

**Full Council Meeting**

**9th December 2019**

**Agenda Item**

**Lisa Bowman, Town Clerk**

**Report from the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Forum**

**SUMMARY**

This report summarises the findings of the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Forum (TAFF). It sets out the TAFF's conclusions to date and proposes priority areas for Exmouth Town Council to pursue.

**BACKGROUND**

At a meeting held on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019, Exmouth Town Councillors declared a Climate Emergency and resolved to give the highest priority to using all the Council's influence to work with others (for instance, Devon County Council) on developing carbon reduction plans and to reduce damaging carbon emissions and other environmental threats.

Whilst Councillors recognised the vital urgency of this work and agreed to press the case for the speediest possible reductions in carbon dioxide emissions and other environmental mitigation measures, including the Town Council's own carbon footprint, it was acknowledged that Exmouth Town Council does not have the powers, the professional staff, the money or the equipment to carry out monitoring or measuring work. It was agreed that the Council's major impact will be persuading and advocating for change by working with local organisations and residents on action in the town.

A Task and Finish Forum (TAFF) was subsequently set up to coordinate information and action by involving the public and to create an action plan which dovetails with wider Devon plans.

Sustainability and climate change are wide-ranging areas which give rise to a range of concerns to the public, from fundamental, long term issues such as the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, to potentially more immediate actions such as encouraging "reduce, reuse, recycle", in that order. Members of the TAFF recognise that Exmouth Town Council is already actively involved in a number of initiatives which relate to sustainability and climate change (Appendix A).

The TAFF's recommendations have also been informed by the views of Transition Exmouth, an active member of the Town Council's Community Organisation Liaison Panel (COLP) which is dedicated to tackling the dual crisis of Peak Oil & Climate Change and to finding ways of rebuilding the local resilience of the town. It was agreed at the first meeting of the TAFF that Transition Exmouth representatives should be invited to join the TAFF and contribute relevant ideas to the forum.

One important way in which we have actively engaged with members of the public has been through the Town's "Our Exmouth, Our Planet" networking event, held on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November and organised by Transition Exmouth. The event was promoted as an opportunity for members of the community to contribute to the debate and to shape a sustainable future for Exmouth. It proved highly successful, with 90 people attending, representing 40 different groups. It was hoped that comments from attendees would inform our work and assist in the formulation of recommendations to the Town

Council. Transition Exmouth has subsequently submitted a list of ten recommended actions from the event which are included in Appendix B and support the key issues identified by the TAFF. The work of the TAFF has also been supplemented by the attendance and contributions of members and officers at a range of broader external events, such as Devon County Council's Carbon footprint workshop, DALC's annual conference and the SLCC National Conference.

## **The Way Forward**

The TAFF recognises that some work is already underway at the District and County Council level to tackle sustainability and climate change. Furthermore, in particular cases such as highways, transportation and recycling, the Town Council does not have any statutory responsibility for them, but does have an input via motions to the Council, letters expressing local viewpoints etc. Our priority therefore is to focus our work upon areas which the Council is directly responsible for.

The TAFF also recognises that actions to address sustainability and climate change must be part of an overarching framework and embedded within the delivery of all the Council's services and functions.

However, five key issues emerged which ought to be given priority:

- **Leadership** - People are looking for stronger leadership from Exmouth Town Council and this should be viewed as an opportunity for the Council to rise to the challenge;
- **Procurement** – the TAFF wants to see a much stronger procurement policy for the Town Council around sustainability;
- **Constitutional approach** – the TAFF recognises the need to embed sustainability and climate change actions into all Council processes;
- **Publicising, Public Engagement and Education** - many good initiatives have come to light during the course of our evidence gathering. What has been immediately apparent is the fact that there is very little awareness of the work that is already underway within the Council;
- **Co-ordination** with other authorities and external organisations - there is a lot of good work going on within Exmouth, which has not been rigorously self-promoted. This in part may be due to the ad hoc nature of the range of initiatives – various things going on within different organisations and delivered by a range of not necessarily connected partners. There is a strong need for some level of co-ordination of information to help the public make informed decisions.

