

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Wednesday, 8 January 2025 - 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair)

Councillor A Brenton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Bach, S Harding, P Shepherd, H Thomas and
C Wheatley

ALSO PRESENT

A Bell

- UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve
Co-ordinator, North Devon Biosphere

S Dorey

- Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring
Officer)

T Vanstone

- Senior Electoral & Democratic Services
Officer

K Hewlett

- Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

S May

- Corporate Support Officer

Councillors P Pennington

282. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Smith, Councillor
Wheatley attended as substitute.

283. MINUTES

Wednesday 16 October

It was proposed by Councillor Harding, seconded by Councillor Bach and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 16 October 2024 be
agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For 5, Abstentions 2)

Wednesday 13 November

During review members noted the vandalism in Victoria Park, which had been discussed, and it was asked that an update on the request for improved CCTV which targets the playground be provided. The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) advised that the Public Health & Community Safety Manager had this work in progress and advised an update could be provided at the next Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Harding, seconded by Councillor Brenton and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 13 November 2024 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For 5, Abstentions 2)

284. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

285. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

Councillor Cottle-Hunkin declared an interest as a farmer, this was in reference to the main agenda item for the meeting – North Devon Biosphere.

286. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

287. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

None.

288. NORTH DEVON BIOSPHERE

Chair introduced Andy Bell, UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve Co-ordinator for North Devon Biosphere, who provided members with a detailed presentation updating on the work of North Devon Biosphere.

Detail was provided on the area covered and the diversity of the landscape, the governance and makeup of the biosphere and the work they're involved in. The presentation went on to detail funding arrangements in terms of the programme delivery, and the benefits of this work for the community, landscape and economy.

The key areas of work (below) were then highlighted and examples of some of the work taking place under these themes were explained;

- sustainable economies
- climate change adaptation and mitigation
- improving rivers and seas
- pioneer policy for natural capital growth
- linking people and biodiversity.

Work to grow tourism within the biosphere area, without environmental harm was detailed, as well as the North Devon Biosphere Business Partner network and the Green Economy Group. Work on Climate Change was explained in detail alongside the funding and set up of Biosphere Communities project and their work.

The presentation moved on to how the North Devon Biosphere were working to reduce risks and the Reserve Co-ordinator noted specific work in terms of natural flood management and reducing pollution risks. During the presentation a number of projects were highlighted along with how the North Devon biosphere engaged with partners - local farmers, and other key partners like DEFRA, Environment Agency and South West Water were noted.

During discussion on the technology and data that the biosphere share and the impact of these projects and the data, members asked about the monitoring of water quality planned for the River Torridge. It was asked if this would use existing water treatment plants. The Reserve Co-ordinator confirmed it would be existing treatment works and the aim was to reduce the amount of surface water going to these.

Members then asked if there was the potential or need for an upgrade to these treatment works. The Reserve Co-ordinator felt this would be needed, given the scale of development taking place locally and in the future.

Projects linked to CRITTER – coastal natural flood management – were highlighted in detail for members. Specific work with the salt marsh at Weare Gifford was explained, along with the work with land owners at East the Water to create a fresh water wetland area at Manteo Way. The benefits of salt marshes and mud flats for flood prevention now and in the future was explained.

The Reserve Co-ordinator went on to highlight Marine work that North Devon Biosphere were involved with, recognising the potential of off shore wind, and the possible impact and benefits that may come as a result. The possibilities that come from the marine environment as a whole and conservation work in the area were also highlighted.

Work to engage and connect with people through art and culture was highlighted, specifically work with Beaford Arts and The Shared Outcome Project.

Finally, the Reserve Co-ordinator highlighted how North Devon Biosphere work to share their knowledge and findings through influencing the Joint Local Plan, national policy, local economy, working with landowners and engaging with communities. The Reserve Co-ordinator also highlighted some of the challenges and opportunities on the horizon for North Devon Biosphere.

Members then had the opportunity to ask questions and the following was discussed.

Members asked about youth engagement and work within schools. The Reserve Co-ordinator advised that although work in schools had taken place in the past there wasn't the capacity within North Devon Biosphere to facilitate this. As a result, the focus had moved to teacher training.

A pilot programme to reintroduce climate change back into the school curriculum was highlighted. The aim of the programme was explained and it was confirmed this would be for primary and secondary schools.

The Reserve Co-ordinator also went onto explain how they were working with partners to improve and add to the education offer locally, and support Petroc plans for University status.

Members asked about the North Devon Biosphere's input in terms of the Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre. The Reserve Co-ordinator advised how they supported the work to date, and how they planned to continue to offer that support moving forward.

Members asked how Torridge District Council could help to enhance the work of North Devon Biosphere and the Reserve Co-ordinator recognised the funding that Torridge District Council (TDC) already provide and the positive working relationships with officers in Planning and Economic Development.

The Reserve Co-ordinator reflected on the introduction of targets for Biodiversity Net Gain and the buy in of developers. During discussion on the complexity of the issue The Reserve Co-ordinator explained that North Devon Biosphere could offer support, through training, to officers in the scrutinising the applications from developers.

Members asked whether North Devon Biosphere were consulted regarding any of the development that is taking place and planned locally. The Reserve Co-ordinator advised that TDC Planning Team do seek their views and advised that they also aimed to influence the development of the new Local Plan.

Members noted the work North Devon Biosphere do with South West Water (SWW) and asked how much influence they felt they had, noting the pollution rates for South West Water locally.

The Reserve Co-ordinator recognised North Devon Biosphere were not a regulator for South West Water and explained their aim was to influence change through positive engagement. He went on to explain the reasoning for working

with SWW and others who were polluting the rivers. Work to support enforcement was noted, but it was confirmed that regulation was the responsibility of the Environment Agency.

Members asked about woodland management and asked if there was a programme of leaving woodland too. The Reserve Co-ordinator went on to explain the aim of woodland management and the importance of considering the condition of the woodlands and the landscapes in these matters.

Members asked if North Devon Biosphere were involved in maintaining the coast path, given their work on wellbeing. The Reserve Co-ordinator advised of the King Charles Coast Path and how this may help improve access, as well as work with landowners to improve the surrounding areas.

Members asked if North Devon Biosphere were able to make direct applications for Section 106 monies. The Reserve Co-ordinator advised that this was the aim of Biodiversity Net Gain and went on to provide some context of the issues and explain the challenges of influencing developers. It was confirmed that one success had been in Abbotsham where trees had been planted.

Members asked about the proposed Tourist Tax. The Reserve Co-ordinator recognised this was already in place in other countries of the world and the potential benefits of extra funds for the local area.

Members asked if there were any projects focused on Regenerative Farming and the Reserve Co-ordinator advised there was a project in the early stages of development. The Farm to Fork shop idea was explained – where a shop uses only local suppliers of organic food. A plan to explore this idea in terms of regenerative farming was then explained.

Following a question about the planned 10 year review, the Reserve Co-ordinator advised of the planned consultation process in time for September 2025 and confirmed TDC would be a consultee.

Members thanked The Reserve Co-ordinator for a detailed presentation.

Cllr Pennington left the meeting at 19:26

289. ACTION LIST

Action 199 – Chair advised of work taking place in North Devon following the joint committee on Dentistry. It was noted that a petition has been taken to government Reform of the Dental Contract.

During discussion it was agreed that Democratic Services would email out the notes for the first meeting of the new task group set up by the MP for North Devon.

Action 220 –Members were advised that Councillor David Brenton was continuing to attempt arranging a meeting with Bideford Family Centre.

Action 273 – It was confirmed a letter had been sent to Devon Council Council and this had been acknowledged.

Action 283 – An update on CCTV at Victoria Park play area to be provided at the next Committee.

290. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Chair reviewed the Forward Plan with members and the following was agreed:

2 April 2025 – Committee to hear from the TDC Domestic Abuse Officer.

The meeting commenced at 6.10 pm and closed at 7.33 pm

Chair:

Date: