

Public Document Pack

6. **Public questions responses** (Pages 1 - 10)

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 15 FEBRUARY 2023

a) Question from Karl Barrow to Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change

“The current debate over the large-scale deployment of solar arrays on productive farmland requires a willingness to prioritise every other alternative site for solar PV first. That includes both Council owned buildings and land and also the increasing number of recently constructed commercial buildings in Derbyshire, including large logistics centres. Many of these have good connections to the National Grid. This council should encourage installation on commercial roofs by proactively identifying suitable premises and working with those businesses to raise their awareness of both the economic benefits to their business and the wider environmental benefits.

So, since this council was elected in 2017, how many solar panels has this council installed on its own estate and how many has it directly facilitated by working in partnership with Derbyshire businesses to identify opportunities for large scale installation of solar PV arrays on such buildings?”

Response:

“Thank you very much indeed Mr Barrow for your question. The Council has an existing public target to generate 200,000 kW of electricity per annum including from solar panels on our own estate. A property directorate has recently identified proposals to generate up to 1 million kilowatt hours per annum and the 2023-24 capital programme contains costed plans to deliver the first 400,000 kW of this.

The Council has worked with businesses over a number of years providing general support and advice, building business plans to help manage costs and income and two schemes in particular have been delivered by Derbyshire County Council.

One of those was decarbonised which supported a range of low carbon energy measures in premises but specifically targeting that at 24 Small to Medium Size Enterprises who received funding totalling £274,871 of solar PVs with predicted carbon savings of 285.2 tonnes of CO₂ per year.

We also, you are probably already aware of this, but we have the current Green Entrepreneurs Fund that has so far supported seven businesses. We have relaxed the rules around that so that we can support businesses, particularly through the current cost of living crisis which is also impacting on significant numbers of SMEs out in Derbyshire for solar PV decarbonisation projects, supporting with £120,000 of that. Within that there is a pipeline for a further £125,000 worth of submissions that have been invited to full application. That was part of a £2m scheme that we

announced some years ago. We have committed to a further £10m scheme as well to help support that across the county.

I can assure you, Mr Barrow, that we are committed to working with our own estate and existing businesses and that there is no policy in place to promote solar farms on high quality agricultural land. I will come back to that point in a minute. To that end this Council published a Renewable Energy Strategy in November of last year and this set out the right type and scale of renewable energy to be delivered in the right locations understanding both the landscape and sensitivity, character and heritage, all those sorts of things.

As part of this report a GIS study was done, the potential for rooftop solar across the county which in future could play a pretty pivotal role in identifying where solar is more appropriate. That can then influence matters such as surety for investment, developing investment strategies and influencing sensible planning decisions in the future across the piece. Indeed we used that recently to great effect when Her Majesty's Inspectorate came to look at a large scale solar array planned on some fairly prime agricultural land as well as not so prime agricultural land but impacting on setting etc around Alfreton. I was able to present Her Majesty's Inspectorate with that document and we know what the outcome was there. That being said we want to encourage solar investment in Derbyshire. We want to encourage it in the right place and create the right opportunities for investment as well. I hope that helps answer some of that question, Mr Barrow."

Supplementary question:

"The only thing I would raise is I understand as a result of the surveys that you carried out in 2015 there was an accepted plan then to build five solar arrays, including the one at Williamthorpe. Why have Williamthorpe and the other four planned solar arrays from 2015 not actually taken place?"

Response:

"Thank you very much indeed, Mr Barrow. At the moment we are undergoing a review of our corporate properties that the Council holds with a view to what we do with those in the long term. That is not to say it is impossible. We will be looking at those, but it is entirely possible that we can revisit those and a more sensible plan that is encapsulated in what I have just said which is around ensuring that we have a strategic outlook for these particular sites."

b) Question from Anne Thoday to Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change

"The Climate Change Strategy Annual Review of Progress shows very little decline in projected emissions from the Council's core and grey fleet over the next 10 years. The County's fleet of vehicles is around 550. At the current rate of

replacement (5 in 2022) how long will it take to convert all of the council's vans to ZEVs?

There are no targets for the grey fleet and apparently no policy to reduce the mileage accrued by employees during their working day. At a meeting with Cllr Barry Lewis in July 2019 Derbyshire Climate Coalition recommended a number of climate actions including "Commission Energy Saving Trust to conduct a grey and green fleet review of the council before the end of the year". This is something many councils have been doing for years – saving money, improving safety and reducing emissions. Why have the Council still not done this?"

Response:

"Thank you very much indeed Anne for your question. The projected emissions from the Council's core and grey fleet are based on the current charging infrastructure rather than the anticipated infrastructure so plans have to be afoot to approve the next phase of EV charge point installations. That is due to be presented to Cabinet actually next month.

Draft plans for a procurement framework are in place to procure four electric cars and electric vans. Switching larger vehicles to zero emission vehicles will take more time as the electric HGVs which are currently available and on the market are not suitable for our needs here in Derbyshire because of the mileages that they get driven and also the terrain as well of the county. Hydrogen vehicles are also not currently feasible as there is not the infrastructure to refuel these, although we are working on that in the background but it will be some time off.

In the meantime as part of the fleet replacement programme in order to replace the last few vehicles to ensure all vehicles are clean air zone compliant, that is Euro 6 compliant, will be replaced in Spring 2023 some of which, where suitable, will be electric vehicles. Following this there will be a gradual transition to electric vehicles and other zero emission technologies as these mature, subject to sufficient Grid capacity being available.

We commissioned what they call Cenex, the first low carbon and fuel cell Centre of Excellence, an independent not-for-profit research consultancy to conduct a grey and green fleet review which was completed in May 2020, relevant findings from which have already been taken forward by the Council. Annual mileage targets for grey fleet mileage are included in the departmental service plans and as such - and they will be coming to a future Council - as such will work with experts in industry across local government and academia as we have always done when it comes to thinking about how we do this. I might add at this point as a consequence of Covid the changing way that Derbyshire now works is we have reduced significantly our grey fleet mileage as well.

Furthermore, to support a growth in EV charging infrastructure and therefore a growth in EV use and ownership across the Council's estate and also across the county, a consultant report was completed in June of last year into potential demand and to assess the preferred locations and types of charge points needed to meet this demand. It is always about thinking ahead how we can plan for that infrastructure that is required then everybody, ourselves and industry can tailor their electric vehicle usage to that.

A detailed procurement exercise is now being carried out to appoint appropriate charge points suppliers to install a significant number of Council estate residential and destination charge points across the county, that is being carried out now, but I also go back to my earlier point around the Green Entrepreneurs Fund as well what that can do working with industry and other people to ensure that we have particularly our destination charge point infrastructure out there as well. Our Scrutiny Committee here is also looking into this in detail I think at its next Scrutiny Committee. I hope that sets the scene a little bit."

Supplementary question:

"Thank you, that was a very full answer. I would still like to know whether the departmental targets for the grey fleet translates into a policy to encourage staff to reduce their mileage? Talking to DCC staff at the moment they find it difficult to access the department's EV vehicles. There isn't a clear booking system and it is difficult to book public transport for trains for longer journeys through the department. I would just like to know when there will be a clear policy in place for the staff?"

Response:

"Thank you very much indeed. So the departmental service plans will be quite clear in the provision of electric vehicles and how that will come on-stream in the future as I have just talked about that in some detail anyway.

Interesting to hear what you say about booking vehicles internally and also booking train systems. We only have a limited number of electric vehicles at the moment. That will change in the future and more will be available. We are already very clear in our policies about ensuring that if you need to do those miles for visits or anything like that you are encouraged to book electric cars wherever possible.

When it comes to booking public transport that I have just been informed has been overhauled as a system so that should be a little bit easier to do as well but I don't think that has been helped terribly much recently by rail strikes and so on, perhaps built a little bit of uncertainty into that system as well."

c) Question from Wendy Bullar to Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change

“19 of the 27 targets contained within the Climate Change Strategy Annual Review of Progress either have no target data, no baseline data, or are just reiterations of government targets. Some examples:

1. *“Reduce manufacturing and construction emissions by 70% ...”*. We do not know the size of manufacturing and constructions emissions in Derbyshire. How can this target be rated as ‘good progress’?
2. *“24,000 skilled green jobs to be created in Derbyshire by 2030”*. How can we measure progress when we do not have any figures for Derbyshire?
3. *“All owner occupiers and renters to have access to education and training programmes to decarbonise their homes by 2025.”* There is no meaningful measure for this target, other than councils are *exploring* this. Despite this, progress is rated as ‘good’.

Will DCC revisit the action plan and ensure the targets are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely)?”

Response:

“Thank you, Ms Bullar for your question. It is quite a technical question so this is unfortunately going to be broadly a technical answer. So in developing the Climate Change Strategy the Council recognise the importance of having measurable targets that align with and contribute to the Council’s overall targets for the organisation to be net zero by 2032 or sooner and for the county to be as an economy net zero by 2050.

The target is set out under the Council’s estate and operations theme within our Climate Change Strategy or where the Council has direct control over the data needed to track progress as well as direct control over the delivery of the actions and projects needed to achieve those targets.

However, 19 of the 27 targets in the Climate Change Strategy are related to county- wide emissions and reduction sustainability improvements and as such 19 targets are aligned with a national or sector targets and policy and are reliant on the availability of national, regional or industry data and widespread action by all of those sectors that are involved in that.

The Council recognises that targets should be SMART, as you described, but if the Council was to develop its own targets for these regional/national elements it would be difficult to develop a baseline for it and also look to track progress due to the reliance on external data and evidence.

We review our Climate Change Strategy annually which includes a review of the targets within it, which I am sure you have seen. Targets will be updated as national, regional and industry targets and data are refined and updated as targets are achieved.

The Council is also developing interim targets for those who have longer term target dates and where interim assessment and measurement is beneficial and possible, so that is the long answer and the short answer is this is all quite new stuff. We have had to work and utilise data from whatever sources we can in order to establish our own kind of baseline that we can work towards I suppose.

You mentioned the situation with regard to 24,000 skilled green jobs and that is an answer I will be giving later on as well to I think it is Councillor Kinsella's question, but what I can say there is again that is based upon national definitions of what a green job might be and as a proportion of a national allocation of what the government thought a certain number of jobs would be needed across the new green economy and therefore 24,000 is roughly what we thought our allocation was against those figures."

d) Question from Laura Stevens to Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change

"At the Climate Scrutiny meeting on 10 October the Council tabled a paper on climate change performance reporting. Out of 32 actions, half (16) were rated as 'green' or 'on track' while a further 15 were rated as amber or some risk to timetable, with one was rated as 'red' or unlikely to achieve timetable.

Given the lack of progress on so many climate targets this suggests that either the rating for these actions is wildly optimistic or that the actions themselves are not sufficient to meet the targets and further actions are needed. Please advise which of these it is?"

Response:

"Thank you very much indeed for your question, Ms Stevens. The performance ratings given to the 32 priority actions in the quarterly Climate Change Performance dashboard are based on progress made against the target date for completion and against the agreed success measures for each action. These ratings are allocated by the relevant senior officer leads for each action and they are reviewed and challenged where appropriate and agreed by the Council's Climate Change and Environmental Programme Board. Therefore the ratings provided accurately reflect the position at the end of a particular quarter.

I would add to that that the Council is committed to playing its part in driving down emissions generated across the whole of Derbyshire as quickly as possible to net zero by 2050. That being said the Council has only direct control of 1-2% of

Derbyshire emissions and influence over a further 40%. Therefore getting Derbyshire to net zero is not something we can do on our own it requires widespread action across all the county and across all sectors as well as UK wide action from Central Government. We do work quite closely with things like the minerals industry and so on. We are doing really quite remarkable work in this sphere as well and we are keen to work with that and any other sectors where we can help and provide support.

As such the many priority actions in our Climate Change Strategy are enabling actions that allow the Council to seek and deliver on opportunities to reduce Derbyshire's emissions through partnership working, place shaping, showcasing and involving and engaging residents and businesses. Delivering the priority actions alone won't mean that all targets are achieved but they set the foundation and direction for county-wide action of which the County Council will continue to play its pivotal role as well as in wider sustainability and local nature recovery projects and programmes, so we will do what we can to enable basically working with all the other sectors and the general public that is out there. This is also an evolving programme that we keep working on. It will get wider and you will see more actions coming through."

Supplementary question:

"Well I didn't but I have now. Diverse Derbyshire is showing a film on Friday, 24 March in the Imperial Rooms. You are all invited. It is called the Oil Machine, a fantastic film, and my question is will you come? Thank you."

(There was no response.)

e) Question from Kathy Farr to Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change (not attending)

"In the Annual Progress Report for the Climate Change Strategy, one of the targets is for "All existing owner occupier domestic properties [to be] EPC rating C by 2035." The progress against this is marked red in respect of work to engage with residents "to understand what support they need to enable them to retrofit their own homes and to co-design and co-deliver a programme of activities".

Given that many conversations have already taken place with residents, what is taking the Council so long to deliver any tangible action on this on the ground? Many community groups, including Transition Chesterfield and other members of Derbyshire Climate Coalition, have made practical suggestions of how we can work together with the Council and offered support. What is stopping the Council taking up this offer of support and when can we expect the first real action on the ground?"

Response:

“Thank you. Well on the basis that we have Derbyshire Climate Coalition members here and they will be aware of the question that was posed I am quite happy to answer it. I won’t read it out. I am sure they will be aware of what it is but it is all around annual progress against the Climate Change Strategy about owner/occupier domestic properties EPC ratings by 2035 and other matters.

My answer to that is considerable work has already been undertaken in this area by the County Council in collaboration with Boroughs and Districts, external stakeholders and our partners in Nottinghamshire as well where there is some sector leading work being done on this through the Vision Derbyshire approach that we have been working locally and very very closely on and well with our local authority partners. That work is still continuing. Progress has been made. An extensive engagement programme has been delivered across the county, including online consultations, face-to-face and online meetings with groups and individuals.

Officers are currently drafting two documents. One is a draft consultation action plan which will be sent out to groups and individuals who have agreed to be contacted in March. The action plan contains actions suggested through the engagement process which can be delivered by the Councils and the community groups working in tandem and then the other one is an options paper which is exploring options for further delivery and an advice and support service as well.

Further to that there is also more work being carried out to support increased provision for retrofit training and skills opportunities (part of those 24,000 jobs there) and building confidence in the retrofit supply chain which is quite key to ensuring that we can deliver all this. We want to ensure that high quality assurance mechanisms are prompted as part of this wider approach as well. Thank you.”

e) Question from David Locke Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change

“Have the Council considered the use of quiet lane legislation to increase the safety of cyclists on public roads? Cycling through leisure, shopping and commuting on public roads will only increase if cyclists feel safe and that requires speed limits and signage.

Active Travel rates seem to have stalled so we need to identify strategic limits between towns, business sites and places of interest, find the best cycling route using the expertise of Sustrans Cycle UK etc and then ensure they are safe as shoppers, families, commuters. That has got to be by speed restriction. It has got to be by signage and some off-road sections but speed limits are the main thing. We have to produce quiet usable routes and quiet lane legislation might help with

this. We will upset some car drivers but it is an absolute choice that has to be made.”

Response:

“Thank you very much indeed for your question. We do have ambitious plans and we have had them over quite some time. We are putting those into practice for county-wide infrastructure development which will secure Derbyshire as a world class cycling destination for everyone.

Our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan reflects the priorities of the Key Cycle Network. This was approved by Cabinet in January 2020 and provides a strategic network for the county with connections to key destinations, towns and villages, transport hubs, places of employment and also housing areas with long distance trails and loops that support the visitor economy.

I am sure you will already be aware of Green Lane and the Key Cycle Networks that we have in the North East corner, Bolsover etc which is being led by the Derbyshire Countryside Partnership. My colleague Councillor Alex Dale sits on that. I did used to sit on that as well some years ago and that does good work.

The designation of a “quiet lane” can be carried out by Councils under the Quiet Lanes and Homes Zones (England) Regulation 2006. Designation as a quiet lane does not necessarily bring about any enforceable restriction in isolation. I think it is fair to be clear on that.

There was a scheme that was trialled in Derbyshire in the Youlgreave/Conksbury area around the time of this new legislation and care was taken in this rural environment not to over-urbanise the lanes with signage clutter. It was done working closely with the Peak District National Park Authority as well so we do have some form in this sphere.

I believe, I have been told today by one of my colleagues, David Taylor, there is a quiet lane in the Hazelwood area of Derbyshire as well. You are probably aware of Crow Lane in Chesterfield which has become a cycling route through their using Government money relatively recently to fund that work as well.

Any necessary changes to speed limits can be triggered independently and are governed by their own national guidance, the setting of local speed limits etc. If a situation suited the combination of a quiet lane and a new speed limit this can be done as well. Consideration of any speed limits though is done in association with Derbyshire Constabulary through an agreed speed management protocol and that protocol works based on meeting casualty and speed reduction targets and the competition of a capital investment for highways scheme means that a scheme to enhance the natural environment such as quiet lanes must also attract funding from elsewhere rather than those that run through those for road safety or for repair

of our roads or any other asset replacement programmes and that is where much of our budget tends to lie. It may, however, be possible to promote schemes in the future through future planning opportunities or through Government initiatives that are dedicated towards climate change or indeed its aim to become net zero.

Whilst not being directly related to quiet lanes the Council are consulting on two 20 mph limits spanning across the town centres of Buxton and Long Eaton, which you will probably be aware of. These trials will inform us whether the lower limits influence behavioural changes by encouraging more cycling and walking and a generally greener approach by all in these towns.

I must touch on as well we have committed ourselves as an administration to completing the White Peak Loop which would be another pretty critical piece of cycling infrastructure for the county which would no doubt be internationally well-known in no time at all but it is quite critical to connecting lots of other routes across the county and through the county as well. An awful lot of work going on in this phase. We are committed to making Derbyshire a better place for cycling and quiet enjoyment of our countryside.”

Supplementary question:

“Yes. I have downloaded all the cycling routes as advocated by the Council and I have tried three or four. There is no signage, not too much. There is zero signage. There are no speed limits and they are not safe for a family to cycle on. Unless we actually identify cycle routes and reduce the speed on them and put signage up it is just not safe to be advocating that people cycle in the county on rural roads, I am afraid, so we have to introduce speed limits on designated roads if you are going to put them on that.”

The Chairman: “Would you like to phrase that into a question by asking Councillor Lewis will he pledge to make more signage on these cycle routes perhaps then he can answer your question because that is what you are asking I think isn’t it?”

Mr Locke: “Yes, well, make it safe for me and my family.”

Response:

“Thank you very much indeed. I am sure if you can write to me and let me know which particular routes you are talking about then we can certainly look into those and see what we can do to make some small improvements that should improve safety. Thank you.”