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

£500 for FY 2019/20

£2,000 for FY 2020/21

These implications would cover general and small-scale developments – anything larger will need separate approval for funds or we will need to look more widely for funding sources (in conjunctions with partners such as other Councils or Transition Exmouth).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. That Exmouth Town Council creates a Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Party, which will incorporate the current Plastic Reduction Working Party (terms of reference and membership to be determined separately). Recognising the importance of the Plastics

Reduction Working Party so far, meetings of the new Working Party would include a dedicated part of the agenda for plastics issues.

2. That an external auditor is appointed to calculate the Town Council's carbon footprint and conduct a review of Exmouth Town Council's procurement policy and business processes with a view to identifying improvements (quote attached Appendix c);
3. That Exmouth Town Council endorses and prioritises the ten action points received from Transition Exmouth's Our Exmouth, Our Planet meeting;
4. That Exmouth Town Council allocates an initial budget of £2,500 to Climate Change initiatives which will be delivered via partnership with TE.
5. That coordination with, and lobbying of, other bodies, including Government, County and District Councils and others, as appropriate, be formally recognised as a legitimate and effective way of the Council conducting business in this vital, urgent area.

## Appendix A

Our evidence gathering has covered a wide range of issues and policy areas. The wealth of information received has been both diverse and immense. This in itself reflects both the overarching nature of sustainability and climate change in everything that we as a Council do, as well as illustrating the sheer complexity the Council and its partners face in tackling the issues.

The Town Council's **Planning Committee** plays a key role in the local planning process as a statutory consultee on all planning applications and is fully supportive of the policies relating to climate change and renewable energy within the Local Plan so that energy efficiency and renewable generation is maximised in new developments. Historically, the Planning Committee has

- supported solar energy installations throughout the Town;
- in at least one case, discouraged over-provision of car parking space, to encourage better public transport provision, walking, cycling etc.
- discouraged use of ecologically valuable land for building development e.g. "Green Wedge" at Courtlands, Bystock etc.
- encouraged provision of cycle trails and facilities for those trails e.g. the recent crossing at Rivermead.
- encouraged the saving / replanting of appropriate trees e.g. suggesting to the Environment Agency that their replacement trees on the estuary be more resistant to salt than the existing sycamores.
- Representation was made at EDDC's Development Management Committee (DMC) to highlight the Town Council's concern about an application at Liverton Park for a gas fired "standby" generator. DMC subsequently turned the application down.

The Planning Committee also has delegated authority from EDDC to determine all tree applications relating to protected trees in the parish, which in theory gives the Committee more power to oppose those applications damaging to the environment.

Road Transport is one of the UK's main climate change culprits and through **Exmouth Transport Partnership (ETP)**, the Town Council actively promotes environmentally friendly travel, including the use of public transport and electric vehicles - for which we are keen to see an increase in charging units across the town. The aim of the ETP is to increase the effectiveness of transport in and around Exmouth. It draws on the EDDC Local Plan, DCC Transport policies, and our new Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for the basis on which it works. The Partnership regularly argue the community's need for public transport direct to the commercial transport operators in our area. Although improved parking provision, in areas of town where there is some difficulty, and road schemes such as the Dinan Way "completion" have been supported, most of the Partnership's effort has gone into improving public transport and cycling/ walking trails, footpaths etc. It has also encouraged schemes which make public transport easier to use as well as a better coordinated, more attractive and generally better service. It has fought against bus cuts and poorer service.

The Council continues to subsidise the circular 99E service in the evenings and on Sundays. This must keep some cars off the road and may also limit numbers of taxi journeys. In the past year, the Partnership has successfully stopped a proposal to substantially change the 99E.

