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Exemption applied: None

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## Local Plan Climate Emergency Policy Approaches

### Report summary:

The local plan will play a key role in responding to the climate crisis. This report provides some background as to what approaches we may want to take in the local plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through development. Adaptation to its effects is proposed not to be specifically covered in the climate change chapter as it flows throughout other chapters of the plan including those covering biodiversity, flooding and coastal change.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

- (1) That Strategic Planning Committee note the proposed approaches to tackling the climate emergency through the local plan, as set out in the report.

### Reason for recommendation:

The climate emergency is one of the critical issues that requires addressing in the Local Plan. It's important that members have an active understanding and appreciation of the direction of travel so that their views and priorities can be incorporated into plan policy.

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### Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

## Climate change Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk; as Members are being asked to note progress rather than make a decision.

**Links to background information** GESP Low Carbon Study [UoE-2020-Low-Carbon-and-Climate-Change-GESP-report-net-zero-draft-120320.pdf](#), Future Homes consultation [Future Buildings Standard \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

### Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
  - A greener East Devon
  - A resilient economy
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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The climate is in crisis. Human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe, the atmosphere and seas are warming at rates unprecedented in human history. Bold action needs to be taken over the next 20 years if the worst impacts are to be avoided.
- 1.2 No organisation or individual is exempt from responsibility, and in 2019 the Council declared a climate emergency where it committed to become carbon neutral by 2040. The Local Plan has a key role to play and should therefore reflect the severity of the situation and respond with ambitious and implementable policies to address the crisis that we are all facing.

## 2 Issues and Options feedback

- 2.1 The Local Plan issues and options consultation presented a variety of different potential policy approaches for tackling the climate emergency. In particular, we presented a variety of different options for increasing the energy efficiency of new buildings, provision of new renewable energy developments and other carbon saving measures.
- 2.2 In general, strong support was received for taking bold action on climate change. 80% of respondents supported a requirement for new developments to be net-zero, either from plan adoption or a future date. There was also strong support for identifying suitable areas for different renewable energy developments, with 60% of respondents in favour of this approach.
- 2.3 A variety of other suggestions were made, including
  - Combining solar arrays with biodiversity improvements;
  - Encouraging small scale renewable generation;
  - Including an exceptions policy for zero-carbon or passivhaus development; and
  - Need to take into account carbon cost of materials used for construction.

## 3 Key messages from previous work

- 3.1 Considerable evidence gathering was undertaken on formulating an approach to climate change during production of the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP). One key piece of work, The Low Carbon Study was published in February 2020 and formed the main piece of evidence underpinning the proposed GESP climate change policies. The report was

produced by the Centre for Energy and the Environment at Exeter University and the key messages are as follows:

- That policy should reinforce the “energy hierarchy”, focusing on locating development in sustainable locations first, then moving onto improving the fabric of buildings before employing renewable energy technologies or carbon offsetting.
- That policy should address a “performance gap” where anticipated energy use differs from actual usage once buildings have been occupied.
- That opportunities to utilise existing heat sources should be utilised for larger scale development, building on the existing networks operating in the west end of the District.
- Policy should utilise mapping undertaken which identifies suitable areas for locating solar and wind energy.

3.2 Whilst Member’s voted not to proceed with the GESP, they have previously reinforced the desire to utilise the evidence developed in the formulation of Local Plan policy, and given this is still relatively recent (February 2020), it is considered appropriate to use to provide a strong basis for policy writing in the Local Plan.

#### **4 Raising standards for new development**

4.1 Perhaps one of the most fundamental and recognisable ways of reducing carbon emissions through planning is to ensure new developments are constructed to be as energy efficient as possible.

4.2 Evidence undertaken to support the GESP suggests that new development should be planned to follow the “energy hierarchy”, which prioritises improvements to the fabric of buildings above off-site or on-site implementation of renewable energy. The logic being that once a building is constructed it becomes much harder and more expensive to improve its fabric, whereas renewable energy generation can be retrofitted much easier.

#### *4.3 Proposed approach*

4.4 The Government are pursuing implementation of the future homes standard from 2025, which intends to reduce emissions from new dwellings by 75% to 80% of current standards. It is intended that as the grid decarbonises this will reduce further still. However, there are no guarantees that this will come forward in the timeline envisaged, and given that Local Authorities are still able to set their own targets, it is proposed that we include an ambitious policy in the Local Plan. This approach also gathered significant support in the Issues and Options consultation.

4.5 The policy would require a developer to submit a carbon statement demonstrating that new homes developed will deliver net-zero carbon emissions, in compliance with the energy hierarchy.

4.6 In addition, to address “the performance gap”, major developments would be required to ensure that 10% of houses are fitted with in-use energy performance and carbon emissions data which can be monitored for a period of 5 years.

#### **5 Encouraging renewable energy and battery storage**

5.1 Ensuring that as much of our energy as possible comes from zero carbon sources will play a crucial role in achieving climate objectives. Renewable energy makes up an ever-increasing proportion of energy supply and this is a trend which is set to continue. In

addition, the ability to store energy so it is available at peak times will become even more important with growing energy demand and as we make the transition from petrol to electric vehicles.

