

REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 11 September 2025

Report of: Strategic Director of Place

Title: City Wide Net Zero

Is this a Key Decision?

Scrutiny is a non-decision making committee

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report provides an update on City Wide Net Zero activity from January to August 2025, and outlines the work planned for September 2025 to February 2026.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 Members note and support the work being undertaken to deliver the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan and reduce city wide Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 In 2019, the Council declared a climate emergency and made a pledge made to work towards net zero by 2030.

3.2 In August 2025, the Council published its new Corporate Plan for 2025 to 2028 which sets out the key priorities over the next four years. Extensive consultation has taken place with residents to ensure that identified priorities match those of residents and communities as well as those who visit or work in Exeter.

3.3 After carefully considering the feedback, the new Corporate Plan will prioritise delivery in four key areas - Local Economy, Homes, People and Sustainable Environment. City Wide Net Zero is a cross-cutting theme which links to all four priorities and is particularly focused on the Sustainable Environment.

3.4 Under the Sustainable Environment priority, the Council will work to reduce its own carbon emissions and work with city's key partners, businesses, communities and residents to take action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

3.5 Intended outcomes include:

- A city taking action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- A Net Zero Carbon City.
- Well-maintained parks, open spaces and biodiversity across the city.

3.6 To achieve this the Council's strategic efforts will focus on working in partnership to reduce carbon emissions, by supporting the delivery of District Heat Networks, securing affordable clean and secure energy for the city and bringing forward an Electric Vehicle Strategy for the city.

3.7 Delivery of the Corporate Plan will be carefully monitored against key metrics which have been set out to ensure it is successful in meeting the needs of residents, communities, and businesses.

3.8 The Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero works in partnership across Council services and with city stakeholders to implement the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan and the new Corporate Plan.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources

4.1 A report was presented to Council on 10 June entitled 'Generating income to fund Net Zero activity' which recommended that the net income from a temporary car park on the former bus station site "will provide an ongoing budget to fund the net zero team and its activities at the Council." The recommendation was passed with the salary of the Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero (who is part of the Executive Office team) being paid from the General Fund from the financial year 2026/27.

4.2 Of the £200,000 committed previously from earmarked reserves for city wide net zero activity, £36,638 remains for project activity in 2025/26 and £21,104 in 2026/27.

City Wide Net Zero	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Associated salary costs	£20,990	£66,781	£0
Project activity	£10,000	£36,638	£21,104
TOTAL	£30,990	£103,419	£21,104

5. What are the legal aspects?

5.1 Section 1 of the Climate Change Act 2008 states that it is the duty of the Secretary of State to ensure that the net UK carbon account for the year 2050 is at least 100% lower than the 1990 baseline. The target was originally 80% and was increased to 100% by the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019.

6. City Wide Net Zero update – stakeholder engagement and partners

6.1 Stakeholder engagement: The Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero facilitates engagement with stakeholders across the city including public sector partners and organisations, businesses and community groups. From the original proposal in January 2024, it was proposed that Net Zero team would engage with two main groups, the Strategic Climate Change Group and the Community Climate Change Group. The Strategic Climate Change Group has evolved into the Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group, with community engagement through this group also.

6.2 Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group: A Climate and Nature Group has been established as part of The Exeter Partnership, bringing together representatives from organisations, businesses and community groups to work collaboratively together to deliver the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan. This group meets virtually on a quarterly basis with a rotating chair. Members of this group represent organisations, businesses and communities across the city including: Devon & Cornwall Police, Devon Climate Emergency, Devon County Council, Devon Wildlife Trust, Diocese of Exeter, Exeter Chamber, Exeter Chiefs RFC, Exeter City Council, Exeter City FC, Exeter College, Exeter Community Alliance (Climate Action Hub), Exeter Community Energy Advice, GWR, In Exeter, Inclusive Exeter, Livewest, Met Office, Michelmores, Oxygen House, Pennon Group/South West Water, RDUH, Sport England, Stagecoach, and the University of Exeter.

6.2.1 March 2025 meeting: the first meeting of Climate and Nature Group took place in March 2025 with a focus on attendees introducing themselves and their organisations, followed by a discussion to explore priorities, challenges and areas/themes for this group to address at future meetings including:

- Active and Sustainable Travel: collaboration opportunities, knowledge sharing
- Nature and Biodiversity: opportunities, engagement and connection
- Energy and Buildings: renewable energy, energy advice and retrofit
- Circular Economy: local supply chain, procurement, waste and recycling
- Exeter's Net Zero Target
- Engagement: culture, communication and behaviour change, knowledge sharing, best practice and Exeter as a sustainable city
- Adaptation in Exeter and the surrounding areas.

