

## **Environment theme**

*Compiled by Paul Sadler, the Environment Agency*

### **1.Reduce waste production by encouraging re-use and recycling**

#### **Why was the high level strategic issue chosen?**

Devon is running out of places and means to dispose of its waste. We need to send less to landfill, under government targets, reduce our demand for materials, re-use materials where we can and recycle more. Currently figures for approaching 40% for recycling are being achieved in places across Devon.

#### **Linked issues – why are they linked**

Links to flood risk and climate change issues within the environment theme – one way of dealing with our waste mountain is to send less to landfill and either reduce demand for the items in question in the first place, re-use or recycle the materials. This will reduce the amount of landfill gases which include greenhouse gases – the driver behind climate change. Reduce the speed and size of climate change and we can reduce the knock-on impacts including flood risk.

Low carbon economy/Economy – reducing waste and recovery of materials can save businesses money as well as reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Housing – re-using demolition waste. Consideration of waste issues generated by new builds.

Health – there are concerns about health impacts arising from living near landfills. Certainly there are quality of life issues which could be reduced if less was landfilled.

Culture – we have an asset in terms of the recreational use of Devon. Better managed waste streams can mean cultural interests are protected too.

Older people/Stronger communities – not all communities in Devon can get access to either recycling facilities or waste management advice or information.

#### **How the findings of the evidence base theme report/sensitivity to equality informed the issue?**

The equality issue rightly points out there needs to be more comment in the analysis about efforts in reaching vulnerable groups in terms of practical assistance and information on planning waste reduction. Likewise there needs to be more information about the proportional impact of refuse systems on minority ethnic food industry (with the percentage of that community in the food industry).

#### **How have the public contributions been dealt with?**

The most important observation was that the analysis focuses only on municipal waste and not construction and agricultural waste. Further comment and data needs to be included in the analysis but the same conclusions would be reached – we need to re-use and recycle more and dispose of less.

## **2. Minimise Flood Risk across Devon**

### **Why was the high level strategic issue chosen?**

South Devon Coast October 2004, Ottery St Mary, Bideford, Tiverton – just some of the places that have suffered from flooding in Devon in living memory.

Existing flood risk and future flood risk due to climate change is a significant factor in the quality of life, public safety, accessibility and economic well-being of many locations across Devon.

More than 15% of properties in Devon are at risk of flooding from a variety of sources (river flooding, tidal flooding, runoff from land including urbanised areas).

Sea-levels expected to rise by over 80cm in the next 100 years.

Winters expected to be 20% wetter by 2050s.

How do we know this?

The Environment Agency maps and keeps records of flood risk and flood incidents.

The UK Climate Change Impacts programme makes predictions of sea-level rise and rainfall.

National and regional strategies and data sets on flood risk.

### **Linked issues – why are they linked**

The Low Carbon Economy – the drivers behind the low carbon economy are also driving up flood risk. If Devon leads in taking advantage of the low carbon economy then there is a chance that other areas will follow and so reduce the drivers behind increasing flood risk.

Economy – flooding causes million pounds worth of damage and disruption to economic life.

Health/Older people/Stronger communities/Safer Devon – emergency response, community support and major incident planning around flooding events.

Housing – flood risk and the planning process is an increasingly crucial debate. The new planning policy statements strengthen the Environment Agency's position on objecting to building in the flood plain.

Transport and access – disruption caused by flooding. Think Cowley Bridge in Exeter after the autumn 2000 floods, think of the pretty regular disruption to the *mainline* train service that passes through the Dawlish to Teignmouth arising from tidal flooding (storm overtopping of the line).

### **How the findings of the evidence base theme report/sensitivity to equality informed the issue?**

The following works from the recommendation that “environment” does indeed mean the narrow physical focus as per the theme analysis. The equality paper suggested a wider definition including issues about access to the environment (like creation of parks and public spaces) but I see those issues relating more to culture, community or transport and access. The theme authors have used a physical definition for environment and used the risk management idea of source-pathway-receptor as the perspective. Source is the origin of the risk, pathway is how it gets from the source

to the receptor. Receptor is the receiving entity. In these terms the access issues, if they relate to environment, are receptor issues.

The suggestion that no analysis is presented of access to flood warnings amongst vulnerable groups is valid in terms of the contents of the theme analysis but not in reality an issue. The Environment Agency is the sole body responsible for issuing flood warnings and has invested much time, effort and money in understanding and targetting vulnerable groups with flood warning information. More and more people are signing up to the flood warning service or forming local information chains (via local flood wardens).

### **How have the public contributions been dealt with?**

Nothing new has been added through the public consultation on flood risk – further data has been provided e.g. details of annual sea-level rise, but these do not change the conclusions.

### **3. Reconnecting Devon's fragmented habitats**

#### **Why was the high level strategic issue chosen?**

Devon's natural habitats are clearly important for the wildlife that lives in them but also form a key draw for cultural enjoyment of Devon – Dawlish Warren, Dartmoor, the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty all contain designated natural habitats.

But these habitats are a fragmented version of their former self.

Not all are protected, recorded and there is no overall plan for their management.

Devon is a very important county for many declining species, important on a national and international scale.

