

**CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP**

27 February 2025



Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group “informal” meeting held remotely on Thursday 27 February 2025 at 2:00pm.

Members of the Steering Group Present: Councillors K.M. Field (Chair), S. Burton (in part), Mrs V. Cook (in part), P.J. Gray, S.B. McGurk (in part) and P.N. Osborne.

Other Members Present: Councillors C.A. Bayliss and S.M. Prochak (MBE).

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

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**CCSG24/41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T.M. Killeen (MBE).

**CCSG24/42. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

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

**CCSG24/43. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 30 JANUARY 2025 – MATTERS ARISING**

Members considered the list of actions, and the following was confirmed / noted:

- **Action 1:** To raise / promote the profile of climate champions at the next scheduled RALC meeting. This action was ongoing.
- **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. This action was ongoing.

Councillor Bayliss confirmed that she was attending the meeting to address some inaccuracies that had been recorded regarding the planting scheme along the Bexhill seafront (Marina Gardens). She acknowledged that her name had not been recorded in the Minutes, but was disappointed that the discussion took place, particularly, as at that time during the meeting, a member of the public was in attendance.

She clarified the following:

- She had not decided the seafront planting scheme. This was an officer decision and not a Councillor decision.
- She had not suggested (or raised) replanting traditional plants, e.g. geraniums, instead of wildflowers and understood that traditional plants were not carbon neutral and required much more maintenance.
- She had raised issues regarding the condition of the wildflower beds when they were not in bloom (46 weeks of the year), as they looked messy and unsightly. It would be sensible to plant native flowers and shrubs to create a natural look along the seafront.
- The wildflower seeds used at Marina Gardens were not native flowers and therefore struggled to grow naturally in a seaside location.
- Negative feedback on the wildflower scheme had been received from residents / tourists.

She was disappointed that she had been misrepresented and hoped this clarified the situation. The Chair advised that no further discussion would be held on this matter.

- **Action 3:** The Chair to ask a question at the next East Sussex County Council (ESCC) full Council meeting regarding the responsibility of planting along the seafront to be devolved to Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council. This action had not been completed. As this would not be considered a priority project, the Chair advised that she would informally raise this issue with the relevant ESCC officer.

The following matters were also discussed:

Minute Ref CCSG24/36 – The Head of Corporate and Strategic Services advised that the Climate Action Plan (CAP) would be reviewed using standardised wording throughout and that all Heads of Service would be made responsible for and aware of the actions that related to their service areas. The CAP would be discussed every quarter at Corporate Management Team meetings. Project (internal and external) progress would be continuously monitored. She advised that she was raising climate awareness at every opportunity.

Minute Ref CCSG24/38 – Objective 1.1 Mass Retrofit of Existing Buildings – 1.1.1 Access Government Funding to decarbonise private housing such as HUG2. Members agreed that this was an excellent project that would have a significant impact on the climate, poverty and fuel poverty across the district, particularly in rural areas. It was important that energy efficiency measures were incorporated in all planning developments and that retrofitting was promoted throughout the district. Members requested that a breakdown of Rother's upgraded properties be sought and reported at a future meeting. Information would be sought from the Head of Environmental Services, Licensing and Community Safety.

**ACTION 1 (Action 3 – 30.01.25):** To raise the responsibility of planting along the seafront to be devolved to Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council with the relevant officer at ESCC. (Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group)

**ACTION 2:** To ask Head of Environmental Services, Licensing and Community Safety for the breakdown of Rother's upgraded properties (retrofit); to be reported at a future meeting. (Head of Corporate and Strategic Services / Climate Projects Officer)

**CCSG24/44. ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINTS IN ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL CAR PARKS – VERBAL UPDATE**

The Climate Projects Officer provided a detailed update on the Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP) in Rother District Council (RDC) Car Parks project. Following a feasibility exercise, six RDC car parks had been identified for suitability for EVCPs to be installed i.e. three in Bexhill, two in Battle and one in Camber. The project had been temporarily stalled due to legal issues regarding the procurement process and subsequent contract which had been awarded to Blink Charging UK. It had been necessary to seek external legal advice, and a response was expected by the end of next week.

Originally, the On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme funding received meant that the project had to be completed by March 2025. RDC applied for an extension, and this was granted until July 2025. To meet the revised deadline, it was important that the contract was signed imminently. Once the contract was signed, leases would be arranged. If there were no further delays, it was anticipated that the project would be completed by the required deadline.

