

TORRIDGE

Carbon,
Environment
and
Biodiversity
Plan

June 2021

Version	Date
1	June 2021

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Introduction

Background to this plan

In July 2019 Torridge District Council (TDC) 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 TDC are committed to assisting in the response to this threat.

This declaration committed Torridge District 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. TDC 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 Torridge to meet this goal. We also recognise that TDC 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 Torridge

Torridge District Council is located within the north west of Devon. The district is divided into 16 Wards, comprising 64 parishes, and is predominantly rural. The main towns are Bideford, Holsworthy and Great Torrington, with almost half of the population living in or close to Bideford/Northam and the remainder of the area fairly sparsely populated. The district is officially classified as 'Rural 80', with at least 80 per cent of the population living in rural settlements and larger market towns.

The district comprises 984 sq. km (380 sq. miles) and has a high quality natural and built environment. The large majority of land in Torridge is classified as green space, covering 95% (938 sq. km) of the district's total area. 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 Torridge will continue.

The economy and culture of Torridge has been traditionally focused on agriculture and fishing and activities linked to agriculture and food processing remain a strong feature of the local economy. Torridge also benefits from its active and attractive tourism sector, particularly around the seaside resorts of Westward Ho! and Appledore, and the historic town of Great Torrington.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) provided a population estimate for Torridge in mid-2018 of **68,143**. (The 2011 census had a total population of 63,839, showing a 6.7% increase in the Torridge population over that 7-year period).

Our demographic is predominantly within the 45-64 age group and our population is older than the UK average. Conversely, we have lower than the UK average of residents within the 25-44 age group, and there is a concern that our young people are choosing not to stay in the district to pursue education and economic opportunities.

Between 2016 and 2041 Torridge's population is set to grow by 15.3% to an estimated 77,300 and the age profile of the population is expected to shift dramatically with a real and proportionate increase in the oldest age groups over the 25-year period.

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. Torridge in particular has a significant number of 'off-gas' communities. 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.

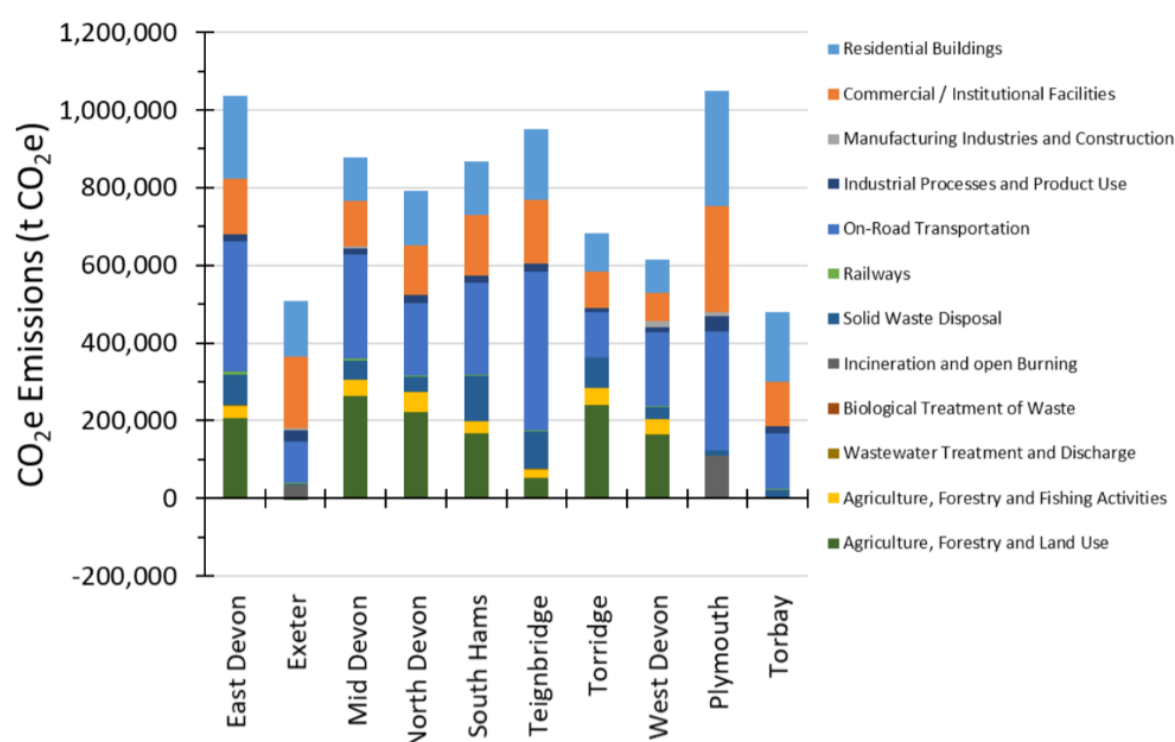


Fig 1 2018 Greenhouse gas emissions across Devon by Sector (with kind permission of Devon County Council)

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.

