

REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 12 March 2026

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 September 2025 to February 2026, and outlines work priorities from March 2026 onwards.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 Members note the Exeter Territorial Greenhouse Gas Inventory report (2023).
- 2.2 Members note and support the positive work being undertaken to work collaboratively to 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.
- 3.2 In 2020, the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan was published, which was produced following extensive engagement with Exeter communities, organisations and businesses.
- 3.3 In August 2025, the Council published its Corporate Plan for 2025 to 2028 which sets out the key priorities over the next four years. Extensive consultation took place with residents to ensure that identified priorities match those of residents and communities as well as those who visit or work in Exeter. The Corporate Plan prioritises 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 is working to reduce its own carbon emissions and work with the city's key partners, businesses, communities and citizens to take action to mitigate to the impacts of climate change. 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.

3.5 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 There is £31,000 remaining in the City Wide Net Zero project activity budget for 2025/26 and this will be rolled forward into 2026/27 (minus any expenditure before 31st March 2026). An additional £21,000 (originally for salary costs; however, these are now covered by new car parking revenue from 2026/2027) has been re-allocated to the project activity line, giving an overall total of £52,000 for project activity in 2026/2027.

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. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

6.1 The report is for information only. For each project Exeter City Council leads on in the delivery, an EQIA is undertaken to ensure no project discriminates against any protected characteristic.

7. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

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

8. Exeter Territorial Greenhouse Gas Inventory report (2023)

8.1 The draft Exeter Territorial Greenhouse Gas Inventory report (2023) can be found in the Appendix. The report provides an updated GHG inventory for the city using the latest data published in 2025 covering emissions throughout 2023, and estimates the annual emission reductions required to achieve zero emissions by 2030 and 2050. The city's 2030 target year is 20 years in advance of the 2050 national Net Zero target required under the Climate Change Act and reported on in the Seventh Carbon Budget.

8.2 Exeter has continued its steady decline towards Net Zero, with total GHG emissions in Exeter for 2023 reducing by an estimated 8% (by 38.0 ktCO₂e to 436.3 ktCO₂e*) from 2022. Responsible for 43% (-16.5 ktCO₂e) of this reduction in 2023, increased renewable energy generation has continually been driving decarbonisation of the power sector nationally. At 38% (14.4 ktCO₂e), reductions within the buildings sector have also contributed, reducing by 9% from 2022. There were minor (<5%) changes to emissions in the other sectors: transport, agriculture, land use, waste and f-gases.

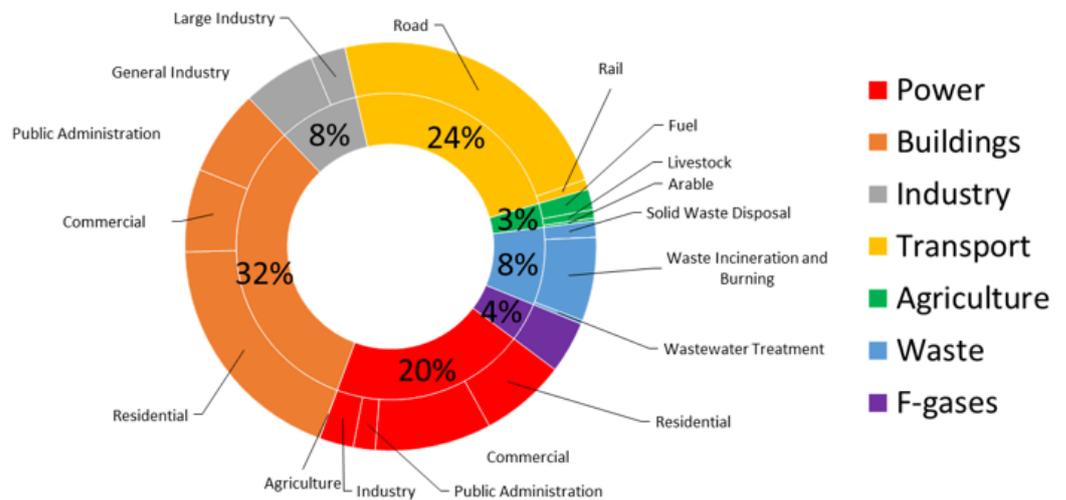
8.3 Based on the last four inventories, the "current trend" shows Exeter is decarbonising steadily at a rate of 13.1 ktCO₂eyr⁻¹, which would see it reach Net Zero by 2057. If Exeter is to reach Net Zero by 2030, it would have to decarbonise at a rate of 62.3 ktCO₂eyr⁻¹ from 2023.

* Multiple compounds are responsible for climate change, including carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄), with varying potencies. The unit, ktCO₂e, kilotonnes of carbon dioxide-equivalents, measures all activities relative to emissions of carbon dioxide.

