

Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **19 September 2023**

Title: **A Renewed Commitment to Climate Change and Biodiversity**

Portfolio Area: **Climate Change – Cllr Lynn Daniel**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Author: **Adam Williams** Role: **Principal Climate Change Officer**

Contact: [Adam.williams@swdevon.gov.uk](mailto:Adam.williams@swdevon.gov.uk)

---

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**That the Hub Committee NOTES:**

- 1. The update regarding the Council’s progress on climate change and biodiversity and the emerging priorities set out by the new administration; and**
- 2. The launch of the ‘Mayor’s Young Person Environment Award’**

**That the Hub Committee RECOMMENDS that Council:**

- 3. Endorse the Devon Carbon Plan; and**
- 4. Support the Climate and Ecological Bill, and**
  - i. Inform the local media of their decision.**
  - ii. Write to local MPs, asking them to support the Bill.**
  - iii. Write to the CEE Bill Alliance, the organisers of the campaign for the Bill, expressing its support ([campaign@ceebill.uk](mailto:campaign@ceebill.uk)).**

**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 The Council declared a climate change and biodiversity emergency on 23 July 2019, it was resolved that the Council sign the Devon Climate

Emergency Declaration (Minute CM 29 refers). This report provides a summary of work undertaken.

- 1.2 Following the elections in May 2023 and formation of the new political administration, the Council is developing its priorities for the next four years.
- 1.3 In line with the ambition set out in the new administration's position statement and its renewed commitment to tackling the climate and biodiversity emergency, it is recommended that the Council should strengthen its position in support of the Devon Carbon Plan.
- 1.4 It is proposed that the Council should support the Climate and Ecology Bill UK which is currently before the House of Commons following its reintroduction on 10 May 2023.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Following the declaration of a Climate Change and Biodiversity emergency in 2019, the Council subsequently adopted its Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.
- 2.2 The adopted strategy and actions delivered to date have primarily focussed on reducing the Council's organisational carbon emissions and increasing biodiversity on its own land.

## **3. Climate Change and Biodiversity Update**

- 3.1 To date, much of the work undertaken by the Council has been to focus on organisational emissions and work on tackling external emissions and improving biodiversity set out in 'A Plan for West Devon'.
- 3.2 The Council was involved in a successful consortium bid to the LGA (Local Government Association) for support in developing a plan for encouraging greater uptake of retrofitting measures. This was completed in April 2023. The work was focussed on behavioural insights. In particular understanding the barriers to retrofitting homes in the able to pay market and what could be done, in a cost-effective way, to promote people to carry out cheap DIY improvements to improve the energy efficiency of their home.
- 3.3 The trial was focussed on loft insulation. The findings were that cost motivation was the primary driver for energy efficiency as opposed to environmental awareness and that people responded to normative messaging in the promotion of retrofit, as opposed to simply passing on information. We are using the findings to help shape and target future delivery.
- 3.4 We secured £9,900 through the Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund to produce a heat decarbonisation plan for our leisure centres. This was completed in March 2023 and the information obtained provides a

better understanding of our leisure centres and detail around how we can go about fully decarbonising the heating system.

- 3.5 This work will enable us to access further funding to pay for capital works, should this be considered a future priority and subject to a level of match funding.
- 3.6 Electric Vehicle (EV) charging installation is proceeding following some protracted delays with partner organisations. Four chargers went online at Mill Road, Okehampton and Hatherleigh Car Park in March 2023. Eight chargers remain to come online through the DELETTI scheme by the end of the year in Chagford, Tavistock and Bere Alston.
- 3.7 An EV Strategy has been developed and was consulted on between 6<sup>th</sup> June and 6<sup>th</sup> July. A report will be taken to Hub committee in November to outline the findings and any proposed amendments to the strategy prior to adoption. Delivery of the EV strategy will in part be facilitated in partnership with a consortium led by Devon County Council to apply for funding through the Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund.
- 3.8 We are also able to install chargers in house now with a view to increasing the charging availability for future fleet vehicle replacements. Currently we are forecasting 11 installs at 4 Council assets by the end of the year, including Pod point replacements at Kilworthy Park. These will likely be 7- 22kw chargers which are cheaper to install and often come without costly power upgrades. Feasibility is underway at more key assets within the Council's ownership.
- 3.9 Carbon Literacy Training is being rolled out to staff after two members of staff became accredited Carbon Literacy Training Facilitators. Training is offered regularly, and staff can opt in when training dates are set. The SLT (Senior Leadership Team) and Heads of Service were provided training in 2021 and subsequently the Council has become a Carbon Literate Organisation at bronze level.
- 3.10 WDBC secured a grant of £30,000 over 4 years from the Forestry Commission in autumn 2022, to plant and maintain 70 large standard trees in parks and greenspaces in Tavistock. The Grounds Maintenance team, in partnership with the Town Council planted these trees in early 2023. Additionally, the opportunity was taken to plant some surplus large trees from other schemes on our smaller open spaces in Tavistock.
- 3.11 In May 2023, over £50,000 was secured from the Defra 'Tree for Climate' fund via the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest to establish two 2ha natural woodland regeneration sites on Council owned land near Bedford Bridge (Grenofen) and Harrowbeer Lane (Yelverton). The funding primarily covers the cost of installation of

deer exclusion fencing, monitoring and site maintenance over a 10 year period.

