

CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP

30 January 2025



Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group “informal” meeting held remotely on Thursday 30 January 2025 at 2:00pm.

Members of the Steering Group Present: Councillors K.M. Field (Chair), S. Burton, P.J. Gray, T.M. Killeen (MBE) and S.B. McGurk (in part).

Other Members Present: Councillors J. Barnes (MBE) and S.M. Prochak (MBE).

Advisory Officers Present: Head of Corporate and Strategic Services, Climate Projects Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

Also present: Chris Richards, Energise Sussex Coast (in part).

CCSG24/32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P.N. Osborne and the Chief Executive.

CCSG24/33. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations of interest made and no dispensations noted.

CCSG24/34. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 28 NOVEMBER 2024 – MATTERS ARISING

Members referred to one of the actions from the last meeting and the following was confirmed / noted:

Action 1: To raise / promote the profile of climate champions at the next scheduled RALC meeting.

Members were unclear whether this action had been completed or was still ongoing. This action originated from the meeting held on 26 September 2024 (Minute CCSG24/11 refers), where the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) had reviewed their Terms of Reference (ToR). One of the objectives within the ToR was:

- To liaise with Rother Association of Local Councils (RALC) to identify citizens across Rother who are climate champions for their communities and to use them to inform on ideas to implement locally.

It was felt, at that time, that the best platform for raising / promoting the profile of climate champions across the district would be at RALC's Annual Parish Conference. Therefore, the Chair of the CCSG and Climate Projects Officer had agreed to raise this at the Conference.

Those Members who attended RALC's Conference and subsequent meetings advised that climate champions had not been mentioned. The CCSG agreed that climate champions should be promoted across the district and felt that the best platform to do this was at RALC meetings. Therefore, this action would be reinstated.

The following matter was also discussed:

Wildflower Bedding along Bexhill Seafront: Tourism preference had indicated traditional planting rather than wildflower planting was preferred. Comments had been received from Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council (BTC) and other relevant stakeholders regarding appropriate planting schemes. It was understood that one of the Central Ward Councillors had decided for 2025 to replant the wildflower beds along the seafront with traditional plants. This decision was questioned by the CCSG, as it was understood that individual Members could not make decisions on their own. It was also not supported by some of the Members of the CCSG. In 2024, Bexhill in Bloom had won the Royal Horticultural Society's South and South East In Bloom GOLD Award for Coastal Town of the year. It was felt that this had been awarded largely due to the wildflower bedding displays along the seafront. Wildflowers required minimal care and funding. Clarity was sought on whether a definitive decision had been made regarding the planting scheme and whether these bedding areas were the responsibility of the Council's grounds maintenance contractor, idverde. It was felt that Bexhill in Bloom should be consulted on any future planting schemes. The Head of Corporate and Strategic Services agreed to speak to the Leader of the Council and the Council's Parks Technical Officer.

It was felt that the potential new Unitary Authority would not want to take on the responsibility of seafront planting schemes / maintenance and that this should be devolved locally. Therefore, it was suggested that responsibility of planting along the seafront should be devolved to BTC. The Chair agreed to ask a question at the next East Sussex County Council full Council meeting. The Chair agreed to liaise with other Members to formulate appropriate wording for the question.

ACTION 1: To raise / promote the profile of climate champions at the next scheduled RALC meeting. (Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group / Head of Corporate and Strategic Services)

ACTION 2: To seek advice from the Leader of the Council and the Council's Parks Technical Officer regarding the planting scheme for the seafront. (Head of Corporate and Strategic Services)

ACTION 3: To Chair to ask a question at the next East Sussex County Council full Council meeting regarding the responsibility of planting along the seafront to be devolved to Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council. (Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group)

CCSG24/35. **ENERGY CHAMPIONS AND THE ROTHER ENERGY ROADSHOW – VERBAL**

The Chair welcomed Chris Richards of Energise Sussex Coast to the meeting, who proceeded to advise Members of roadshows, events and talks that would be held at various locations across the district during 2025 (from Bodiam to Brightling to Crowhurst to Ticehurst and many more). An Energy Roadshow was scheduled to be held on Tuesday 18 February 2025 at 7:00pm to 9:00pm at Ticehurst Village Hall. Further dates would be published on Energise Sussex Coast website at the following link [Energise Sussex Coast](#).

It was confirmed that six Energy Champions (EC) had been trained, which covered both urban and rural areas. Rother Association of Local Councils Chair was one of the trained ECs. Volunteer ECs advised local communities on how they could lower their energy bills, save money and become more energy efficient. This was achieved by setting up energy stalls / talks across the district.

Events held in 2024 had proved more popular than anticipated, which was extremely encouraging. Clarity was sought on whether advice disseminated at the sessions had been activated by attendees, e.g. had residents installed solar panels, insulation, heat pumps etc. Attendees were asked to complete feedback forms after each event, but follow-up information was not collated.

Implementing energy efficiency measures in listed / historical buildings was not straightforward and required a careful approach to balance conservation with modern sustainability. Despite the challenges, it was possible, and it was noted that solar panels had been installed at Salisbury Cathedral. However, it was not suitable or possible to install these measures on some listed / historical buildings.

Members were advised that heat pumps had been installed at the Observer Building in Hastings, plus solar panels were being installed at Brightling Village Hall.

Councillor McGurk advised that he had attended a conference of the Network Buildings / Traders (Environment Conservation Building) who discussed / delivered serenity (Passivhaus House) projects. They were extremely knowledgeable and specialised in the delivery of energy efficient retrofit techniques and were currently building a demonstration house for Canterbury City Council. These conferences / events could be promoted on the Council's 'MyAlerts' platform.

Members were advised of the Battle Solar Town project. The expectation was to produce 25% of its own energy. Energise Sussex Coast was overseeing this project. Data and information would be forwarded once known.

POST MEETING UPDATE: Several dates had now been received, as follows:

Beckley: Energy Advice at Sunday Market – date to be confirmed.

Pett: 4 March 2025 at 7:00pm Heat Pump and Solar Talk; and 5 March 2025 at 10:00am Energy Advice Coffee Morning.

Robertsbridge: Making your Home Energy Efficient Talk – date to be confirmed.

Sedlescombe: 14 May 2025 at 6:00pm Energy Advice Talk.

Bodiam, Brightling and Crowhurst: event details to be confirmed.

CCSG24/36. **CLIMATE ACTION PLAN MONITORING**

The Climate Projects Officer (CPO) updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on the new internal monitoring processes of the Climate Strategy (CS) and Climate Action Plan (CAP). The CS and CAP were formally adopted by the Council in December 2023. Responsibility for climate now came under the remit of the Head of Corporate and Strategic Services (HCSS).

From April 2025, quarterly CAP meetings between the HCSS and CPO would be held to monitor progress of the objectives / projects within the CAP to ensure continued focus and implementation of the CS. CAP Progress reports would continue to be reported to the CCSG focusing on one of the five CS themes. CAP action leads would be invited to present updates to the CCSG, as and when appropriate. The schedule for the reports would be as follows:

January & June:	Buildings and Energy Efficiency
February & July:	Transport
March & September:	Resource Consumption and Waste
April & October:	Biodiversity and Land Use
May & November:	Energy Generation

Members were reminded that both March and October meetings would be held in public. It was also noted that organisational and district-wide emissions reports would continue to be reported at the October meeting.

Despite staffing reductions and changes, liaison with lead officers would continue to ensure staff were aware of the actions which related to their roles within the CAP. Commitment to the CS and CAP would be maintained and was embedded within the Council's procedures and policies.

It was noted that concern had been raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) at their meeting held on 20 January 2025, that only one CS Key Performance Indicator (KPIs) had been proposed to be monitored during 2025/26. The HCSS reiterated that it was difficult to set relevant CS KPIs to measure. Collating data involved extensive work and was time consuming. It was essential that only appropriate / relevant KPIs were proposed, as many of the objectives within the CS were outside of the Council's direct influence. Members were advised that CS data / measures would be included within the State of the District document / report. This document provided the up-to-date objective and comprehensive position of the district across various areas from the local economy, employment and skills, and health and wellbeing, which included strengths and trends and emerging strategic challenges. This document was reported annually to the OSC in June.

Clarity was sought on how many trees had been planted as part of the community orchard project. Once the project was completed, information would be made available / communicated. This information should be promoted via the Council's communication / social media platforms. It was also suggested that this information / good news stories could be illuminated / projected across the front of the Town Hall, subject to funding requirements.

The Chair thanked the HCSS and CPO for their commitment and hard work and stipulated that a "good team was in place".

RESOLVED: That the Climate Strategy and Climate Action Plan internal monitoring processes be noted.

CCSG24/37. VILLAGE HALLS ENERGY PROJECT UPDATE

The Village Hall Energy Project (VHEP) aimed to reduce the carbon footprints of village and community halls across the district by reducing reliance on oil and gas as a fuel source, and decreasing electricity drawn from the national grid by 2025. £500,000 from the Community Infrastructure Levy Fund (Climate Emergency Bonus Fund) was awarded for the project. Decarbonisation surveys were undertaken on 39 eligible halls. Once decarbonisation plans were received, two rounds of capital grant were awarded. The following measures were installed and funded at 29 halls: LED lighting; roof and wall insulation; glazing and replacement doors; and solar panels. All measures were expected to collectively save £34,000 per year on energy bills with an expected lifetime carbon saving of 1,220 TCO₂e. Two halls had installed LED lighting using their own reserves while others would fund raise to implement measures in the future.

Some additional measures were also funded, including air source heat pumps; solar battery storage; radiators; smart heating controls; infrared heaters; and thermal blinds.

The VHEP would be concluded at the end of the financial year with all grant-funded measures completed.

Members agreed that the VHEP had successfully achieved its aim to reduce the carbon footprint of village and community halls across the district, which contributed to both environmental and financial sustainability for these important community assets.

RESOLVED: That the final update and outcomes of the Village Halls Energy Project be noted.

CCSG24/38. CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS – BUILDINGS AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY – JANUARY 2025

The Climate Projects Officer (CPO) updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on the Climate Action Plan Progress Report – January 2025, which specifically focused on objective – Buildings and Energy Efficiency. The following actions had been updated since the last meeting:

Objective 1.1 Mass Retrofit of Existing Buildings:

- 1.1.1 Access Government funding to decarbonise private housing such as HUG2: It was confirmed that HUG2 was scheduled to close at the end of the financial year. 50 properties had been upgraded across the partnership; 33 were approved and awaiting completion; and 19 were in progress but had not started. The exact number of Rother properties was unknown. In December 2024, the Council, in collaboration with neighbouring authorities, had expressed an interest for a Warm Homes Grant (to deliver energy performance upgrades and low carbon heating to low-income households). Grant award was anticipated, and the scheme was expected to commence in April 2025 (three to five years).
- 1.1.2 Fund Energy Efficiency Measures in Community Assets through Community Infrastructure Levy, UKSPF: The Village Halls Energy Project was scheduled to close at the end of the financial year. 29 grants had been awarded to implement carbon saving measures saving more than 1,200 tonnes (see Minute CCSG24/37 above).
- 1.1.4 Work with Parish and Town Councils (P&TCs) and other Community Groups to Engage and Educate Residents: The Council was supporting Energise Sussex Coast's energy and retrofit roadshows which were scheduled to be held in Rother in the spring. All P&TCs had been invited to host a roadshow (see Minute CCSG24/35 above).
- 1.1.5 Support Retrofit Skills Partnership: Officers would be attending Public Health's Housing Retrofit Strategy co-design workshop scheduled to be held in February and March 2025 (delivered by East Sussex County Council). The existing Retrofit Skills Plan for East Sussex would form a strand of this Strategy. Members were advised that the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager would be establishing a Rother Skills Forum. There was a need for green skills in development.
- 1.1.6 Run a Series of Community Engagement Events to Raise Awareness and Demystify Retrofitting: See 1.1.4 above.
- 1.1.8 Train Energy Champions to Work with Communities: A training session was held on 28 November 2024 (second cohort) consisting of three training sessions; the second session was scheduled to be held on 30 January 2025.
- 1.1.9 Fund Businesses' Decarbonisation Plans with Capital Grants for Net Zero Infrastructure: All the £60,000 grant funding had been allocated, which funded solar panels, LEDs, glazing and solar powered generator projects.
- 1.1.11 Retrofit Rother District Council Owned Accommodation to EPC C or above: 63 units of accommodation were EPC rated C, except seven which were EPC rated B.
- 1.1.13 New Local Plan – Refurbishment Energy Standards Set Through Policy: Adoption of the Council's Local Plan was scheduled for 2027/28.

During the discussion the following was noted:

- There was a national shortage of retrofitting skills within the building industry.

- Concern was raised that Housing Association (HA) Registered Providers were not retrofitting their current stock, because of financial difficulties. It was understood that relevant stakeholders, including HAs, would be invited to the Rother Skills Forum meetings (see 1.1.5 above).
- Clarity was sought on energy efficiency measures undertaken on the Town Hall buildings, since the Town Hall Renaissance Project had been withdrawn. New condensing gas boilers had been installed (other energy efficient products were not suitable).
- It was disappointing to note that a large major development being built in Bexhill had not installed any energy efficient measures. Members agreed it was essential that energy efficiency measures were incorporated / embedded within Council policy and the Council's emerging Local Plan (LP). Adoption of the LP was expected in 2026/27.
- Important to lobby the Local Government Association to influence the Government to update the Building Regulations to include energy efficiency measures within policy e.g. grey water systems etc.

CCSG24/39. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no any other business items discussed.

CCSG24/40. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the date of the next "informal" meeting would be held on Thursday 27 February 2025 at 2pm.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 3:05pm

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