

Formal Consultation Response on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan

Report of the Head of Service for Planning, Transportation and Environment

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: that the Cabinet be asked to approve the proposed formal consultation response from Devon County Council to the Devon Climate Emergency partnership on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan.

1. Summary

Devon County Council was the founding partner of the Devon Climate Emergency project, which convened an [independent Net-Zero Task Force](#) of specialists who have subsequently involved the public in the preparation of a [consultation draft Interim Devon Carbon Plan](#). This report presents a proposed consultation response to the Interim Devon Carbon Plan.

2. Introduction

Devon County Council (DCC) has declared a climate emergency and is a founding partner and principal funder of the [Devon Climate Emergency \(DCE\) initiative](#). In signing the [Devon Climate Declaration](#), DCC has committed to working collaboratively with partners to engage Devon's residents, businesses and visitors to develop and implement a plan to achieve the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions across the area to net-zero by 2050 at the latest.

An [independent Net-Zero Task Force](#) of specialists was set up by the initiative, who have subsequently involved the public in the preparation of a [consultation draft Interim Devon Carbon Plan](#). The consultation has been open from the 7th December 2020 and closes on the 15th February 2021. All County Councillors were notified by email of the consultation period, which included a webinar session for local authority members.

The Net Zero Task Force will consider the consultation responses and work with the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group to prepare a post-consultation version of the Interim Devon Carbon Plan, which will be available for organisations to consider adopting in late summer/autumn 2021. The exact timetable depends upon how significant the consultation comments are and how many comments are received.

Alongside the preparation of the post-consultation version of the Interim Devon Carbon Plan, in July 2021 an online Citizens' Assembly will deliberate some of the more controversial issues highlighted by the consultation and suggest actions for implementation in Devon. The recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly will be considered by the Net-Zero Task Force and used to update the Interim Devon Carbon Plan into a Final Devon Carbon Plan for further consultation in 2022.

This twin-track process is a symptom of COVID-19 which cancelled the Citizens' Assembly that would have otherwise occurred in July 2020.

3. Proposed Consultation Response

DCC ("the Authority") is hugely grateful to the Net-Zero Task Force for preparing such a comprehensive roadmap showing the extensive technological, infrastructure and behavioural changes required to achieve net-zero carbon in Devon, and to the community who participated in the Call for Evidence and Thematic Hearings.

The Authority endorses the draft Interim Devon Carbon Plan ("the Plan") and will do what it can to implement relevant actions within its areas of responsibility, including enabling and encouraging Devon's citizens to play their part in the transition. Feedback on matters of detail have been provided to the DCE secretariat, which does not materially affect DCC's support for the Plan.

The Plan makes clear that new or changed regulation at national level and enhanced resources are necessary to address many of the challenges of achieving net-zero. DCC will continue to pursue additional resources and work with Government to put in place the framework necessary to accelerate carbon emissions reductions.

The Plan shows that the transition to net-zero will have far reaching and profound implications for how communities function and how behaviours will need to change. DCC aims to ensure that nobody's needs are overlooked during the descent to net-zero and that the wide-ranging opportunities to improve health, wellbeing and social justice are seized. All parts of our communities, including businesses, will need to feel invested in the transition and will need time to adapt behaviours, change practices and adopt different technology. However, this is an emergency, and time is of the essence, which is why the Authority agrees with the recommendation for the UK's Sixth Carbon Budget from the Committee on Climate Change (December 2020) which declares that the decade from 2025 will be incredibly important to see accelerated effort to meet net-zero by 2050.

For these reasons, DCC continues to be committed to playing its part in achieving net-zero in Devon by 2050 at the latest and urges every individual, community and organisation to act to reduce carbon emissions within their own influence as quickly and as early as they are able to. As previously stated, national Government action is necessary to deliver many of the transformations necessary at the speed required. The Authority therefore welcomes the 2030 UK emissions target introduced by Government in December 2020 (54% reduction on 2010 levels) which aligns with the target proposed in the Interim Devon Carbon Plan for the same date (50% reduction).

The funding of the Citizens' Assembly, expected to operate online in summer 2021, remains a pledge by the Authority on behalf of the whole DCE partnership. Having actions carefully informed by the people of Devon to address some of the most challenging issues for Devon's journey to net-zero will be valuable to ensure the solutions are right for our communities. DCC understands that the Citizens' Assembly is unlikely to have sufficient time to deliberate all of the challenging issues identified within the Interim Devon Carbon Plan. The Authority is content for the design of the Assembly to be informed by the consultation results and the expertise

of the Net-Zero Task Force and is therefore not providing comment on the prioritisation of those issues in this response.

The Authority fully believes in the co-benefits that are available to Devon through achieving net-zero and, over the past year, has been furthering its plans to achieve net-zero within its own operations and supply chain by 2030 and has been forging ahead with developing projects to help implement actions in the draft Interim Devon Carbon Plan.

The reduction of carbon emissions needs to fit alongside a broader consideration of the unavoidable climate change impacts for Devon and associated action to achieve resilience and adaptation to deal with these. The Authority is pleased to be working with other DCE colleagues and broader Local Resilience Forum partners to assess these risks and to produce and support the implementation of a Climate Adaptation Plan for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

4. Options/Alternatives

DCC has three options available:

- a. Endorse the consultation draft Interim Devon Carbon Plan and provide feedback on matters of detail that do not materially affect DCC's support for the Plan (the recommendation of this report).
- b. Endorse the intent of the Plan but provide comment on fundamental elements which DCC cannot support. This is not recommended because feedback from officers across the Authority's responsibilities have not identified fundamental concerns that would warrant withholding support at this stage of the Plan's preparation.
- c. Do not endorse the Plan. This is not recommended for the same reason as option b and would add substantial delay to the DCE process.

5. Financial Considerations

The Plan makes clear that new, substantial financial resources are necessary to address many of the challenges of achieving net-zero and that much of these new resources will need to come from the community and private sectors (where investment opportunities exist) and national government. DCC will continue to pursue additional resources and work with Government to put in place the framework necessary to accelerate carbon emissions reductions.

DCC continues to financially support the work of the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group in preparing the Devon Carbon Plan and Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Adaptation Plan and has proposed a budget of £150,000 to be agreed as part of the 2021/22 budget setting process. This is on top of the £250,000 already committed. This funding is providing a full-time project manager and communications officer, enabling research and staging the citizens' assembly.

At this time there are no new financial requests on DCC for the implementation of the Plan. Once in the implementation phase, individual projects to be led by DCC may approach the Authority for funding if deemed appropriate.

6. Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations for DCC. The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 requires the UK to become carbon neutral by 2050. DCC has a moral obligation to demonstrate local leadership towards achieving this requirement.

7. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

The Interim Devon Carbon Plan is explicitly designed to reduce carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050 at the latest across Devon, including substantial nature improvement (on land and in rivers, estuaries and coastal waters) to absorb carbon. The Plan advocates taking whole catchment approaches to land management to ensure that opportunities to improve the full spectrum of services provided by the environment (e.g. clean air and water, flood risk reduction, healthy soil, nutritious food etc.) are taken advantage of whilst meeting the need to store carbon.

There is scope for the transition to net-zero to negatively affect landscape quality and character and wildlife (for example due to the potential for inappropriate tree planting or siting of low-carbon infrastructure projects) and elements of the historic environment (for example due to the need to reduce the energy consumption of heritage buildings). However, these issues are acknowledged by the Plan and actions to work collaboratively with communities and statutory bodies to navigate them, and indeed turn these potential negative effects into opportunities for positive effects, are proposed.

Potential environmental impacts of specific projects arising from the implementation of the Plan will be managed on an individual basis.

8. Equality Considerations

Where relevant to the decision, the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

Taking account of age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), gender and gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women/new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage/civil partnership status in coming to a decision, a decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

This may be achieved, for example, through completing a full Equality Impact Needs Assessment / Impact Assessment or other form of options/project management appraisal that achieves the same objective.

In progressing this particular scheme/proposal, an Impact Assessment has been prepared which has been circulated separately to Cabinet Councillors and is also available alongside this Report on the Council's website at: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/devon-carbon-plan/>, which Councillors will need to consider for the purposes of this item.

Climate change will affect everybody in the county, and it will affect people less able to adapt the most. These include less affluent people, those living with physical and mental health conditions, those living in coastal communities or other areas prone to flooding and young people who will live with the effects becoming worse over their lifetimes. Implementing the recommendation will help grow efforts to reduce international carbon emissions and minimise these impacts on everyone.

Implementing the Interim Devon Carbon Plan will require fundamental changes to the way the Authority's services are provided, which has the potential to impact negatively and positively on service users depending on the specifics of the proposals. Tactical-level changes to services will need their own impact assessment to consider their effect on equality characteristics.

The Plan has been designed with an overarching principle (Principle 9) that:

"A just transition is required to ensure that:

- a) Vulnerable and low-income segments of society and rural communities are not disadvantaged.*
- b) The differing impacts of climate change on different groups e.g. disabled, minorities, gender, are addressed.*
- c) Actions to decarbonise Devon must not be at the expense of other communities or ecology globally"*

9. Risk Management Considerations

The potential risks to Devon's communities from climate change are profound e.g. extreme sea level rise, health effects (heat stress, anxiety, vector-borne diseases etc.), increased flood risk, economic shocks and a breakdown of environmental services that provide food, fuel and pharmaceuticals to name just a few.

The effort to minimise these impacts must occur at all scales from the individual to the global. Whilst DCC is unlikely to influence emissions elsewhere in the world by itself, it is vital that the Authority demonstrates local leadership alongside the DCE partners and communities throughout the county and our partners in the wider southwest.

The corporate and community risk registers have been updated as appropriate.

10. Public Health Impact

Encouraging everyone to be more active by walking and cycling; improving air quality through the electrification of vehicles; insulating our homes to make them warmer; and eating more balanced diets are example of the co-benefits arising from the transition to net-zero carbon that will all improve public health.

11. Summary

The consultation draft Interim Devon Carbon Plan provides a comprehensive roadmap showing the extensive technological, infrastructure and behavioural changes required in communities to achieve net-zero carbon in Devon by 2050 at the latest. The Authority endorses the Plan and will do what it can to implement relevant actions within its areas of responsibility. Feedback on matters of detail have been provided to the DCE secretariat, which does not materially affect DCC's support for the Plan.

DCC looks forward to continuing the formal collaboration with partners on the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group and working in partnership with everyone to continue the reduction of Devon's greenhouse gas emissions and the required adaptation to the inevitable impacts of climate change.

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Electoral Divisions: All

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper

Nil

Formal Consultation Response on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan - Final