

BRIEF ON HOW DFPC MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFORTS TO TACKLE THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Sources:

- Devon Climate Emergency Website.
- Teignbridge DC Climate Emergency Resources Pack For Town And Parish Councils.
- DNPA Climate Action Plan.
- Carbon Trust website.

Background

“Declaring a Climate and Environmental Emergency means putting your Climate and Ecology at the heart of everything that you do”

The Devon Climate Emergency Partnership seek to achieve carbon net-zero across the county at the earliest credible date. Proposals to achieve this have been sought from climate experts and the public. A Devon Carbon Plan and a Devon Climate Declaration have been produced. All District and Borough Councils have agreed to reduce carbon emissions by 45% (of 2010 levels) by 2030 and achieve net-zero by 2050 at the latest, but most are targeting 2030. DNPA seeks net-zero for the Authority’s activities by 2025.

Process

Most organisations have embarked on a large undertaking to understand and analyse carbon emissions, capture, offsets together with their environmental footprints and risks. None have completed this task, partially due to the pandemic but also due to the complexity of the issues. Most have started interim action plans with more obvious measures to make reductions. Many bodies have linked environmental factors to the climate emergency, reflecting concerns over bio-diversity, habitat loss and pollution etc.

Means for Carbon Reduction

Broadly there are four methods considered at Local Authority level:

Avoid emissions where possible by stopping activities: eg go paperless, stop unnecessary meetings, avoid unnecessary travel etc.

Reduce emissions where activities cannot be stopped: eg using electric/hydrogen vehicles, homeworking and virtual meetings.

Source low carbon products: eg buy low carbon electricity and building materials.

Offset unavoidable emissions: eg buying carbon credits, planting trees etc.

There are risks in many solutions, particularly in transferring emissions. Homeworking can lead to home printing, extra heating and more electricity for computers: the Carbon Trust calculates homeworking increases emissions if the commute is 4 miles or less each way. Similarly, some energy efficient equipment can have high carbon costs in manufacture.

Parish Councils

Parish Councils have a limited powers to assist in the response to the climate and environmental emergency. So far, 27 Parish Councils in Devon have signed the Devon Climate Declaration, see Annex A, although any associated action plans are difficult to find.

Dartmoor Forest Parish Council has less scope than most as it does not own any buildings, land or vehicles. However, there are areas where the council could be active. Those listed below are taken from the Teignbridge DC Climate Emergency Resources Pack for Town and Parish

Councils, and from other Devon sources. They are listed alphabetically by the power under which action could be taken and without me promoting any one measure above another.

Allotments

Encourage landowners to donate land for Allotments and establish local support groups to share knowledge and skills to grow local produce. Run competitions to encourage the community to grow produce and encourage biodiversity in gardens and allotments.

Bus Shelters

Use these to advertise climate and environmental issues and good practice.

Cemeteries and Churchyards

Organise a Biodiversity survey to record what is alive and growing in these green spaces, connecting with Head Teachers and local primary schools. Site educational plaques. Introduce the concept of less mowing while maintaining a respectful environment.

Drainage ditches

Maintain necessary drainage whilst looking after/encouraging biodiversity. Record flooding issues and refer them to local authorities.

Footpaths

Take action to keep footpaths in use and in good order. Provide interpretive educational posters and encourage good use and understanding of paths, wildlife, farming and the countryside.

Highways

Encourage car-sharing by providing a signing-up site with destinations and times. Encourage and signpost community transport schemes.

Seek provision of electric car charging points in the Parish eg via 'Rapid Charging Exeter'.

Litter

Provision of more litterbins and support for any anti-litter campaigns.

Planning

Object to any applications that are not carbon neutral

Demand that all developments provide verifiable and enforceable mitigation for damage to the climate and environment

Openly support Green/Low Carbon planning projects

Insist on replacement tree planting and follow up with local tree warden

Postal and Telecommunication Facilities

Seek good broadband access to all properties in the community.

Public conveniences

Seek adaptation to use rainwater harvesting.

Recreation

Consider the opportunities for tree-planting and reduced mowing in public open spaces. Find spare corners of greenery to encourage wildlife, plants and insects.

Encourage landowners and gardeners to create wildflower meadows eg via 'Moor Meadows'.

Tourism

Promote green tourism.

Water Supply

Promote very careful use of water and suitable water storage and disposal.

Section 137 (This allows a Parish Council to incur expenditure for activities beyond its legal duties and powers subject to an annual limit.)

Businesses and Traders

Encourage local businesses and traders to work with green initiatives, plastic-free and reducing-waste groups. Recognise achievement, promote and celebrate publicly.

Encourage local businesses to assess their operating emissions with a view to reducing them.

Food resilience

Support local food producers and local market traders. Support or start bulk purchase/zero-waste buyers' groups. Support or start a community fridge scheme to help reduce food waste.

Climate and Environment Decisions

To respond as the Devon Climate Emergency Partnership advises would require the council to consider the climate and ecology in all its decisions. This might include our decisions on skate park design and location, grass cutting, and our relationship with local businesses and other organisations. For example, our decision to ask the Duchy to cut back trees along the Rundlestone road has led to carbon capture loss by many dozens of trees that will take new planting and many years of growth to be replaced.

Conclusions

Local Authorities across Devon have signed up to a Climate and Environmental Emergency. Long term, sustainable carbon reduction is extremely complex to analyse and understand. While this work is ongoing, interim action plans have been adopted. Parish Councils have limited powers to reduce carbon but can take small steps, and influence local businesses and people to take positive action.

Recommendations

The council consider this briefing and decide:

Whether or not to sign the Devon Climate Declaration.

Whether to implement some of the listed suggestions into council policy or projects.

NKT

12 April 2021

THE DEVON CLIMATE DECLARATION

1. This Declaration has been prepared by a consortium of public, private and voluntary organisations collaborating through a Devon Climate Emergency Response Group. It sets out an ambition to tackle climate change that covers all of Devon, including those people who live, work in and visit our county, and those businesses who are based or operate here.
2. We are aware of the significant implications of climate change for Devon's communities; it is already affecting our environment, infrastructure, economy and health & wellbeing. If not addressed, the impact on future generations will be profound and the ability to meet the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals will be severely compromised.
3. We understand that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has advised that carbon emissions must reduce globally by at least 45% by 2030 from 2010 levels and reach net-zero by 2050 if we are to avoid the worst effects of climate change by keeping warming below 1.5 degrees.
4. We will lead in the global response to climate change through our collective action, innovation and influence.
5. Individually, we will review (within 6 months) our plans to reduce our organisation's carbon emissions to meet or exceed these targets, including ensuring the people we do business with are doing the same. We will publicly report our carbon emissions annually in accessible formats.
6. In collaboration, we will engage Devon's residents, businesses and visitors to develop and implement a plan to facilitate the reduction of Devon's production and consumption emissions to meet IPCC recommendations at the latest. We will openly report progress on its delivery. We know this transformational change will be challenging and will include:
 - Deploying more renewable, decentralised and smart energy systems
 - Retrofitting energy-efficiency measures into our existing buildings
 - Constructing zero-carbon new buildings
 - Travelling less and using improved walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure more often, and using electric and hydrogen vehicles
 - Changing our consumption to use less, re-use more and choose low-carbon options
 - Challenging all economic sectors to review their practices and the values of those they do business with
 - Divesting from fossil fuels
 - Changing our dietary patterns and reducing food waste
 - Changing agricultural practices to reduce emissions associated with farming operations, manage soils sustainably and replenish soil carbon
 - Encouraging carbon storage such as through tree planting, the use of wood in construction and peatland restoration
 - Empowering the people of Devon with the knowledge and skills to act collectively.
7. Additionally, we will work to understand the near-term and future risks of climate change for Devon to plan for how our infrastructure, public services and communities will have to adapt for a 1.5-degree warmer world.
8. Local organisations and communities cannot do this alone as the national government plays a key role in many of the policy areas that are vital to reducing emissions and adapting to climate change. We call on the government to prioritise decarbonisation and adaptation within decision making and work with us by using its powers to provide the resources and funding necessary to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon and resilient economy and society.
9. We challenge every organisation, business, community and individual to do the same.