

# REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 21 September 2024

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Councillor Matt Vizard – Portfolio Holder for Climate, Ecological Change and Communities

### 1. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities

#### Net Zero Carbon City

Over the summer, the team have been researching and developing a range of KPI's to monitor the effectiveness of work undertaken by the team in reducing City Council carbon emissions. Best practice has been sought from LA's from across the UK, and from partners through the Devon Climate Emergency. Once finalised, the KPI's will be presented back to Strategic Scrutiny.

#### 1. City Wide Net Zero 2030

Programme Manager for City Wide Net Zero has recently been appointed. The post holder is currently meeting City Council officers and businesses in the city to make connections. This role comes with a limited budget, so activity will need to be funded by external funding.

#### 2. Exeter City Council Net Zero 2030

Residential food waste is being rolled out across Exeter. Further rollout is on hold until a new food bay is constructed. This ties in with the refurbishment of MRF.

A decarbonisation plan for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum is due for completion in 2024.

The City Council GHG report/inventory has been delayed by a couple of months this year, this has been due to recruitment challenges at SWEEG. The report is due imminently and will be reported at November Strategic Scrutiny.

#### 3. Ecological Change

Ongoing high demand for sports and mixed leisure use across City Council green spaces presents conflicting land use priorities. Resource and space restrictions mean that ecology enhancement potential is currently limited across City Council owned land. Enhancements are therefore currently reliant on developments, private landowners, or across existing designated sites. The implementation of statutory planning frameworks, council policy and the Devon local nature recovery strategy can ensure the protection, enhancement, and restoration of biodiversity.

In addition, space restrictions mean that additional canopy cover targets will need to be achieved across developments and/ or private landowners in the main. This limits the ability of the Council to directly influence canopy levels and carbon reduction progress through Exeter's Treescape. Ongoing resource and budget constraints mean that development projects require external funding.

The capacity of operational teams to secure and deliver ecology-based projects, alongside core workloads, is limited. However, operational meadow grass programmes

and the Exeter Wild city project in combination with Devon Wildlife Trust are ongoing aiding with carbon sequestration, pollution mitigation and biodiversity enhancement.

### **Leading a Well-Run Council**

The City Council's solar estate has increased to **3.4MW** which reduces energy consumption and costs for a number of service areas.

## **2. Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work**

### **City Wide Net Zero 2030**

The University of Exeter has kindly paid for an update to the **city wide green house gas report** and inventory. This report will be used to develop a work programme for the Programme Manager for City Wide Net Zero and to enable a review of the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan to address areas that have high carbon emissions. The updated report is due imminently.

The **Programme Manager for City Wide Net Zero** started in their post 1 August 2024. They are currently working through an initial work programme of:

- Review the Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan
- Research how place based net zero is delivered at similar LA area's to Exeter, such as Norwich & Gloucester
- Set up Strategic Climate Change Group, representatives from Exeter Place Partnership & the city business community
- Set up Community Climate Change Working Group, with representatives from community and voluntary groups
- Discussion with University of Exeter, in how the [Civic University Agreement](#) can support city wide net zero, as well as [Exeter Innovation](#) and [Green Futures Network](#)
- Research external funding opportunities, to deliver city wide transformation in reducing carbon emissions
- Address Exeter City Futures legacy projects:
  - Creating a vision for a low vehicle city centre
  - Community Energy Pilot
  - Facilitating the collaboration necessary for the delivery of a city centre commercial District Heating Network

The City Council **Transport Working Group** met 1 August and reviewed the Terms of Reference with some changes to document. Working in partnership with Devon County Council, the group agreed to look further into developing secure bike hubs across the city. A representative from Devon County Council will be invited to future meetings.

An update on Exeter's allocation of **Shared Prosperity Fund** is provided to Strategic Scrutiny. There are four specific projects that support city wide net zero:

- Exeter Energy Grant
- Greening Your Business - specialist support for businesses located in Exeter <https://www.heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk/prosper-sign-up/>
- Exeter Innovation Hub (high growth business support)
- Exeter College Retrofit Skills Centre

The City Centre & Net Zero team are finalising car park locations to submit to the county wide **LEVI** funding submission.

1Energy, the company rolling out the **District Heat Network** across the city centre, recently held a public consultation in-person at Exeter Community Centre, as well as

online – information boards can be viewed on their website: <https://exeter.energy/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/COAST-Exeter-Energy-Network-A2-panels-pr4-HR.pdf>

The City Council are considering our options in connecting to the DHN, retrofitting our own suitable buildings (those on the route) or stay as is. A report will be brought to Executive later this year with a recommendation. The City Centre & Net Zero team are supporting 1Energy where they can possible.

The City Centre & Net Zero team continue to meet with City Development on the development of **The Exeter Plan** and provide commentary on the chapters that impact on net zero and reducing green house gas emissions across the city, as well as adaptation.

### **Exeter City Council Net Zero 2030**

To Net Zero team continue to deliver **Carbon Literacy** training for officers and Cllrs with 230 completing the training and 122 being certified as being carbon literate. Bronze status has been achieved, silver is the goal.

The Net Zero team is leading a large scale Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) funded project for heat decarbonisation for RAMM & Riverside Leisure Centre. An update on the RAMM & Riverside **PSDS** project is provided at Executive on 2 September.

The City Council has been awarded a £100,000 grant through the South West Net Zero Hub to explore new opportunities for **solar PV on our buildings**. The grant is paying for technical investigations on a number of City Council-owned buildings to install solar PV. This will allow the City Council to further expand solar PV generation, to reduce carbon emissions and provide a sustainable energy supply to support services from leisure centres to car parks and office accommodation.

