

**Statement re presentation of Cabinet member for Climate Change, Biodiversity & Transport report presentation to Full Council, Cllr J.Hodgson 28.05.26**

I'm truly delighted to be presenting my report today, now a year in the role of Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Transport. As you will imagine this is a broad ranging portfolio, but it is a very cohesive one, for example, transport accounts for 30% of our carbon footprint. Public transport offers the means to help us all address this serious issue for ourselves and our residents across the county.

This week's record-breaking hot weather, both here in the UK and across Europe is yet another reminder that Climate Change and indeed Climate chaos is already upon us. This winter has witnessed unprecedented heavy storms that have caused extensive flooding, dramatically affecting a number of homes across Devon. The gradual increase in global temperatures is increasingly putting many elements of life as we have known it, at risk, and that change is speeding up. The oceans which have been absorbing those additional temperatures are reaching the point where they can no longer absorb extra heat without adverse impacts on the marine wildlife in the seas, the major ocean currents and the weather, as well as allowing our air temperatures to rise further and dangerously unchecked.

My portfolio is established to address Climate Change and support, enhance and restore our wildlife and their habitats in the face of climate chaos and the many other modern challenges, such as habitat loss and pollution that nature faces. Improving access to public transport will give our residents, businesses and visitors the opportunity to reduce their carbon footprint. All these areas of work at have incredible teams of dedicated with expertise officers, who are working to help us in Devon both mitigate and adapt to the climate changes and impacts.

The directorates supporting my portfolio includes a flood team who work with the Environment Agency and others who act directly when flooding happens. They are monitoring and acting on coastal erosion and work with landowners and communities to prevent future flooding. We have extensive planning and ecology teams who look after our national landscapes, country parks, wildlife areas, rivers, coasts and wildlife across the county.

Our Transport team are actively involved with key operators of bus and train services across the county and in doing so work in partnership to manage the subsidies we receive from government to maximise the availability of public transport across the county. The year by year cuts to these subsidies makes this extremely difficult and it is astonishing that despite these challenges DCC has managed to maintain school bus services, a reasonable but not by any means perfect rural and urban bus services, deliver 4 new train stations over the past few years and is currently bringing in 150 new

Electric buses over this year and next, this will not only reduce our carbon footprint, but also reduce traffic emissions, improving air quality and quality of life in our streets.

Our Active Travel team support proposals for safe routes for walking and cycling, some of which have emerged through the LCWIP work. Some routes are miles long, others just short safe links to link bus stops to communities and village centres. There has been a huge increase in interest in these Active Travel routes and many community groups across the county are working very hard to bring their plans forward. They offer huge benefits to health and wellbeing for all ages, in particular young people to be able to walk safely to school. Together with our Active Travel Team I fully support these schemes coming forward and while they will take a while to shape and deliver, more government funding would certainly support these urgently needed routes being implemented.

Waste is also within my portfolio. Recycling gives everyone the opportunity to play a part in making good value of our finite resources. Behaviour change is a key element of our waste team's work. As public representatives we have the opportunity to encourage our local town and parish councils and communities to reduce waste and engage in local initiatives, such as repair cafes, furniture recycling, community composting etc.

We have an environmental team who having worked across the county with a wide-ranging partnership since 2020 to develop our Devon Carbon Plan. They continue to work with those partners and others from Universities, businesses, specialist groups, community representatives, schools, to deliver the plan which is a roadmap to deliver net zero carbon emissions in Devon by 2050 and reach 50% of this by 2030. A huge task, but the plan is wide ranging, full of choices and ideas that can be adopted, some individually and other collectively. Our Environmental Performance team working with a diverse partnership of experts across the region advises, supports and monitors reduction of our collective carbon footprint in Devon and across our service delivery and assets at DCC. This includes supporting renewable energy projects on some of our buildings and land and has the additional benefit of creating investments that will save money and protect against rising energy costs.

As you will see from the circulated extensive report of my involvements and activities over the past year, this Cabinet role is wide ranging and demanding. But the reality is that we must all be advocates for our environment to be clean and safe. We can all do our part. I feel very privileged to hold this role and I find it very interesting and enjoyable and carry out my duties with hope and determination that DCC can realise our 2025-2029 Strategic plan for a green Devon for future generations, and ultimately our target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, ideally by 2030. Our children and future generations will thank us for this.

To close, I wish to bring to your attention that there will be a film Screening on June 8<sup>th</sup>, here at C.Hall of the People's Emergency Briefing film. The invitation has been issued to you all today, Councillors and staff are welcome to attend. This is a film version of an event that took place in Parliament last November; The National Emergency Briefing, where a series of experts gave an address to parliament on a number of key aspects of climate change, including the impact on wildlife and biodiversity. This film has short clips from those presentations and includes responses from members of the public, plus a few familiar faces in discussion with Chris Packham, the well-known wildlife advocate. Despite the warnings it brings, it's a really interesting, informative and inspiring film. I hope many of you will attend and join in with the Q&A with a couple of experts involved in making the film.

Further to this screening, I am arranging for the teams in my portfolio to provide a series of monthly lunch time briefings for all fellow Councillors covering the various chapters of the Devon Carbon Plan. My hope is that this will help us all to be well informed about these urgent issues and gain confidence about possible solutions to address climate change, that we and the people we represent can all be involved in.