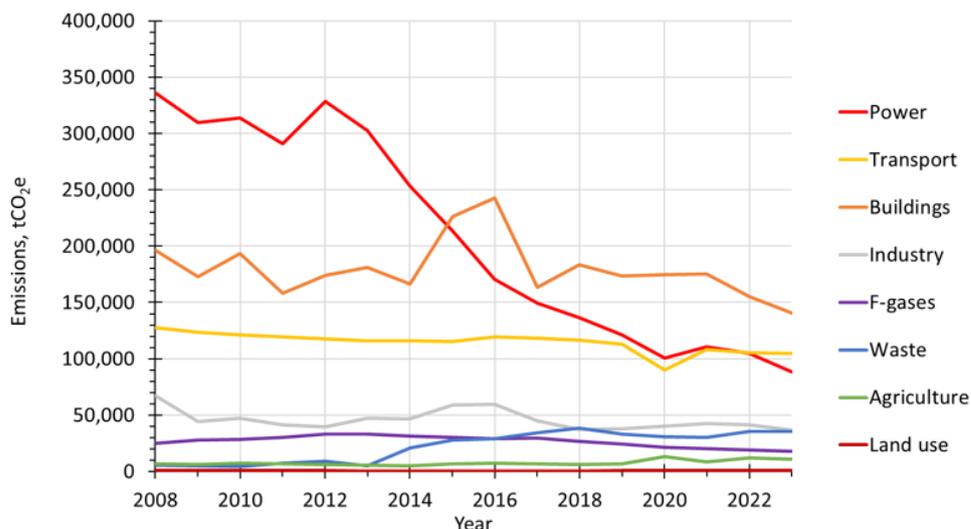
8.4 The GHG emissions for Exeter are reported under the following categories:

- **Power:** emissions resulting from electricity consumption.
- **Buildings:** emissions resulting from fuel combustion in the domestic, commercial, and public administration sectors.
- **Industry:** emissions as categorised from industry in the government local authority CO2 dataset [6]. This includes large industrial installations but excludes electricity use, which is reported under power.
- **Transport:** emissions from road and rail vehicles. Emissions from electric vehicles are reported under power; emissions from aviation and shipping are excluded.
- **Agriculture:** emissions from fuel use (excluding electricity), livestock and arable operations in the sector.
- **Land use:** emissions are produced by biomass removal and are removed (sequestered) by biomass growth. Draining or wetting organic soils, soil mineralisation, and fertiliser application in the forestry industry are also included. Fertiliser use in agriculture is reported under agriculture.
- **Waste:** emissions from the disposal of solid waste and wastewater.
- **F-gases:** emissions from the leakage of fluorinated gases.

8.5 Exeter’s 2023 GHG emissions are estimated as 436.3 ktCO₂e. At 32% buildings represent the largest share of emissions followed by transport at 24%, power at 20%, industry at 8% and waste at 8%. This breakdown of emissions is shown below.



8.6 The annual change in emissions for each sector from 2008 to 2023 is shown below.



8.7 Ongoing grid decarbonisation will continue to deliver emissions savings, but a reduction from non-power sectors, especially transport and buildings, is vital to achieving Net Zero in a timely manner. Achieving Net Zero requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders in the city: businesses, citizens and the public sector, as acknowledged by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Future emissions trajectories for Exeter following the Climate Change Committee’s Seventh Carbon Budget show that the emissions reduction needed to meet 2050 Net Zero, as established under the Climate Change Act, will require emissions reductions in advance of the current trend.

9. Delivery of the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan

9.1 **City-wide Net Zero – Stakeholder Engagement** [*Net Zero Exeter Plan 2030 theme: Capability – Goals: Collective Action, Analytic Approach, Locally Controlled Finance*]

9.1.1 **Stakeholder engagement:** The Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero facilitates engagement and manages relationships with stakeholders across the city including public sector partners and organisations, businesses and community groups.

9.1.2 **Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Theme 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 and focuses on a different aspect of the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan at each meeting. The Programme Manager researches each theme, identifies and briefs speakers, and develops an effective agenda aligned to the goals of the Plan. The Programme Manager invites additional relevant stakeholders to meetings as required.

- **Nature and biodiversity meeting (September 2025):** this meeting included speakers from the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the University of Exeter, Met Office, Exeter City Council and the Education Nature Park, South West (RHS) The discussion focused on how the city can: collaborate on nature and biodiversity; and share knowledge and good practice in this area. Attendees supported the principle of the city applying for Nature Towns and Cities accreditation. The key action from the meeting for Exeter City Council was to bring

together partners and set up a project to apply for Nature Towns and Cities accreditation.

