

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Full Council meeting 23 July 2020

Liberal Democrat Motion on Declaring an Ecological Emergency

To be proposed by Councillor Jess David

Council acknowledges that:

1. On 10 October 2019, the Council's Climate Emergency Progress Report recognised the ecological emergency, noting specifically: species extinction, loss of habitat and the connectivity of habitats, decline in the pollinators that are crucial to food supply, and the loss of and decline in the health and quantity of soil. The Council recognised that the climate and ecological emergencies are both the result of over-exploitation of the earth's resources and poor land management.
 2. The report recognised the long and strong history of work on biodiversity, landscape and ecology in Bath and North East Somerset, including a range of strategies, partnerships and projects, both at local and West of England level that are delivering action related to the ecological emergency.
 3. In late 2018, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued their special report raising the alarm and calling for much more radical and rapid action to reduce carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels to avert climate catastrophe, which inspired the School Strikes 4 Climate and Extinction Rebellion and has resulted in over two thirds of UK local authorities declaring a Climate Emergency.
 4. In May 2019, the UN's Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) similarly raised the alarm about the urgent ecological emergency the world also faces. The UK's State of Nature 2019 report also highlights the critical decline in biodiversity in the UK.
 5. The survival of our society and economy depends absolutely on the health of the natural environment and ecosystems, providing, for example, clean water and air, food, timber, flood protection, mental and physical health and well-being and, as is now being recognised, carbon sequestration.
 6. In terms of the relationship between the climate and ecological emergencies, both the IPCC and the UK's Climate Change Committee make clear that whilst reducing carbon from fossil fuels is the top priority for tackling the climate emergency, it is also necessary to find ways to increase carbon absorption, or sequestration, by the natural environment, by, for example, tree planting, peatland restoration, different methods of land management and
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improved agricultural practices that enable carbon to be drawn down into the soil on a large scale.

7. The October Council report recognised Bath and North East Somerset has an opportunity to increase the sequestration of carbon by trees, grassland and soil, and that further work would be needed, involving a range of stakeholders in order to balance this complex set of natural environment issues:
 - a. Increasing biodiversity and protection of habitats and species, including key pollinators and other insects;
 - b. Increasing carbon sequestration;
 - c. Increasing soil quality and quantity, reducing chemical fertilisers and pesticides and preventing soil erosion;
 - d. Increasing local food production, utilising local productive capacity, through less intensive agricultural methods, as a number of local farmers already do;
 - e. Increasing flood defence, natural flood mitigation measures, natural shading as the climate change;
 - f. Protecting our natural landscape and enhancing the natural capital and ecosystem services it provides, whilst enabling sensitive renewable energy development and enabling more people to benefit from time spent in nature.
 8. The Government's Climate Change Committee has set a target of doubling tree cover in the UK by 2050. As part of the West of England Nature Partnership, through its Nature Recovery Network, Bath and North East Somerset has an ambition of doing so by 2060. Work is currently underway to produce a West of England Tree and Woodland Plan on how this could be brought forward, taking into account loss of trees through ash die-back.
 9. Through the Bathscape Partnership, led by the Council, work is underway to look at the best ways of managing and increasing tree cover in the Bathscape area and the Council will be producing a Tree and Woodland Strategy during 2020-21, for the whole of Bath and North East Somerset.
 10. The Government's new Environment Bill will mandate a requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG), building on the existing National Planning Policy requirement for new development.
 11. The West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020-2030 work programme has produced West of England BNG Guidance and work is now underway to produce a road map for implementation. This work will integrate with delivery of the West of England Nature Recovery Network.
 12. There are major opportunities for enhancing nature through regional and local strategies and plans, including spatial polices and strategy for the West of England, the Joint Local Transport Plans and the Bath and North East
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Somerset's Local Plan Partial Review as well as the West of England Nature Recovery Network and West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy.

13. In February 2020, the Bath and North East Somerset Council Corporate Strategy 2020-24 was approved by Council and contains the new core policy 'tackling the climate and nature emergency', noting that this, alongside the other new core policy of 'giving people a bigger say', 'will shape everything we do'.

Therefore, alongside the work already underway, this Council formally declares an ecological emergency and will:

14. Promote its existing core policy of 'tackling the climate and nature emergency' as stated in the B&NES Corporate Strategy and ensure that this policy drives what the Council does.
 15. Work with partners locally and regionally in the West of England to drive coordinated leadership and collaborative action on 'tackling the climate and nature emergency'.
 16. Ensure the delivery of biodiversity and environmental enrichment and resist destruction of habitats through planning policy and development management.
 17. Review the Bath and North East Somerset Green Infrastructure Strategy during 2020-21 and use it as the nature emergency delivery framework and to increase local targets, whilst ensuring these are promoted through local and regional partnerships and embedded in local natural environment delivery projects such as Bathscape and Waterspace and management and connectivity of parks and green spaces and water spaces.
 18. Through the Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan Partial Review (2020), consider the potential to increase the percentage of biodiversity net gain beyond that required by the new Environment Bill and promote the same conversation within the West of England.
 19. Identify appropriate areas for habitat restoration within Bath and North East Somerset for wildlife.
 20. Continue to collaborate with our communities, businesses and other organisations, existing networks and partnerships, schools, colleges and universities, to improve ecological literacy and encourage greater biodiversity, tree-planting and management.
 21. Continue to work with our West of England partners to update the existing ecological audit.
 22. Continue to support the West of England Nature Partnership, as the region's local nature partnership (LNP), to deliver a Nature Recovery Network at landscape scale.
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