

Report to: **Council**

Date: **17 December 2020**

Title: **Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Update**

Portfolio Area: **Council – Cllr Judy Pearce (Leader)**

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 that:**

- 1. the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy (as set out at Appendix 1 and including an updated Action Plan) is adopted;**
- 2. It be noted that the Action Plan will be a continually evolving document and delegated authority be granted to the Director of Governance and Assurance, in consultation with the lead Executive Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity, to make revisions to the Plan as and when deemed necessary;**
- 3. the Terms of Reference of the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Panel be updated to enable the strategic oversight and implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan to be a function of the Executive and performance against the Action Plan to be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on a six-monthly basis;**
- 4. the verbal feedback from the Climate Change Community Forum session on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020 be noted; and**

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

**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 The Council declared a Climate Change and Biodiversity Emergency on 25th July 2019 and committed to develop an action plan ('the Plan').
- 1.2 The draft Plan was subsequently adopted on December 19<sup>th</sup> 2019 and the Council resolved to develop a Strategy Framework and consult on the Plan.
- 1.3 The Draft Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy was developed and presented to the council on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020 and again on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020.
- 1.4 Members of the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity Community Forum were selected in November following an expression of interest exercise conducted in October. The first session of the Community Forum will be held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020.
- 1.5 This report provides an update to Members, sets out progress to date, and recommends that the Council now adopt the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 At Full Council on 24<sup>th</sup> September, Members considered an updated Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy, containing both a framework and action plan.
- 2.2 A key part of the resolution arising from the meeting was to compile the first version of the Strategy and Action Plan to bring back for adoption at the Council meeting to be held on 17 December 2020;
- 2.3 In addition, another key resolution arising from that meeting was to create the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity Community Forum and hold an initial meeting before the final draft of the Strategy and Action Plan are presented to the Council meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020.
- 2.4 The Climate Change and Biodiversity Member Working Group met on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020 to discuss the content of the draft Strategy and Action Plan and to also hear about the Green Homes Grant Scheme funding that the Council was awarded from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

### **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 its strategic approach to work towards its adopted aims in light of its declaration of a Climate Change and Biodiversity emergency.

### **4. Outcomes from the first Climate Change and Biodiversity Community Forum Session**

- 4.1 Officers will provide a verbal update on the first meeting of the Forum that was held on 9<sup>th</sup> December by which time this report will already have been published.
- 4.2 The Forum will act as an ongoing collaboration between the Council and a broad cross section of the Community. However, it is recognised that Climate Change and Biodiversity loss are of critical importance and interest to a wide range of individuals and established groups across the District. It's also clear that there is expertise, knowledge and capacity that the Council should endeavour to learn from, work with and support.
- 4.3 In view of this, the Executive will continue to engage and meet, on an informal basis, with wider groups and individuals as and when appropriate in order to work towards shared aims.

### **5. The Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy**

- 5.1 Appendix 1 is the first version of the South Hams District Council Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy. Since 24<sup>th</sup> September, the Strategy has been refined in terms of content narrative and now has the inclusion of some baseline data over which the Council has a level of influence.
- 5.2 The Action Plan has been amended to include two timeframes for each action. The intention for this is to indicate when various actions are expected to begin and end. Whilst Officers are unable to identify detailed project plans at this stage, a delivery plan is being developed which will enable officers to track Council activity that has links to the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy and its Actions.
- 5.3 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 and to continue to

engage and work with the Devon Carbon Plan, utilising the expertise involved with that process.

- 5.4 In the lead up to the 26<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), due to be held in Glasgow in November 2021, having been postponed from November 2020, it is likely that increased opportunities to tackle carbon emissions will present themselves as the Government seeks to position the UK as a leader in tackling Climate Change. By having a fluid Strategy and Action Plan the Council can capitalise on emerging projects and funding to develop work streams to input into the delivery plan. A good example of this is the successful bid for the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery fund.
- 5.5 This strategy also 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.
- 5.6 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 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020.
- 5.7 With that in mind, it is proposed that the Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy is updated again within 1 year, at which point the Devon Carbon Plan will have completed its consultation process. This will allow officers to cross reference the plans to ensure that they are both complementary and suitably resourced.
- 5.8 Since declaring a Climate Emergency, and despite the on-going pandemic, Officers have continued to work on tasks and projects that will aid the District in becoming net zero by 2050. Most notably we have secured £336,750 from the governments Green Homes Grant Scheme in order to provide insulation and some air source heat pumps for eligible households.
- 5.9 Officers have also been undertaking work relating to the application of Policy DEV32 as part of the Joint Local Plan Supplementary Planning Document. In addition there is ongoing work with Plymouth City Council on a 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 Joint Local Plan.

## **6. Climate Change and Biodiversity Earmarked Reserve**

- 6.1 As a result of the ongoing financial impacts of the Pandemic, the £400,000 earmarked reserve for initiatives relating to Climate Change and Biodiversity has, as with all earmarked reserves, been under review whilst the Council's immediate and medium term financial position has been established.

- 6.2 In view of the emerging budget position, we are now able to consider how best the reserve can be utilised to work towards the Council's aims as set out in the, soon to be adopted, Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.
- 6.3 The £400,000 is a one-off earmarked reserve and Members will recall that the Executive, at its meeting on 22 October 2020 approved an allocation of £20,000 to support the delivery of work to improve the energy efficiency of the existing housing stock in light of the successful Green Homes Grant bid (Minute E.31/20 refers). This leaves an earmarked reserve of £380,000.
- 6.4 The Council's declared aims are:
- a) to reduce its organisational carbon emissions (Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions) to net-zero by 2030; and
  - b) to commit to working with partners through the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group to aim to reduce the District of South Hams' carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050 at the latest;
  - c) That the Council aim for a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in the habitat value of its green and wooded public open space by 2025;
- 6.5 It is proposed that the following split initially be adopted; £180,000 for initiatives/actions supporting a) and c) – focussed on the Council's own carbon footprint and biodiversity and showing leadership within the Community by setting a positive example.
- 6.6 The remaining £200,000 for initiatives supporting b) through a range of Community Grants. This would be split, initially, into 2 phases of £100,000 each
- 6.7 The grants - which will be a combination of small, cash grants and larger match funded awards - will be managed through the Crowdfunder Platform and offered in a manner so as to achieve, where possible, a representative geographical split across the District.

## **7. Proposed Way Forward**

- 7.1 Recognising that the Climate Change Strategy is the Council's first version and that actions are likely to be developed, amended and generated based on emerging opportunities, outcomes from the quarterly Community Forum Session and the developments with regard to the Interim Devon Carbon Plan, it is recommended that powers to amend the Action Plan are delegated to the Director of Governance and Assurance, in consultation with the lead Executive Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity.
- 7.2 In doing this, it will be expected that updates to the Strategy and Action Plan will be presented to the Executive (and reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel) on a six-monthly basis to ensure

continued Member involvement as work progresses on the Strategy and Action Plan.

- 7.3 To note the proposals for the Climate Change and Biodiversity Earmarked Reserve.

## 8. 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. This report sets out how the remaining £380,000 of the Climate Change Earmarked Reserve will, initially be split between various initiatives set out in 6.5 and 6.6.
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.

## Appendix 1

Draft SHDC Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy