

Report to: **Executive**
Date: **30th November 2023**
Title: **Climate Change and Biodiversity Update**
Portfolio Area: **Cllr John McKay**
Climate Change and Biodiversity
Wards Affected: **All**
Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: Upon the expiry of the call-in period: 5.00pm on Monday, 11 December.

Author: **Drew Powell** Role: **Director of Strategy and Governance**
Adam Williams **Principal Climate Change Officer**

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Executive:

- 1. Approves allocating £62,000 per year to establish a new Members 'Green Fund' to support community-based climate and biodiversity projects for 2023/24 and 2024/25. This will be funded from the climate change and biodiversity earmarked reserve;**
- 2. Notes that the Bioregional Learning Centre has been commissioned as a partner to conduct learning and capacity building for local climate adaptation;and**

3. Requests that the Audit and Governance Committee review the merits of awarding Yealm Community Energy a grant in the order of £100,000 to further the Council's strategic ambitions around climate change and biodiversity.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Council declared a Climate Change and Biodiversity emergency in 2019 and subsequently adopted a Strategy and Action plan and established a climate change and biodiversity (CC&B) earmarked reserve to deliver against its commitments.
- 1.2. The Council is progressing a range of actions and developing further work in support of the declaration which will be set out in the emerging corporate strategy which is subject to a separate report on this agenda.
- 1.3. This report sets out a number of actions that are already in progress and proposes the setting up of a new for Members to support local 'green initiatives' and the potential to award a grant to Yealm Community Energy to support community energy initiatives within the local community.
- 1.4. The report also offers an opportunity for initial feedback on the 'Keep it Local' Symposium held on 10 November 2023 at the Council offices.

2. Background.

- 2.1. The primary aims of the emerging corporate strategy that support the Council's climate change and biodiversity ambitions are:
 - A 12% per year reduction in eCO2 emissions across the South Hams with a 40% reduction in 4 years
 - A 5.5% per year increase in biodiversity in the South Hams with a 20% increase in 4 years
 - To form an adaption plan for the South Hams so there is a pathway to deal with the consequences of climate change.
 - To make South Hams an example for other Local Authority areas by showing what can be achieved.

- 2.2. To work towards these aims the Council is establishing relationships with key strategic partners.
- 2.3. The Council continues to fund Sustainable South Hams and has now commissioned the Bioregional Learning Centre (BLC) as a partner to conduct learning and capacity building for local climate adaptation. The BLC work will cost £46,000 funded through the established climate change and biodiversity earmarked reserve.

3. 'Keep it Local' Symposium

- 3.1. Economic activity is the main source of CO2 emissions and environmental damage. To protect the environment, we need to reconsider how we produce and distribute food locally. The Council is developing ways to collaborate with local businesses and create the support infrastructure needed for a greener future.
- 3.2. Given the context above, a 'Keep it local' symposium was held on 10 November 2023 where a range of experts and key influencers met to scope out how work in this area can be effectively progressed and to build on some of the initiatives already being supported through the UKSPF.
- 3.3. The purpose of this event was to maximise.
 - technical and practical input and experience into the Keep It Local concept.
 - engagement and buy in from key influencers.
- 3.4. This will be the subject of a verbal update at this meeting in advance of a report being produced by Sustainable South Hams in conjunction with partners.

4. Investing in Community Energy

- 4.1. The Council is keen to support community energy initiatives and projects especially where they have the potential to generate renewable energy, offer lower electricity tariffs and to fund wider climate change and biodiversity projects.
- 4.2. An opportunity has recently arisen to provide financial support, through the provision of a climate change grant with a potential to generate a financial return, to Yealm Community Energy (YCE).

- 4.3. Yealm Community Energy are in the process of purchasing three solar farms located in the South Hams. This forms part of a wider portfolio of Solar assets across the UK as part of Community Energy Together, of whom YCE is a member.
- 4.4. The work of Yealm Community Energy strongly aligns with the Council's emerging strategic objective around supporting community energy initiatives.
- 4.5. The options for providing financial support, in the order of £100,000 funded through the climate change and biodiversity earmarked reserve, are presently being explored and it is therefore recommended that the Executive ask the Audit and Governance Committee to review the merits of this approach.

5. Establishing a Member's 'Green Fund'

- 5.1. To accelerate the Council's support for community groups and local organisations tackling climate change and increasing biodiversity it is proposed to introduce a members 'Green fund' of £2,000 per year, per member. This will be a total of £62,000 a year.
- 5.2. This will be managed alongside the existing Sustainable Communities Locality Fund and targeted at projects that support the Council's aims set out in 2.1 above.
- 5.3. The fund will be established initially for 2023/4 and 2024/5 from the Climate Change and Biodiversity earmarked reserve making a total of £124,000.

6. Summary

- 6.1. The Council is progressing a range of actions and developing further work in support of its climate change and biodiversity ambitions.
- 6.2. The report sets out an investment of £170,000 with a potential further £100,000 subject to a review by the Audit and Governance Committee.

7. Implications

| Implications | Relevant to proposals Y/N | Details and proposed measures to address |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| Legal/Governance | Y | This report includes an overview of process in developing the strategy. |
| Financial implications to include reference to value for money | Y | The report sets out an investment of £170,000 with a potential further £100,000 subject to a review by the Audit and Governance Committee. |
| Risk | Y | None |
| Supporting Corporate Strategy | Y | Climate Change and Community Development |
| Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact | Y | This report supports Climate and Biodiversity aims through additional financial support for community projects. |
| Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications | | |
| Equality and Diversity | | None as a direct implication of this report |
| Safeguarding | | None as a direct implication of this report |
| Community Safety, Crime and Disorder | | None as a direct implication of this report |
| Health, Safety and Wellbeing | | None as a direct implication of this report |
| Other implications | | |

Supporting Information

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None