

## **NORTH DEVON COUNCIL:**

**COUNCIL: 24 NOVEMBER 2021**

### **ENVIRONMENT - REPORT BY LEAD MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT**

On 9<sup>th</sup> November I attended a workshop on transition to a low carbon future which was hosted by 361 Energy and chaired by NDC's sustainability and climate officer, Donna Sibley. I thought I'd share with you some of my observations from the workshop, which was a useful and informative day with practical steps parish and town councils can take to reduce their carbon footprint. A formal report on the workshop will be published by 361 Energy and circulated to councillors.

Though the workshop was aimed at parish and town councils the actions to reduce carbon are just as applicable to other organisations. It was a surprise to discover that there was a global reduction in carbon through the Covid pandemic of just 7%. 361 energy's ambition is to reduce it by 50% in the next 3 to 4 years.

The first thing councils were advised to do in order to be able to measure the reduction is to calculate a baseline, if not already done: the recommendation was to calculate it based on 2019 data. Once it is clear where carbon savings can be made it is important to engage all parties in the actions they can take: simple changes in behaviour can make a big difference, e.g. switching off lights, monitors, computers when they are not in use.

Retrofitting public buildings to make them more energy-efficient can reduce carbon emissions by as much as 20%. Grants are available to support various carbon-reducing initiatives..

I was particularly interested in the presentation from North Devon Biosphere. They are encouraging individuals, community groups, parishes, town, and district councils to sign up to their Nature Recovery Declaration: [Nature Recovery Plan - North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve UK \(northdevonbiosphere.org.uk\)](https://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/nature-recovery-plan). They also recommended that each council make their own plan for nature.

For the team at the Biosphere partnership working is key, as is public engagement, e.g. for some people grass verges are cut too often and for others not often enough, trees evoke strong emotions and there should always be good reasons for felling or coppicing: the Forestry Commission approach is 'Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason'.

Rivers across the country, as we know, are all suffering from pollution to some degree: the West Country Rivers Trust has a citizen scientists programme enlisting volunteers to help monitor water quality by taking samples. Beavers are being introduced to various rivers to help address problems with flooding. The Devon Hedge Group raise awareness and interest in Devon's hedges and run courses in hedge maintenance.

They have developed a peer-reviewed accreditation scheme for businesses called Biosphere Business Partner (BBP): a network for sharing ideas on conservation,

local development, and awareness-raising. The benefits of signing up are inclusion in a network directory on the visitor website, use of the BBP logo, invitations to networking meetings and events; a newsletter; the 'Biosphere Star Business' award recognising achievements. They use the hashtag #togetherforourbiosphere and councils were asked to encourage businesses to sign up (there is currently no charge for accreditation).

We also heard about actions 361 Energy are taking to help families in fuel poverty (definition: more than 10% of income spent on fuel bills). In Devon we have one of the highest rates in the country at 13% - in Ilfracombe Central Ward it is 21-22%. This is not just about reducing carbon but improving health. Presentations on community energy and transport rounded off the day.

Actions to reduce carbon not only help to tackle the problems of climate change but help nature to recover. We can – and must - all do our bit: every little really does help.

Councillor Netti Pearson

Environment Lead