#### **Linked issues – why are they linked**

Within the environment theme – links to climate change; it threatens our natural habitats through changes in weather patterns.

Culture/economy theme – the tourism benefits and threats are significant. Visits to our natural habitats are popular amongst tourists and residents alike. But more visitors threatens the very survival of these habitats. Some of the habitats link with what makes Devon "Devon".

Health/Access – a healthy environment can encourage people to get out and about and therefore keep healthy.

#### **How the findings of the evidence base theme report/sensitivity to equality informed the issue?**

The equality assessment rightly calls for information about access and understanding of Devon's habitats and open spaces amongst vulnerable and minority groups. What is the typical make up of the audience watching Springwatch from Devon on tv?

The call for communities to get involved in valuing their local environment (habitats) is a valid one as is the use of environmental projects to protect or improve habitats using vulnerable groups or reinforcing self-esteem (ex-offenders).

### **How have the public contributions been dealt with?**

There is comment in the contributions about the lack of mention of issues around access to the land. But the comment that is made in the analysis that this is relevant to the tourism related theme.

There were no other major comments made about habitat fragmentation in the consultation comments.

## **4. Reducing pollution and runoff from compacted soils**

### **Why was the high level strategic issue chosen?**

- The importance of rural issues, including the socio-economic aspects, in Devon
- Agricultural pollution is the biggest single cause of river water quality problems in Devon
- Run-off from agricultural land can cause pollution, flooding, highway/transport disruption and harm aquatic life
- The soil across many parts of Devon is compacted due to heavy machinery going on the land when it is wet – this leads to greater chance of runoff when rain occurs and the associated issues as above

### **Linked issues – why are they linked**

Climate change/flood risk/low carbon economy/economy – Climate change will give rise to wetter winters perhaps when the land is bare. If soils are compacted then the risk of flooding and the other associated impacts arising from compacted soil and rainfall is raised. If Devon does take advantage of the low carbon economy then there could be a reduction in the flood risk from soils and runoff. The economic interests and future of farming in Devon is also fundamentally linked to this theme – if farmers had more money and resources then they could still operate without affecting the state of soils – farmers can profit from a better economy.

Culture – the state of our soils is linked to land use. The way our land looks and is farmed is a cultural draw for visitors and residents alike.

Transport and access – runoff from fields affects the management and use of our highways.

Stronger communities – the solutions to improving our soils can be tackled through linking the farmer with the consumer so that our communities recognise the benefits and role of local farmers e.g. a fair price is paid for our food and it is locally produced and farmed in an environmentally friendly manner.

### **How the findings of the evidence base theme report/sensitivity to equality informed the issue?**

The equality report is correct in calling for assessment or at least presentation of the economic and mental state of farmers in the context of the need to make changes to farming practise or as a result of animal diseases and fuel shortages.

This is a good example of where the needs of a community is associated with “environment” because the equality author assigns a wider definition of environment than the authors of the environment theme. Undoubtedly, farmers have a role to play in protecting and improving Devon’s physical environment. In encouraging this we do need to be aware of and take account of the farmers’ economic and mental wellbeing.

### **How have the public contributions been dealt with?**

Again some respondents are interpreting the terms in the analysis differently to the authors: for example, one person lamented no mention of landuse matters but the main issue of soils and runoff is actually all about land-use. And soils and run-off is the most important current issue concerning land use that affects the physical environment.

There were no other significant comments about soils and runoff or related issues.

### **5. Adapting to and mitigating against climate change**

**N.B. This is an issue within a theme but I believe as it connects with so many of the other issues and all of the themes then we should really think about whether it sits within the environment theme at all!!!**

### **Why was the high level strategic issue chosen?**

Warming to the idea –UK Climate Change Impacts Programme report.

As per the low carbon economy paper by Ian Hutchcroft.

Climate change, as we know, is forecast to affect all aspects of life and the physical environment of Devon.

### **Linked issues – why are they linked**

It links to all the themes.

### **How the findings of the evidence base theme report/sensitivity to equality informed the issue?**

The equality paper refers to assessment of impacts on vulnerable groups and their ability to adapt and their access to emergency services. This is a known issue within the theme and, in fact, there is a proposal for an extreme weather adaptation project run by DSP to deal with this.

### **How have the public contributions been dealt with?**

There are comments on flood risk which I have dealt with through the flood risk issue paper but no other comments about climate change.

### **Possible other issues**

Paul Sadler, from the Environment Agency and the theme author, also wants the T&FG to note the following

*You'll see the climate change one is rather short - that's because I think it may be a theme in its own right rather than an issue just within the environment theme. And the drivers behind it are recorded in the flood risk issues and in Ian Hutchcroft's low carbon economy one. I think it worth reflecting on my observations.*

*I believe there may actually be another two issues and possibly on e additional theme:*

*- many consultation comments talked about recreation, access to land, involvement of the public in improving their neighbourhood. Perhaps this is within the access theme as an issue, perhaps it is a theme in its own right.*

*- the other issue is our coast: our bathing waters are excellent but there are concerns about other aspects including the biodiversity of our coast and shore areas as well as emergency planning issues (think Napoli).*