- **Energy meeting (December 2025):** this meeting included speakers from the South West Net Zero Hub, 1 Energy, Exeter Community Energy (ECO), ECO Advice and Exeter City Council. The discussion focused on: the future of energy in the city, the benefits and opportunities around renewables; knowledge sharing and collaborating in this area. The key action from the meeting for Exeter City Council was to explore working more closely with ECO and ECO Advice.
- **Circular Economy, Waste and Recycling** is the focus for the upcoming meeting in March 2026.

9.1.3 **University of Exeter Civic University Agreement (CUA):** The Civic University Agreement Exeter missions include 'Support the sustainable and inclusive growth of the city' and 'Innovate towards a sustainable low-carbon economy for the City of Exeter'.

- **CUA Sustainability Advisory Group** met to discuss areas of collaboration and opportunities including supporting sustainable travel choices in the city, inseting options for the University of Exeter and future skills provision at Exeter College.
- **CUA Sustainable Travel Group** (sustainability and travel leads from CUA partners + other organisations in the city) is working collaboratively together with a focus on employee and student travel including best practice, knowledge sharing, and opportunities for working together such as aligning travel survey questions and data analysis, joint approaches to sustainable and active travel, and awareness and behaviour change campaigns.

9.1.4 **Exeter Climate Forum:** Organised by the University of Exeter, this event takes place from 29 June to 3 July, bringing together world-leading climate researchers, businesses, policymakers and young people, to shape and engage with the priorities for COP31 and beyond.

9.1.5 **Devon Climate Emergency:** The Devon Climate Emergency Coalition Tactical Group meets monthly and the **Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (DCIoS) Climate Impacts Group** also meets monthly.

9.1.6 **Doughnut Economics:** a briefing paper on Doughnut Economics has been produced for review by the Senior Management Board.

9.2 **City-wide Net Zero projects and activity – Sustainable Travel** [*Net Zero Exeter Plan 2030 theme: Mobility - Goals: Reliable Journeys and Resilient Roads, Reduced Dominance of Cars*]

9.2.1 **GWR/Green Circle project:** With funding from the GWR Customer and Community Improvement Fund, the GWR/Green Circle project (with additional funding from Devon County Council and the University of Exeter) aimed to connect the city's railway stations with the Green Circle trail, encouraging visitors and citizens to take the train rather than drive (reducing carbon emissions). The project was successfully delivered (between

April and October 2025) on time and within budget, as part of the national Railway 200 celebrations (celebrating 200 years of the modern railway).

GWR has confirmed that this project was officially completed 7th (in terms of timing) out of a total of 90 completed GWR Customer and Community Improvement Fund projects delivered nationally.

Exeter City Council led and managed the project in partnership with GWR, Devon County Council, the University of Exeter, and Devon Wildlife Trust. The project has been shortlisted for an Exeter Sustainability Award. The project team:

- Commissioned a series of new Green Circle walking trail maps showing the location of train stations, cultural and community interest points, and the route itself.
- Refreshed and improved the branding of the Green Circle, installing new stickers along the key routes from train stations.
- Installed new signage (with maps) at St. David's, Polsloe Bridge and Marsh Barton train stations.
- Refreshed a series of Visit Exeter web pages, making the links between stations and the route clearer, and encouraging use.
- Delivered a media and PR campaign to raise interest and awareness of the Green Circle and its connection with the railways, encouraging people to leave the car at home and use the train to take long or short walks along the trail.

Green Circle ongoing general management returned to the Live and Move team from October 2025.

9.2.2 **Barnfield Road Gateway consultation:** Exeter City Council submitted a response to Devon County Council on the consultation, which was overall supportive of the proposals for the Barnfield Road Gateway to the city centre in terms of active travel, health (travel and air quality), Net Zero, place-making and heritage. The response was led by the Planning team with input from across the Council, including City Wide Net Zero. Devon County Council's Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) met in January and resolved that all the Barnfield Road Gateway proposal recommendations be rejected.

9.3 **City-wide Net Zero projects and activity – Energy** [*Net Zero Exeter Plan 2030 theme: Built Environment - Goals: Reduced Energy Consumption, Access To Renewable Energy, Affordable Healthy Homes*]

9.3.1 **Community Energy:** Further discussions are taking place about how Exeter City Council can work with the South West Net Zero Hub to support further development of renewable energy in the city, and how the Council can support Exeter Community Energy (ECOE) and ECOE Advice. The Government's Clean Energy Campaign was promoted across the Council's communications channels in January. Great British Energy and the UK government have recently published the Local Power Plan to increase local and community ownership of clean energy.

