

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**  
**Wednesday 9 June 2021**

**1. QUESTION FROM CAROLINE SNOW (REMOTE ATTENDANCE)**  
**Re: Carbon Reduction Targets**

New Homes are still being built across Devon with gas boilers that will require costly retrofitting in the very near future if Devon is going to meet its carbon reduction targets for 2030. The technology for hydrogen gas boilers is not ready and in any case there will be limited supplies of hydrogen that will need to be prioritised for use in industry. What steps will Devon County Council take to engage with developers and government to ensure all new homes in Devon are fitted with low carbon heating using currently available technology such as heat pumps that will immediately begin saving householders money and eliminate both carbon and methane emissions currently released through natural gas?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS**

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from homes is one of the really significant challenges in meeting the Government's carbon reduction targets and the 'net zero' aspirations of the Devon Climate Emergency partnership, in which Devon County Council is closely involved. One essential element of this, as set out in the draft Devon Carbon Plan, is a move away fossil fuel (oil and gas) boilers, initially in new homes and, thereafter through the existing housing stock; this shift has already been signalled through national policy. This cannot be achieved simply through legislation (i.e. a ban on such systems), but must be approached in parallel with the development of technologies, supply chains and financial mechanisms to ensure the availability of viable and affordable non-fossil fuel alternatives.

In relation to most new homes, it is also reliant upon adoption by developers, which requires negotiation through the planning process. In Devon, the planning responsibilities for new homes sit with the district councils, which are the Local Planning Authorities in relation to housing developments. It is expected that, in time as new technologies become available, government policy will require new homes to switch to lower carbon heating, with this requirement being tied to planning permission granted for new homes. To do so requires both the policy and technology to be in place

Devon County Council, working in conjunction with District Planning Authorities, is active in the promotion of District heating schemes for suitable new developments. Whilst this has been adopted in some locations (e.g. Cranbrook), issues of technical feasibility, cost and affordability mean that this outcome cannot be secured in all cases.

**2. QUESTION FROM MARILYN SPURR ((IN ATTENDANCE))**

**Re: Climate Emergency and Action**

It is now 2 years since DCC declared a climate emergency. This has been sufficient time to engage in consultations, make new appointments etc. Please give some indication of what practical measures have been taken to deal with this emergency or any that will be implemented in what remains of 2021.

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS**

We have been extremely committed to acting on the climate emergency declared by Devon County Council and have been implementing culture change activities and practical measures throughout the COVID pandemic.

Our Chief Executive, Phil Norrey, is leading a Devon-wide response under the name of the Devon Climate Emergency with strategic partners and community involvement.

Devon's independent Task Force, chaired by Patrick Devine-Wright at the University of Exeter, has collected people's ideas about how they would like to see carbon emissions reduced, produced a draft Interim Devon Carbon Plan with the support and backing of all of the partners, consulted on that Plan and it is now incorporating the findings of the consultation into a revised version.

Alongside the development of the Interim Plan the partnership has been designing the Devon Climate Assembly. Seventy people are in the process of being recruited to represent Devon in discussions about how we can solve some of the big challenges for getting to net-zero. The Assembly will meet over a series of evenings and weekends later in June and July this year. Its recommendations will be considered by the partners and incorporated into a final version of the Carbon Plan.

In addition, we have combined forces with partners across the Tamar to produce a Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Climate Adaptation Plan. Chaired by the Regional Director of the Environment Agency, Helen Dobby, the Climate Impacts Group has: worked with the Met Office to understand the climate projections for the southwest; identified risks to the environment, health, infrastructure and communities; and is now looking at how we can improve our preparedness for these risks.

We are very mindful that we need to help Devon reduce its emissions as fast as possible and that is why the partners are busy delivering practical carbon reduction projects that implement actions in the Interim Devon Carbon Plan whilst the formal procedures continue. You can view all of these on the [Taking Action](#) pages of the Devon Climate Emergency website.

I will highlight those that involve Devon County Council directly:

