged and supported in providing greater transparency in relation to any proposals/applications.</p>
Paul Elstone	<p>Motion 608 references a report prepared in France and which found that only 30% of AD's tested were providing green and sustainable energy. Of the AD's currently in operation in Mid Devon only one is producing green and sustainable energy. It is an on farm AD producing just 80Kw per hour of electricity. It's primary feedstock being cow slurry. The 2 largest industrial sized ADs are producing around 1 mega watt per hour of electricity. This being 100% over planning consent and with maize as the primary feedstock. They are growing energy crops to produce electricity to the grid using combined heat and power units running at around 38% efficiency.</p>

Question 1

Will this Committee recognise that these are the very worst types of AD's and which the French report identifies as not green and therefore not sustainable. AD's that require very particular consideration in any planning policy etc? This Council is very proud of its green and sustainability credentials. Be it recycling rates, net zero social homes, leisure centre energy consumption reduction, solar panel installations.

Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG

The point made is noted.

Question 2

Does this Committee fully appreciate that in a strike of a pen and in approving certain types of anaerobic digester installations and even worse the increase in power generation and resultant feedstock requirements for existing and industrial sized AD plants that all the MDDC CO2 emission savings will be negated and perhaps a hundred times over?

Therefore I would suggest that this Committee needs to access the best of technical expertise it can when deciding on the best way forward in support of its green agenda. Expertise which is available in the public realm.

Expertise with relevant Doctorates and Masters Degrees. Expertise that would come free of charge. Expertise that will relieve a time burden on officers and save MDDC cost.

Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG

The purpose of this report is to consider how the Council is best positioned to secure further guidance/advice in relation to AD plants. Any additional information to be produced for the Council by external consultants will necessarily be sought from suitably qualified individuals/organisations and will be procured in accordance with public sector procurement regulations.

Question 3

Will this Committee please fully develop this option?

The current planning approvals concerning anaerobic digesters are highly reliant on planning condition compliance. History over the last 8 plus years has shown that planning conditions are being totally ignored and without any meaningful enforcement. A list of condition breaches and based fully on evidence follows.

1. AD' exporting over twice as much electricity as the planning conditions allow. Over 1000kw per hour as opposed to 500. Even reporting different production to MDDC and OFGEM. If this condition alone was enforced much of the abuse would be controlled.
2. Feedstock and digestate tonnages far greater than consent.
3. Feedstock supplied from and digestate spread in locations not approved.
4. Failure to comply with agreed traffic routes.
5. Failure to provide correct weigh bridge data.

There are 12 separate planning condition breaches but time prevents me from completing.

Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG

The Council is active in Planning enforcement matters and take planning breaches seriously. The LPA is aware of concerns regarding the operation of some AD plants but is unable to comment on specific live cases or issues.

Question 4

Will this Committee recognise that it now has the opportunity to put much of these abuses to rights?

Response from the Chair of the Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG

The Council is limited in its ability to introduce new planning policy in relation to AD plants. The production of a consolidated guidance note will therefore support officers and members in decision making and ensure that relevant information can be considered when dealing with AD plants within the district.