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

¹ IPCC report <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/download/>

² <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

³ <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/approach/collaboration/ukcp/about>

⁴ <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change/what-is-climate-change>

⁵ <https://www.nasa.gov/press-release/2020-tied-for-warmest-year-on-record-nasa-analysis-shows>

UK annual temperature

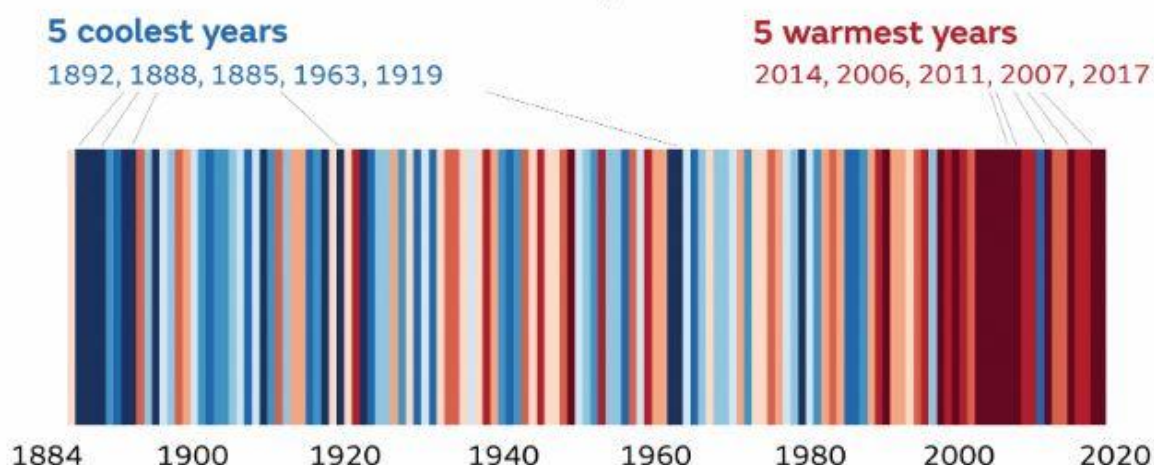


Fig 2 Met office graphic showing UK annual temperature trend – cooler years are blue, warmer years are red.

Climate change is having a range of impacts and the term ‘global warming’ does not adequately express the effects – it’s 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 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 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 worse 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.

⁶ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/sea-level-rise-7/assessment>

⁷ The Coastal Change Management Area Technical Evidence and maps can be found at www.torridge.gov.uk/ccma

Farming will also be 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, 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.