- Forty electric vehicle charging points are expected to be installed across Devon this year in council car parks. We have submitted a funding bid for a further 48 charging points that if successful will also be installed by March next year.
- Okehampton rail service is to be reinstated and will be operating a daily service every 2 hours from December this year.
- Preparatory works for Marsh Barton railway station are underway.
- Planning applications have been submitted for sections of the Teign Estuary Trail that will provide safe, segregated walking and cycling opportunities between Teignmouth and Newton Abbot.
- A £1m Green Homes Grant project is improving the energy efficiency of some of Devon's most inefficient homes for the most vulnerable people.
- The Connecting Devon and Somerset programme has secured new contracts to install fibre internet services into a further 56,000 premises.
- In partnership with the Devon Community Energy Network we have a new member of staff dedicated to piloting an approach to accelerating the retrofitting of energy efficiency measures into homes called People Powered Retrofit.
- The Devon Solar Together buying consortium for domestic solar panels is currently in its installation phase. Over 130 households have had their panels and batteries installed already and the final number could be close to 900 depending on the number that take their quotation through to completion.
- Devon's Local Nature Partnership, serviced by the Authority, has begun work on preparing a Nature Recovery Network for Devon. This will map Devon's existing habitats and opportunities for their enhancement and creation to achieve further benefits for nature, people and climate.
- The Devon Food Partnership has been created to provide healthy food for all and sustainable food for the planet.
- Tuesday Tables encourages people to pass on items they no longer use so they can be given another life. Residents who take part simply put items outside on their front door, in the front garden or driveway each Tuesday.

Furthermore we have been working to continue the reduction of emissions from Devon County Council's own activity. We have put in place the [Carbon Reduction Plan](#) and have provided the necessary additional funding for its first two years of delivery (£2.2m) and have been successful at attracting a further £4.8m from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. In May a new officer dedicated to helping us achieve a net-zero supply chain took up their post. By the end of the financial year we expect to have:

- Retrofitted seven of our buildings and three schools with energy efficiency equipment.
- Mounted solar panels on the roofs of our salt barns.
- Added solar panel car-ports and battery storage to office car parks.
- Installed electric vehicle charging posts at our highways depots.
- Integrated more electric vehicles into the fleet.
- Continued the £9m upgrade of street lighting to LED technology.
- Completed baselining the carbon intensity of the supply chain for one of our most carbon-intensive contracts - highways maintenance.
- Prepared a more detailed strategy for achieving a net-zero supply chain.
- Recruited into a new post that will test and develop the most affordable and cost-effective carbon offsetting opportunities here in Devon.
- Implemented a carbon offsetting activity to net-off 10% of our annual corporate emissions.

This is quite a remarkable achievement in what has been unprecedented circumstances for everyone involved. I thank all of our strategic partners, the volunteers on the Task Force, the staff within this Authority and the people of Devon for engaging with the emergency and helping us make so much progress.

### **3. QUESTION FROM MAURICE SPURWAY (IN ATTENDANCE)**

#### **Re: Net Zero Targets**

Because a net zero target by 2050 only gives us a 50:50 chance of keeping below 1.5 degrees of warming, it is great news that preliminary results from February's consultation on the Devon Carbon Plan indicate that 2030 is the preferred target. Will Devon County Council announce this new 2030 deadline as soon as possible, in order to bring Devon more in line with most of the deadlines of other district councils in the county?

#### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS**

The consultation on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan by the Devon Climate Emergency partnership received 1,321 responses. Fifty-two percent of those people favoured a county-wide, net-zero target of 2030. A further message from the consultation is that there is appetite for early and rapid progress towards net-zero but there is acceptance that achieving net-zero itself will be incredibly challenging.

The Devon Climate Emergency partners are developing an enhanced ambition to reflect the consultation findings that will be incorporated into the next iteration of the Devon Carbon Plan.

Whilst it is not in the gift of Devon County Council to unilaterally decide what the Devon Carbon Plan should say (as it's a partnership project), we agree that early and rapid global carbon reductions are necessary to ensure carbon budgets are not exceeded and to improve the chance of keeping below 1.5 degrees warming. This is why we are delivering the projects described in the answer to the question from Marilyn Spurr.

Yet we also recognise there are practical issues with achieving net-zero ahead of the national timetable (2050) for the whole county as many sources of carbon emissions in Devon are influenced by national policy. Our approach is to work with government to reduce emissions quickly and show that if we work together with communities we can bring the net-zero date forward, hence the current county-wide target set by the partnership is '2050 at the latest'.

**4. QUESTION FROM GODFREY WHITEHOUSE (IN ATTENDANCE)  
Re: Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill**

It's great news that Devon County Council has passed a motion to support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill. Even greater news that Devon County Council will "write to local MPs, asking them to support the Bill". Could you give more details on what you will say in the letters? And when will you do this?

Will you be publishing their reply or indeed a possible lack of reply?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS**

We will explain how many of the Bill's objectives are closely aligned to the Devon Climate Declaration, the work of the Devon Local Nature Partnership, particularly the Nature Recovery Network, and the co-benefits identified by the draft Interim Devon Carbon Plan.

We will ask local MPs to work with government colleagues to provide a national framework of necessary legislative changes and additional resources to facilitate the unprecedented levels of behaviour change, skills development, technology deployment and investment that will be necessary to meet Paris Agreement commitments.

We will do this within the next month. We will inform the MPs that any response we receive will be made available to the public.