

The County Farms Estate
Devon's Climate Emergency and Green Action Plan

Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation(s):

That the Committee endorses the proposed new actions linked to the principal themes promoted by the '10 Point Green Action Plan' or otherwise linked to the Devon Climate Emergency.

1.0 Background

1.1 Members will be aware that at its meeting of 25 July, Council considered the recommendations of Cabinet in relation to the Notice of Motion submitted by Cllr. Wright which proposed the adoption of a '10 Point Green Action Plan', the purpose of which was to help mitigate the anticipated, catastrophic, effects of climate change and the associated environmental crisis. In line with the recommendation from Cabinet, it was resolved to approve the spirit of the Notice of Motion and, specifically, that the Council:

- Endorse the principle of further action to address environmental issues in line with the global concerns highlighted through relevant intergovernmental panels; and
- Mandate the Environmental Performance Board (EPB) to consider how relevant issues raised by the proposed Green Action Plan might be addressed through changes or additional to its own suite of action plans.

1.2 Attached to this report is the paper put to the County Council's Environmental Performance Board on 8 August 2019.

1.3 Members of this committee will note that the County Farms Estate has been identified as a valuable land resource that can and hopefully will play an instrumental role in supporting the County Council deliver its Climate Emergency objectives.

2.0 Options/Alternatives

2.1 Alternative options have been considered and discounted as they are believed to either be contrary to current Estate policy and/or not in the best financial interests of the Estate.

3.0 Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

3.1 The views and opinions of the Devon Federation of Young Farmers Clubs and the Estate Tenants Association will be presented by the two co-opted members to the committee.

3.2 No other parties have been consulted and no other representations for or against the proposal have been received

3.3 The technical data is believed to be true and accurate.

4.0 Financial Considerations

4.1 The Author is not aware of any financial issues arising from this report.

5.0 Environmental Impact Considerations (including Climate Change)

5.1 The Author is not aware of any environmental impact (including climate change) issues arising from this report.

6.0 Equality Considerations

6.1 The Author is not aware of any equality issues arising from this report.

7.0 Legal Considerations

7.1 The Author is not aware of any legal issues arising from this report.

8.0 Risk Management Considerations

8.1 The Author is not aware of any obvious risks to manage.

9.0 Public Health Impact

10.1 The Author is not aware of any public health impact.

11.0 Summary/Conclusions/Reasons for Recommendations

11.1 The Author has prepared this report in accordance with the findings of the County Farms Estate Strategic Review (April 2010).

Rob Parkhouse
Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support

Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers:

None

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Report to the Environmental Performance Board – 08/08/19

10 Point Green Action Plan – Opportunities for Improved Environmental Performance

Recommendation: In accordance with the County Council resolution, it is recommended that the EPB approves the approach outlined below to the adoption of enhanced environmental action.

Background

At its meeting of 25 July, Council considered the recommendations of Cabinet in relation to the Notice of Motion submitted by Cllr. Wright which proposed the adoption of a '10 Point Green Action Plan', the purpose of which was to help mitigate the anticipated, catastrophic, effects of climate change and the associated environmental crisis. In line with the recommendation from Cabinet, it was resolved to approve the spirit of the Notice of Motion and, specifically, that the Council:

- Endorse the principle of further action to address environmental issues in line with the global concerns highlighted through relevant intergovernmental panels; and
- Mandate the Environmental Performance Board (EPB) to consider how relevant issues raised by the proposed Green Action Plan might be addressed through changes or additional to its own suite of action plans.

The purpose of this report is to guide the EPB in its consideration of this issue by suggesting a possible way in which DCC might adopt enhanced environmental action in relation some of the key themes addressed by the proposed 10 Point Green Action Plan.

Issues Addressed by the 10 Green Action Plan

Attached as Appendix 1 is the factual briefing presented to Cabinet to support their consideration of the Notice of Motion and the specific proposals set out by the proposed 10 Point Green Action Plan. This highlighted: constraints (both practical and legal) to the adoption of some of specific proposals; relevant action already being taken by DCC; and identified some opportunities for further action.

This analysis suggested that adoption of the Green Action Plan in its originally proposed form was not appropriate. However, it does address themes which are clearly recognised as environmental priorities and relevant to DCC's own environmental performance agenda, specifically:

- Pollinators
- Pesticides and Fertilisers
- Habitat Protection, Creation and Tree Planting
- Soil Health
- Water Use

Proposed Approach to Enhanced Environmental Action

In line with the Council resolution, members of the Environmental Performance Management Group and NPS colleagues have considered alternative ways in which DCC might commit to enhanced environmental action. Initial ideas are set out in Appendix 2, which cover the themes highlighted above, plus DCC's declaration of a Climate Emergency (as it relates to the County Farms Estate).

The following steps are proposed to formalise this process:

1. Through its consideration of the initial ideas set out in Appendix 2, EPB to clarify its expectations in terms of the scale of ambition and general nature of the intended new action. In particular, whether this should be based on currently available staff and budgetary resources and any viable new business case for investment, or whether a case should be made for the allocation of dedicated new (or re-allocated) resources.
2. In the light of this guidance, the Environmental Performance Management Group will review and propose amendment and updating to the relevant Action Plans, in the general manner anticipated by Appendix 2.
3. If achievable (subject to other Climate Change Emergency priorities), drafts of these updated Action Plans will be brought back to the next meeting of the EPB for its consideration and sign-off.

Peter Chamberlain
Environment Manager

Appendix 1 - Briefing / Position Statement

The 'Special Report on Global Warming' published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change highlighted the need for rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society if we are to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C and, thereby, avoid the worst of the anticipated impacts of climate change. It was in this context that this Authority declared a Climate Emergency and is now working collaboratively with other strategic bodies to this end.

In a similar vein, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services has just released its first-ever assessment, indicating that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history. More than just an environmental crisis, this is characterised as a developmental, economic, security, social and moral issue which requires 'transformative change' at every level, from local to global. On this basis, it forms a direct parallel to the Climate Emergency and demands urgent consideration by all, including Devon County Council.

This Authority's approach to minimising its impact upon the environment and supporting the protection and enhancement of Devon's distinctive natural, historical and cultural surroundings is based around the nine objectives of its Environmental Policy. Since 2014 the role of implementing this policy has been overseen by an Environmental Performance Board and an associated Management Group. This has included the production of a suite of Strategy and Action Plan documents covering the following topics: energy; renewable energy; waste; plastics; water; environmentally sustainable procurement; environmental risk; and countryside and heritage interests, including an associated pollinators plan. All of these documents are available on the County Council's web pages (see: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/environment/environmental-policy>).

The 10 Point Green Action Plan promoted by this Notice of Motion has been devised in the context of the Climate Emergency recognised by Devon County Council and sets out proposals which are directly relevant to this Authority's environmental performance agenda.

The attached table lists each of these proposed actions and provides a summary assessment of constraints and opportunities associated with each. This might be used to inform the consideration of their appropriateness and practicality for adoption.

	10 POINT GREEN ACTION PLAN MOTION FOR DEVON	COMMENTARY ON OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS TO INFORM POTENTIAL ACTION BY DCC
1.	Call on the government to offer all pollinators full legal protection from harm	According to the national charity Buglife, wild pollinators include bumblebees and other bees (250 species), butterflies and moths (2200 species), flies (6700) and various other insects such as beetles, wasps and thrips. On this basis, calling on government to offer all pollinators full legal protection from harm would not appear to be a pragmatic option.
2.	Write to all Devon outlets stocking bee harming pesticides, and urge them to permanently cancel their order with the suppliers	<p>A wide range of readily available insecticides have the potential to harm bees; DCC does not hold details of Devon outlets stocking such products. In any event, the targeting of Devon outlets is questionable when such authorised products remain readily available to purchase / order from elsewhere. There might also be legal and financial constraints related to such an approach in the light of the regulatory functions exercised by Trading Standards and their need to maintain a non-political / non-campaigning stance and avoid any potential future claims of bias or civil claims relating to financial losses.</p> <p>In relation to both 1. and 2., this Authority's current proactive approach in relation to the pollinators issue is set out through the DCC Pollinators Action Plan, which includes support for the Devon LNP's 'Keep Devon Buzzing' campaign.</p>
3.	Take action to phase out all glyphosate pesticides used in council weed spraying or any other council related activity, by December 2019 (there may be exceptional circumstances such as dealing with specific non native species, such as Japanese knotweed)	<p>In the absence of any cyclic programme of weed spraying by DCC through its highway management activities, any usage would be through exceptional circumstances. However, glyphosate is currently used for several other Council activities, particularly through the grounds maintenance contract and the tree works contract (as a stump killer) and, less regularly, through specific landscaping schemes and some management operations linked to public rights of way and country parks. To limit such applications, the majority of such use is highly targeted (i.e. selective treatment, rather than blanket spraying).</p> <p>At present there is no clear consensus on the safety risks associated with the use of glyphosate or related formulations, nor on suitable alternatives which offer the same practical advantages. More informed choices should become possible as this evidence emerges.</p>
4.	Support Devon County Council tenant	The underlying purpose of the County Farms Estate is to provide people with their first

	farmers in phasing out the use of inorganic fertilisers (such as nitrogen) by December 2023	opportunity to farm, whilst also realising financial and environmental objectives. The following points on the management of the estate are relevant to the consideration of Green Action Plan points 4, 5 and 6.
5.	Support Devon County Council tenant farmers in setting aside 10 per cent of their land for wildlife and/or wildflower mixes for pollinators	The County Council's agricultural tenancy agreements have been reviewed by a Chartered Surveyor and Lawyer and, as far as we can see, provided the tenant is acting within the law and industry best practice, there are no provisions within the leases that would enable the landlord to prevent the tenant using artificial fertilisers. Similarly, the landlord is not able to insist any proportion of the farm is set aside for wildlife and/or wildflower mixes for pollinators or for tree planting.
6.	Work with community groups and non-government organisations such as Devon Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust to support Devon County Council tenant farmers to set aside five per cent of their land for tree planting	<p>Despite this, the County Council actively supports, signposts and encourages participation in all agri-environment scheme contracts by tenants, such as the current Countryside Stewardship Scheme or the standalone 'Wildlife Offer', through which they can apply for funding towards the establishment costs of creating nectar and pollen rich environments for insect pollinators, plus annual payments for maintaining these areas under a five-year contract. Tree planting can be supported through a Woodland Creation Grant, which is also available through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Tenants attending the recent Training Academy received a presentation from a consultant on applying for the current Countryside Stewardship grant.</p> <p>It is important to note that Tenants would be ineligible for these government-funded schemes if the works or management was already a requirement of the tenancy agreement.</p> <p>Where tenants have more than 15 hectares of arable land, of which less than 75% is in permanent grass, temporary grass, herbaceous forage or leguminous crops, they will need to put 5% of that land into an Ecological Focus Area (EFA) to claim their Basic Payment Scheme Entitlements. The EFA can include 'options' such as AB1 – Nectar flower mix, AB8 – Flower rich margins and crops and AB16 – Autumn sown bumblebird mix.</p> <p>The rapidly developing 'Payment for Ecosystems Services' market may well offer potential opportunities for the County Farms Estate. An example of how this operates is through reverse tender process to put land into specific management schemes which deliver public benefits in terms of improved water quality. This concept is currently being explored through Defra's 25-Year Environment Plan 'Pioneer' within the North Devon Biosphere Reserve, as well as by South West Water through its 'Upstream</p>

		Thinking' initiative. DCC will need to consider carefully any specific management requirements or restrictions on its tenants which might prevent them from benefiting from this developing market.
7.	Work with community groups and non-government organisations such as Devon Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust on supporting town and parish councils, schools and community groups to set aside land for tree planting	DCC is already working with the Devon Ash Dieback Resilience Forum to investigate ways of promoting tree planting across Devon. Specific consideration is being given to ways in which this might be encouraged through town and parish councils and community groups, particularly to compensate for the loss of ash. Cabinet previously approved the allocation of £250k in support of such compensatory planting, with this being offered as potential match-funding for the 'Saving Devon's Treescapes' project, which is focussed on exactly this type of initiative and for which lottery funding is being sought. A meeting is already planned with the Woodland Trust in June to explore how such action might be promoted in the interim.
8.	Develop a policy on soil health good practice, with an emphasis on allowing land to recover and phasing out damaging chemicals, which are ultimately sterilising the land. This would include setting appropriate and reasonable targets for Devon County Council tenant farmers	<p>Soil health is vital to the sustainability of agriculture / food production and to providing resilience to climate change and flood risk. Whilst there is no overarching DCC policy relating to this, it is specifically addressed through the letting of County Farms Estate holdings. In particular, soil health and condition is covered by clauses within all new farm tenancy agreements. There is a requirement to comply with the DEFRA Code of Good Agricultural Practice for farmers, growers and land managers – covering the protection of water, soil and air – which includes a need to produce a soil management plan. In addition, Tenants are required to take soil samples on entry to the farm and to put, keep and leave soil pH levels, and macro and micro nutrients at prescribed maintenance levels. They are also prohibited from exporting manure off the holding, ensuring that all manure produced on the holding is spread on the holding to ensure good levels of organic material are maintained.</p> <p>Soil condition is also being addressed through a range of natural flood risk management initiatives in which DCC is a partner. This included support for the publication of the excellent guide to soils and natural flood management in Devon and Cornwall, which was produced through the East Devon Catchment Partnership in 2018 and will soon be made available in an interactive web format.</p>
9.	Work with South West Water on a campaign to save water across the county, with an emphasis on education	DCC has developed a range of strategies and action plans linked to its environmental performance agenda, the most recent of which specifically deals with water consumption. The immediate corporate priority for this action plan is addressing the

	<p>about future water scarcity. Specifically target town and parish councils, community groups and schools to raise awareness of the importance of good water practice</p>	<p>objective of reducing water usage by DCC. However, broader issues of good water practice will form part of the climate adaptation agenda to be addressed in Devon through the collective response to the Climate Emergency, which South West Water is now party to.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Support Devon Wildlife Trust's campaign by calling on the Environment Secretary to allocate a further eight Marine Conservation Zones to Devon's waters. Details can be found on the DWT website - https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/take-action/marine-conservation-zones</p>	<p>In recognition of the outstanding wildlife associated with the County's estuaries and coastal waters, the 2012 advice to Government from Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee on the potential designation of Marine Conservation Zones included 14 Devon sites. Since then, the designation of only six of these sites has been confirmed. This was followed in summer 2018 by a Defra consultation on the designation of a further eight sites; however, the outcome of this consultation is still awaited. Clarification of the intended status of these remaining areas would appear to be long overdue and would help to dispel the current, unhelpful, uncertainty.</p>

Appendix 2 – Options for Enhanced Environmental Action

Listed below are examples of new actions linked to the principal themes promoted by the '10 Point Green Action Plan' or otherwise linked to the Devon Climate Emergency which might be adopted through the review of the relevant DCC (EPB) Action Plans.

Theme	Relevant DCC Action Plan	Potential Actions
Pollinators	Pollinators	Complete review and updating of DCC Pollinators Action Plan
		New phase of work on 'Keep Devon Buzzing' campaign with Devon LNP
		County Farms Estate promotion of pollinator campaign in 2020 through development of case studies and issue of special edition of newsletter.
Pesticides and Fertilisers	Pollinators and/or Countryside & Heritage	Consider how issues relating to pesticide and fertiliser use might be incorporated into future 'training academy' events for County Farms Estate tenants
Habitat Protection, Creation and Tree Planting	Countryside & Heritage	Work with Woodland Trust in launching a new Devon free tree scheme linked to ash dieback.
		Launch a new 'Flagship Trees' planting scheme with Town and Parish Councils, again linked to ash dieback.
		Approach all County Farms Estate tenants to review opportunities for new tree planting and provide tree stock.
		Undertake a review of new tree planting opportunities on DCC highways land and former landfill sites.
		Work with DWT / DBRC to facilitate preparation of Devon Nature Recovery Network strategy / mapping
		Promote and support a partnership initiative to review the Devon Ancient Woodland Inventory through DBRC.
		Review condition of County Wildlife Sites found within County Farms Estate holdings and promote uptake of relevant agri-environment schemes to tenants.
Soil Health	Countryside & Heritage	Review County Farms Estate compliance approaches to the soil health requirements of the Code of Good Agricultural Practice as part of existing formal monitoring process of new tenants
		Incorporate consideration of soil issues with farm re-letting reports for the County Farms Estate
		Promotion of improved soil management through: a farm-based training event on a County Farms Estate holding; the establishment of good practice case studies; and via the County Farms Estate newsletter.
Water Use	Water	Review and finalise current draft Action Plan, informed by long-delayed supply of meter data by South West Water, in order to confirm priorities for reduced water consumption by DCC.
Devon Climate Emergency	Countryside & Heritage	Review County Farm dwellings for potential 'deep retrofit' opportunities and explore potential business case for investment.

(action on County Farms Estate)		Consider additional capital investment on the county farms estate to reduce methane and other emissions
		Establish a demonstration site on the County Farms Estate exploring potential approaches to 'net-zero' farming practice.
	Renewables	Review field-scale renewable opportunities on the County Farms Estate and explore associated investment options.
		Consider capital investment in anaerobic digestion plants on the county farms estate.
		Consider capital investment in methane gas harvesting from the county farms estate to fuel DCC vehicle fleet

Note: This is not suggested as a comprehensive and definitive list of future commitments, but an initial set of ideas on ways in which DCC might take further action to improve its environmental performance. In this way, it could form the starting point for the review of the various Action Plans listed above.