During the discussion, the following comments were made:

- Important to raise profile of and promote the project e.g. photographic opportunities “first spade in the ground” etc. To be promoted on the Council’s website and all social media platforms.
- Mixed views were expressed regarding the pros and cons of slow, fast and rapid charging methods, particularly regarding the amount of electricity used, charge time lengths and the amount of time vehicles would / could be parked in charging bays. Cars could potentially be parked all day, from 2-5 hours, or 1 hour and less. Councillor McGurk advised that “charger sharing etiquette” was well known amongst the electric vehicle ownership community.
- Councillor Bayliss advised that she had campaigned for Wainwright Road, Bexhill and Gibbets Marsh, Rye to be long-stay car parks, as both car parks would be ideal for EVCP installations.
- EVCP were still to be installed in the Town Hall Car Park.

**CCSG24/45. CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS – TRANSPORT – FEBRUARY 2025**

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

**Objective 2.1 Sustainable forms of transport are supported through the planning system:**

- 2.1.1 Work with Local Transport Authority and Transport for the Southeast to ensure Rother's interests are met: The CPO advised that, from February 2025, she would be attending quarterly East Sussex Healthcare Trust and Sussex College Group meetings on behalf of the Council. It was noted that Hastings and Rother Transport Action Group had not met since April 2024.
- 2.1.2 Local Plan – Development Strategy to plan spatially to reduce reliance on personal vehicles through town and village networks and clusters: Adoption of the Council's Local Plan was scheduled for 2027/28.

**Objective 2.2 Facilitate the transition to low/zero carbon vehicles:**

- 2.2.1 Install Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in Rother District Council car parks: Project delivery was scheduled for end of July 2025 and the contract was still under negotiation with the contractor (see Minute CCSG24/44 above).
- 2.2.2 Encouraging businesses to install EV charging: The Clean Growth UK's Net Zero 360 project was funded UK Shared Prosperity Fund; this funding had closed. No applications had been made for EV or EV charging points. The next "[Net Zero Quick Wins](#)" Workshop was held on 26 February 2025 in Bexhill. Two Rural Business Grants managed by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) had been awarded to DE Etchingham Community Interest Company and Ashburnham Christian Trust for EV charging points.
- 2.2.3 Support businesses to switch to Low Zero Carbon fleet: One Rural Business Grant managed by ESCC was awarded to Racing Snail Productions in Battle to purchase an electric van.
- 2.2.10 Salary Sacrifice scheme for EVs promoted to all staff: Scheme available on the Rother Lifestyle Benefits Platform and promoted to all staff in November 2024.
- 2.2.11 Encourage homeowners to install EV charging points through collective buying: Inter Authority Agreement (led by West Sussex County Council) was near completion; procurement would commence once agreed.

**Objective 2.3 A programme of activities to promote active travel across the district:**

- 2.3.2 Climate Awareness Training introduced for all Rother District Council staff: Dates in April/May had been offered to Members (following a survey to gauge interest). These sessions would only progress if enough interest was received; closing date to reserve a space was 14 March 2025. To date 89 officers had completed the carbon literacy training. Three more workshops were scheduled for March, June and September 2025. Full attendance would secure a Gold Status Carbon Literate Organisation for the Council by March 2026.

During the discussion the following was noted:

- Important to raise awareness of all sustainable travel methods including walking and cycling for health reasons, as well as

promoting public transport. How could this be achieved? Safe segregated cycle routeway improvements were required across the district. The Chair agreed to seek advice from ESCC.

- ESCC had been awarded £1.1m to improve walkways and cycle lanes across the county. It was unknown at this stage how much of this funding would be used on Rother projects. Important that the Council, in corporation with relevant stakeholders / civic groups, lobbied ESCC to ensure that this money was spent wisely and on relevant projects. All Rother district projects should be promoted on the Council's website.
- It was noted that Sussex Greenways promoted safe, accessible leisure routes for walking and cycling.
- The Council to establish walking groups to promote healthy living across the district. As Councillor Killeen was the Council's representative on the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board, she would be asked to raise this at their next meeting.
- Park and Ride Systems were predominantly suitable for urban areas and relieved small towns from congestion. This system would only be feasible if suitable infrastructure and car parking facilities were available on the outskirts of towns. The following suggestion was proposed: a Members' day out on a bus promoting public transport across the district.
- Both Rye and Bexhill offered a Community Bus facility.

**ACTION 3:** To seek advice from East Sussex County Council regarding public transport promotion. (Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group)

**ACTION 4:** To ask Councillor Killeen to raise establishing walking groups at the next East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board meeting. (Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group / Head of Corporate and Strategic Services)

#### CCSG24/46. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following any other business item was discussed:

Minute Ref CCSG24/14 and CCSG24/19 refers – Councillor Gray confirmed that an oak tree had been planted on the Downs, West Down Road, Bexhill to commemorate the Council's 50 years of public service. It was hoped that the Chief Executive would do a photographic (mulch the tree) press release to be uploaded on the Council's website and promoted via all social media platforms.

#### CCSG24/47. **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

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

#### **CHAIR**

The meeting closed at 3:03pm