ETP has made, and continues to make, strenuous efforts in and around the station 1) to create as effective an integrated transport interchange as possible (this is policy in both the Local Plan and NP), and 2) to use any available funding, e.g. CCIF, to improve facilities in and around the station. The Partnership brought significant influence to bear on the creation of the current station forecourt as an attractive area, along with the associated pedestrian crossing and passenger set-down point.

Currently CCIF funding is being made available through GWR for spending next financial year and Exmouth Town Council has submitted a bid for improvements such as lighting, information, signage,

additional cycle storage etc. Members believe that such improvements will encourage more train and bus usage and will complement the gradual increase and modernisation of train carriages undertaken by GWR.

ETP is also currently involved with EDDC in providing public car parks with electric charging points, to enable people to realistically take up electric vehicle use (note a recent EDDC motion on this issue).

On the issue of the Dinan Way "completion", which Exmouth Town Council has supported, one particular side benefit is the potential for new bus routes directly to Brixington with its very low public transport usage.

The Town Council was heavily involved in the initial kerbside recycling trials in Exmouth which were conducted by East Devon District Council and in the subsequent roll out of the enhanced kerbside recycling scheme. The recent formation of our **Plastic Reduction Working Party** aims to raise awareness of the impact of and minimise the use of single use plastics in our Town and in 2019, we suggested and sponsored a new Environmental Impact award as part of the Exmouth Chamber of Commerce Business Awards to promote awareness of the issue. We cooperate with, and have a member on, the Surfers against Sewage linked Community Plastic Reduction group, working towards SaS's Plastic Free Community status.

Through our **Flooding and Land Drainage Working Party**, the council has been working with the environment agency and Devon County Council's Flood Risk team to support flood defence initiatives and measures throughout the Town. The Town Council has been consulted by South West Water in connection with its Watershed Exmouth project which has resulted in a range of sustainable urban drainage systems being installed throughout the Town to manage rainwater and the Working Party has produced a flood toolkit for local residents and businesses; booklets were "personalised" to Exmouth and have been delivered to most households in flood vulnerable parts of Exmouth.

Our **Community Resilience Working Party** is developing an emergency plan to enable our community to become more resilient in the face of more extreme weather such as flooding.

The **Public Rights of Way Working Party** frames the Town Council's membership of Devon County Council's Parish Paths Partnerships Scheme (also known as the P3 scheme), which is an initiative to ensure that the rights of way network is properly maintained and well publicised across the County. It has the support of the National Association of Local Councils and is Devon County Council funded. Through the scheme, Devon County Council has given delegated authority to Exmouth Town Council to maintain and improve the condition of our local rights of way and keep them open and used properly. We receive an annual grant to enable us to undertake rights of way work. The Public Rights of Way Working Party is supporting Devon County Council's definitive map review to ensure that existing public rights of way in the parish of Exmouth are correctly recorded in terms of status and location and our Supplementary Town Maintenance Team have cleared footways.

The Town Council is represented on the **Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC)** - on both its Larger Councils Committee and County Committee. DALC is supporting Devon County Council's call for evidence on how Devon can reduce its carbon emissions.

The Town Council is also a major funding partner and member of the **Exe Estuary Management Partnership**. The Partnership coordinates management of the estuary, on behalf of local authorities, government agencies and conservation bodies and provides a contact point for local communities of the estuary. It seeks to conserve and enhance the estuary's special nature and promote sustainable economic and social activity by managing competing demands and addressing any conflicts as they arise, to ensure that interests and activities are harmonised.

The work of the partnership is guided by the Exe Estuary Management Plan and a Partnership Committee. Local communities are engaged through two public forums each year and regular estuary clean ups.

**Exmouth allotments** are owned by Exmouth Town Council and consist of approximately 420 plots split between two sites. The site at Hamilton Lane has 300 plots of various sizes - all on level ground and includes eight raised beds designed for disabled gardeners. The smaller site at Pound Lane has about 120 plots of various sizes.

