

Carbon, Environment and Biodiversity Plan

June 2022

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Introduction

Background to this plan

In July 2019 North Devon Council (NDC) declared a 'Climate Emergency'. This was in recognition of the science and evidence of the impacts that climate change is having on our environment, population and communities and to acknowledge that we are committed to assisting in the response to this threat.

This declaration committed North Devon Council to reach net carbon neutrality by 2030. This plan will outline how we have aligned our organisation with this goal and will work towards meeting the commitment against climate change.

We recognise that climate change is a long-term threat and action needs to be taken now, at every level to slow and if possible, reverse, these effects. NDC is committed to taking responsibility and being fully involved in this process. We recognise that we are at the heart of taking action and promoting positive changes in North Devon to meet this goal. We also recognise that NDC cannot do this alone and are committed to working alongside others to achieve this important objective.

We also see the opportunities that these necessary operational and lifestyle shifts will bring, to help our communities and residents lead healthier, more sustainable lifestyles while supporting businesses and our economy to grow and flourish in this new green future.

Welcome to North Devon

North Devon Council is located within the north west of Devon. The district is divided into 25 Wards, comprising 58 parishes, and is predominantly rural. The main conurbations are Barnstaple, Braunton, Fremington, Ilfracombe and South Molton. The district is officially classified as 'Rural 50', with at least 50 per cent (but less than 80%) of the population living in rural settlements and larger market towns.

It is the second largest district authority area in Devon, covering an area of 1,106 km² (427 square miles). It is bordered by the largely rural districts of Torridge, Mid Devon and West Somerset, and the coast to the north. Most of the land in North Devon is classified as green space, covering 95% (1035 km²) of its total area, and is designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The coastline, historic towns, nature reserves and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are valuable assets. As quality of life and environment becomes an ever more important factor in choosing where to live it is likely that population growth in North Devon will continue.

The extensive rural areas and popular coastline support an economy characterised by the very visible agriculture and tourism sectors, and support a population characterised by its resilience and self-sufficiency. The area is peppered with a few larger manufacturing businesses on which many rely for employment, but in the main northern Devon is notable for the large numbers of micro and small businesses.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) provided a population estimate for North Devon in mid-2018 of **96,110**. The 2011 census had a total population of 93,667, showing a 2.7% increase in the North Devon population over that 7-year period. Between 2018 and 2033 North Devon’s population is set to grow by 7% to an estimated 103,400.

It may be useful to understand the carbon dioxide emissions from the district in the context of the other local authorities across Devon. The graphic below highlights the differences between carbon emissions from rural district compared to urban locations. City areas have lower transport emissions as residents tend to be in closer proximity to amenities and therefore can walk, cycle and use public transport for a higher proportion of journeys than those in rural areas. Urban areas tend to be on the gas grid whereas dwellings in rural areas are more likely to rely on oil, and gas is a lower carbon fuel. Rural areas have higher emissions from agriculture, while manufacturing and other industrial processes tend to be located in urban areas, so these areas have higher emissions associated with these activities.

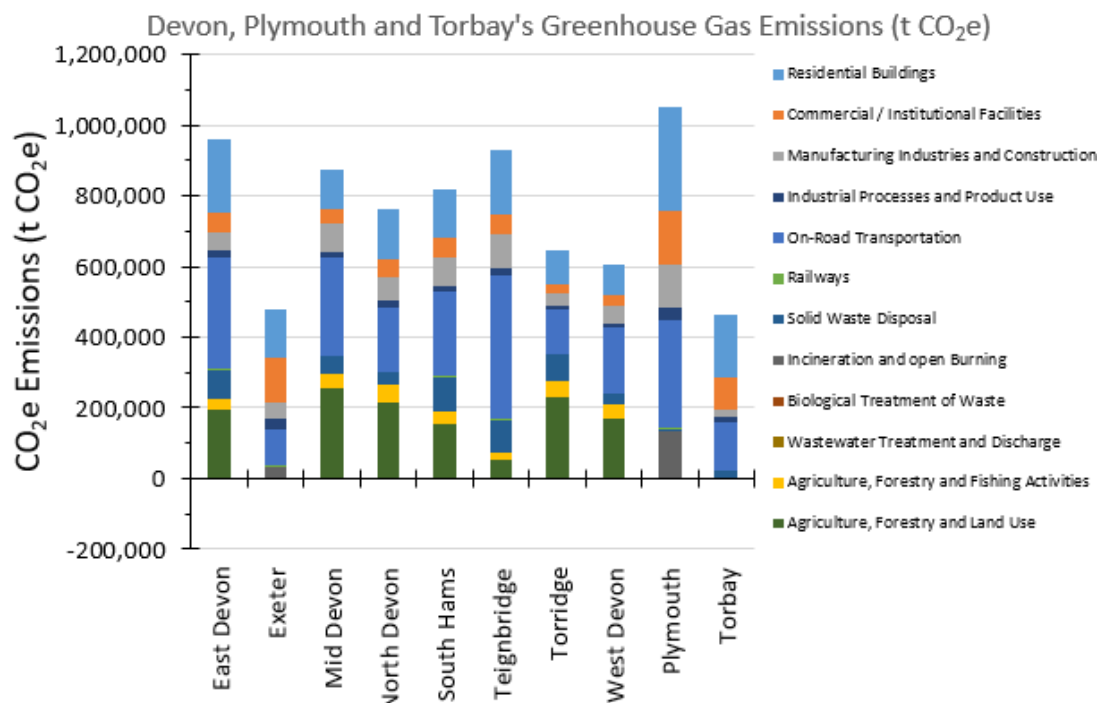


Fig 1 2019 Greenhouse gas emissions across Devon by Sector (with kind permission of Devon County Council)

The case for declaring a climate emergency

Our planet's climate is changing and warming is accelerating. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that we have 10 years to limit climate change to avoid a catastrophe. In response to the Paris Agreement, a special report on Global Warming¹ was published in October 2018. This describes the risks that a 2°C rise in temperature is likely to cause compared to 1.5°C, including increased risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security and economic growth. The report found that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require 'rapid and far-reaching' transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport and cities. The report emphasised that with ambitious action from national and sub-national authorities, civil society, business and local communities, it may still be possible to limit warming to 1.5°C. In addition, a recent Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)² stated that around 25% of the world's species are now at threat of extinction due to habitat loss and the effects of climate change.

Global temperatures have already increased by 1°C from pre-industrial levels. Atmospheric CO₂ levels are above 400 parts per million (ppm). This far exceeds the 350ppm deemed to be a safe level for humanity.

The latest generation of national climate projections, the UKCP18 resource from the Met Office³, provides up to date and robust scientific evidence on projected climate changes. The general climate trend predicted by UKCP18 for the UK is an increased chance of warmer, wetter winters and of hotter, drier summers, along with an increase in the frequency and intensity of extremes. Under UKCP18, Storm Desmond, which occurred in winter 2015/16 and caused £1.3 billion in insurance costs, was deemed more than 40% more likely due to climate change.

In order to reduce the chance of runaway global warming and limit the effects of climate breakdown, it is imperative that CO₂ (carbon equivalent) emissions reduce from their current 6.5 tonnes per person per year to less than 2 tonnes, and this needs to be done as soon as possible.

Whilst the cause might be a subject of debate for some, human activity has contributed to the situation and so we have a moral duty to intervene. The risk of not acting could have profound consequences on this and future generations.

¹ [IPCC report](#)

² [Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services report](#)

³ [Met Office UK Climate Programme](#)

For those who say that climate change is not happening, we need to look at the global evidence⁴.

- 2010-2019 was the warmest decade since records began in 1850 and each decade since 1980 has been warmer than the preceding one.
- 2019 was the second warmest year on record (2016 is currently the warmest) and 2020 reached the same record level⁵.
- The UK's warmest ten years ever recorded have all been since 2002.

 **Met Office**

UK annual temperature

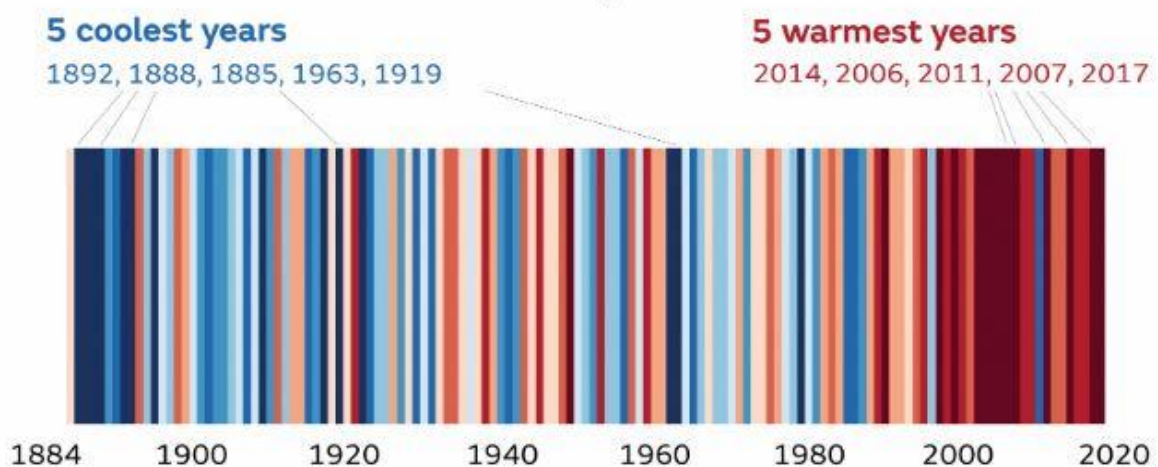


Fig 2 Met office graphic showing UK annual temperature trend – cooler years are blue, warmer years are red.

Climate change is having a range of impacts and the term 'global warming' does not adequately express the effects. It is causing more extreme storms, droughts, heat waves, melting ice, ocean acidification and rising sea levels. Our coastal communities and habitats are at particular risk from the acceleration in rising sea levels; in 2019 the Global Mean Sea Level was at the highest ever measured⁶. As sea levels rise, low lying and coastal areas will be at particular risk.

The Local Planning Authorities for Northern Devon, North Devon & Torridge District Councils, have identified the need for formal designation of Coastal Change Management Areas in the developing revised Local Plan in recognition of the impacts on our coastline from a range of factors, including climate change. This is underpinned by a detailed research project in partnership with Natural England, the Environment

⁴ [Met office: What is Climate Change?](#)

⁵ [NASA 2020 Weather records](#)

⁶ [European Environment Agency indicators](#)

Agency, the Marine Management Organisation and the University of Plymouth. This research uses the latest projections for sea level change, and particularly establishes the extent of potential flood risk across the Taw-Torridge estuary. In its worst case scenario modelling, incorporating up to date climate change impact predictions, it shows that more areas may be at risk of coastal change than previously thought⁷. This modelling will be used to help plan for managing future coastal change by the Council and other agencies. While the new Local Plan will set out policies about development in those areas, along with consideration of what might need to be relocated or protected, the research will also assist with coastal protection work and the operation and maintenance of existing sea defences and flood risk and coastal erosion measures. However, in conjunction with this it is vital that we play our part in addressing the causes of climate change as another means to mitigate these local impacts.

Farming is also being affected by climate change. While hotter weather and higher levels of CO₂ may make growing some crops easier, or even allow us to produce new ones, with more droughts expected, water may not be as easy to access, making it harder to plan the growing season. Some crops we grow today may also be unsuited to higher temperatures, and there are risks from new pests and diseases previously unsuited to our climate.

Floods, storms, and extreme heat can cause damage to buildings, disrupt transport, Cause power cuts and affect health. Buildings and infrastructure need to be adapted to cope with the new conditions. Businesses will have to plan around a changing climate, bringing additional costs and challenges as they look to adapt.

⁷ The Coastal Change Management Area Technical Evidence and maps can be found at [Torridge District Council](#)

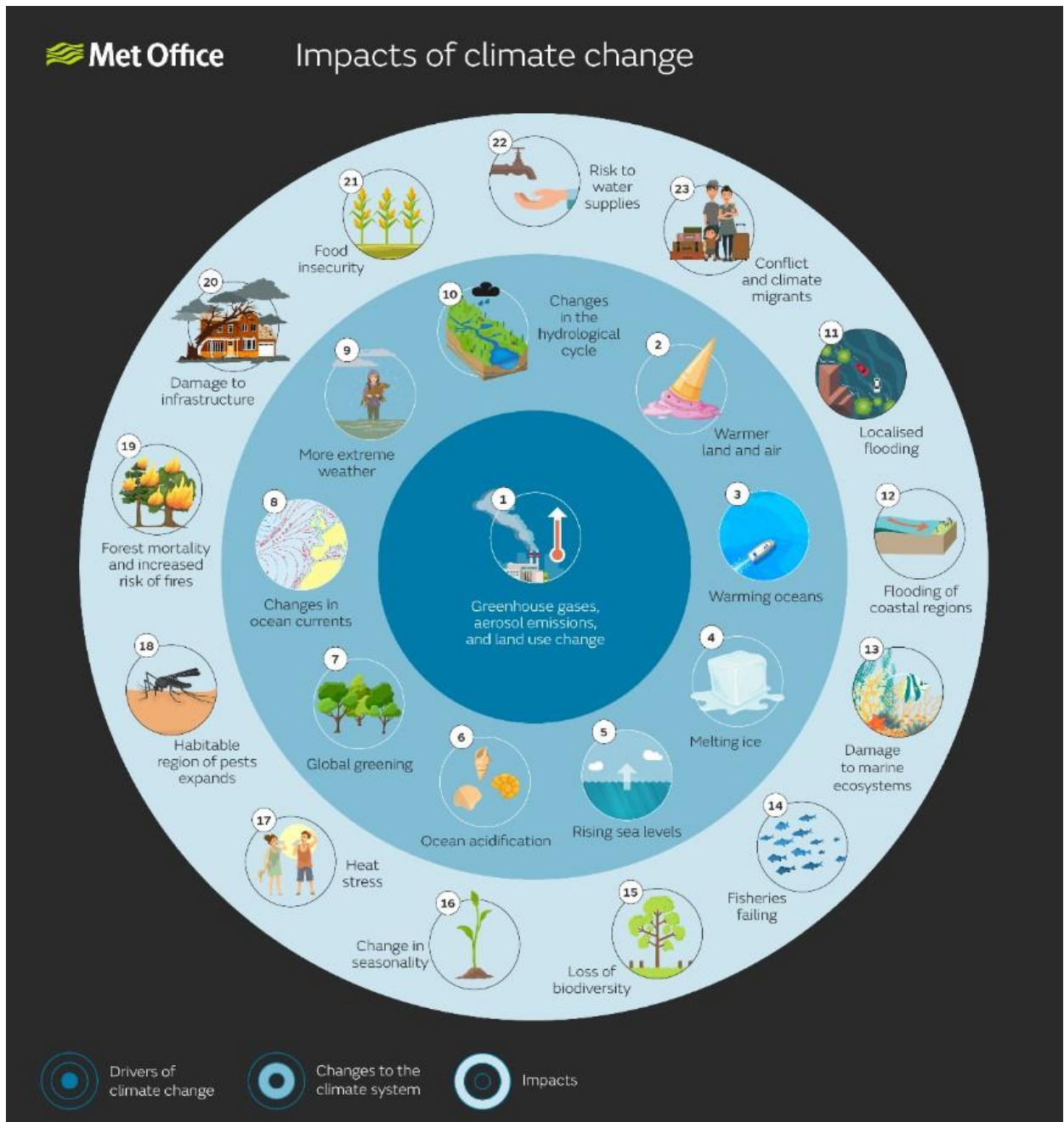


Fig 3 Met office graphic showing the impacts of climate change.