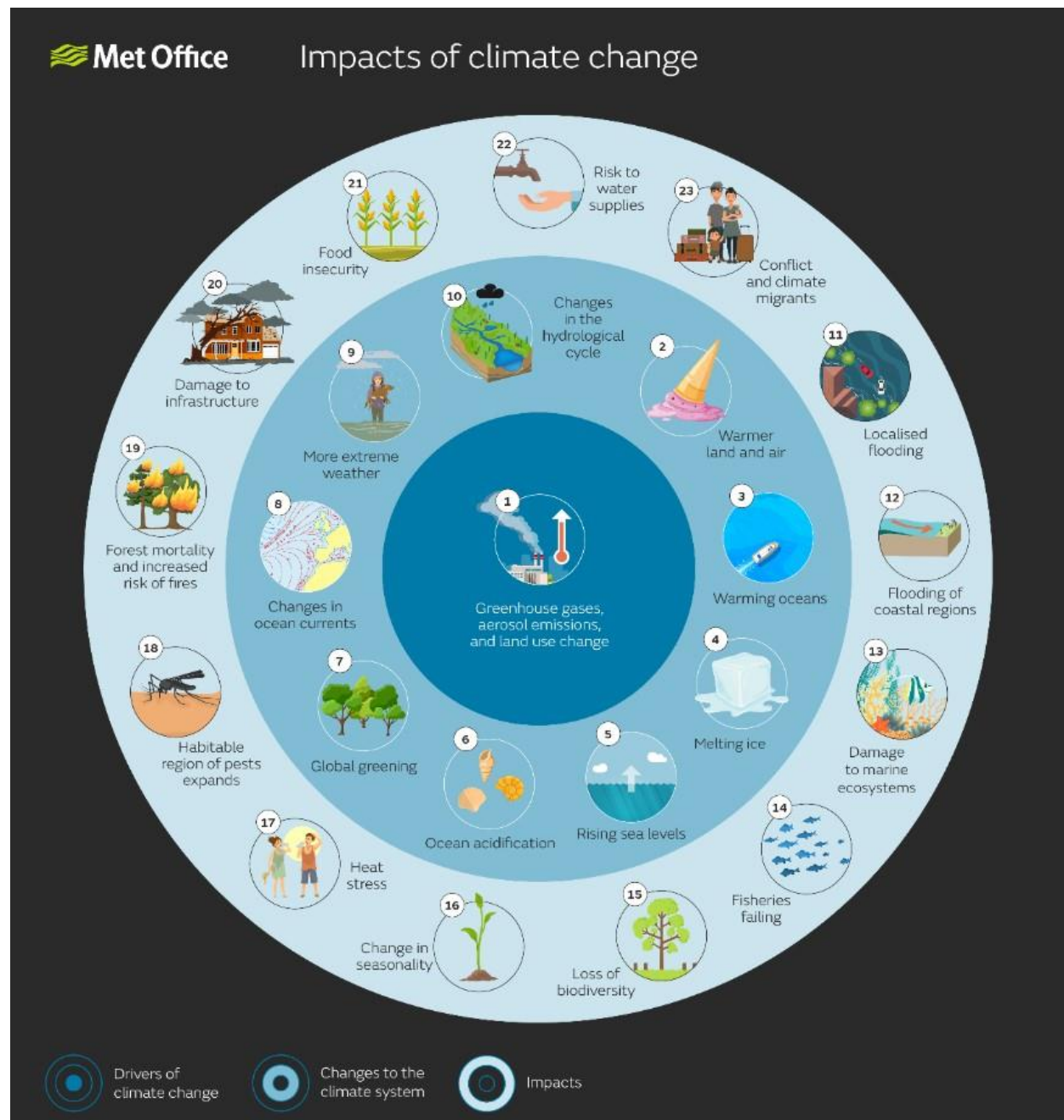


Fig 3 Met office graphic showing the impacts of climate change.

What we have already achieved

Torridge District Council has historically been very active in the monitoring of its carbon footprint and has taken steps to reduce emissions. We developed a Carbon Management Programme which was approved in 2009 and committed TDC to a 12.5% reduction in CO₂ by 2014. This target was met and exceeded: in the last period measured (16/17), carbon emissions had been reduced by 16.3% since the baseline year of 2008. We have already shown foresight and willingness in our sustainability ambitions and will continue to do so.



Examples of measures implemented under this programme include:

- Installation of solar panels on our main building at Riverbank House. The 39 kw of panels generates approximately 27,000 kWh pa which is used internally and exported back to the grid. The roof at Riverbank House has also had its insulation upgraded for added heat efficiency.
- Solar panels at Caddsdwn - 24KW of panels generates approximately 21,000 kWh pa. Woodchip Biomass boilers are also installed at Caddsdwn and Caddsdwn Blue.
- Riverbank House has an electric vehicle charging point and we are rolling out EV charging points in our public car parks and 55KW rapid charging units have so far been installed in Bideford, Torrington, Holsworthy and Appledore.
- Major refurbishments at our leisure facilities in Northam, Holsworthy and Torrington Pools included heat recovery and air conditioning systems replacing old inefficient plant.

- Solar powered Car Park meters have been installed at our main car parks.
- Our construction schemes at Caddstown and Tamar have won multiple sustainability awards and works have been undertaken at all of our commercial sites to improve energy efficiency standards.
- TDC have purchased their first electric fleet vehicle, while all our waste vehicles comply with the latest Euro engine standards and we are committed to including electric and other sustainable options when on renewal of any Council vehicle.

The measures put forward in the previous carbon Management Programme had an added benefit of projected savings to the council of over £300,000 through reduced energy consumption, investment in renewable energy and improving energy performance ratings for our estate.



