

Formal consultation submission to the Devon Climate Emergency partnership's responses to the recommendations of the Devon Climate Assembly

Report of the Head of 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 approves the consultation submission from Devon County Council to the Devon Climate Emergency partnership's consultation on its responses to the recommendations of the Devon Climate Assembly. (Section 3 of this report).

1. Summary

This report presents a proposed submission to the Devon Climate Emergency partnership's consultation on its responses to the recommendations of the Devon Climate Assembly (Section 3 of this report). The consultation has been live between the 17th March and 14th April 2022.

2. Introduction

Devon County Council (DCC) has declared a climate emergency and is a founding partner and principal funder of the [Devon Climate Emergency \(DCE\)](#) partnership. 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 partnership, who have subsequently involved the public in the preparation of the [Interim Devon Carbon Plan](#) whilst preparations for a Devon Climate Assembly were progressing.

The Devon Climate Assembly was held last summer after a year's delay due to COVID-19. Seventy randomly-selected individuals, representative of Devon's population, were invited to discuss three of Devon's key climate issues: onshore wind, how to encourage less car use, and how to accelerate the upgrading of buildings.

In [its report](#), the Assembly has made recommendations about how they would like to see the issues addressed. Their recommendations take the form of headline resolutions and supporting conditions to guide the implementation of the resolutions.

Over the past few months, the organisations of the DCE partnership have worked together to respond to the Assembly's recommendations. Some of the partnership's responses are actions to include in the next version of the Devon Carbon Plan, which will be available for partners to adopt from August 2022.

Relevant officers at DCC and the membership of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group have had the opportunity to influence the proposed responses ahead of the public consultation. These have been considered by the DCE Secretariat, alongside feedback from the other DCE partners, to arrive at the proposed wording of the responses.

The consultation is the public's chance to say whether the DCE partnership has interpreted and responded to the Devon Climate Assembly's resolutions reasonably and effectively. The full list of the partnership's proposed responses is available on the [consultation website](#).

3. Proposed Consultation Response

DCC remains incredibly grateful to the Net-Zero Task Force for overseeing the design and implementation of the Devon Climate Assembly, particularly during the challenging conditions presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This exemplar of citizen engagement has attracted interest from many local authorities in the UK and elsewhere. The Authority also extends its appreciation to the seventy people who took part in the Assembly to share their concerns about climate change and their preferred approaches for reaching net-zero in Devon.

This administration agrees with the Assembly that wind farms, where sited appropriately to minimise effects on communities and the environment, can be part of providing Devon's energy needs and that the benefits of new energy infrastructure should be retained locally wherever possible – not only will this reduce Devon's dependence on carbon-dense fossil fuels, alongside other forms of low-carbon energy, but also increase Devon's energy security. We also agree that Devon needs better active and public transport infrastructure, and that it should be more affordable and convenient, alongside providing confidence to drivers to switch to electric vehicles. Additionally, we believe much more must be done to support people to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes and businesses.

The Authority endorses the Devon Climate Emergency's proposed response to the Assembly's recommendations and will do what it can to implement relevant actions within its areas of responsibility. DCC understands that the proposed responses have had to be designed to be palatable to the whole partnership. As such, the Authority is content that whilst in some cases they reflect a compromise position, they represent a position that enables the partnership to move forward to address the climate and ecological emergencies together – this will be vital for success.

Just as for the changes required by the existing Interim Devon Carbon Plan, new or changed regulation at national level and enhanced resources are necessary to address many of the proposed responses. DCC will continue to pursue additional resources and work with Government to put in place the framework necessary to accelerate carbon emissions reductions.

DCC is already delivering projects as part of its emergency response that help deliver many of the recommendations of the Assembly. It is continuing its long-standing support for communities to take ownership of local energy via the £200k Community Energy Fund. Transport improvements include the preparation of Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plans; the installation of electric-vehicle charging infrastructure on-street and in car parks; the continued development of strategic multi-use trails,

such as the Teign-Estuary trail; and the submission to government of the Bus Service Improvement Plan. People are being supported immediately to retrofit their homes through the £6m Sustainable Warmth project whilst the Retrofit Devon project is using Community Renewal Fund money to pilot approaches to providing impartial advice to people who are willing to pay for home upgrades. Alongside this, it is establishing a Devon energy advice service in partnership with community energy organisations. This project is also experimenting with novel approaches to engaging businesses with retrofit advice and funding models.

The Authority, spurred on by the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report which reminds us that there is still hope of minimising global warming to 1.5 degrees but only if we all take concerted action, continues to drive down emissions across its own operations: Its largest buildings are being retrofitted with cutting-edge insulation and heating technology, more electric vehicles are arriving in the fleet, solar panels are being fitted to rooftops, lower-carbon materials are being trialled in highways maintenance, and land has been purchased for tree planting.

DCC continues to be committed to playing its part in achieving net-zero in Devon by 2050 at the latest and looks forward to receiving the next iteration of the Devon Carbon Plan for consideration later in the year.

4. Options/Alternatives

DCC has three options available:

- a. Endorse the partnership's proposed responses (the recommendation of this report).
- b. Endorse the intent of the partnership's proposed responses but provide further feedback on points of detail. This is not recommended because feedback from officers and the Corporate, Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group has been collected over the past few months and considered by the DCE Secretariat, alongside feedback from the other DCE partners, to arrive at the proposed wording of the responses which are designed to be palatable to the whole partnership.
- c. Do not endorse the proposed responses. This is not recommended for the same reason as option b and this would add substantial delay to the DCE process.

5. Financial Considerations

The Interim Devon Carbon 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.

This situation also applies to the proposed responses to the Devon Climate Assembly's recommendations that will be incorporated into the next version of the Devon Carbon Plan. Where proposed responses can be implemented within existing resources, this will be indicated in the Plan.

At this time there are no new financial requests on DCC for the implementation of the Devon Carbon Plan. Once in the implementation phase, individual projects to be led by DCC may approach the Authority for funding if deemed appropriate, and which will be considered in accordance with the established approvals process, subject to affordability.

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 and these proposed responses to the Devon Climate Assembly's recommendations are explicitly designed to reduce carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050 at the latest across Devon.

Regarding the three issues discussed by the Devon Climate Assembly, there is scope for onshore wind and the upgrading of buildings to negatively affect landscape quality and character, wildlife and elements of the historic environment. However, these issues are acknowledged by the Interim Devon Carbon 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 proposed responses 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: [Proposed Responses to the Devon Climate Assembly - Impact Assessment](#), 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. Postcodes with the lowest Indices of Multiple Deprivation were over-represented in the initial recruitment of people onto the Devon Climate Assembly because the experience of the external facilitators had shown that it can be difficult to engage people in those categories. The result was that the Assembly make-up matched demographic data for Devon very well. Black and Asian people were over-represented in the Assembly in comparison to baseline data because it was suspected that the baseline data underrepresented these members of our communities.

Implementing the recommendation will help grow efforts to reduce international carbon emissions and minimise these impacts on everyone.

Implementing the Interim Devon Carbon Plan and the proposed responses to the Devon Climate Assembly's recommendations 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. Future 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"*

This principal also applies to the implementation of the proposed responses to the Devon Climate Assembly's recommendations.

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; and insulating our homes to make them warmer are examples of the co-benefits for public health arising from implementing the proposed responses to the Devon Climate Assembly's recommendations.

There is evidence that poorly-sited onshore wind turbines can negatively affect the health of people living nearby. This issue will need to be managed carefully by acting on the science and involving communities in any schemes that come forward for development.

11. Summary

The Devon Climate Assembly has deliberated three of Devon's key climate issues and made recommendations to the Devon Climate Emergency partnership about how they would like to see them addressed.

The Authority endorses the proposed responses developed by the partnership and will do what it can to implement relevant actions within its areas of responsibility.

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.

Dave Black
Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport: Councillor Andrea Davis

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper

Impact Assessment for the Proposed Responses to the Recommendations of the Devon Climate Assembly, March 2022

The above mentioned Reports are published on the Council's Website at:
<http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

Formal consultation submission to the Devon Climate Emergency partnership's responses to the recommendations of the Devon Climate Assembly - Final