

CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP

24 April 2025



Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group “informal” meeting held remotely on Thursday 24 April 2025 at 2:00pm.

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

Other Members Present: Councillor S.M. Prochak (MBE).

Advisory Officers Present: Property Lead (in part), Climate Projects Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

CCSG24/55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T.M. Killeen (MBE), S.B. McGurk and Head of Corporate and Strategic Services.

CCSG24/56. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations of interest made or dispensations noted.

CCSG24/57. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 27 MARCH 2025 – MATTERS ARISING

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

- **Action 1:** To raise / promote the profile of climate champions at the next meeting of Rother Association of Local Councils scheduled to be held on 23 April 2023. The Chair confirmed that this action had been completed (though lack of interest was expressed at the meeting).
- **Action 2:** To include progress on how contracts were scored and performing, particularly in relation to climate issues, within the annual Emissions Report. This action was pending and would be completed as and when required.
- **Action 3:** To promote the Reduce, Reuse and Recycle Grants Scheme at the next Rother Association of Local Councils meeting. This action had been temporarily paused, because of the proposed new grants partnership with Sussex Community Foundation (to be considered and formally approved at the full Council meeting scheduled to be held on 19 May 2025). Once the new scheme was adopted, it would be promoted across the Council’s social media platforms.

There were no other matters discussed.

CCSG24/58. **NATURAL ASSET MANAGEMENT – VERBAL UPDATE**

The Property Lead updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on the Council's Green (Natural) Asset Management Plan which would also connect to the devolution programme. The following was highlighted:

- The Council owned approximately 100 land assets (varying sizes).
- Potential to sell land improvements (measured in biodiversity units) to developers off (or on) site to achieve their mandatory 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements.
- Provided income generation opportunities for the Council.
- Developers would be paying the Council as the landowner for creating, enhancing and maintaining BNG on the units purchased.
- The Council's Estates Team would be categorising all assets to explore the opportunity of improving their biodiversity habitats to potentially sell BNG credits (per sqm units) to developers.
- Money achieved would be ringfenced to further protect the district's habitats.
- Priority would be given to local developers to purchase off site units, where applicable.

During the discussion the following comments, questions and issues were raised:

- It was understood that the Council's Planning Enforcement Team would be responsible for overseeing enforcement to ensure that developers were enhancing and maintaining BNG habitats. Legal mechanisms / land registry requirements would need to be adhered to, however specific details of enforcement procedures were unknown at this stage.
- It was important that aftercare was maintained to ensure longevity of habitats across the district.
- The national statutory BNG process was still in its infancy, therefore it was too early to provide statistics for the district at this stage. Once data was available, a report would be presented to the CCSG.
- Members were signposted to Groundworks UK who were supporting the process of identifying pieces of land for BNG credits. More information was available on their website at the following link: [About Groundwork - Groundwork](#).
- It was important to protect all green spaces including village greens. It was suggested that guidance be sought from the Village Green Registration (VGR) on how BNG could be achieved on these pieces of land. The Chair advised that the VGR process was extremely complicated and therefore probably not suitable for sourcing this information.

CCSG24/59. **CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ONGOING REVIEW – VERBAL UPDATE**

The Climate Projects Officer (CPO) updated the Climate Change Steering Group on progress of the Climate Action Plan (CAP) review. The Head of Corporate and Strategic Services and CPO would be meeting with each Head of Service (HoS) to discuss the actions within the CAP that came under their service area. The first meeting was scheduled to be held with the Head of Planning shortly.

As a result of the Council's restructure, new actions would be established and some deleted or reassigned to the appropriate HoS. It was anticipated that the refreshed CAP would be ready by the summer.

Green Team meetings had been re-established and volunteers in departments where members were not currently assigned were being sought. Enthusiasm was being upheld amongst the group.

CCSG24/60. **CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS – BIODIVERSITY AND LAND USE – APRIL 2025**

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

Objective 4.1 Halt Land and Marine Species Decline:

- 4.1.2 Work in partnership with relevant organisations to improve the health of the water environments in the district: The CPO advised that she had attended a Strandliner's (plastic litter picking along River Rother / water quality) "Love our Rother" event in February 2025.
- 4.1.3 Work in partnership with relevant organisations to improve land management practices across the district: The Council was a formal partner of Rother Food Partnership who considered regenerative and organic farming practices.
- 4.1.5 Develop a Green Asset Management Plan: Feed into renewable energy opportunities (see Minute Ref CCSG24/58).