What we have already achieved

North Devon District Council is a large employer and a significant resource user and we recognise that our operations and service delivery have an impact on our environment.

Our Environment Policy states our commitment to managing this impact.

Whilst North Devon Council has not had a specific Carbon Action Plan in place, previously we have undertaken a number of projects which address the climate and ecological emergencies, including:

- Changes to our grounds maintenance regime to reduce carbon and encourage nature;
- Trial of biodiversity net gain approach;
- We have improved our kerbside recycling collection to include additional materials. Including food waste;
- Working with Carbon Savvy to promote use of personal carbon footprints and support people to make changes that reduce carbon;
- We have replaced our old Leisure Centre with a more energy efficient building;
- Working with 361 Energy to promote home energy efficiency advice.

Our Vision

- By 2030 North Devon District Council operations will be clean, efficient and net carbon neutral, leading by example in our community and to our residents and businesses.
- We will play a wider role enabling, encouraging and supporting the wider District of North Devon to achieve net-zero ambitions.
- We will work with our partners including Devon County Council, Torridge District Council and North Devon Biosphere and will cooperate, seek opportunities to develop projects, and take forward policies that will enhance our environment, biodiversity and improve sustainability of our communities and the wellbeing of our residents and visitors.
- We will seek economic opportunities and improvements for our communities and businesses in the new green future, promoting and directing sustainable development and seeking financial support for projects to enhance our environment and assist in reaching our carbon neutral target.
- We will promote our beautiful environment and rich biodiversity, and North Devon as a beacon for sustainability, community action and green opportunities.
- We will work with Central Government and Devon County Council to contribute at a local level in the delivery of national and regional climate change, biodiversity and sustainability programmes.

- We will work with our local communities to plan for and mitigate the effects of climate change within our district.
- We will seek to work with our local schools and young people to educate, promote and support the next generation to take on the challenges ahead.

We intend to deliver this Vision through a combination of changes to existing work programmes and staff responsibilities as well as new work programmes which will require funding.

Our response to the challenge

While this plan sets out North Devon Council's road map to carbon neutrality, we recognise that we need to integrate climate change and sustainability into the heart of our governance and processes. In order to achieve this we have implemented the following:

Corporate Plan

Our Corporate Plan was published in 2019 and has four priorities:

- We achieve financial security
- We become focussed on delivering the best for our customers
- Our environment is cherished and protected
- We plan for North Devon's future.

The Plan included commitments to:

- Protect and enhance our most valuable and unique coastline and countryside and ensure that North Devon remains a high class and internationally recognized natural environment
- Put the environment at the centre of our decision making and to lead on reducing any harmful effects on the environment including carbon creation
- Adopt community based approaches in planning and in implementing that vision whilst recognizing the threats and implications of climate change

These priorities will form the basis of divisional business plans going forward, so that all the services in the Council will be aligned to and working towards these aims.

Specific actions that will be taken forward by us and in partnership include:

- Work with partners to develop a County wide carbon reduction plan to comply with international targets
- Work with our communities on developing new practices that protect the environment

- Work to enhance green spaces and recognise and use the links with health enhancement
- Encourage and implement energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives.
- Adopt a policy for regulating energy efficiency in private rented properties.
- Explore investment opportunities in renewable energy generation and storage from the installation of renewable energy on Council buildings and land.

Management and Governance

Members are at the heart of decision making at NDC. A Lead Member for the Climate has been assigned who is tasked with; overseeing, supporting and lobbying for sustainability and climate change to be at the forefront of Council operations and policy; responding effectively to need and maximise the influence of NDC as widely as possible in our communities.

We have developed a Member Climate Action Team who meet regularly to discuss environmental matters, feed into projects and provide a sounding board and feedback on actions and priorities before these are discussed at formal Committee.

Where specific work streams merit it, we will establish specialist Task and Finish groups to progress and report on actions and outcomes. These will provide a flexible response to issues and projects as required. These will utilise the expertise of external individuals and organisations and will promote collaborative and multiagency working to establish common goals and meet those aims.

NDC's Carbon Footprint

It is clear that in order to meet our stated target of net zero carbon by 2030 we must regularly measure our carbon impacts and usage accurately and use this as a basis for determining our actions and priorities over the coming years. We will regularly report on the effectiveness of our actions and demonstrate achievements.

The Government regularly publishes Local Authority and regional carbon dioxide emissions national statistics⁸. These provide the most reliable and consistent breakdown of estimates of CO2 emissions across the country using nationally available datasets going back to 2005. These show a steady reduction in per capita emissions for North Devon, from 7.3 tonnes in 2005 to 4.5 tonnes in the last reporting year of 2019. This is below the average in the country but still some way off the 2-tonne per capita goal set by the IPPC. It is interesting to note that these improvements have come about through a steady reduction in carbon emissions across industrial, commercial and domestic sources (due in large part to switch from coal in electricity

⁸ Local Authority carbon dioxide emissions

generation to gas and renewables) however there has been a marginal increase in emissions from transport sources over the same period.

There is an established methodology for assessing and reporting on the carbon footprint of an organisation as given in guidelines published by HM Government – Environmental Reporting Guidelines (updated March 2019)⁹

The reporting guidance identifies the main types of emission sources in three categories known as ‘scopes’. These are defined as:

Scope 1: direct emissions from fuel combustion, such as boilers for heating buildings, transport fuel used by owned or directly leased vehicles and ‘fugitive emissions’¹⁰.

Scope 2: indirect emissions from the consumption of purchased electricity i.e. from power stations, and heat generated off site i.e. district heating.

Scope 3: indirect emissions from the transmission and distribution of electricity and from many other activities, including products and outsourced services which are bought on behalf of the council. For most organisations, these are the largest area of emissions, but are acknowledged as the most difficult to measure.

Reporting of scope 1 and 2 emissions is given as ‘essential’ by the guidance. Scope 3 reporting is discretionary, but desirable.

Following North Devon Council’s Climate Emergency Declaration, the Centre for Energy and the Environment at Exeter University was asked to calculate a baseline carbon footprint for our organisation based on data provided from 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019.

A footprint based on data provided from 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021 was calculated in 2022.

⁹ [HM Government Environmental Reporting Guidelines](#)

¹⁰ Some equipment, such as fridges and air conditioning units, not only use energy, but also contain chemicals which are greenhouse gases such as hydrofluorocarbons. A degree of leakage is inevitable. These gases are known as fugitive emissions and good equipment maintenance can reduce the problem.

The summary results are shown in the table below:

No.	Category	2018/2019 tCO2e	2020/2021 tCO2e
Scope 1 Direct GHG emissions and removals		1392.4	1354.3
1.	Stationary Combustion	190.7	181.5
2.	Owned transport	1201.8	1172.9
3.	Process emissions	0.0	0.0
4.	Fugitive emissions	0.0	0.0
Scope 2 Energy GHG indirect emissions		351.0	197.0
5.	Electricity	351.0	197.0
Scope 3 Other indirect GHG emissions		2208.1	6207.7
6.	Purchased material and fuel	748.1	3246.2
7.	Transport related activities	425.6	19.2
8.	Waste disposal	0.0	7.3
9.	Leased assets and franchising, outsourcing	0.0	2043.9
10.	Sold goods and services	1034.4	891.1
TOTAL GROSS FOOTPRINT (SCOPES 1, 2 AND 3)		3951.5	7759.0
11.	Offset emissions	0.0	0.0
TOTAL NET FOOTPRINT (SCOPES 1, 2 AND 3)		3951.5	7759.0

Scope 1 emissions remain about the same for both years. The use of gas or oil for building heating and our waste collection rounds were largely unaffected by covid lockdowns.

Scope 2 emissions decreased, this is likely to be the result of covid lockdowns as many staff worked from home.

Scope 3 emissions show a substantial increase. This is because the carbon impact of our procured goods and services was not taken into account in our baseline. Typically 70-80% of an organisation's footprint lies in their Scope 3 emissions, and so it is important that procured goods and services are included.

Overall, our main carbon impacts are seen in the following areas:

Property - NDC has a wide and diverse range of property assets, some leased or rented, including leisure facilities, the crematorium, and the council offices and buildings themselves. The heating and lighting of these buildings fall under both scope 1 and 2 emissions.

Operational vehicles - particularly in our waste collection service which provides the majority of our transport carbon usage. However, business mileage is also accrued over a range of services.

Procured goods and services – this is the most significant part of our footprint.

Sold goods and services – we sell diesel for boats at Ilfracombe Harbour.

We will update our carbon footprint annually in order to provide a sound basis to plotting our route to carbon neutrality by 2030. In addition, we will seek to standardise our reporting approach, particularly around scope 3 emissions, with Torridge District Council. This way we can look to compare and contrast our carbon usage and drive improvements through a collaborative approach with our neighbouring Authority.

More detail on the outcome of this process will be provided in future versions of this plan.

Opportunities for North Devon on the journey to Carbon Neutrality

For too long, climate change and the climate emergency has been portrayed in purely negative terms. This needn't be the case and we should look to the benefits that moving to a sustainable and low carbon future can bring to our district and economy.

Such benefits can include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting local economic growth by harnessing a low carbon economic strategy that identifies local opportunities and supports the development of local jobs, knowledge and infrastructure.
- Generating and supporting innovation to stimulate growth and develop real social change in our communities.
- Helping local businesses to diversify and grow sustainably, to cut costs and increase competitiveness by reducing their energy, water and resource use. Promoting and supporting the circular economy.
- Saving money for the council and local people by ensuring that local homes, businesses and public buildings use energy and other resources efficiently.
- Helping the most vulnerable at risk from fuel poverty and the impacts of extreme weather such as flooding, over-heating and cold.
- Boosting the local economy by supporting and promoting our green tourism base, protecting and marketing our natural assets and local sustainable services.
- Generating income for the council: making the most of the council's assets to generate power, enhance biodiversity and support the diversification and vibrancy of our communities in our new sustainable future.
- Helping households save money on their energy bills and keep warm and healthy by improving the energy efficiency of local homes.
- Promote wellbeing within our communities through the use of active travel and making our natural assets accessible to all.
- Direct cost savings: through initiatives to reduce the council's use of energy and water and to minimise waste.
- Pooling resources: working in partnership with others, sharing services and increasing purchasing power.

- External funding: maximising opportunities to bring in investment through external funding mechanisms available under the emerging climate and biodiversity agendas.
- Protection from future costs by supporting our communities to be fully prepared to manage future weather-related events, reducing costs such as the repair and clear-up from flooding and storm damage as well as the human costs of such events.

Embracing a low carbon, biodiverse, sustainable future will have huge benefits for this Authority, and for our communities, businesses and residents. By addressing the climate and ecological emergency we have an opportunity to create a fairer, healthier, more resilient and more prosperous society for generations to come.

Working with Devon County Council

Devon County Council have similarly declared a Climate Emergency¹¹, and since that time have been working on developing their own carbon plan in response. In 2019 it set up a Devon Climate Emergency Response Group (DCERG) tasked with coordinating a collaborative Devon-wide response to the climate emergency to facilitate the reduction of carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050 at the latest and prepare Devon for the necessary adaptations to infrastructure and services to respond to a 1.5-degree warmer world. North Devon Council has a representative on this group as well as the Tactical Group which sits beneath it and provides the practical support to the strategic group.

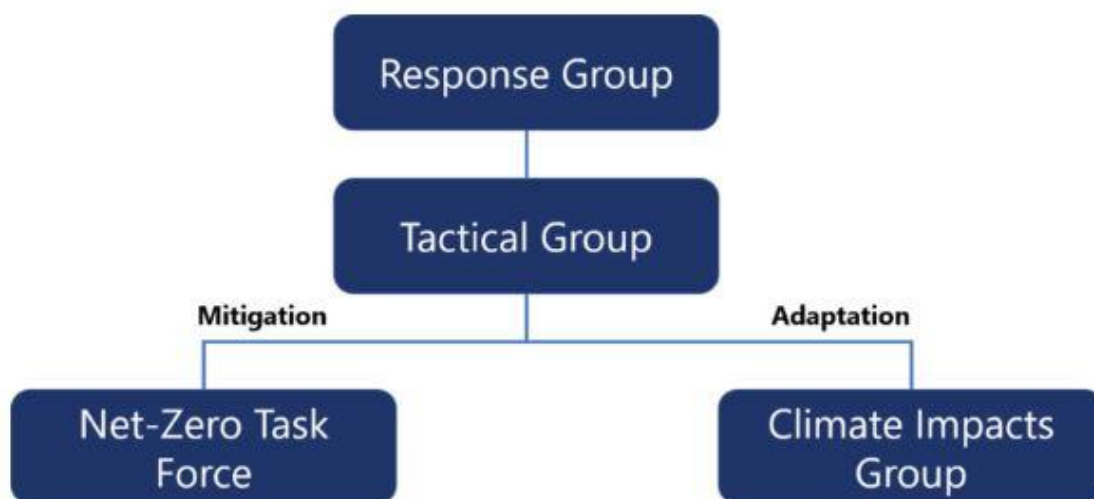


Fig 4 Devon County Council structure Climate Response Structure

¹¹ [Devon Climate Emergency](#)

The climate impacts group has been tasked with reviewing levels of community adaptation for a warmer world and will report on measures that need to be implemented to ensure that our communities are suitably prepared.

The Net Zero Task Force¹² was tasked with developing a Devon Carbon Plan to set Devon on the path to becoming net-zero by their target date. This task force is made up of leading academics and sector experts who have used their specialist knowledge and experience to produce an evidence-led Devon Carbon Plan.

The process for the development of the Devon Carbon Plan is given below:

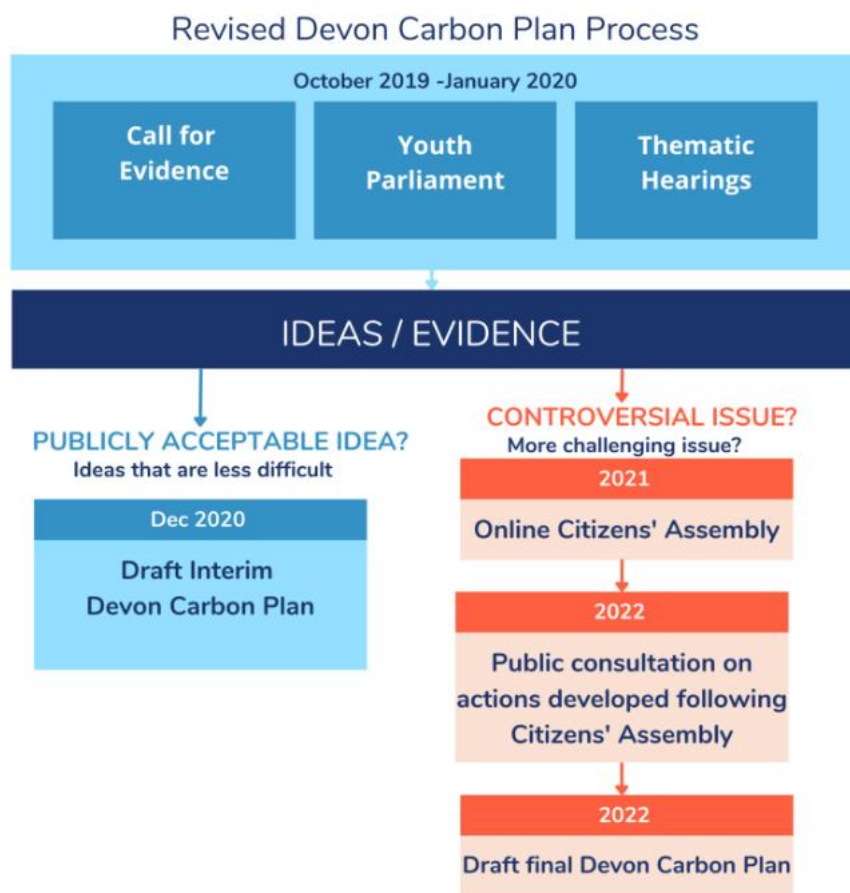


Fig 5 Devon Carbon Plan development process

At the current time, the Citizens Assembly¹³ have reported their results and the final Devon Carbon Plan is being prepared to be put to County Council Members for approval by the end of this year.

NDC are committed to continuing to be involved in this process including the integration of our own carbon plan with the wider Devon plan. We recognise that only through a shared

¹² [Devon Climate Emergency Net Zero Taskforce](#)

¹³ [About Devon Climate Assembly](#)

vision and ongoing collaboration with both our County and wider District Partners will we be able to achieve many of the goals we aspire to, particularly where wider infrastructure or regional actions need to be implemented to support our own and our community's journeys to net-zero.

The LEP and the Growth Strategy

The Heart of the Southwest Local Enterprise Partnership covers Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay. It is a business-led partnership between the private sector, Local Authorities, universities and colleges. The purpose of the partnership is to:

- Identify common priorities.
- Attract resources and investment.
- Make a difference to productivity and prosperity.

As one of the Authorities involved in this partnership we are closely involved in the development of the plans and strategies on which the local business community needs to increase productivity and prosperity.

The HotSW LEP has made a commitment to clean, sustainable development across its initiatives and programmes. Coming out of the Covid-19 epidemic, the Build Back Better programme¹⁴ seeks to focus investment to deliver longer-term economic resilience and levelling up. This includes retrofit schemes and developing work hubs supporting new local ways of working in a post-Covid economy. This forms part of a more extensive investment plan that the LEP is developing under its Route Map to Recovery¹⁵; which will not only support recovery but help transform the Heart of the South West's productivity and their commitment to deliver net-zero carbon as part of England's Greenest economy.

The Route Map to Recovery will:

- Restart the economy by supporting businesses to reopen, getting newly unemployed back to work and support hardest hit sectors;
- Revitalise through local interventions that start to build back better, support bedrock and growth sectors, promote economic growth and create new jobs, and train residents to access jobs;
- Grow to a better economy which has higher GVA and productivity, better quality jobs, more innovation and R&D, lower carbon emissions, less inequality and exclusion.

¹⁴ [Build Back Better](#)

¹⁵ [Heart of SW Route Map to Recovery](#)

Another significant indicator of future direction and commitment is the LEP's Local Industrial Strategy¹⁶. This strategy aims to create a long-term approach to navigate through the current challenging climate and maximise the opportunities and potential available, whilst at the same time putting reduction of our carbon footprint and protecting our natural environment at the heart of the strategy. It looks to put in place measures to reduce economic disparities while creating a stronger and more sustainable economy and high-quality jobs making us more resilient in a rapidly changing world and moving our economy towards a cleaner and more inclusive future.

In May 2021 the LEP published its Blueprint for Clean Growth¹⁷ which seeks to harness our region's unique opportunities around clean energy, marine, aerospace and agri-tech to deliver clean and inclusive growth across the Southwest and accelerate the path to carbon net zero. Their stated ambition is to grow the area's economy in a clean and sustainable way by delivering inclusive economic prosperity whilst protecting the environment, lowering emissions and enhancing natural capital. The blueprint sets out how we they will do this, by focusing on the area's blue and green economy, creating the necessary conditions to enhance the economic connections with the marine and land-based environments.

The LEP are also instrumental in supporting innovative local projects such as the Smart Biosphere Pilot. This project seeks to scale up technology and environmental intelligence at a landscape scale to build real time predictive models of the inter-relationships between agriculture land use, soil health, water quality and run off, natural flood management and flood risks. In doing this it will trigger a range of economic activity and jobs in the natural capital economy of Northern Devon. This is a ground-breaking project involving the North Devon Biosphere, Southwest Water, Environment Agency, University of Exeter, Satellite Applications Catapult and the Environmental Futures & Big Data Impact Lab. Our involvement in this project shows that NDC are at the cutting edge of innovation and natural capital and clean growth.

NDC fully support this direction of travel of the LEP and also commit to continuing to be integrated with these wider strategies and programmes. We are developing a new Economic Strategy for Northern Devon with Torridge District Council, which will promote clean growth.

Planning System – People and Place

The planning system will play a central role in enabling a shift to a carbon neutral future. The National Planning and Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the role of planning is to 'shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse

¹⁶ [Local Industrial Strategy](#)

¹⁷ [Blueprint for clean growth](#)

gas emissions'. By supporting the right development in the right place, the planning process can have major impacts on sustainable travel behaviour, low carbon impact building use, and supporting the infrastructure needed for our low carbon future such as renewable energy schemes.

Central to this process is the development of statutory local plans. Torridge and North Devon District Councils adopted a Joint Local Plan in October 2018. This is currently the principal element of the development plan and is the starting point for the determination of planning applications across both districts. The Plan provides visions, strategies and policies that are intended to shape how northern Devon develops and it aims to ensure that development is well planned and managed effectively whilst having a positive impact on local communities, the economy and the environment and provides a consistent and transparent approach to planning across the whole of northern Devon.

However, in March 2022 Torridge and North Devon Councils launched their People and Place project which will empower our local communities to play a key role in shaping the future of northern Devon through a review of the Local Plan.

The project encompasses a comprehensive review of the two Councils' joint Local Plan and, working with our local communities, will explore how the planning system can be used to help tackle some of the current and anticipated challenges we face in our area, such as:

- Providing enough quality affordable homes to meet the needs of local people.
- Improving access to the services and facilities that support thriving and healthy communities.
- Adapting to evolving economic challenges to support sustainable economic growth.
- Responding to the challenges of climate change.
- Protecting and enhancing our natural and historic environments.

This is a significant piece of work for both authorities. An outline timetable for this review is as follows:

Local Plan key milestones	Date
Issues and preferred options consultation	November 2022
Draft Local Plan consultation	November 2023
Publication Local Plan consultation	June 2024
Submission to the Planning Inspectorate	November 2024
Examination hearings	April 2025
Adoption	December 2025

Fig 7 People and Places key milestones

This timetable for preparing an update of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan is based on current legislation and national planning policy and guidance. However, in August 2020 the Government published a Planning White Paper seeking views on radical reforms to the planning system. At the current time there is no clarity as to whether all of the proposed reforms will be taken forward, or of the timetable for such reforms. In line with Government advice, the Councils will continue to progress with the proposed update of the Local Plan on the basis of current legislation until such time as it can no longer do so, or it is not prudent to do so having regard to any transitional arrangements.

A Joint Planning Policy Committee has been established to oversee the development of this plan, and includes the Lead Climate Members for both Authorities, indicating the commitment to the climate and biodiversity agenda in this process.

A number of policies will be developed through this process which will have a significant impact on the climate and biodiversity agendas. This includes Solar PV and Wind Sensitivity Assessments, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plans, Coastal Change Management Plans and the development of Design Codes. More information will be provided on the progress of this in future iterations of this document.

Our current Joint Local Plan was already ahead of the curve in many areas on environmental and sustainability matters, and we will be looking to continue this by making our new Joint Local Plan a flagship of our climate and biodiversity ambitions for the future of Northern Devon. As this review progresses, further information will be included in future iterations of this report.

Biodiversity and the Natural Environment

We recognise that climate change and biodiversity are closely linked: climate change has severe direct and indirect impacts on biodiversity and is predicted to be a significant driver of future biodiversity loss. At the same time, the loss of biodiversity magnifies the adverse effects of climate change. Biodiversity impacts linked to climate change include habitat degradation/destruction and the introduction of invasive alien species to ecosystems.

In the same way, biodiversity protection and climate change mitigation go hand-in-hand and are strongly co-dependant. Managing and protecting biodiversity will mitigate the negative impacts of climate change and help humans adapt to it; policies and actions aiming at limiting the effects of climate change will contribute to the protection of biodiversity.

It can be seen that ecosystems rich in biodiversity are healthy ecosystems, which are more resilient to the impacts of climate change. They provide us with natural buffers against the impacts of climate change, especially extreme weather events. Healthy ecosystems also produce other environmental, economic and social benefits such as the supply and purification of water, provision of food, purification of air and the provision of recreational areas which promotes activity and wellbeing. A significant benefit of conserving or restoring habitats is the removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere which help to minimise the cause of climate change by carbon sequestration.

Here in North Devon, we have a unique resource on our doorstep – the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve¹⁸. Biospheres are designated by UNESCO to be sites of excellence for demonstrating sustainable development on a bio-regional scale. They have 3 functions:

- Conservation of ecosystems, habitats, species and genetic diversity
- Development that is environmentally, economically and socially equitable
- Knowledge management to promote learning and understanding to be an example for the local and international community.

The Biosphere seeks adaptation to climate change through the optimisation of natural capital and the range of ecosystems services from the area.

¹⁸ [North Devon Biosphere](#)



Fig 6 North Devon Biosphere map

The North Devon Biosphere Reserve covers 3,300 square km across North Devon and Torridge and extends into West Devon District. There are 63 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the Biosphere Reserve and 671 County Wildlife Sites.

As well supporting and promoting these special landscapes and wildlife areas, the organisation also seeks to support communities who care about living sustainably and are involved in a range of projects from local food to transport, waste minimisation, from sustainable energy production to the role of the environment in supporting wider wellbeing.

North Devon also forms part of Exmoor National Park and the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, two of a family of 'Protected Landscapes' in the South West of England.

Exmoor National Park contains an amazing variety of landscapes that provide inspiration and enjoyment to visitors and residents alike. Large areas of open moorland provide a sense of remoteness, wildness and tranquillity rare in southern Britain, while spectacular coastal views, deep wooded valleys, high sea cliffs and fast flowing streams all combine to form a rich and distinct mosaic. Exmoor supports a great diversity of wildlife including herds of wild red deer, rich lichen communities, rare butterflies, bats, and other species uncommon in southern Britain.

The North Devon Coast AONB contains a diversity of scenery, landscapes and habitats and encompasses the Hartland Heritage Coast, North Devon Heritage Coast as well as the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

We will continue to work with Exmoor National Park Authority, the Biosphere and North Devon Coast AONB and will look to align our ambitions and direction of travel to the maximum benefit of all organisations and more importantly, for our wonderfully rich and diverse environment.

Communications

How our staff will help make us a greener authority

We will provide climate change training for all our staff. As part of this they will be able to suggest how we can act to mitigate the effects of, or adapt to, climate change.

Supporting our Members in the journey to net zero

Our elected members are at the heart of all strategic, policy and financial decision making of the Council. It is therefore vital that we develop an ongoing process to equip our Members with understanding on emerging national issues that may affect our local environment and communities and are able to participate in developing action in response to those issues. We have already put in place the governance structures needed to ensure democratic involvement in all aspects of our evolving carbon and biodiversity plan. We will develop ongoing communication routes to ensure that our decision makers are engaged and prepared to be fully involved in this agenda.

Outward Facing Communications

We recognise that we will need to develop a communications plan for a variety of reasons – from supporting our local communities and businesses with information and guidance to assist on their sustainability journeys, to celebrating our achievements and leading by example.

Our communication objectives will be to:

- Influence behaviour and increase awareness about how residents and businesses can contribute to reducing energy use and CO2 emissions through providing information and support, including carbon footprint calculators and personal action plans.

- Increase the uptake of renewable / low carbon energy technologies across the district.
- Provide information and signposting to improve homes, businesses and community buildings to reduce their emissions and make them more comfortable places in which to live and work.
- Enhance the green economy by promoting sustainable business and green opportunities.
- To promote the valuable work and successes of our partners on this journey to net zero.
- Promote the progress and successes of the Climate Change Strategy.

We will maximise the use of our social media presence to enhance these messages and develop a go-to web resource to provide up to date information on a range of climate and biodiversity matters.

Risk Management

It is acknowledged that a demanding target has been set for our organisation and there are factors that could negatively impact on our journey to net-zero. The risk of failing to meet this target, as well as the potential financial implications of progressing this agenda, has been acknowledged in our Corporate Risk Register and will be monitored through the management process in place to oversee these risks.

Some of the key risks noted with the delivery of this plan are as follows:

Resources unavailable or not secured to achieve actions identified. This includes failure to secure external funding to support carbon reduction measures on major capital projects such as a retrofit programme, but also securing funding for identified measures through our own budget setting process. It is acknowledged that financial savings from the implementation of carbon reduction measures are finite; there comes a point where carbon and biodiversity improvements come at a financial cost. The financial constraints on Local Authorities mean that Members are faced with increasingly difficult decisions when it comes to budget allocations and in the face of this, carbon reduction or biodiversity enhancement may not be prioritised.

