

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Cc: Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Rt Hon
George Eustice MP, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Rt Hon Grant
Shapps MP, Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP

Chief Executive

Phil Norrey
Devon County Council
County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
EX2 4QD

Tel: 01392 383000
phil.norrey@devon.gov.uk

2nd July 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

RE: Seizing the opportunity for a green COVID-19 recovery

A partnership of 25 public, private, voluntary and community organisations has come together under the name of the [Devon Climate Emergency](#) (DCE). We are working to accelerate Devon's journey to net-zero carbon by 2050 at the latest and further its adaptation planning for a warmer world. The partnership is chaired by Devon County Council and includes all eight district councils, Torbay and Plymouth councils and the national park authorities of Dartmoor and Exmoor.

As the Chair of the DCE I am writing to endorse fully the recommendations offered by the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) in [their letter to you](#) on the 6th May regarding how **we must work together to achieve a green COVID-19 recovery and to highlight opportunities for doing so.**

There is no need for me to repeat all of their recommendations here, but we would like to reiterate the importance of the **need for a socially-just recovery**. It is clear that the long-term impacts of climate change and those of the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affect the same young people, low-income and health-deprived groups. In Devon, some of our more rural and challenged communities will see 10% loss in productivity and are predicted to take five years to recover. Recovery policy needs to be designed so that it benefits as many people as possible, including those whose employment is under threat as the economy adjusts to a more resilient and low-carbon state.

I have identified below some of the CCC's recommendations that have pertinence to our context and experience in Devon, which with **appropriate new support programmes from your government** will all contribute to green growth, training and jobs:

Investments in low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure

○ **Flood and coastal risk management**

As the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), Devon County Council is developing a pipeline of projects in our updated Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for community flood protection in about 17 locations to be delivered over the next six year programme that will require detailed feasibility work for implementation via Defra's Flood Defence Grant in Aid. Plymouth and Torbay councils in their LLFA roles will do likewise.

- **Electric vehicle charging infrastructure**
Devon, and indeed the wider south west, needs a dense network of electric vehicle charging infrastructure due to its patchwork of rural communities that means there are fewer opportunities for active travel and public transport to replace car journeys. Devon authorities are deploying a modest network of charging infrastructure with the assistance of EU grant funding; with further investment this could be substantially expanded.
- **Renewable energy deployment**
Financial support mechanisms for renewable energy need to be reviewed to enable stalled development, particularly schemes of less than 5MW capacity, to be built. The current support mechanisms do not overcome the hurdle required for investment. Many of the DCE partners have made commitments to deploy and purchase renewable energy and battery storage as part of their carbon reduction plans and have assets on which technology can be deployed when an investment opportunity is available.

Significantly strengthen electricity networks

The Great South West consortium of Local Enterprise Partnerships has an ambition to be a renewable electricity exporter. Parts of the local distribution network operated by Western Power requires substantial enhancement to carry greater amounts of power, which will be exacerbated by future demands for the electrification of transport and heat. Currently, a proportion of the upgrade costs are borne by developers which consequently renders many projects unviable. Financial assistance to cover the network upgrade costs in the southwest would unlock further investment in energy infrastructure.

Housing retrofits and building new homes that are fit for the future

- **Rapidly increase the rate of retrofitting homes and develop supply chains for whole house retrofits.**
In Devon we have many existing assets that will help accelerate the deep retrofit of our 550,000 homes: engaged local authorities with a good track record on fuel-poverty activity; the best community-energy sector in the country; and a legacy of supply chain engagement through our Zero Energy Building Catalyst programme. We are progressing towards an investment-ready model for retrofit in partnership with the BEIS South West Energy Hub which will subsequently require start up investment to develop this massive opportunity for skills and jobs.

Tree planting, peatland restoration, green spaces and other green infrastructure.

- **Restoring parks and planting urban trees**
There is a great appetite in Devon for community tree planting. We recently worked in partnership with the Woodland Trust to provide free trees, for which demand out-stripped supply. A scheme to fund further parkland restoration, tree planting and the incorporation of substantial green space in new development would continue the trend of communities reengaging with their local environment along with the health and wellbeing benefits these bring.
- **Landscape-scale nature improvement (marine and land)**
Devon is fortunate to be home to the UNESCO North Devon Biosphere Reserve that has hosted two of Defra's Natural Capital Pioneer projects. These have resulted in terrestrial and marine Natural Capital Plans that are seeking funding to significantly improve the public good that the natural environment provides. Additionally, the partners would like to transfer the learning to the remaining areas of the county so that the whole area is able to prosper from the economic benefits available.

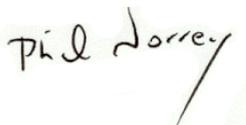
Making it easy for people to walk, cycle, and work remotely.

- **More safe spaces for walking and cycling, and more bike parking**
Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council have engaged with the Covid-19 Prompt Action Fund to deploy temporary traffic management schemes to enable safer and easier walking and cycling. Further funding would enable many more communities to benefit and to make some of these schemes permanent.
- **More shared bike schemes**
Devon has experience of operating the UK's first, shared, electric bike scheme – Co-bikes in Exeter. The scheme is a great success and received start-up funding from local partners. Further funding would provide the opportunity to extend this scheme into more communities throughout the county.
- **Investment in digital infrastructure**
The Connecting Devon and Somerset Programme is rolling out superfast broadband which will provide an £800m boost to the economy. Government investment has brought total public funding from a variety of partners to £38m. The project has delivered superfast access to more homes and businesses than any other broadband programme in England. We have the knowledge and experience to develop this programme's ambitions further given additional support.

Many of these initiatives appear in our recently published Team Devon [Economy and Business Recovery Prospectus](#) that aims to create a stronger, more inclusive and sustainable economy by building on our dynamic and entrepreneurial business community, coupled with our world-class environment, our talented workforce, and global expertise in climate science and green technologies.

We are ready to support the recovery of the UK economy with our partners on the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership and the Great South West initiative to secure the prosperity of the region as it looks to rebuild with the green economy at its heart.

Yours sincerely



Phil Norrey
Chief Executive of Devon County Council and Chair of the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group