

Report to: **Council**
Date: **8th December 2020**
Title: **Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy
and Action Plan**
Portfolio Area: **Council – Neil Jory (Leader), Mike Davies
(Chair of the Climate Change and
Biodiversity Working Group)**
Wards Affected: **All**
Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**
Date next steps can be taken: Immediately
following this meeting

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Council is RECOMMENDED:

- 1. That the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy (as set out at Appendix 1 and including an updated Action Plan) is adopted;**
- 2. To note that the Action Plan will be a continually evolving document and grant delegated authority to the Director of Governance and Assurance to make revisions to the Plan as and when deemed necessary;**
- 3. To update the Terms of Reference of the Hub Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable for the Strategy and Action Plan to be updated (by the Hub Committee) and reviewed (by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) on a six-monthly basis;**
- 4. To instruct Officers to establish an officer led Community Forum and hold a quarterly Community Forum meeting with each**

session focused around a Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy theme.

5. To put on record its thanks to the Members of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group for developing the draft Strategy and Action Plan.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 At the meeting of full Council on July 23rd 2019 it was resolved that the Council sign the Devon Climate Emergency Declaration (Minute CM 29 refers).
- 1.2 At the meeting of full Council on 17th December 2019, the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group was requested to develop a Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy to be brought back to full Council for approval and that an update on progress against the adopted aims be brought back to Council on an annual basis.
- 1.3 This report provides an update to Members and sets out progress to date.

2. Background

- 2.1 At Full Council on 17th December 2019 Members considered a comprehensive report, including an action plan, on Climate Change and Biodiversity.
- 2.2 A key part of the resolution arising from the meeting was to develop a Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy. It was originally intended to bring the Strategy to Council on 22nd September 2020.
- 2.3 Since the Full Council on 17th December 2019 the COVID-19 pandemic through much of 2020 has meant that officer and Member resources have been focussed on the Council's response phase and the provision of support to residents and businesses.
- 2.4 The Council continues to play a key role, alongside partners, in responding to the short, medium and long term impacts of the pandemic and at this stage all plans need to remain flexible.
- 2.5 In view of this, the report recommends that the Council adopt this first version of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy recognising that the actions within it will continually develop and may be subject to delay due to the ongoing pandemic.
- 2.6 It is important to highlight the correlation between the Council's Recovery and Renewal Plans and the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy and also the emerging Interim Devon Carbon Plan, which will

contain actions that partners such as West Devon Borough Council will have the ability to deliver.

- 2.7 It is also important to recognise the excellent work that has been undertaken by the Members of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group to progress this vital work during the ongoing challenges arising from the pandemic.

3. Outcomes/outputs

- 3.1 The Council recognises the need to reduce its carbon footprint, and to respond to the challenges of climate change and loss of biodiversity in the interests of local, national and global well-being.
- 3.2 This report sets out a summary of the Council's progress and the strategic approach to work towards its adopted aims in light of its declaration of a Climate Change and Biodiversity emergency.

4. The Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy

- 4.1 Whilst recognising that the development of a draft Action Plan and the establishment of the Council's first Greenhouse Gas inventory (Carbon footprint) were positive steps forward, the need for a strategic framework setting out evidence, aims and objectives became clear.
- 4.2 The first version of the West Devon Borough Council Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy can be found at Appendix 1. This document has been put together by the Council's new Climate Change Officer, Adam Williams formerly a Planning Specialist for the Council, who was appointed during the first 'lockdown' after an external recruitment process and started on 1 June 2020.
- 4.3 The Council has committed to the following aims;
- That the Council aim to reduce its organisational carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030;
 - That the Council commit to working with partners through the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group to aim to reduce the Borough of West Devon's carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 at the latest;
 - That the Council aim for a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in the habitat value of its green and wooded public open space by 2025;
- 4.4 The Actions within the Strategy have been refined following discussions between officers and the Working Group and represent a culmination of key priorities that the Council should focus on in order to assist the Borough, and the County, to become net-zero by 2050.

- 4.5 The actions proposed are, in general, necessarily high level, capitalising on the Councils position as an influencer, partner and facilitator between residents, business, stakeholders and elected members.
- 4.6 Setting targets for reducing carbon emissions is notoriously difficult. A key factor is the level of control over which, in this case, the Council have in securing the necessary reductions. Whilst the Council can influence, promote and support change it has very limited direct control other than over its own activities. The Strategy proposes to continue to monitor yearly carbon emissions data but to continue to engage and work with the Devon Carbon Plan, utilising expertise involved with that process.
- 4.7 As highlighted in 2.6 above, this strategy complements the Council's Recovery and Renewal plan and relevant actions from within the first iterations of the Recovery and Renewal plan have been carried across into the Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 4.8 As a signatory of the Devon Climate Emergency, the Council is a key partner in the development of the Devon Carbon Plan. The progress on this has been delayed in part because of partner pressures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, however public consultation on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan is expected to commence on 7th December 2020.
- 4.9 With that in mind it is proposed the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy is updated again within 1 year, at which point the Devon Carbon Plan would have completed its consultation process. This will allow officers to cross reference both plans to ensure that they are both complementary and suitably resourced.
- 4.10 Since declaring a Climate Emergency, and despite the on-going pandemic, Officers have continued to work on tasks and projects that will aid the Borough in becoming net zero by 2050. Most notably we have secured £224,500 from the governments Green Homes Grant Scheme in order to provide insulation and some air source heat pumps for eligible households. Officers have also been undertaking some work relating to the application of Policy DEV32 as part of the Joint Local Plan Supplementary Planning Document and have also been working with Plymouth City Council on project brief for Renewable Energy Capacity in the Plan area which may be used as evidence for future site allocations as part of a review of the JLP.

5. Climate Change and Biodiversity Community Forum

- 5.1 As part of ongoing work on the Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Plan, and recognising the need for collaboration on the action plan over time, it proposed that a Community Forum is established.
- 5.2 The group's purpose is to act as an informal Forum to help co-ordinate and undertake activity which is aligned with the Borough's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2050, specifically those actions which are listed in the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy.

- 5.3 The Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy is a continually evolving area of work which will change over time as opportunity and projects aligned with Climate Change are presented. The Community Forum will be encouraged to input into the Action Plan with a view to council reviewing its development plan to sit alongside this.
- 5.4 It is envisaged that the Forum will comprise 20 people, representative of age and geography, officers will also be mindful to ensure there is a strong level of Parish and Town Council representation. This will be done through an online expression of interest exercise with members selected as part of a selection process using the aforementioned criteria. In doing this, officers will also be keen to ensure voluntary community groups and community interest companies are appropriately represented. This won't be an exact science, but ensuring a good spread of ages and location will be key outcomes
- 5.5 In short, this forum will aim to oversee the development and implementation of the Council's engagement work to support the above, including considering the best methods for working with stakeholders and the wider community on the response and action plan. The forum will also represent the wider community within West Devon, acting as a link between the interests of the community and the work taking place on the ground and relaying this to the Council.

6. Proposed Way Forward

- 6.1 Recognising that the Climate Change Strategy is the Council's first version and that actions are likely to be developed, amended and created based on emerging opportunities, outcomes from the quarterly Community Forum Session and the completion of the Interim Devon Carbon Plan, it is recommended that delegated powers to amend the action plan is given to the Director of Governance and Assurance.
- 6.2 In doing this, it will be expected that updates to the Strategy and Action Plan will be presented to the Hub Committee (and reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) on a six-monthly basis to ensure continued member involvement as work progresses on the Strategy and Action Plan.

7. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	There is no statutory requirement for the Council to set climate targets, or produce a Climate Strategy

		or an Action Plan set out in the Climate Change Act 2008. The Council is, however, obliged to meet obligations in grant funding agreements; under regulatory arrangements such as through air quality reviews and monitoring under the Environment Act 1995; and in the development of local plans under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, where the local planning authority must have regard to national policies.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	Y	Some actions commit to financing some measures through developer contributions.
Risk		The key risk relates to the potential to not deliver against the aims set by the Council. By adopting a strategy and action plan and by building in regular reviews this risk is mitigated.

Supporting Information

Green Homes Grant – Report to Hub Committee Report 20 October 2020

Appendix 1

West Devon Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy