

DEVON IN THE FUTURE

4.1 A VISION FOR A NET-ZERO CARBON DEVON

Creating a resilient net-zero carbon Devon – where people and nature thrive

In order to move towards a net-zero carbon Devon, it is essential that we can imagine what it might look like.

When the DCE partners first declared a climate emergency, they outlined key social, economic and environmental changes they collectively expect to be needed to achieve net-zero. These are encapsulated within the Devon Climate Declaration which has been endorsed by all Devon's local authorities and many parish councils. The transformational changes in the Declaration include:

- Deploying more renewable, decentralised and smart energy systems.
- Retrofitting energy-efficiency measures into our existing buildings.
- Constructing zero-carbon new buildings.
- Travelling less and using improved walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure more often, and using electric and hydrogen vehicles.
- Changing our consumption to use less, re-use more and choose low-carbon options.
- Challenging all economic sectors to review their practices and the values of those they do business with.
- Divesting from fossil fuels.
- Changing dietary patterns and reducing food waste.
- Changing agricultural practices to reduce emissions associated with farming operations, manage soils sustainably and replenish soil carbon.
- Encouraging carbon storage such as through tree planting, the use of wood in construction and peatland restoration.
- Empowering the people of Devon with the knowledge and skills to act collectively.

Through responses to the public Call for Evidence, residents have told us many things which they envisage as being part of a net-zero carbon Devon, and so the richness of the vision has continued to deepen. The Devon Carbon Plan articulates in more detail what a net-zero Devon could be like.

All organisations and communities are encouraged to sign up to endorse the Devon Climate Emergency Declaration online at www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/devon-climate-declaration/endorse

The implementation of this vision brings opportunities to create a fairer, healthier, more resilient and more prosperous society. Some examples are described in Section 1.5 and co-benefits of reducing carbon emissions are highlighted throughout this Plan.

4.2 A CHANCE TO BUILD BACK BETTER

In the most tragic of circumstances, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown what a more sustainable Devon might sound and feel like. The lockdown resulted in a reduction in Devon's carbon emissions by almost a quarter (23%) during April 2020. Average traffic flows in Devon reduced by 60% and air quality improved. However, history indicates that after an economic downturn the rebound in emissions is often larger than the decline. There is every chance that this will happen again unless there is concerted action to build back better. The Devon Climate Emergency Response Group has been discussing how it could support a low-carbon Covid-19 reset.

There is strong public support nationally for the recovery to align with the imperatives created by the climate emergency. The National Climate Assembly found that 79% of assembly members either "strongly agree" or "agree" that the "Steps taken by the government to help the economy recover should be designed to help achieve net-zero"; and that 93% of assembly members "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that, "As lockdown eases, government, employers and/or others should take steps to encourage lifestyles to change to be more compatible with reaching net-zero."³¹

The chairman of the Committee on Climate Change, Lord Deben, said:

*"The UK is facing its biggest economic shock for a generation. Meanwhile, the global crisis of climate change is accelerating. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address these urgent challenges together; it's there for the taking. The steps that the UK takes to rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic can accelerate the transition to a successful and low-carbon economy and improve our climate resilience"*³²

In Devon, we are seizing this opportunity. We have written to Boris Johnson endorsing the Committee on Climate Change policy recommendations for building a resilient recovery from the Covid-19 crisis and highlighting aspects that are particularly pertinent to Devon. This plan lays a roadmap to building back better and creating a resilient, net-zero carbon Devon, where people and nature thrive.

www.devonnewscentre.info/pandemic-offers-glimpse-into-a-carbon-neutral-future

³¹ Climate Assembly UK, 2020, Interim Briefing – COVID-19, Recovery and the Path To Net Zero Executive Summary, UK ³²Lash, D. (2020) Net Zero Devon Report. Centre for Energy and Environment, University of Exeter. Available at: <https://www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/studies-and-data/>

³² <https://www.theccc.org.uk/2020/06/25/covid-19-can-be-an-historic-turning-point-in-tackling-the-global-climate-crisis/>