

CLIMATE ACTION: BOVEY & HEATHFIELD CLIMATE CHANGE AND DARTMOOR: PLANNING FOR DECARBONISATION



In November Alex Gandy, at the time the Acting Head of Forward Planning and Economy at the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA), gave a talk to Climate Action Bovey and Heathfield (CABH) detailing DNPA's response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency they declared in 2019. Alex led their response which resulted in a Climate Action Plan in 2020. The presentation was broken down into two main areas. Firstly, looking at the organisation's carbon footprint, the emissions directly under their control, and secondly looking at the carbon footprint of all activities within the national park, for example from residents, businesses and visitors to the area.

The 2020 plan set a target for the organisation to be carbon neutral by 2025 and since 2018/19 there has been a 14% reduction in their carbon footprint to around 200 tons CO² equivalent (tCO²e). Within this area DNPA have looked at the carbon footprint of their land estate, energy efficiency, their vehicle fleet plus remote and paperless working. Actions taken so far have included installing a heat pump at the Haytor Visitor Centre and a biomass boiler at the Princetown centre using locally sourced wood chips. Covid lockdowns led to more remote meetings and home working taking place resulting in a reduction in emissions, although these have risen to some extent since then. In addition to these direct emissions, carbon sequestration from land owned by DNPA, such as woodland, moorland and heathland, has been calculated. The estimated amount from these is 1500 tCO²e, well in excess of the total emissions, which makes it appear that DNPA is already carbon negative!

However, Alex described how the organisation is taking a scientific approach in their work with a new target set for carbon neutrality against a science-based target by 2050, and this limits offsets (from sequestration for example) to 10% of the calculated amount. Based upon work developed by Exeter University using remote sensing data from satellites, together with manual soil sampling, the soil carbon storage has also been estimated. This work will be revisited in the future to monitor changes.

A question concerning the wildfire risk on Dartmoor was asked. Alex explained how Molinia grass dries over winter and can ignite easily. Furthermore, increased scrubbing up can also pose a risk. There are therefore concerns that different ways of managing the land may increase this risk. Another question on the impact of swaling (managed burning) on tree seedlings was asked. Here a balance between the need for grazeable and biodiverse habitat and actions to improve carbon capture needs to be achieved.

The second part of the talk concerned activities outside those of DNPA. Alex described the Dartmoor Partnership Plan (2021-26) which set a target of Dartmoor being carbon negative by 2045. To achieve this the actions include new broadleaved woodland planting, peatland restoration, allowing for natural regenerating of habitats, restoring functional hydrological systems, reduced transport emissions and supporting renewable energy. Several different projects are working to achieve these targets, such as the South West Peatland Partnership, Natural Flood Management in partnership with the Environment Agency (EA) and the Dartmoor Headwaters Project 2023-2033.

Alex continued to stress the scientific rigour in the work on Climate Change by DNPA. This includes work alongside all of the national parks covering carbon footprinting of full consumption emissions, estimating carbon emitted by businesses, residents and visitors both directly and indirectly. For example, this includes manufacturing emissions associated with goods purchased. Visitors contribute approximately 20% of the total consumption emissions. For both residents and visitors within the park, vehicle fuel plus food and drink form a significant part of these emissions. This work has produced a possible path to net zero by 2037, although some of the targets necessary to achieve this were described as very challenging!

Alex also described how DNPA are working within the policy landscape set out in the government's Sixth Carbon Budget and Net Zero Strategy, together with the Devon Carbon Plan, plus Race to Zero, a UN initiative for non-governmental organisations to take actions to halve global emissions by 2030.

Questions followed on woodland carbon sequestration and how conifers capture more carbon as they grow faster than broadleaved trees but they are poorer in terms of biodiversity compared with broadleaved woodland. Also Alex mentioned how the Woodland Carbon Code does not take into consideration soil carbon which is poorer in conifers. There was also discussion on energy generation within and close to the park and transport emissions. DNPA are working with Highways England and local councils on the availability of public transport, EV charging infrastructure and encouraging cycling within the national park.

Altogether it was a very interesting and informative talk which gave the audience a good understanding of the work DNPA is undertaking with respect to climate change and the sheer complexity of that task.

If you would like to follow up any of the documents referenced please contact us for details.
cabh@boveytracey.gov.uk

What can we do about Climate Change in the Bovey area?

Is there anything YOU would like to do locally to address the challenge of Climate Change?

An invitation to anyone who lives in the Bovey area.

CABH will be holding an Open Meeting to discuss the above on Saturday 10th February 2024 from 9.30 am to 1.30 pm at the Phoenix Hall, Bovey Tracey.

Everyone is welcome to join and take part in the meeting for however long you like. Put the date in your diaries and calendars.