

Report of the Cabinet Member for Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services

Introduction

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 3 October 2019:

1. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

Cornwall Council has recently revealed a plan to create a 20,000-acre forest costing up to £30m to help tackle climate change. A "Forest for Cornwall" is the flagship project in Cornwall Council's climate change and carbon-neutral action plan.

The authority has been drawing up the plan since declaring a climate emergency in January, with the aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Researchers from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said that if the world wanted to limit the rise in temperatures to 1.5C by 2050, an extra 1bn hectares (2.4bn acres) of trees would be needed. Cornwall Council's 63-page climate change action plan includes a number of measures that the council intends to implement but planting trees is at the heart of it.

It states: "We will develop a mass woodland tree planting programme - once fully developed a Forest for Cornwall - covering approximately 8,000 hectares (20,000 acres) ... or about 2% of Cornwall's land mass." The trees would be planted "on our streets, in our hedgerows and through the creation of new woodlands and forested areas", it continues. The report states the estimated cost of the forest would be between £25m and £30m and bids were being prepared for government-supported national tree planting schemes.

It also adds: "We will also consider developing a voluntary carbon offset scheme for Cornwall to help fund tree planting through the sale of Woodland Carbon Units to organisations wishing to evidence carbon neutral operations; this could involve partners such as the Local Nature Partnership, landowners, the National Trust, the Duchy, South West Water and the Forestry Commission."

Can the Cabinet member in the report cover the following areas:

- Can a similar scheme be considered and in progressed in Devon to further enhance the south west peninsula's carbon neutral status?
- Can this matter be referred to the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group?
- Can this be included and factored into Devon County Councils Climate Change Strategy?

2. By Councillor Wright as follows:

The Council launched its wildflower verge policy in May. Can I please have a full report on take up from communities and general progress?

3. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

Domestic Violence Services - update on the current service pressures, overall trends, numbers and gender balance of clients, changes to housing benefits and universal credit payments for those in temporary and emergency accommodation.

4. By Councillor Wright as follows:

Progress on the actions resulting from the 10 point green action plan.

5. By Councillor G Hook as follows:

The safety of all dams in Devon, but with particular reference to the Holbeam Dam which protects Newton Abbot. The statement to include all relevant information but to include responses to the following points:

- I would ask if residents can be given an assurance that Devon's dams are safe and that their safety is checked on a regular basis by qualified engineers who in turn report all findings to the authority?*
- How regular is "regular"?*
- Are these reports publicly available? Have any of these reports ever been other than completely satisfactory? If so, which dams have caused concern and what remedial action was undertaken?*
- Have any inspections been commissioned since events elsewhere in the country caused such concern?*
- When was the Holbeam Dam last inspected? Can Newton Abbot residents be assured that there is no risk to them and their homes from this construction?*

Response

1. Climate Change and Trees

The Devon Climate Emergency Response Group (DCERG) has initiated the process of producing the Devon Carbon Plan: A Net-Zero Task Force of specialists was appointed in September 2019 to develop a draft plan by summer 2020 with the support of officers from the DCERG organisations. The process will involve evidence gathering through a set of hearings, each focussed on an individual decarbonisation topic (e.g. buildings, agriculture), and community involvement including the use of a citizens' assembly. The various opportunities available for land-use to absorb carbon, including tree planting, will be considered through this process. Further details on this process is available at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/energyandclimatechange/devon-climate-emergency>

Devon County Council's Climate Change Strategy was updated in 2018, just a few months before the various climate emergency declarations. It will be updated again following the preparation of the Devon Carbon Plan to ensure it contains the actions from the Devon Carbon Plan for which Devon County Council will be responsible for implementing.

2. Wildflower Verges Policy

DCC's Life on the Verge Guidance was launched in May. This sets out how communities can take on the management of verges for wildlife benefit. Since the launch we have been contacted by communities from Bideford, Tawstock, Crediton, Newton St Cyres, South Brent, Bovey Tracey, Ogwell, Stoke Canon, Brampford Speke, Dolton and five communities on the Yealm Estuary, totalling 15 communities at present. The communities on the Yealm Estuary are associated with a 'Living with Wildlife Community of the Year' award being run by the Life on the Yealm community group and DCC Environment Group will be running a workshop on road verge management at this initiative in October.

DCC has been actively promoting this initiative at a number of different events and through a number of different platforms. This has included: Toby Buckland Garden Festival, Devon County Show, Devon Local Nature Partnership Communities Conference, Devon AONB newsletters, BBC Spotlight, Countryside Jobs Service guest online blogs and the Devon County Council and Devon LNP social media sites. At the Devon Local Nature Partnership Communities Conference the 'Life on the Verge' workshop was the most popular, with representatives from 45 local communities attending and showing an interest in managing road verges for wildlife.

3. Domestic Violence Services

Service information

The LEESAR (Listen, Engage, Empower Support, Advocate, Recover) Partnership were commissioning from 2017/18 to provide support to high and medium risk victims of domestic violence and abuse. The LEESAR Partnership comprises of; North Devon Against Domestic Violence and Abuse, Stop Abuse for Everyone, Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Service and is led by Splitz Domestic Abuse Service.

LEESAR are commissioned by the Communities Team within Devon County Council. The annual contract value is £800,000.

Service

A comparison from first six month of 2014/15 to the first six months of 2018/19 shows a 24% rise in referrals to specialist domestic abuse support services.

Below is the distribution of clients by Districts. It is also worth noting that delivery of services within rural areas is more costly due to the extra travel

District	High Risk (score 10+)	Medium Risk and other support	Total	%
East Devon	142	400	542	15
Mid Devon	135	291	426	12
Exeter	259	372	631	17
South Hams	62	400	462	12

West Devon	62	318	380	10
Teignbridge	123	130	253	7
North Devon	154	411	565	15
Torrige	111	334	445	12
Total	1048	2656	3704	100

The gender split in 2018/19 was female 89% and men: 11%

The outcomes of the service were collected and analysed by SafeLives. 70 % of clients experienced cessation of all abuse at exit compared to intake and 88% of clients were not living with the perpetrator at exit. However, 25% of client were repeat victims. This is largely because the repeats coming through are from those originally referred as medium risk, who do not engage or refuse a service and then come back into the service as at a higher risk level. This needs some further analysis.

Housing Benefits and Universal Credit Payments

We have not been able to locate and present a comprehensive Devon wide response to this part of the request.

We initially approached colleagues in DWP who referred us on to a network of colleagues within District Councils. We have received partial data from a few Districts in relation to parts of the request. It is suggested that if required, a more specific question is developed and

Any further questions, please contact:
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4. 10 Point Green Action Plan

At its meeting of 25 July, County Council resolved to endorse the principle of further action to address environmental issues. However, rather than adopting the 10 Point Green Action Plan proposed by Cllr. Wright, it mandated the Environmental Performance Board to consider how relevant issues raised by it might be addressed through changes or additions to DCC's own suite of action plans. This issue was considered by the Board at its meeting on 8 August, at which initial options for enhanced environmental action were suggested in relation to the following topics:

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

The Board endorsed this general approach and asked for additional work to be undertaken to refine these options and to set them out in revised action plans for its adoption at a future meeting. Similar endorsement was also provided by the Farms Estate Committee at its meeting on 9 September, at which it noted the opportunities for action through the County Farms Estate.

Although formal adoption of revised action plans may take some time, relevant staff will continue to pursue relevant actions in the interim. For example, support has recently been confirmed for a planned review of the Devon Ancient Woodland Inventory; and discussions have also started about the future development of a Devon Nature Recovery Network.

Future progress will be reported through the Environmental Performance Board and the publication of the annual Environmental Performance Statement.

5. Safety of Dams

I would ask if residents can be given an assurance that Devon's dams are safe and that their safety is checked on a regular basis by qualified engineers who in turn report all findings to the authority? - How regular is "regular"? - Are these reports publicly available?

Under the Reservoirs Act 1975 all dam structures impounding 25,000 cubic metres or more of water must be registered and inspected/maintained in accordance with the Act. In Devon there are 35 registered high-risk dams, with 23 of these owned and maintained by South West Water (SWW), 3 by the Environment Agency (EA), including the Holbeam Dam, and 1 by Devon County Council (DCC) at Stover Park Lake. The remaining 8 are privately owned.

All registered high-risk dams are inspected once every 10 years by an All Reservoirs Panel Engineer (a Section 10 Inspection), and once a year (at different times of the year) by a Supervising Engineer (a Section 12 Inspection). All Reservoirs Panel Engineers and Supervising Engineers are Chartered Engineers.

A report is produced following each Section 10 and Section 12 inspection. These will include any measures, with differing levels of risk, that the Engineer is recommending. The most significant being any 'Matters in the Interests of Safety' (MloS), which will need to be addressed within a specified timescale. The reports are then provided to the asset owner and submitted to and held by the EA's Reservoir Safety Team, as the national regulator. They are not publicly available in their entirety, but redacted versions may be made available upon request.

In addition to the legislative inspections, South West Water has a regular surveillance and inspection regime for all of its dams and reservoirs. Similarly, the Environment Agency undertakes and records annual routine asset inspections of its dam sites, with these recorded via its Asset Management System. The operation of the mechanical and electrical elements at each site is checked at least once weekly by a member of the EA's field team.

Have any of these reports ever been other than completely satisfactory? If so, which dams have caused concern and what remedial action was undertaken?

One of the dams maintained by the EA at Harbertonford was subject to overtopping during the floods in 2012. The downstream spillway face was badly eroded during these flood events and the operation of the control gates was compromised. As a result, a Section 10 inspection was carried out in December 2012, with recommendations being made and implemented over the subsequent years, including the reconstruction of the spillway with armouring to reduce the risk of any future erosion.

It should be recognised, that there may be recommendations made by the various inspecting engineers due to the evolution of best practice in the light of experience gained by the reservoir inspection community. As such, new measures recommended are not necessarily new defects which have occurred since the previous inspection, but new best practice.

Have any inspections been commissioned since events elsewhere in the country caused such concern?

Following the recent and widely reported problems at the Toddbrook Reservoir dam at Whaley Bridge, the EA has completed additional in-house inspections for all the dam sites that it owns, operates and maintains and has confirmed that all three of its dams in Devon are in a safe and satisfactory condition.

South West Water has also confirmed that all its dams and reservoirs have been checked following the incident at Toddbrook Reservoir, and there are no concerns with the condition and safety of its dams.

It should be noted, however, that this does not mean that they could not overtop. Each site is designed to store flows in a flood event and to release water at a controlled rate to reduce the risk of flooding downstream. In an extreme event, the capacity of the attenuation area upstream may become fully utilised, in which case the dam will overtop. Exceeding the capacity of the storage reservoir should not be mistaken for failure of the dam.

When was the Holbeam Dam last inspected? Can Newton Abbot residents be assured that there is no risk to them and their homes from this construction?

The most recent Section 10 inspection of Holbeam Dam was completed on 21 March 2019 and the previous inspection occurred on 21 December 2009.

For Holbeam dam, there were no items of MloS identified in the 2009 inspection; however, in this year's inspection, there were several MloS notified requiring new works to be completed. All of these are further improvements in line with current best practice and are not as a result of any defects. Such recommendations included improvements to monitoring, telemetry and weather & vandal proofing. The EA has been tasked with completing these items in the next three years and has sought the necessary funding to do so.

Holbeam Dam is a concrete cored dam, embedded into bed rock, which is designed to remain stable in an overtopping event, even without the downstream earth fill in place. It is also worth noting that the Holbeam Dam, and the 2 other dams maintained by the EA, are dry for the majority of the time, so the inspection can include getting to both the upstream and downstream faces, something which is not normally possible with water storage reservoirs where the upstream face is, generally, under water.

The EA has confirmed that Newton Abbot residents can be assured that there is no risk to them or their homes for any flood event within the design criteria. It is currently believed that the dam provides protection from all events up to about a 1 in 50-year event, which is quantified as an event with a 2% probability of occurrence within any one year.

**Councillor Roger Croad
Cabinet Member for Communities, Public Health, Transportation and
Environmental Services**