Objective 4.2 Increase biodiversity and carbon sequestration:

- 4.2.1 Audit Rother District Council's green assets to provide a baseline for biodiversity: In 2023, the Council commissioned Biodiversity Audits of 23 of its largest rural sites. The individual reports had been uploaded to the website at the following link: [Biodiversity Audit 2023 – Rother District Council](#). The CPO advised that the overarching report had now been received. Information from these audits would be used by the Estates Team when categorising assets (see Minute Ref CCSG24/58). The largest asset was located at Hoads Wood, Fairlight. This land had recently been tenanted (900 years +) and therefore was no longer managed or controlled by the Council.
- 4.2.3 Adopt the county-wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS): Prior to formal publication later in the year, the draft

strategies would be shared for public consultation (summer). The impact of the LNRS on planning policy was unknown at this stage.

- 4.2.6 Deliver on Bexhill Tree Planting Strategy: A street trees project in central Bexhill was being planned by the St. Leonards Road Neighbourhood Association. Details of the project would be shared with the Council's Levelling Up Funding Manager for consideration by the Neighbourhood Board.
- 4.2.8 Work in partnership with parish and town councils (P&TCs) to carry out biodiversity audits and create Management Plans to enhance biodiversity and increase carbon sequestration in parks and open spaces: After receiving Rother District Council grants, Battle Town Council, Crowhurst Parish Council and Hurst Green Parish Council had planted Coronation Community Orchards.

During the discussion the following was noted:

- It was thought that the impact on biodiversity by solar panel farms was limited. Biodiversity net gain could be incorporated / combined within these farms.
- Longbridge Farm, Polegate Biodiversity Open Event on 1 May 2025: the CPO and Estates Surveyor would be attending this event. Longbridge Farm was improving biodiversity across its land and selling units for profit. Advice would be sought on how this was being achieved, from mechanism to operation to sale.
- Encourage Rother Community Lottery (RCL) winners (£1,000 above) to donate their winnings to plant trees across the district. The CPO advised that it was difficult to find sizeable pieces of land for tree planting. Landowners would need to be willing to allow tree planting on their land. The RCL was managed by an external company, therefore advice would need to be sought on how this could work. The CPO agreed to investigate.
- Progress was sought on the Council's Rother Tree Management Plan (Bexhill). The CPO advised that the Bexhill Tree Planting Strategy (BTPS) was managed by the Neighbourhood Services Team. The BTPS highlighted priority areas for planting. Tree planters were being installed along St. Leonards Road, Bexhill (see 4.2.6 above). The Neighbourhood Services Team would be asked to provide an update at a future meeting.
- Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre: delivered biodiversity audits at a cost of £120 per audit. These were free to Rother District Council but not P&TCs. Individual expertise could cost £1,000 upwards. The CPO advised that there was no funding, resources or in-house Council expertise to assist P&TCs with these audits. P&TCs would need to seek advice from East Sussex County Council, and source alternative funding opportunities.

ACTION 1: To investigate tree planting opportunities through Rother Community Lottery winnings. (Climate Projects Officer).

ACTION 2: An update of the Rother Tree Management Plan (including Bexhill Tree Management Plan) to be presented at a future meeting. (Head of Corporate and Strategic Services / Climate Projects Officer).

CCSG24/61. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Climate Change Steering Group discussed and approved the meeting dates for 2025/2026. All meetings would be held on the last Thursday of the month (except August and December), starting at 2pm via MS Teams. Due to a clash with a formal committee meeting and lack of resources, both May and June's meetings would be held on a Wednesday instead. The meetings dates were confirmed as follows:

28 May 2025 (Wednesday)
25 June 2025 (Wednesday)
31 July 2025
25 September 2025 (formal – webcast live)
30 October 2025
27 November 2025
29 January 2026
26 February 2026
26 March 2026 (formal – webcast live)
30 April 2026

ACTION 3: Members to note the dates in their diaries and MS Teams invitations to be forwarded. (Democratic Services Officer)

CCSG24/62. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following any other business items were discussed:

- Councillor Osborne advised that Jempson's Supermarket in Peasmarsh had installed electric vehicle charging points.
- Local Authority National Recycling Results (2023): Councillor Burton understood that the results were available and agreed to forward the information website link to the Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group and Climate Projects Officer.
- It was confirmed that the covered bicycle storage unit located in the staff car park had been installed last year and was being used by staff.
- Carbon Literacy Training for Members: Modules 1 (why and how the climate is changing and impacts of climate change) and 2 (international, national and local climate policy and the role of local authorities) were being delivered on Tuesday 3 June 2025 at 9:30am to 2pm in the Committee Room, as a Joint officer / Member session. Tea and coffee refreshments would be provided, however Members would need to bring their own lunch. Modules 3 and 4 (not a joint session) to be arranged after the first session, with those Members who attended.
- Tetra Pak Containers / Aluminium Foil: the Chair advised that both Tetra Pak containers and aluminium foil would soon be included within the recyclable materials, collected by the Waste Contractor (Biffa). Residents would be advised of a start date.

ACTION 4: To forward link of the Local Authority National Recycling Results (2023) to the Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group and Climate Projects Officer. (Councillor Burton)

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 2:45pm

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