

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL
COUNCIL: 20 NOVEMBER 2024
LEAD MEMBER FOR CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY REPORT**

This is the first time Lead Members have had the opportunity to give feed-back to Full Council on what they have been doing for the last eighteen months with regard their portfolios. So here goes:

Provisos: I am grateful to the Liberal Democrat majority and to our Independent Group leader for agreeing to recommend me for this position. I possibly have the credibility and definitely the passion but it has been a steep learning curve.

However, without the patient guidance and professional acumen of our Climate & Sustainability Officer (DS), the input from the Head of Environment Enhancement (MK) and the utterly reliable support from our Corporate & Community Services Administrator (GT), there's no denying: I would've been lost.

Further proviso: I'm writing this on the day of the US election result and the week before Baku COP29. Don't ask

- June '23 – first steps: catching up on the documentation appertaining to the brief; meeting with previous portfolio holder to get to understand the way the Climate Action Team (CAT) worked; initial meetings with DS to understand her role and how we could best represent the NDC's Environmental Policy to achieve in-house Net Zero by 2030, address our Carbon footprint with accurate data and set up the working group.
- The CAT was formed: a working group of 12, to meet bi-monthly via Teams. Just to say: any Cllr is more than welcome to join this group – it is not onerous but our work is often unsung but very important.
- On site visit to Ixora Energy Biomass plant in South Molton.
- Sept: First CAT meeting; Mark Saunders presented an overview of the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements for planning consideration and the implications of 'Habitat Banks'.
- The White Cross application is presented to Council and begins to stir interest.
- The Joint Local Plan is disrupted but compromise agreed – I attend first two Joint Planning Policy Committee (JPPC) meetings in Bideford as an observer (Jan/Mar '24)
- Jan '24 – the CAT meeting welcomes Alex King from Tower Group for a presentation on Green Hydrogen. Reference to a significant investment from the South West Net Zero Hub into Green Hydrogen. Further discussion on NDC carbon footprint data.
- Meanwhile, several ongoing external involvements relevant to my brief: Northern Devon Active Travel, Tarka Line Forum, Taw and Torridge Estuary Forum (TTEF), North Devon Climate Forum, Devon Rail Forum, Fremington Local Nature Reserve (LNR) – the Bat Walk!
- March CAT welcomes Claire Moodie from Plastic Free North Devon
- South West Water (SWW) presentation (and grilling) at Petroc and Caddsdawn Business Centre.

- May CAT welcomes Frank Benbow to talk about the pros and cons (mostly pros!) of electric vehicles. Further analysis of the Council's Scope 1, 2 & 3 emissions. Council to purchase two EVs for Parks.
- I have attended on-line training on the potential for electrification of refuse collection fleets; also the 'Right of Reply' webinar on 'Scorecards' – important for us and for Torridge, because 'Scorecards' can harm reputations by securing media headlines based on faulty or cherry-picked data. The next Scorecards assessment has already started – this time, we'll be ready!
- I also underwent an interview on our carbon plan performance with the external auditor, which I (or rather, DS) passed with flying colours!
- July – first meetings of the Joint Local Plan working groups. Three members of the NDC CAT are selected to be on the Climate and Environmental Emergency Thematic Working Group (TWG): Cllrs Maddox, Bishop and R Knight, along with Sustainability Officer DS, giving us the opportunity to meet up with our Torridge District Council colleagues. Members were given the aims and objectives of these TWGs and the role that members would be expected to play. This meeting formed the basis for the feed-back for the July CAT meeting. The CAT were provided with links to several documents relevant to Cllrs: Northern Devon Futures Partnership, North Devon Economic Strategy and Clean Maritime Growth Vision. The CAT identified renewables, the Grid and electrification as the 'top three' focal points.
- Honourable Mention at this point to Parks and Recreation manager AM, tirelessly beavering away on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), planting thousands of trees (Yeo Valley Woods and more) and never seeking accolades – but getting them nonetheless; to Leisure and S106 Officer RS for his patience on explaining his role and all he does for encouraging open spaces and environmental enhancement; and to Sophie Britton for all my fantastic quotes – I couldn't have done better myself
- SO: where to now; the way forward? CAT has its Forward Plan in place: over the next twelve months we will be looking at Home Energy Efficiency, Fleet Decarbonisation, the Scorecards report and response, Sustainable Housing strategies, a presentation on the Clean Maritime vision, North Devon Futures and the important one: the 3rd Annual Review of our Carbon Plan. An invitation has also been sent out to colleagues in East Devon, who seem to be doing better than us with their recycling rates. Our next meeting is next week (26th).
- In many respects, the October meeting was a bit of a watershed moment for us as a group, as presented to Strategy and Resources on 4th October. As many feared or were resigned to, it is very likely that we will not be able to achieve in-house Net Zero by 2030, due to reasons 'beyond our control'. Sorry to repeat but just in case colleagues wish to know: our Scope 3 emissions are literally beyond our control; we still do not produce our own electricity, despite so many roofs crying out for solar panels. This is not due to lack of will, simply lack of money plus grid capacity - but watch this space; the fossil fuel boilers at BEC, the Crematorium, the Leisure Centre and other properties we own, need to be replaced; the red diesel we 'sell' for the fishing boats in Ilfracombe

adds significantly to our footprint and it's virtually impossible in the short term to extricate ourselves from that one; and of course, the fuel we use for our refuse fleet produce our highest emissions.

- The Senior Management Team discussed this situation last month. Having declared our support for action on the climate emergency along with two-thirds of the UK's councils and in line with the Government's legal obligation to reach 100% Net Zero by 2050, we have no option but to strive to make incremental steps towards this goal, to be open, honest and transparent and to publicise our genuine efforts and demonstrable progress, in order to be exemplars of good practice.