- 3.12 Grounds Maintenance staff have been seeking opportunities to relax grass cutting where appropriate on Council greenspaces to diversify habitat beyond closely cut grass. Further opportunities will be explored to add wildlife interest (potentially by proactively creating wildflower areas) for the 2024 season, and to introducing targeted long grass 'cut and collect' using machinery now available to our Grounds Maintenance team.

#### **4. West Devon Priorities**

- 4.1 Firstly, the Council wishes to lead by example and take a vigorous stance on the Climate Emergency and to promote sustainable practices within the Council. This will be achieved through ensuring all staff are suitably trained to ensure they are all making informed decisions on matters the council carries out and how this can influence emissions and biodiversity. A new project evaluation process will be developed and trialled to help address this.
- 4.2 Furthermore, the council will promote the use of renewable energy and support and incentivise low carbon energy projects to reduce emissions as well as improve energy security and where possible, help to drive down costs.
- 4.3 This will be achieved through a continuation of our domestic retrofit programme, delivering Government grants and working with Energy Saving Devon and helping to support community energy groups through our Shared Prosperity Fund programme.
- 4.4 Travel emissions are some of the largest in West Devon, with this in mind, the Council will support walking and cycling. Active Travel is a key component of our work through the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). The Council will assess the progress of the Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan being developed through our SPF work and work towards its implementation to improve active travel infrastructure within West Devon.
- 4.5 West Devon is home to important streams and rivers flowing from Dartmoor. Water quality is important not just for leisure and recreation but also ecosystem biodiversity. The Council will work towards eliminating the discharge of raw sewage into rivers within West Devon and to collaborate with relevant authorities and stakeholders to improve sewage treatment and improve monitoring systems.
- 4.6 To this effect, it is proposed that South West Water and the Environment Agency are invited to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish what is happening in our water systems.
- 4.7 To help inform our approach and the community, the Council will provide annual reporting on carbon emissions, on both an organisational and borough-wide basis.

- 4.8 To further underpin the Council's commitment, it is proposed to recognise the efforts of the Borough's young people in carrying out environmental initiatives and to harness the energy and enthusiasm of our youth.
- 4.9 The Council will therefore introduce a 'Mayor's Young Person Environment Award', with the first one being awarded in October and then on a 2 monthly basis with the final award to coincide with the general Mayoral awards.
- 4.10 In recognising the biodiversity, ecological and carbon benefits of trees, a West Devon Tree and Woodland Plan will be developed that will set out a coordinated approach to managing trees on our land, on private land and on development sites.
- 4.11 The plan will ensure we maximise the opportunities for future tree planting whilst protecting existing stock.

## **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 At the Council meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022 the Council resolved to 'Note' the Devon Carbon Plan (minute HC. 55/21 and CM53 refers). This Council recognises the impact the Plan can have on tackling the shared ambition on the Climate and Biodiversity emergency.
- 5.2 In view of this, it is proposed that the Council 'endorses' the Devon Carbon Plan and, by doing so, fully aligns itself with partners across Devon.
- 5.3 The Council is recommended to introduce a 'Mayoral Young Person's Environment Award', with the first one being awarded in October then to on a 2 monthly basis with the final award to coincide with the general Mayoral awards.
- 5.4 The Climate and Ecological Bill (CEE), which is currently before the House of Commons following its reintroduction on 10 May 2023, sets out a range of obligations on the Government aimed at tackling the climate and ecological emergency.
- 5.5 A statement from the West Devon CEE Bill Alliance was considered and a motion to support the Bill debated at Council on 28 September 2021 (CM 37/21 and CM 38/21 refers). At the meeting an amendment was proposed and carried to support the Government's Environment Bill and not the CEE Bill. It is now recommended that the Council actively support the Bill and communicate it's intention to do so.

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	This report includes an overview of process in developing the strategy.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money.	Y	The financial implications are as set out in the report.
Risk	Y	None
Supporting Corporate Strategy	Y	Climate Change and Biodiversity
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	Y	This report directly supports the Council's commitment to tackling climate change and increasing biodiversity.
<b>Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications</b>		
Equality and Diversity		None as a direct implication of this report
Safeguarding		None as a direct implication of this report
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		None as a direct implication of this report
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		None as a direct implication of this report
Other implications		

**Appendices:**

None

**Background Documents:**

None