While some of the measures taken were significant, the cost saving benefits were realised and provided incentive for action, taking this process further may be more challenging in some areas. However, opportunities and technology are continually advancing and measures that were considered and rejected previously may be viable now or in the future. Because of this it will be necessary to keep these matters under regular review. In addition, as policies change and priorities develop, funding and support for implementing sustainable measures should be explored at every opportunity. We need to position ourselves to fully tap into these wider opportunities and work alongside others to achieve these objectives. Cost savings are important, but not the only driver of the climate change agenda that TDC has committed to.

Our Vision

- By 2030 Torridge 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 Torridge to achieve net-zero ambitions.
- We will work with our partners including Devon County Council, North Devon Biosphere and North Devon Council and will cooperate, seek opportunities to develop projects, and will take forward policies that will enhance our environment, biodiversity and improve sustainability of our communities and the wellbeing of our residents.
- 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 Torridge District 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.



Our response to the challenge

While this plan sets out TDC'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:

Strategic Plan

In October 2020 the Full Council adopted a revised Strategic Plan for 2020-2023⁸. This made a commitment to 'Our Environment, Our Future' and to:

- Reduce the eco-footprint of the district to meet the Council's carbon neutral target of 2030.
- Deliver clean, well maintained and managed streets, parks and open spaces.
- Provide high quality planning and development services.
- Manage coastal and flood defences to meet the challenges of the changing climate.
- Reduce waste and increase recycling.

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:

- Relocating all Waste and Recycling resources to one new modern Environmental Centre.
- Adopt, implement, monitor and report against a revised carbon plan for TDC ensuring that climate change and biodiversity is at the heart of our governance and processes.
- Seek carbon reduction and energy efficiency across the existing Council asset base, looking at options for solar generation, ground and air source heating, biomass and other technologies.
- Review the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan to ensure that it remains relevant for good development that unlocks investment and opportunity, protects our important natural assets and helps to create strong and resilient communities.
- Be responsive to erosion risks and work in partnership for the protection of our coastal assets and communities.

Management and Governance

Members are at the heart of decision making at TDC, and a Member Lead for the Climate has been assigned, and 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 TDC as widely as possible in our communities.

We have developed a Member Climate Emergency Group who are meeting regularly to feed into projects and provide a sounding board and feedback on actions and priorities. This group

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<https://democracy.torridge.gov.uk/documents/s16880/Strat%20Plan%20Appendix%20%20July%202020%20agreed%20by%20Full%20Council%20for%20consultation.pdf>

is formally recognised in TDC's Constitution and reports and makes recommendations to the wider decision-making committees of the Council.

We have an established committee reporting procedure, part of which is consideration of the impacts of policies and proposals brought before those decision-making bodies. Climate Change is an explicit matter which must be reported on as part of this process so that members can take full account of the environment when making their decisions.

Where specific work streams merit it, we will establish specialist Task and Finish groups to progress and report on actions and outcomes. These will be essentially task and finish groups and 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. An example of this is the establishment of the Torridge Active Travel Development Group tasked with identifying and developing cycling, walking and other active travel options across the district which includes membership from local Town Councils, Active Devon, Devon County and North Devon Councils, and a local Cycling campaign group.

TDC's Carbon Footprint

It is clear that in order to meet our stated target of carbon neutrality we must measure our carbon impacts and usage accurately and regularly 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 statistics⁹. 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 Torridge, from 7.1 tonnes in 2005 to 4.3 tonnes in the last reporting year of 2018. 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 generation to gas and renewables) however there has been a marginal increase in emissions from transport sources over the same period.

TDC's reporting of our own carbon emissions¹⁰ very much mirrored this wider trend as measures and opportunities for carbon reduction became viable and were implemented and incorporated into our day-to-day operations.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-local-authority-and-regional-carbon-dioxide-emissions-national-statistics>

¹⁰ TDC Carbon Management Programme
2009<https://www.torridge.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=4356&p=0>

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

Property - TDC has a wide and diverse range of property assets, some leased or rented, from our leisure facilities, to our hostel and homeless accommodation, to the council offices and buildings themselves. The heating and lighting of these buildings fall under both scope 1 and 2 emissions (as explained below)

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. In addition to this we also operate a crane and pilot boat for the harbour. These will be reported as scope 1 emissions.

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)¹¹

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’¹².

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.

We intend to carry out a full review and update to our carbon footprint to this revised guidance 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 North Devon 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. We have already put in place measures that will allow us to monitor carbon emissions from our operations and estate on an ongoing basis, and we will review, revise and publish our overall carbon footprint breakdown on an annual basis.

¹¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850130/Env-reporting-guidance_inc_SECR_31March.pdf

¹² 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.

Opportunities for Torridge 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 Emergency¹³, and since that time have been working on developing their own carbon plan in response. It has 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. TDC 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.

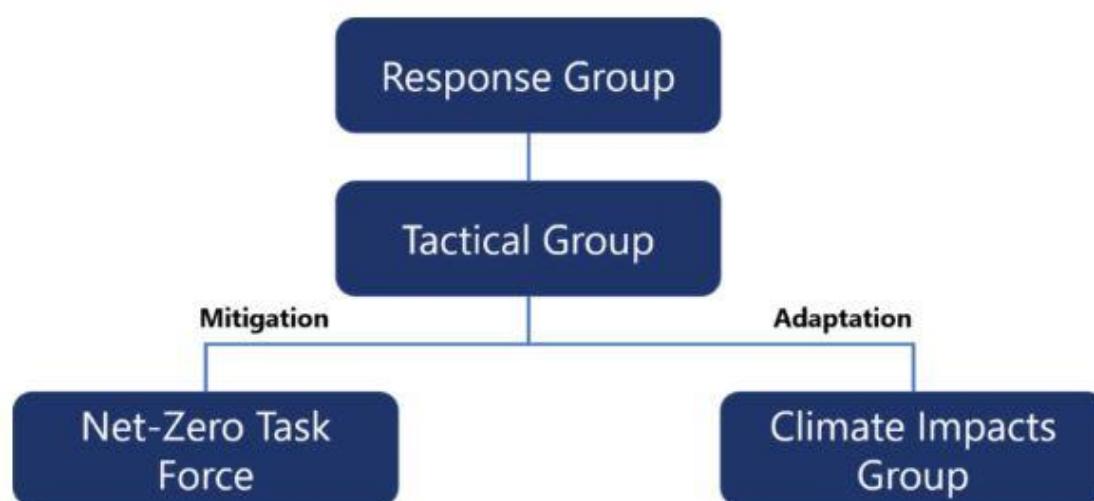


Fig 4 Devon County Council structure Climate Response Structure

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 Force¹⁴ is 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 will use its specialist knowledge and experience to produce an evidence-led Devon Carbon Plan. This plan is currently in the stages of advanced development and it is intended that this will be taken to a Citizens Assembly¹⁵ to enable the views of the public to shape the final document to be put to County Council Members for approval.

TDC 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 vision and ongoing

¹³ <https://www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/governance/net-zero-task-force/>

¹⁵ <https://www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/devon-carbon-plan/citizens-assembly/>

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 South West 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 programme¹⁶ 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 Recovery¹⁷; 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.



Fig 5 HotSW LEP Roadmap to Recovery

Another significant indicator of future direction and commitment is the LEP's Local Industrial Strategy¹⁸. This strategy aims to create a long-term approach to navigate through the current

¹⁶ <https://heartofswlep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HotSW-C-19-121m-Economic-Stimulus-31.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://heartofswlep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Heart-of-the-SW-C-19-Route-Map-to-Recovery-June-2020.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://heartofswlep.co.uk/news/ambitious-local-industrial-strategy-launched-to-deliver-long-term-growth-in-the-south-west/#>

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.

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, South West Water, Environment Agency, University of Exeter, Satellite Applications Catapult and the Environmental Futures & Big Data Impact Lab. Our involvement in this project shows that TDC are at the cutting edge of innovation and natural capital and clean growth.

TDC fully support this direction of travel of the LEP and also commit to continuing to be integrated with these wider strategies and programmes.

The Role of Development Control in Responding to the Climate Challenge

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 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 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 over the period up to 2031. The aim of this plan is to ensure that future 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 into the future across the whole of northern Devon.

While the Joint Local Plan has only relatively recently been adopted, the authorities have already set-in motion a process to comprehensively review and update the Plan. This reflects the current environmental, social, economic and political context which has shifted

considerably since the current Plan was adopted, and also acknowledgement of the Climate and Biodiversity Emergencies declared by both Councils.

Against this is the significant uncertainty as to when and if the Government are likely to introduce the planning reforms arising from the recent White Paper or what proposals may be taken forward. This Council was fully engaged in the consultation process and expressed specific concerns on lack of focus of the proposals on the climate and environment.