A recent initiative, supported financially by the Town Council, has been the creation of a new community polytunnel at Hamilton Lane which will be used to run a course for beginner gardeners. There are plans to offer similar opportunities at Pound Lane in the near future.

**Exmouth in Bloom** is supported financially by the Town Council. Their current Blue Heart campaign (started last year by BBC Natural World film maker Fergus Beely) aims to re-wild Exmouth in gardens, school grounds, parks and road verges.

Town Councillors also represent the Council on outside bodies and these include: **Fairtrade Exmouth and Wild Exmouth.**

Fairtrade status for the Town is contingent on Exmouth Town Council passing a resolution which supports Fairtrade. The Council must serve Fairtrade coffee and tea at its meetings and a range of Fairtrade products must be readily available in the area's shops and served in local cafés and catering establishments. Fairtrade requires companies to pay sustainable prices and addresses the injustices of conventional trade, which traditionally discriminate against the poorest, weakest producers. It enables them to improve their position and have more control over their lives.

The Town Council is also supporting the current **Wild Exmouth** project by providing match funding of £12,000 (from income it derives under the terms of a unilateral agreement with a solar farm to the north of the Town). Other funding partners include the Heritage Lottery Fund, East Devon District Council and Devon County Council's Locality Fund. It is an exciting project which is helping to enhance the environment of the town, engaging residents with green spaces and improving access to nature. The project is focussed on the following themes: Wild at Home, Wild Learning, Wild and Active, Wild around Town.

Our recent **Children's Environment Conference** demonstrated an unprecedented initiative by a Town Council to engage primary school children in climate change matters. The Town Council worked closely with local delivery partners to ensure that the conference was suitable for its target audience and subjects covered included: Waste and pollution, Ecological Impact, Growing Wildlife and Past, Present and Future.

Many of these issues are given additional weight via specific policies and community actions in the adopted **Neighbourhood Plan**, which lends further weight to the planning process and to the Town Council's influence and lobbying power in this area. The Neighbourhood Plan is particularly supportive of renewable energy schemes.

The **Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Strategy** frames the Town Council's involvement in all associated policies and community actions. It is proposed that an annual monitoring report will measure the impact of the Neighbourhood Plan and help to frame the Town Council's progress in meeting the community's aspirations across all six policy areas: the natural environment, the built environment, economy and employment, housing, getting about and community facilities.

## Appendix B

### **Submissions from the Our Exmouth, Our Planet meeting \* (presented by Transition Exmouth to the Exmouth Town Council TAFF on Climate Change, for their consideration)**

1. ETC to partner with Transition Exmouth on a bid to the Lottery Climate Action Fund to create an ECO / Community Hub for Exmouth in the town centre.
2. ETC to plant trees on all “unowned” patches of land, plant wildflowers for pollinators and stop all use of pesticides and herbicides on council property and use only organic fertilisers.
3. ETC to create a website in partnership with Transition Exmouth giving information on how people can tackle climate change as individuals - and link to this in the footer of all ETC emails, and on all ETC publications.
4. ETC to switch to a renewable energy supplier in all Council buildings, and lobby EDDC and DCC to do the same.
5. ETC to support the Transition Exmouth events programme (to run from April to September 2020), starting with an Energy Advice Clinic in the Town Hall.
6. ETC to create a Bike Pool for use with the Bikeability programme in Exmouth primary schools, so that every child has access to a suitable bike. Bikes to be reclaimed and refurbished (explore partnership with Ride-on, who repair bikes for re-use in Exeter).
7. ETC to run Environmental Days for all schools and adults to expand on their excellent first conference in 2019.
8. ETC to work with EDDC to install drinking water fountains throughout town – railway station, Strand and two along beach.
9. ETC to commit to use only Organic, Fairtrade products in all Council hospitality and catering.
10. ETC to work with Transition Exmouth and local bike shops to provide subsidised electric bike hire.

\*meeting attended by 90 representatives from 40 local groups