

Dear Cllr Wood

### **City Wide Net Zero 2030: The clock is ticking.**

We welcome the move to publish the information about the council's work to reduce its operational carbon emissions on the council's website and the report to the Scrutiny committee on Thursday.

We are writing to ask that the Council steps up its responsibility for leading city wide achievement of Net Zero 2030. We would like this wider work to be given greater and clearer priority, and not least placed front and centre on the Council's website.

Last June you said *"The clock is ticking and we have big challenges ahead but Exeter is well known for leading the way. It will take all of us to play our part in bringing Exeter's emissions down to make the city carbon neutral by 2030. The scale and complexity faced by cities and councils across the country in bring emissions down is significant. This report helps by bringing the focus down to what we have to do together to achieve it in our city."*<sup>1</sup>

### **Communication and accountability**

At the Carbon Literacy training session for Councillors it was clearly explained that in general a Council is directly responsible for approx 4% of its area's emissions, can have direct impact on some 30% and influence on some 80% of an emissions. By focusing on and promoting only actions affecting the 4% of emissions resulting from the Council's own operational activities the Council is in danger of misleading the public into thinking more significant action is being taken. A recent Local Government Association survey of 98 councils<sup>2</sup> found 62% had completed or were developing a communications plan for climate change covering both climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation. This should cover all aspects of the Councils responsibilities including it's own and city wide action.

The Council adopted the Net Zero Exeter 2030 plan in June 2020 and approved the Liveable Exeter Place Board "as the appropriate body to adopt the Liveable Exeter Place plan on behalf of the city of Exeter". However, the plan is promoted on the Council's website as Exeter City Futures' plan. That entity prepared the plan on behalf of the Council for the City, and as such it was adopted by the Council as its own plan. In the Council's website there is one page<sup>3</sup> - with a completely ambiguous phrase regarding delivery:

*"Exeter City Futures is working collaboratively with the city to help Exeter become carbon neutral by 2030, through the delivery of the Net Zero Exeter Plan, which was endorsed by Exeter City Council."*

Exeter City Futures (ECF) has no mechanisms for policy setting, resourcing and action as was set out in a recent report to Council from the City Council's Chief Executive and Growth Director.

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<sup>1</sup> [Exeter's Net Zero Carbon ambition and challenges set out in new report - Exeter City Council News](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Climate Change Survey, February 2020 | Local Government Association](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Net zero Exeter plan - Exeter City Council](#)

Nor do there seem to be any reporting mechanisms. We recognize the work of the ECF workshops recently, however there is no evidence that ECF is significantly progressing this Net Zero 2030 work, nor how business or residents can get involved as suggested by the Council's website. We would be grateful for a full report on the outcomes of this work. Indeed ECF's recent work to model the Exeter Development Fund and the construction of 12,000 new homes did not even model the associated carbon emissions and how Net Zero will be achieved in such a scenario.

We understand that the Livable Exeter Place Board has adopted the City's net zero plan. We are sure that many of the organisations on the Place Board are themselves deeply committed to achieving Net Zero. A partnership approach towards this goal is absolutely essential. However, the Board is not placed to demonstrate how the Net Zero 2030 plan is being progressed City wide and how challenges are being addressed.

**The publication of the Exeter Greenhouse Gas Inventory 2019<sup>4</sup> was a stark wake up call for us all.**

So we would like to know what substantive City wide action has been taken since 2019 and the impact this will or has had. The Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report made clear that no policies, nor actions taken by any of the Councils, authorities or others in Exeter over the last ten years have resulted in greenhouse gas reductions. Only the national action to decarbonise the national energy grid has led to carbon emissions reductions. The National Grid plans to continue to decarbonise its activities<sup>5</sup> but this alone will not tackle the requirements to both reduce the City's carbon emissions and consider adaptation requirements, as the report says on page i:

*“the sector detail shows that the reduction is the result of grid decarbonisation, which has taken place outside Exeter, and has delivered 3 times the change estimated in 2007. Local sector reduction in buildings and transport has failed to meet the objectives set in 2007 by factors of 6 and 4 respectively.*

*Extrapolating from the “current trend” since 2016 suggests that emissions in 2022 will be 448 kt CO<sub>2</sub>e. The continuation of the current trend to 2030 would give residual emissions of 291 kt CO<sub>2</sub>e, nowhere near net zero.*

*Importantly, the current trend will not continue because of grid decarbonisation; for the decline in emissions to continue at the same rate, a 28% reduction from non-power sectors will be required to deliver the extrapolated trend in 2030. Delivering net zero in 2030 requires a much greater reduction in emissions.”*

**The City needs to have a serious dialogue about the need to adapt to the impact of climate change and impact on nature.**

Of course, greenhouse gas reduction is only one part of the picture. We need, as a City, to have a serious dialogue about the need to adapt to the impact of climate change - with deep

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<sup>4</sup> [Exeter's 2019 greenhouse gas inventory and sector emissions monitoring](#)

<sup>5</sup> [PowerPoint Presentation \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

consideration to the impacts on our people - especially in light of the widening inequality in the city, places and local environment - both on land and water.

We are therefore deeply concerned that the recommendation of the Customer Focus Committee in December 2022 for the Local Plan team to lead the production of a biodiversity status report, nature recovery plan and tree canopy cover action plan to be included within the Local Plan with specific and measurable targets for Exeter has not been progressed at pace, in fact this recommendation has since been watered down - asking the Local Plan team to consider *if* they should undertake this work.

The need to protect nature was an integral part of the climate motion and no substantive action has been taken to address this. The recommendation from the Committee is a great opportunity to begin to take serious action to address this.

A lot has changed since the recognition of the Climate and biodiversity emergency in 2019, but the clock is still ticking. We would therefore recommend a new concerted effort on this work:

1. **Accountability and transparency:** An urgent review of the governance arrangements for the City-wide oversight of the net zero plan and enable the change that needs to happen.

We would hope to see

- A robust, open and transparent partnership of public, voluntary, community and business organisations;
- Be subject to scrutiny by the relevant partners and the wider public;
- Informed by evidence based on the science and citizens' contributions e.g. building on the work of the Devon Climate assembly.
- Take a transparent approach to securing the investment required to achieve Net Zero.

2. **Check if the Net Zero Plan is still fit for purpose.** It was generally accepted that, as the plan was completed just before lockdown, that it was 'just a start'. Since its publication we now have an adopted Devon Climate Emergency Plan and the publication of a Green House Gas inventory for Exeter and the publication of the 6th Carbon Budget nationally<sup>6</sup>.

It is now time to ask if the Net Zero plan is fit for purpose, with questions such as:

- Does the NZ2030 plan cover both carbon reduction and adaptation actions?
- Do city strategies, policy, risk analysis and investment needs align with local, if not, national carbon budget requirements?
- How must the Plan inform the emerging Local Plan to ensure that it will achieve Net Zero from its adoption?
- This review should also include an urgent assessment of Council policies and strategies to ensure all aspects of this work addresses climate change, since these have the widest influence on climate impacts.
- Set out a clear 'carbon budget' for the City with emissions reduction targets, based on the GreenHouse Gas inventory 2019 and work of bodies such as the Climate Change Committee. For example on page iv of the management summary of the 2019 GHG inventory there are a number of very specific and quantified activities mentioned that should be targets and regularly monitored.

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<sup>6</sup> [Sixth Carbon Budget - Climate Change Committee \(theccc.org.uk\)](https://theccc.org.uk)

- Partner organisations should be encouraged to sign up to this Carbon Budget.
- The progress towards the Budget can be overseen by the Council's new Climate sub-committee established by the Strategic Scrutiny Committee.
- Development of a risk register for the City, not just the Council - covering both mitigation and adaptation - which will then inform policy and investment decisions.

3. **Publish honest and transparent information about the City's work on climate change, backed up by an ongoing communications plan** - on the council website and elsewhere. Use opportunities such as the Council's weekly news to reinforce the importance of the huge collective effort and to highlight how everyone can participate.

We look forward to a full response to these proposals.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Diana Moore, Cllr Kevin Mitchell.  
Cllr Carol Bennet, Cllr Michael Mitchell, Cllr Jemima Moore,  
Cllr Tess Read, Cllr Catherine Rees, Cllr Amy Sparling.

Progressive Group of Councillors.