It is anticipated that the reforms will take a number of years to be worked up, evolve into revised national policy, primary and secondary legislation and be brought into force; the timetable for the introduction of reforms has not been provided, nor any indication of when such will be available. However, we are hopeful that the emergence of the Government's green agenda – the Environment Bill and the 25 Year Environment Plan, will converge with national planning policy and guidance to support the development of a Joint Local Plan with the climate and our environment at its heart.

We are only at the initial stages of carrying out the comprehensive and detailed plan review, and we will ensure that there are effective links with, and support from, the Member Climate Emergency Group throughout this process. 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.



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 Torridge, we have a unique resource on our doorstep – the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve¹⁹. 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.



¹⁹ <https://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/>



Fig 6 North Devon Biosphere map

The North Devon Biosphere Reserve covers 3,300 square km across Torridge and North Devon 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.

We will continue to work with the Biosphere and will look to align our ambitions and direction of travel to the maximum benefit of both organisations and more importantly, for our wonderfully rich and diverse environment.

Communications

How our staff will help make us a greener authority

In 2019 questions on the environment were included in the annual staff survey for the first time. We asked all staff to rate TDC on how green it is, and if they didn't rate it 10 out of 10 – what actions would they suggest to get top marks. Staff put forward over 130 suggestions over a range of areas shown below.

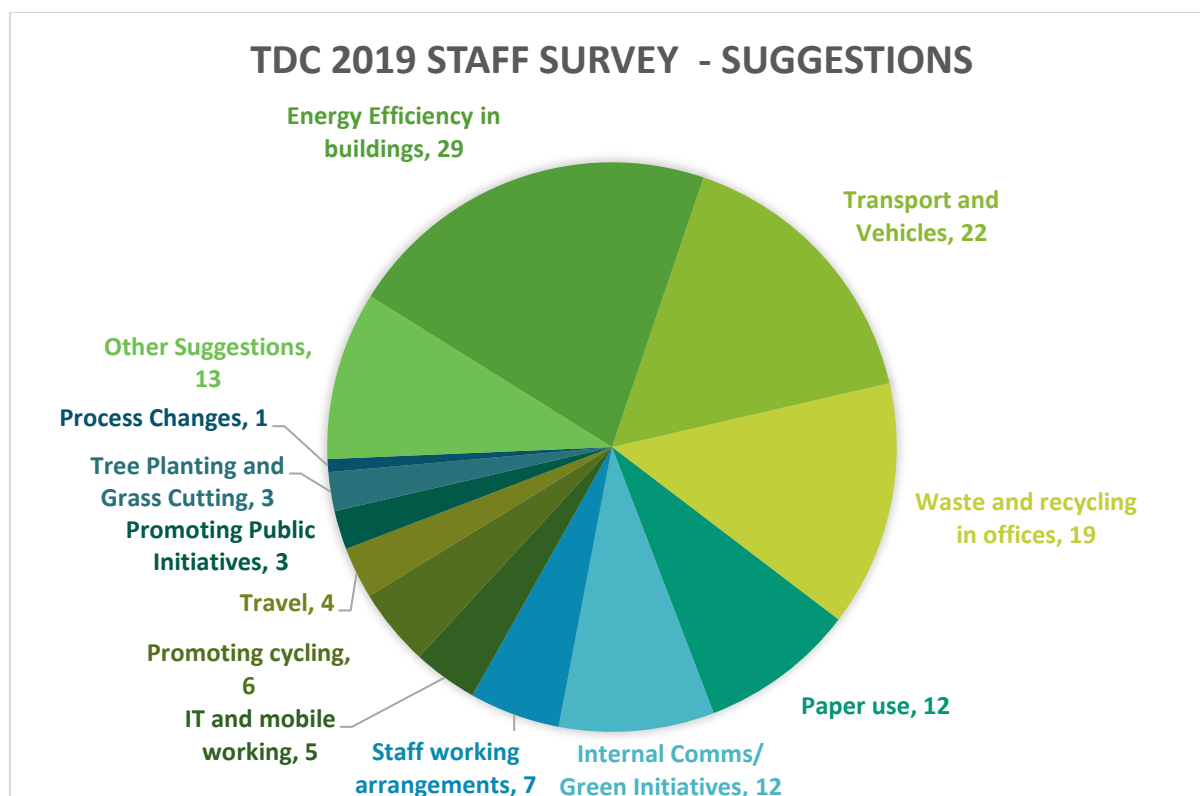


Fig 7 staff survey breakdown

Detailed suggestions included reducing temperatures in the office, electric pool vehicles, more recycling facilities in offices, encouraging agile and home working, and eco-friendly cleaning materials.