6.2.2 June 2025 meeting: the second meeting took place in June 2025 with a focus on sustainable travel as transport emissions were the source of 23% of Exeter's greenhouse gas emissions in 2022. Actions included to share a summary of travel progress against the net zero goals, to connect Exeter City FC with Exeter Chiefs for fan travel collaboration, for the RDUH and University of Exeter to explore further lift share opportunities for staff, and to distribute the GWR/Green Circle campaign materials. The discussion at the meeting included the following areas:

- Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan – Travel Focus
- Civic University Agreement – Travel Group
- Organisational Best Practice Sharing
- Devon County Council Transport Strategy
- Great Western Railway (GWR) Strategy
- GWR/Green Circle Project

6.2.3 The next meeting will take place in September with a focus on nature and biodiversity.

6.3 University of Exeter Civic University Agreement (CUA): The Civic University Agreement Exeter recognises that the University is fundamentally linked to the place and people of Exeter. At the heart of this Agreement is a belief that partnership is the catalyst that sets progress in motion. The missions present clear calls to action for

the University and its partners and include 'Support the sustainable and inclusive growth of the city' and 'Innovate towards a sustainable low-carbon economy for the City of Exeter'.

6.3.1 CUA Sustainability Advisory Group continues to meet to discuss areas of joint opportunities, activities and collaboration. This group is chaired by Exeter City Council. The group has had a focus on sustainable transport and active travel and agreed to set up a CUA Sustainable Travel Group.

6.3.2 CUA Community Panel hosted a discussion about the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan, and how communities and other stakeholders can work collaboratively together.

6.3.3 CUA Sustainable Travel Group As part of the CUA agreement, sustainability and travel leads have started working collaboratively together with a focus on active and sustainable travel exploring joint opportunities and activities. This group integrates with the work of the Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature group. A data sharing agreement has been signed between the CUA partners to enable better understanding of the partners' employee travel across the city. As well as CUA partners, Devon Partnership NHS Trust, In Exeter and Exeter Chiefs have joined this group. Sharing of employee travel survey questions and ways of encouraging active travel to work were the focus of the first meeting in August.

6.4 Exeter Green and Blue Wellbeing Network: This new group is led by CoLab focused on connecting communities to green and blue spaces for wellbeing.

6.5 Exeter Climate Forum (organised by the University of Exeter) took place between 30 June and 4 July with the aim to bring 'together world-leading climate researchers, businesses, policymakers and young people, to shape and engage with the priorities for COP30 and beyond'. Council members and officers attended various events including the Opening Event, a Business Reception, and the Global Tipping Points conference. Community events took place at the Exeter Science Centre and The Phoenix.

6.6 Devon Climate Emergency: The Devon Climate Emergency Coalition Tactical Group meets every six weeks. There is also attendance at the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (DCIoS) Climate Impacts Group, as well as the LRF Extreme Heat Workshop in February and the Devon Climate Emergency partnership workshop with the Carbon Trust in April.

7. City Wide Net Zero projects and ongoing activity from January 2025

7.1 Electric buses in Exeter: Stagecoach South West announced in March that thanks to a successful joint investment of £4.4 million from the transport provider and the Department for Transport (DFT) an additional ten double decker electric buses have been secured for Exeter due to be rolled out over the summer.

7.2 Exeter Energy Grants: Through UK Shared Prosperity Fund, grants of up to £1,000 were made available to residents to pay for upgrades to their homes to improve energy efficiency, reduce energy bills, carbon emissions and levels of fuel poverty.

The grant has contributed to loft insulation, the replacement of drafty windows and doors and new and improved heating. 34 grants were awarded to the residents of Exeter.

7.3 Warm Home Discount and Warm Up Grant: Exeter City Council provides the Government's Warm Home Discount and Warm Up Grant for residents. The Warm Home Discount Scheme can provide £140 off electricity bills during the winter and the Warm Up Grant can provide payments up to a maximum of £3,000 per property to provide top-up funding for energy efficiency measures. Both are subject to eligibility criteria.

7.4 Energy Saving Devon helps people make their homes healthier to live in and more energy efficient to run. The Energy Saving Devon project is delivered by a partnership between all the local authorities in Devon, their strategic partners and local community energy organisations. It is administered by Devon County Council.

7.5 Exeter Energy Network/District Heat programme: the Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero regularly attends meetings regarding the District Heat Network with the Head of Service Net Zero and City Centre the primary contact for this project led by 1Energy.

7.6 Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding: the City Council is currently working with Devon County Council and other Devon District Councils to deliver new charging facilities having secured Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding. The fund from government is allocated to Tier 1 authorities (DCC), to support the expansion of on-street residential electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure as well as public charging facilities in car parks across the County. The City Council seeks to install new EV charging facilities in City Council owned car parks (off-street) in line with the City EV strategy. On street residential charging will be carried out by the Highways authority, Devon County Council.

7.7 Bike Hubs: The Net Zero team is coordinating this project to develop bike hubs. This will be a phased project, with phases 1 and 2 focusing on what is within the gift of the City Council (staff and Housing) focusing on land owned by the City Council. Phases 3 and 4 is focusing on supporting commuters and residents across the wider city. A report is being developed and will be presented to the City Council's Transport Working Group and Senior Management Team, once the review of the Green Travel Plan has been completed.

7.8 Green Skills Advisory Panel (GSAP): This is a quarterly summit led by Exeter College. Through UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Net Zero team has provided funding to Exeter College. The funded project achieved its core objectives, notably the successful installation of six green skills training bays. Funding allowed Exeter College to deliver project aims proficiently, exceeding the initial target of 98 learners, with 107 individuals benefitting from the new facility within just six weeks of its installation. Feedback from participants and prospective employers highlights a marked improvement in employability and skill levels, demonstrating strong alignment with our original success criteria.

7.9 Doughnut Economics: options for using the doughnut economics model are currently being researched, with internal discussions planned in the coming months.

7.10 Plant based treaty: information about the plant based treaty is currently being researched.

7.11 Newtown community active travel project: This is a collaboration between Exeter City Council (Live and Move), Sport England and Devon County Council. The scheme, funded by Sport England, has been developed since 2021 following recurring engagement with the local community and local businesses. It will make walking and cycling journeys more accessible and will increase green space to improve people's health and wellbeing, while also helping to reduce carbon emissions in the city centre.

7.12 GWR/Green Circle project: Thanks to a successful bid for funding by ECC from the GWR Customer and Community Improvement Fund, this project (with additional funding from DCC and the University of Exeter) is connecting and promoting city centre train stations and their proximity to Exeter's Green Circle walking route. The stations involved are St Davids, Marsh Barton, and Polsloe Bridge, all located within easy reach of sections of the Green Circle. New maps and information boards are being developed along with new sticker signage for the whole route. ECC is leading this work and collaborating with colleagues from GWR, Devon County Council, the University of Exeter, and Devon Wildlife Trust. Partners and stakeholders from across the city have expressed support for the project and agreed to share campaign materials with their audiences during the September launch.

7.13 Nature Towns and Cities accreditation is a new scheme (from the National Trust, Natural England, and the Heritage Lottery Fund) that Exeter City Council together with partners and communities across the city could apply for. Further discussions are taking place internally and with external partners in the coming months to decide whether Exeter will apply for accreditation. This will be discussed further with partners at the Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group September meeting.

8. Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan: update on activity and implementation

Theme	Activity/update	Next steps
Energy (Built Environment) Goals: Reduced Energy Consumption, Access To Renewable Energy, Affordable Healthy Homes	The Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group has agreed Energy/Built Environment as a focus for an upcoming meeting. Energy Saving Devon, Green Skills Advisory Panel (GSAP), Exeter Energy Grants, the Shared Prosperity Funding and District Heat Network projects and activities all support this area.	The Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group meeting in December (tbc) will be focusing on Energy and the Built Environment.

Mobility (Sustainable Travel) Goals: Reliable Journeys and Resilient roads, Reduced Dominance of Cars	The Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group meeting in June focused on sustainable travel, with activity taking place across the city in this area including electric bus plans and Devon County Council Transport strategy, GWR strategy and the Green Circle project.	The CUA Sustainable Travel Group has recently been established to continue collaboration and joint projects around sustainable travel.
Sustainability (Biodiversity/ Circular Economy/Adaptation) Goals: Green Spaces and Local Produce, Clear Air, Efficient Resource Management, Regenerative Design	The Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group meeting in September will focus on nature and biodiversity.	The Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group is planning meetings on the Circular Economy and Adaptation in 2026.
Capability (Engagement/ Procurement) Goals: Collective Action, Analytic Approach, Locally Controlled Finance	Stakeholder engagement and collective action has been a priority over the past year with the Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature group and CUA Sustainable Travel Group being established.	Sustainability Stakeholder groups will continue to work together collectively with community engagement planned as a focus of a future Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature group meeting in 2026.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9.1 This report and the work of the Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero supports the 'Sustainable environment' priority in the new Corporate Strategy.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

City Wide Net Zero risks are registered on the Corporate Risk Register.

10.1 Challenges:

10.1.1 Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have trended slightly down over the past four years. Overall, GHG emissions have reduced by 39% (-300 kt CO₂e) since 2008. This is mainly attributable to the power sector, which has seen a 69% reduction in emissions through the national decarbonisation of electricity production. A linear decline in emissions from the projected 2024 value to zero in 2030 requires an annual reduction of 74 kt CO₂e, 16% of 2022 emissions, for each of the six years to 2030. This amount is 7.4 times the reduction rate of the current trend. (From Exeter's Greenhouse Gas Inventory Reporting 2022).

10.1.2 Achieving the 2030 target relies on collective action from businesses and organisations across Exeter as well as from citizens (residents, commuters and

visitors) alongside funding and investment from central government and other public/private bodies

10.1.3 Limited resources available for city wide net zero activity.

10.1.4 Cost of living challenges (for both businesses and residents) impacting the speed of change

10.2 Potential Impacts: Exeter does not meet its citywide target of becoming Net Zero by 2030.

10.3 Mitigations and Controls: Sections 6 and 7 outline the mitigations and controls that are in place.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 For each project Exeter City Council leads on in the delivery, an EQIA will be undertaken to ensure no project discriminates against any protected characteristic.

11.2 An EQIA is currently in development for the GWR/Green Circle Project.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 This report details action being taken to reduce city wide GHG emissions.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 The Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero continues to research external funding opportunities to delivering projects of scale, as well as projects that support small scale change.

Director: Strategic Director for Place

Report Author: Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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