A number of **PodPoint EV chargers** are being relocated across our Corporate Estate to support City Council services to convert from petrol/diesel vehicles to EV's. Since May 2023, when the City Council introduced charging for EV charge points, there has been 87,833.59 kg of co2 avoided, 156,845 of KWh delivered and 17,670 uses – income generated is £3,650.

The team managed a staff travel survey over the summer, to gauge how staff travel to work from home, as well as how they travel for business purposes. Working in collaboration with HR, the results of the survey is being developed into an action and implementation plan to support and encourage staff to travel more sustainably to and from work, as well as in work – The Green Travel Plan. Activity will be funded through the Green Travel budget, held by HR and as an example may include installing secure bike storage across our work places, bike maintenance and more awareness on options of travelling sustainable to work.

The City Council submitted a number of funding bids to Devon County Council, on a new Net Zero Capital Fund and were successful. Due to the election, the fund was put on hold, we are awaiting confirmation if the fund continues post-election. Successful projects covered rolling out secure bike hubs (£2.5m) at a number of public sector sites, retrofitting a number of City Council owned homes (£2m) and providing grants for businesses green their business (£600k).

### **Ecological Change - Recovery, Enhancement and Net Gain**

As a supporting Authority, the City Council will continue working with the Responsible Body (Devon County Council) on the creation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which is due to be published imminently. A requirement under the 2021 Environment Act, the strategy will outline a joint authority framework of objectives, supporting the delivery of nature recovery and biodiversity net gain within Devon.

The City Council is investigating the potential use of Suitable Alternative Natural Greens Spaces (SANGS) to mitigate the impact of the Exeter Local Plan and future development, on sites of significant international biodiversity interest. A report titled 'Recognising and capturing the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) potential of the Valley Parks' has been completed and will form part of the evidence informing the emerging Joint Mitigation Strategy. Footprint Ecology have been commissioned to undertake this work and a final draft version of the strategy is expected next year. Work continues on the implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) arrangements. This statutory requirement will see a 10% BNG requirement implemented (either onsite or offsite) across unexempted developments and following the biodiversity gain mitigation hierarchy.

The City Council's planning teams continue to develop processes in accordance with evolving guidance and regulation, and this includes working with third-party private landowners and Devon County Council to secure legal agreements for offsite 'habitat banks' in Exeter. The first nationally registered Habitat Bank on privately owned land is now complete, a 3.2 ha site in Duryard Valley Park with partnership work between Exeter City Council, Devon County Council and Biogains Ltd.

The City Council have an enhanced biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2021 which requires LAs to communicate what they are doing to improve the environment and to show the positive change they're making through statutory biodiversity reports. BNG, the LNRS and the Exeter Plan will be the primary contributors, as well other projects such as Exeter Wild City, Northbrook Arboretum, and the potential re-naturalisation of Exeter's waterways.

The first report must be published by March 2026 and work in 2024 will begin ensuring we are recording the positive changes from these projects.

### 3. Issues that may impact service delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements

As previously highlighted, there is a challenge that the net zero budget is temporary, with budget remaining for activity to continue until March 2026. The Head of Service City Centre & Net Zero continues to research opportunities to develop an ongoing revenue stream for this work to continue, as well as sourcing external funding.

Due to recruitment challenges at **SWEEG**, the City Council's and City Wide Green House gas report has been delayed by 2-3 months. This is now due to be reported at Strategic Scrutiny in November.

Due to the sale of **Mary Arches Street Car Park**, the City & Net Zero team continue to research alternative locations for the solar located on the top floor of the car park.

The City Council's solar estate is **3.4MW**, which reduces energy consumption and costs for a number of service areas. There have been efficiency challenges with our solar array located on the Matford Centre and the Arc this year, due to seagull faeces. PV performance is slightly lower than in previous years, which is effecting the level of income generated. In previous years, the City Council has achieved a very good market price for our P/kwh at 13.6p/kwh – the current price is 5p/kwh. The City Centre & Net Zero team

are currently out to tender for new prices from August, so income should increase. The poor weather in 2024, compared to last year, has also effected PV performance and income generated.

The **Net Zero Ambassadors** haven't met since early 2024, now that the management restructure is completed the Ambassadors will be re-grouped to share best practice and to support one another in reducing service carbon emissions.

Local **DNO constraints** are restricting the ability to deliver energy renewable projects. Capacity is dependent on completion of Matford BSP. National Grid report that constraints are likely to continue for a further 3-4 years.

### **Ecological Change - Recovery, Enhancement and Net Gain**

Exeter's Tree and Woodland Strategy 2023-33 will be released later in 2024. The strategy outlines a framework for protecting the biodiversity and biosecurity of Exeter's Treescape. It identifies objectives that will support canopy cover increases where space allows across City Council owned land, and through development and private land stakeholders.

The recent 'Valuing Exeter's Urban Forest Report' indicates that Exeter's holistic canopy levels reduce City Carbon by as much as 1,500 tonnes per year. With the implementation of strategy objectives this figure is anticipated to gradually increase as canopy levels do, although the benefits will not be fully realised till the maturation of new planting schemes closer to 2033.

### **4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered**

No significant changes within the City Centre & Net Zero team are proposed.

The team are preparing for the next round of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) funding, which is government funding to assist public bodies to decarbonise and retrofit their buildings. The fund is due to open October 2024, with a notification of success January 2025. Successful applications will be those that save the most amount of GHG from changes made to a particular building, and that the existing heat boiler being replaced is 10years +.

### **5. Other matters the Portfolio Holder wishes to raise with the Scrutiny Committee**

I look forward to working with City Development in how Building Control and the planning regime can act for good in reducing city wide emissions.