5.2 Government guidance also requires that in order for on-site wind energy to come forward at all, suitable areas need to be identified in the Local Plan.

5.3 Previous work undertaken to support the GESP has identified suitable areas for the development of solar and wind energy, taking into account constraints within the district such as AONB, greenspace, heritage and natural features. It should be noted that opportunities for wind energy in the district are very limited whereas there is greater scope for solar. Further information on this can be found in the Low Carbon Study.

5.4 *Proposed approach*

5.5 It is proposed that in order to maximise opportunities for delivering renewables and provide certainty to the industry, suitable areas for solar and wind energy are identified in two separate policies, utilising the mapping work undertaken in the Low Carbon Study. In these areas, permission will only be refused in exceptional circumstances. This approach was also strongly supported in the Issues and Options consultation and it would equate to a significant uplift in support for renewables, which matches the Council's ambition to tackle the climate emergency.

5.6 In addition, a policy of general support for renewable technology, including community energy schemes in other parts of the District will be supported, subject to an assessment of impacts.

## 6 **Making use of existing opportunities for utilising waste heat**

6.1 In Denmark 60% of heating in homes is supplied using district heat networks. These have been remarkably successful in producing a low cost and highly efficient heat supply. In the UK, heat networks are still in their relative infancy and whilst there are currently only a few examples, the Committee on Climate Change advise that 20% of heating will need to come from district heating by 2050 if climate targets are to be met<sup>1</sup>.

6.2 East Devon is well placed to embrace this trend, with networks already operating at the west end of the District at Cranbrook and Monkerton in Exeter.

6.3 The GESP low carbon study considered the location of many large users of electricity and heat within the district that could potentially present opportunities for matching heat supply and demand, or otherwise incentivise the formation of a district heat network, so that this energy would not be wasted. Further information can be found in the study.

6.4 *Proposed approach*

The Local Plan will likely be making large scale allocations within the District to meet housing requirements. We are currently intending to include a policy stating that where development is proposed within 1km of an existing heat network, connection will be required for major development. In addition, where no new heat network currently exists, a new heat network should be deployed for proposals above 1,200 homes or 10 ha of commercial floorspace.

## 7 **Tackling embodied carbon**

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<sup>1</sup> The future of heating in UK buildings, [Infographic - The future of heating in UK buildings \(theccc.org.uk\)](https://theccc.org.uk)

- 7.1 There is an increasing realisation and awareness of the environmental impact of producing the materials required for construction. Making steel, concrete and bricks for buildings creates vast amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, with concrete alone causing 8% of global emissions. Indeed, The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) estimates that 51% of the lifecycle carbon from a typical residential dwelling is emitted before the building is even occupied. The figure for office development is 35%<sup>2</sup>. Much of that energy goes below the ground into the foundations of the buildings.
- 7.2 A recent report steered by the Royal Academy of Engineering has urged for existing buildings to be left standing rather than demolished<sup>3</sup> and the Government has committed to producing a building strategy which will be looking to tackle this issue.
- 7.3 Whilst there is an increasing awareness, embodied carbon has historically and continues being an overlooked issue in Local Plans and thus there are few examples of policies being produced elsewhere in the Country. The examples that have been identified have been fairly limited in scope and ambition, e.g. Central Lincolnshire proposed Local Plan policy S10 only requires that “opportunities be taken to reduce the developments embodied carbon content”.

#### *Proposed approach*

- 7.4 Due to the importance of the topic it is proposed that we include a policy which requires developers to retain existing buildings, or at least their foundations unless it can be demonstrated that refurbishment is either unviable or impractical.

## **8 Adaptation to the effects of climate change**

- 8.1 Adapting to the effects of Climate Change is a theme that will cut across many different topics in the Local Plan including flooding, coastal change and biodiversity. As such, it is not proposed to include a specific chapter on this. Current thinking is that we will include policies such as:
- Addressing the urban heat island affect by encouraging the use of green walls and making trees a compulsory requirement for all new streets;
  - Avoiding development on flood zones and requiring the wider implementation of sustainable urban drainage systems;
  - Avoiding development in locations liable to coastal change; and
  - Encouraging the creation of new woodlands to act as carbon sinks.

## **9 Implications for neighbourhood planning**

- 9.1 Inevitably, some adopted Neighbourhood Plans may contain policies that conflict with the final policies. Where this occurs, upon adoption Local Plan policies will supersede those in Neighbourhood Plans. We will continue to work with Neighbourhood Plan groups to minimise conflicts where possible. Given the topic it is expected that there will be few conflicts as previous Neighbourhood Plan groups that have tackled the issue have tended to be motivated to reduce carbon emissions. Where conflict does occur, it is likely that the Local Plan will be more ambitious which may be welcomed by Neighbourhood Plan groups.

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<sup>2</sup> Whole life carbon assessment for the built environment, RICS, 2017, <https://www.rics.org/globalassets/rics-website/media/news/whole-life-carbon-assessment-for-the-built-environment-november-2017.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Decarbonisation construction: building a new net zero industry, Royal academy of engineering, 2021, <https://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/reports/decarbonising-construction-building-a-new-net-zero>

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**Financial implications:**

There are no specific financial implications.

**Legal implications:**

There are no legal obligations other than as set out within the report.