9.4 **City-wide Net Zero projects and activity – Sustainability** [*Net Zero Exeter Plan 2030 theme: Sustainability - Goals: Green Spaces and Local Produce, Clear Air, Efficient Resource Management, Regenerative Design*]

- 9.4.1 **Nature Towns and Cities accreditation:** Exeter City Council is leading Exeter's Nature Towns and Cities accreditation application with support from partners including Devon Wildlife Trust, the University of Exeter and the Met Office. Successful accreditation would result in Exeter being designated a 'Nature City'. Nature Towns and Cities is a coalition of public, private and third sector organisations, committed to bringing nature and green space to urban areas for everyone's benefit. An engagement survey will be published on the Council's Engage platform, with partners undertaking focus groups and other community engagement.
- 9.4.2 **City Nature Challenge:** Exeter is taking part in this global citizen science project for this first time in 2026. Between 24 and 27 April, people are encouraged to record the wildlife they see in their city. The event in Exeter is being led by the University of Exeter with support from Exeter City Council, Devon Wildlife Trust and other partners.
- 9.4.3 **Great British Spring Clean:** Exeter City Council has registered to take part in Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean. Held between 13 and 29 March, people are encouraged to take part in the nation's biggest mass-action environmental campaign by pledging to pick up litter in their neighbourhoods. The Council will provide litter picking equipment and promote the initiative through its networks and communications channels.
- 9.4.4 **Sustainable Food:** Food Exeter organised an event in January 2026 with a range of stakeholders from across the city and surrounding areas to explore a sustainable food partnership for the city. Discussions also took place with the Plant Based Treaty organisation. Further work in this area will be considered at a future date.
- 9.5 **City-wide Net Zero activity (undertaken by other teams/partners)**
- 9.5.1 **Exeter Energy Network/District Heat Network:** The Head of Service Net Zero and City Centre is the primary contact for this project, commercially led by 1Energy, and has several touch points with the City Council. The Energy Act 2023 contains powers to introduce heat network zoning, to address some of the barriers facing district heat networks. Awaiting formal adoption nationally of heat network regulation.
- 9.5.2 **Warm Home Discount and Warm Homes Plan:** The UK government has announced the extension of the Warm Home Discount through to 2030 to 2031, providing eligible households with a £150 rebate on their energy bills. This is on top of the average £150 of costs being taken off households' energy bills from April, through measures announced at the Budget. The UK government has recently published the Warm Homes Plan to help support people to install electric heat pumps and rooftop solar panels in their homes.
- 9.5.3 **Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI)** funding is a Devon County Council managed project. Coordination within Exeter City Council is supported by the Net Zero team. Draft designs have been reviewed for sites included in the first phase of the project for rapid and fast chargers in Exeter City Council car parks. Lease agreements are currently being populated to enable installation to begin April 2026.

9.5.4 **Electric buses:** the introduction of electric buses in Exeter (originally planned for 2025) is a Devon County Council and Stagecoach project. The latest update is that buses are expected to enter service in late spring, once infrastructure is in place. The Exeter depot electrification contractors are currently on site installing the infrastructure.

10. City-wide Net Zero priorities for 2026/2027 (aligned with Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan themes)

- 10.1 **Capability (Stakeholder Engagement) theme:** ongoing stakeholder support, engagement and management; convening, organising and facilitating the quarterly Exeter Partnership Climate and Nature Group meetings and follow up actions; participating in, supporting and attending partnership groups including the CUA Sustainability Advisory Group, Devon Climate Emergency and DCIoS Climate Impacts Group.
- 10.2 **Mobility (Sustainable Travel) theme:** support the CUA Sustainable Travel Group and collaborative joint projects such as the Clean Air Day campaign (with ECC Net Zero and HR teams for alignment with the ECC Green Travel Plan). Other teams/partners supporting this theme include: Net Zero team for the LEVI programme; Live and Move team for active travel and the Green Circle; Devon County Council for the Devon and Torbay Transport Strategy, Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan (Exeter), Bus Improvement Plan and introduction of electric buses; and GWR, South Western Railway and Network Rail.
- 10.3 **Built Environment (Energy) theme:** awaiting further information regarding next steps for implementation of the Local Power Plan and Warm Homes Plan; exploring opportunities for working with Exeter Community Energy (ECO), ECO Advice and social housing providers. Other teams/partners supporting this theme include: the Net Zero team/ECC Carbon Reduction Plan; and 1Energy's district heat network.
- 10.4 **Sustainability theme:** lead, deliver and project manage Exeter's submission for the Nature Towns and Cities accreditation including public engagement, creation of a vision and the development of an action plan for the city, working with partners and stakeholders to attain 'Nature City' status; support the City Nature Challenge and Great British Spring Clean initiatives; and explore Exeter Food Partnership opportunities.

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

11.1 This report and the work of the Programme Manager City Wide Net Zero supports the Sustainable Environment priority of the Corporate Plan.

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

12.1 This report is for information purposes.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 External funding opportunities for delivering projects at scale, as well as projects that support small scale change are researched and applied for where appropriate.

Director: Strategic Director for Place

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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