All suggestions made by staff have been presented to the Member Climate Emergency Working Group and included in the priority setting as given in this plan. TDC commit to maintaining this feedback process in future staff surveys. In addition to this, the annual staff appraisal will include questions on opportunities and ideas for sustainable working. We will continue to seek the feedback and suggestions in this way as we recognise that staff are central to generating ideas and putting these measures into practice.

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.

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 TDC. 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 Torridge. 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 Strategic 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 in 2021, and this audit will be the basis of the detailed action plan that will be used to prioritise our plans, creating a roadmap to carbon neutrality for Torridge District Council by 2030.



Energy

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 opportunities.

We will review our energy tariff and investigate the feasibility of moving to a renewable energy supplier for all of our energy needs.

We will promote the use of renewable energy tariffs with our tenants across our estate.

Transport

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 and ultra-low emission vehicles. This includes harbour vehicles and vessels.

We will explore, implement and promote electric vehicle charging infrastructure, particularly utilising partnership working and external funding to develop schemes across Torridge 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.

We will identify and develop active travel options across Torridge 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.

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.

Planning

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 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.

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.

We will seek to take forward and build upon our pioneering work that seeks biodiversity net gain from development through the local plan review.

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.

We will lobby Government for improved building regulations for energy efficiency and making renewable energy sources compulsory for new builds.

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.

Biodiversity

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.

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 Torridge, promote sustainability through the 'right tree right place' ethos, promote partnership working and lead by example with our communities.

We will integrate our climate and biodiversity ambitions with our grounds maintenance operations/ contract, developing sustainable options that can be implemented and maintained as part of this programme including developing 'rewilded' areas across our Torridge estate.

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, North Devon 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.

We will support the Environmental Land Management (ELM) trials and projects to ensure that biodiversity is at the heart of post-EU Transition agriculture and that the countryside of Torridge is alive with biodiversity.

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.

We will work with the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and North Devon Council to develop a Natural Capital Investment Fund to support the financing of innovative projects which create jobs and enhance both the biodiversity and green future of Torridge and northern Devon.

Waste/ Recycling

We will seek to 'build green' in our developments such as the Burrows Centre, and look to maximise sustainability and energy generation opportunities in the development of TDC's new Environment Centre, including future proofing the site for an expanding electric vehicle fleet.

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.

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 promote reuse and repair.

The Council

We will carry out an annual review of our carbon footprint 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.

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.

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.

We will support sustainable travel by staff and customers at our main Council sites through the provision of bike racks and facilities for staff as well as the promotion of the Government's Cycle to Work Scheme.

We will carry out a full audit of the Council's carbon footprint to current Government guidance, ensuring parity of scope with North Devon Council to provide future opportunities for comparing performance and best practice, in order to drive change and improvements across both Authorities.

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.

We will support staff and members to reduce their carbon footprints by facilitating home and mobile working technology and 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.

We will review our treasury management policy and resources to determine feasibility of divestment and TDC including and developing ethical investment vehicles within its portfolio.

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.

We will encourage staff participation in our carbon ambitions by including 'green' idea generation through regular staff surveys and the corporate appraisal process.

We will integrate consideration of the impacts of climate change into our committee decision making process and ensure that reviews of internal policies will align with our climate emergency and biodiversity priorities.

We will support members on their role in championing, influencing and implementing positive climate change and biodiversity measures within TDC and the wider communities they represent.

Our Communities

We will support communities in adapting to climate change, sustainability and carbon reduction in community and emergency plans.

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.

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.

We will publicise statutory Minimum Energy Efficiency (MEES) requirements to Landlords, support them in meeting their obligations and align our Housing Enforcement Policy to ensure targeted and effective enforcement of these standards in our private rented sector.

We will develop guidance for supporting and promoting sustainable events through licensing function and Torridge's Safety Advisory Group.

We will seek opportunities for developing a low carbon economy, promotion of green entrepreneurship and investment. We will provide businesses with information and support on energy generation, improving energy efficiency and reducing their own carbon footprint. We will support Torridge 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.

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.