Reputational risk to authority for not pursuing or meeting carbon reduction targets. In light of the above, it is likely that decisions made by the Council will receive heightened scrutiny, especially if those decisions are seen to negatively impact on our stated climate and biodiversity ambitions.

Loss or lack of resource necessary to maintain and develop the carbon reduction programme. Dedicated resource has been allocated to this programme but this is shared with a neighbouring authority and is not yet secured on a permanent basis. While we are seeking to embed this within the wider organisation through the management team, it is the nature of a small organisation that this is seen as an 'add-

on' and is competing with, rather than complementing, other organisational requirements and pressures. There is a risk of failure to understand the scale of resources needed (human and financial) to deliver this programme.

Lack of buy-in reduces participation in relevant carbon reduction projects. This applies as much to staff as it does to Members. Again, this may be due to wider competing pressures but lack of acknowledgement of the climate and biodiversity emergency, or our ability to affect meaningful positive change, may also play a part. There is an element of cultural change that will be necessary which may be resisted in some quarters.

Potential for an increase in carbon demand due to wider pressures and projects impacting on our ability to meet the carbon reduction target. This includes the purchase of hostel accommodation to meet our statutory homeless duties, the development of our recycling service necessitating the additional purchase of vehicles. It also must cover the carbon impacts of legacy estate – buildings which are difficult or costly to retrofit but have value to the Authority for wider reasons.

Wider legislative landscape. Forthcoming legislative changes are likely to enhance opportunities for investment and improved market availability and viability. If this is delayed or shelved, this may impact on our abilities to deliver effective change within the timescales set.

Downgrading of carbon and biodiversity management as a corporate priority. There is a risk that the priority assigned to this agenda in the future may be reduced, either due to competing pressures, or change in political will either at local or national level.

Mandating of changes at national level. This is a constantly moving agenda that is playing out both nationally and globally. There is the possibility that actions and changes will be dictated by Government, the meeting of which may detract from this central programme. While such a mandate will be made to meet centrally set priorities and targets, it may mean that we lose the ability to direct and focus on our own priorities.

The above is an outline of the pressures faced in delivering this programme. Future plans will expand on this and include the mitigation measures that have been put in place or are planned to address these issues, and this will be integrated into the action plan moving forward.

Our Priorities and Plans

Introduction

By declaring a Climate Emergency, we have made a clear commitment and have set a target to reduce our carbon emissions from the estate and operations of NDC. We recognise however that we need to go further than this – as a Local Authority we can direct, influence, lever and support our businesses, households and communities in moving to a sustainable future. So, our plan going forward is wider than just Council operations – we want to be at the heart of this transition for all in North Devon. The following action plan is a summary of all the measures we will be putting in place to reach these goals. While we are already progressing a significant number of the actions given, we recognise that some of these are key to this plan and shall be pursued as a priority following consideration of the results of our carbon audit.

Since our Climate Emergency declaration, we have further integrated our commitment to our carbon neutrality vision by putting the Climate at the heart of our Corporate Plan. This is the core vision that informs the business plans that will be developed across all of our services. Our Council is already changing to meet the challenges ahead. As part of this, we have put in place the means to measure our carbon usage over a range of our services and estate. We will collate and report on this annually, and these audits will be the basis of the detailed action plans that will be used to prioritise our plans, creating a roadmap to net zero carbon for North Devon District Council by 2030.

Energy				
Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
1.0 We will carry out a review of our energy consumption across our estate, develop an options appraisal plan for our sites, and where necessary put in place carbon targets and seek funding to implement improvements. This will include options for retrofit, smart energy controls and energy generation and storage opportunities. We will assess whether the council could generate all of its energy needs from its own resources.	High	Green	Place, Property & Regeneration	Completion of surveys and options reporting 22/23 Progress of actions dependent on subsequent funding.
1.1 We will review our energy tariff and investigate the feasibility of moving to a renewable energy supplier for all of our energy needs, once energy efficiency and renewable energy measures are complete.	Low	Green	Place, Property & Regeneration	No date specified at present.
1.2 We will promote the use of renewable energy tariffs with our tenants across our estate.	Low	Amber	Place, Property & Regeneration	No date specified at present.

Transport				
Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
2.0 We will continually improve the efficiency of our vehicles across our fleet ensuring that our vehicle purchases meet the highest EURO engine emissions standards, and that these are maintained to a high standard. We will regularly review refuse fleet routes to maximise efficiency. At the purchase of any council vehicle we will review options for electric, ultra-low emission or hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.	High	Amber	Environmental Enhancement,	Target date to be determined but likely to be a long-term aspiration
2.1 We will explore, implement and promote electric vehicle charging infrastructure, particularly utilising partnership working and external funding to develop schemes across North Devon for the benefit of our residents and businesses and supporting our sustainable tourism ambitions. This will include exploring energy generation and storage opportunities in our car parking facilities.	Medium if supporting our own fleet/ grey fleet.	Amber	Place, Property & Regeneration	Target date to be determined but likely to be a medium-term aspiration incorporating opportunities arising from the national infrastructure roll out

Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
2.2 We will identify and develop active travel options across North Devon to create a safer environment for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. This includes identifying rural cycle routes and electric cycle charge points in line with central Government recommendations. This will be progressed in partnership with a range of stakeholders including Devon County Council through the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.	Low	Green	Place, Property & Regeneration	2023
2.3 We will carry out a review of our Taxi Licensing Policy and will use this as a basis to encourage our taxi operators to move to electric and ultra-low vehicles, including exploring the provision of dedicated taxi charging point(s) to support the trade.	Low	Amber	Planning, Housing & Health	Policy will be reviewed again in 2024
2.4 We will investigate the use of alternative, low carbon fuels for our vehicles.	High	Green	Environmental Enhancement	September 2022

Planning				
Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
3.0 We will use the review of the local plan to embrace opportunities to deliver carbon reductions and improvements in sustainability and biodiversity making use of guidance, expert evidence and best practice to best deliver on a range of environmental matters. We will use best endeavours to maximise the potential of new developments to be highly efficient and incorporate low carbon heating and cooling solutions and support sustainable travel for future residents, customers and visitors. Through the plan review we will revisit and consider the opportunities to support on and offshore wind energy development.	Medium insofar as to potentially increase opportunities for our own estate such as onshore wind generation	Green	Place, Property & Regeneration	December 2025
3.1 We will seek to take forward the relevant principles and actions of the Devon County Council's Carbon Plan through the review of the local plan to ensure joined up direction of travel to meet our mutual carbon, environmental and biodiversity aims and targets.	Medium as above.	Green	Place, Property & Regeneration	Devon Carbon Plan by December 2022. Project and Place review December 2025.
3.2 We will seek to take forward and build upon our pioneering work that seeks biodiversity net gain from development through the local plan review.	Low	Green	Place, Property & Regeneration	December 2025

Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
3.3 We will seek to engage with wider partners to develop local biodiversity off setting schemes to provide choice and assurance to developers obligated through the planning process within Torridge.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Ongoing
3.4 We will lobby Government for improved building regulations for energy efficiency and making renewable energy sources compulsory for new builds.	Low	Green	Member Lead	Ongoing
3.5 We will lobby Government and local providers for improved digital connectivity to order to promote further flexible and remote working patterns, enhancing access to services, supporting our isolated communities and reducing the need to travel. A Digital Strategy will form part of our emerging Economic Strategy.	Medium insofar as supporting NDC's own operations and flexibility	Green	Member Lead, Place, Property & Regeneration	Ongoing
Biodiversity				
Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
4.0 We recognise the benefits of carbon sequestration and the value of tree planting to future offsetting needs, and so we will continue to develop our tree planting programme on land owned by the Council and will look to take full advantage of funding and schemes available to support this plan.	Low (though with offsetting potential)	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Target date to be determined but likely to be a medium-term aspiration

Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
4.1 We will develop a Tree Strategy which will acknowledge the value of our Green Infrastructure including our approach to the management and protection of trees across North Devon, promote sustainability through the 'right tree right place' ethos, promote partnership working and lead by example with our communities.	Low (though with offsetting potential)	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Target date to be determined but likely to be a medium-term aspiration
4.2 We will integrate our climate and biodiversity ambitions with our ground's maintenance operations, developing sustainable options that can be implemented and maintained as part of this programme including developing 'rewilded' areas across our North Devon estate.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Target date to be determined but likely to be a medium-term aspiration
4.3 We will support the Smart Biosphere to build a data-driven response to climate challenges. Working in partnership with the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, Torrington District Council and other key stakeholders such as the Environment Agency we will develop a network of sensors to measure and then respond to a range of sectoral needs.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	No date set
4.4 We will work in partnership with the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve to ensure that actions stemming from the innovative work of the Marine and Landscape Pioneers can be enacted to enhance biodiversity.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	No date set
4.5 We will work with the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve to support delivery of their Nature Recovery Plan.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	By 2030.

Waste & Recycling				
Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
5.1 We will fully participate in the review of the Resource and Waste Strategy for Devon and Torbay, and actively promote its aims to minimise the waste we create, to reduce the impact of resource and waste management on climate change by tailoring operations to reduce the waste carbon footprint, and to seek to preserve natural capital and practice resource efficiency.	Low	Amber	Environmental Enhancement	Target date to be determined but likely to be a medium-term aspiration
5.2 We will promote and support the development of the circular economy and waste hierarchy and will review and be open to all options available to reduce the carbon footprint of our waste collection activities which may include, but is not limited to, maximising recycling and developing new waste recycling opportunities, promoting the waste hierarchy through review of the residual waste collection programme and exploring options to reduce, reuse and repair.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	No date set
5.3 We will work with Plastic Free North Devon to support delivery of their Strategy.	Low	Amber	Environmental Enhancement	Target dates to be determined

The Council				
Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
6.0 We will carry out an annual review of our carbon plan and will be transparent about our direction of travel, achievements and challenges in meeting our stated ambitions. This will be reported on annually to Full Council and is part of our wider commitment to making our climate and biodiversity ambitions central to the governance and operations of the Council.	Low but this is the basis of our understanding of progress against our stated carbon target.	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Annually
6.1 We will develop and approve a sustainable procurement policy to incorporate sustainability, the environment and corporate social responsibility into our financial procedures. We will guide and support smaller businesses who work with us to meet these ambitions. We will regularly review our sustainable procurement policy application and weighting to further develop this approach to maintain continual improvement and encouragement of the most sustainable suppliers to the Council.	Low due to our carbon accounting process currently used	Green	Governance	Possibly 2024 following review of legislation and lead in time.
6.2 We will integrate carbon, environmental and biodiversity ambitions into all our capital projects and ensure that stated standards and targets in these areas are included into those projects.	High	Green	Finance	2022

Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
6.4 We will carry out a full audit of the Council's carbon footprint to current Government guidance, ensuring parity of scope with Torridge District Council to provide future opportunities for comparing performance and best practice, in order to drive change and improvements across both Authorities.	Low but this is the basis of our understanding of progress against our stated carbon target.	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Annually
6.5 We will review consumables purchased and used by the Authority and will seek to move to environmentally positive options. This will include areas such as cleaning materials, stationary usage, tools and machinery.	Low	Amber	Governance	Target date to be determined but likely to be a medium-term aspiration
6.6 We will support staff and members to reduce their carbon footprints by facilitating hybrid working models that support elements of home working and mobile working practices and promoting sustainable transport options such as mileage reduction methods, developing or promoting the use of electric and ultra-low emission vehicles for business purposes and encouraging cycling, walking, car sharing and public transport.	Medium	Amber	Senior Management Team	No date set
6.7 We will review our treasury management policy and resources to determine feasibility of divestment and NDC including and developing ethical investment vehicles within its portfolio.	Low	Green	Governance	Treasury Management Strategy reviewed on an annual basis.

Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
6.8 We will develop and maintain a communications plan integrated with all departments across the Council to showcase the work of the Authority in leading the response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies. This will include a community facing webpage of information, support and resources, as well as a staff and Member facing information source to internally promote our plans and achievements	Low	Green	Customer Focus	Summer 2022 No date set
6.9 We will encourage staff participation in our carbon ambitions by including 'green' idea generation through training and the corporate appraisal process.	Low	Green	Organisational development	Staff training programme to be delivered by end 2022.
6.11 We will support members on their role in championing, influencing and implementing positive climate change and biodiversity measures within NDC and the wider communities they represent.	High	Ongoing	Environmental Enhancement	Ongoing Member training programme to be delivered by end of 2022.
6.12 We will seek to improve the quality and extent of the data in our carbon footprint, particularly for Scope 3 emissions.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Ongoing
6.13 We will lobby Government and local providers to ensure grid capacity in northern Devon supports our low carbon ambitions.	Low	Green	Member lead	Ongoing

Our Communities				
Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
7.0 We will support communities in adapting to climate change, sustainability and carbon reduction in community and emergency plans.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Ongoing
7.1 We will support our towns, parishes and communities with information and support on carbon cutting and biodiversity enhancing projects, funding and opportunities. We will promote the development of local schemes around tree planting, allotments, community gardens and orchard provision.	Low	Green	Environmental Enhancement	Ongoing
7.2 We will support households experiencing fuel poverty by working with partners to promote and implement energy efficiency measures through the adoption of a fuel poverty strategy. This will develop a multi-agency approach to tackling fuel poverty in the district from maximising leverage of existing options to creating enhanced services to residents on energy efficiency/ money management advice and retrofit options.	Low	Green	Planning, Housing and Health	Ongoing
7.3 We will develop guidance for supporting and promoting sustainable events through licensing function and North Devon's Safety Advisory Group.	Low	Green	Planning, Housing and Health	Summer 2022

Commitment	CO2 Potential Saving for NDC	Project RAG Status	Lead Department(s)	Due for Completion
7.4 We will seek opportunities for developing a low carbon economy, promotion of green entrepreneurship and investment through our new Economic Strategy. We will provide businesses with information and support on energy generation, improving energy efficiency and reducing their own carbon footprint. We will support North Devon employers, communities and organisations in declaring their own Climate and Biodiversity Emergencies and developing action plans. We will work with Petroc and support local schools to maximise opportunities for the next generation in our new green future.	Low	Green	Place, Property & Regeneration	No date set.
7.5 We will promote shopping local, promoting farmers markets, direct fish sales and local green start-ups and develop the local green economy and economic generation by pursuing opportunities, funding and seeking cooperation to take full advantage of opportunities.	Low	Green	Place, Property & Regeneration	Ongoing