

**CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP**

25 July 2024



Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group “informal” meeting held remotely on Thursday 25 July 2024 at 2:00pm.

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

Other Members Present: Councillors S. Burton (in part), Mrs V. Cook (in part) and S.B. McGurk (in part).

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

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**CCSG24/01. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**CCSG24/02. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

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

**CCSG24/03. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 25 APRIL 2024 – MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

**CCSG24/04. GREEN TO THE CORE IN CORPORATE PLAN**

The Chief Executive (CE) updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on progression of the Council’s Plan (CP) [formerly known as the Corporate Plan] and in particular with reference to the “Green to the Core” objectives.

Members were reminded of the CP’s 2040 vision, which was, *“In 2040 Rother District will be an attractive and affordable place to live, work and visit. The district will have a **Thriving Local Economy** with diverse, flexible, well-paid local employment and skills opportunities. People will be enabled to **Live Well Locally** within safe and fairer communities, where they can access the facilities, services, and housing they need. Rother will be recognised for being **Green to the Core**, leading the response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies, protecting the historic and natural environment.”* Three strategic objectives were

highlighted in bold (in order of preference). Members were pleased to see that “Green to the Core” was firmly embedded into the Council’s vision for the future. The CE advised that the vision would be used as a development tool when reviewing all Council policies.

The “Green to the Core” objective was to take bold action to tackle climate change and protect the environment in all that the Council did, plus make the district climate-resilient and reduce council emissions to net zero by 2030.

The CCSG was asked to review the “Green to the Core” objectives as currently stipulated in the CP and to suggest any additional actions that they thought should be included:

- **Ensure the built environment is low carbon and climate resilient:**  
Members were advised that all of the current actions within this section would be referenced in the Council’s Local Plan. The Council would be actively promoting behavioural change to reduce carbon emissions across the district.
- **Produce less waste and support a thriving circular economy:**
  - To develop a clear, robust climate action communications plan to promote, educate and incentivise residents, businesses and community groups to reduce their general waste and improve the district’s recycling rates.
  - The Council must lead by example.
  - Clear guidance to be disseminated to residents – “what goes in what bin”. Members were reminded that, as part of the Joint Waste Contract, bin stickers were delivered to all residents (a couple of years ago), which indicated what should and should not be placed in each bin.
  - A general discussion ensued on non-collectable recycle materials, such as drinks cartons (e.g. Tetrapaks) and where these could be disposed of. The current waste contractor was unable to collect and dispose of drink carton products. The Climate Projects Officer advised that the nearest recycling point for these was at the Tesco Supermarket in Hollington.
  - To promote and encourage local small scale composting services, such as the one that was currently operating in Rye.
  - To create a Green Business Directory detailing local, sustainable and environmentally friendly businesses, community groups and organisations across the district. Similar to the one created by Somerset Council [About the Great Green Directory \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/about-the-great-green-directory/)
  - A metric scheme (series of questions) was suggested that businesses and community groups completed, and star ratings awarded (similar to the food hygiene scheme operated by Environmental Services).
  - To create a sustainable award scheme for local businesses and community groups. It was understood that Rother Voluntary Action already operated an award scheme.
- **Promote behavioural change to reduce the Council’s carbon footprint:**

To deliver Carbon Literacy training to Parish and Town Councils. Training options would be investigated, and this would be raised at the Parish Conference scheduled to be held in October.

- **Protect our natural and historic environment:**
  - Listed Buildings Retrofitting – balancing the need for preservation with the need for energy efficiency was particularly challenging.
  - There were too many legislative obstacles.
  - It was understood that Government grants were available to assist with retrofitting historic properties.
- **Support the recovery of nature across the district:**

No additional actions were suggested.
- **Produce renewable energy locally:**

Members were advised to read a Geothermal Energy Report, which was written by Dr Kieran Mullan, MP for Bexhill and Battle.

[Dig Deep June 2023.pdf \(drkieranmullan.org.uk\)](https://drkieranmullan.org.uk/Dig_Deep_June_2023.pdf)

Opportunities would be explored across the district and all renewable energy issues would be included within the Council's new Local Plan.

The following additional suggestions were proposed, and general comments made:

- A glossary of words and expressions that were used throughout the CP, with a clear definition be included.
- It was important that wellbeing of residents / social element was linked to the "Green to the Core" objectives. The CE agreed.
- Members were encouraged to forward any other actions that they wished to be included within the CP to the CE as soon as possible.

The next steps for the development of the CP included agreeing the core elements; finalising actions and measures by lead officers; governance / consultation timescales; ensuring service plan alignment; and a Target Operating Model would inform how the Council delivered the objectives.

**ACTION 1:** Members to forward actions for the Council Plan to the Chief Executive as soon as possible. (Members)

## CCSG24/05. **CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT – JULY 2024**

The Climate Projects Officer (CPO) updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on the Climate Action Plan Progress Report – July 2024 (June's update had been emailed to Members on 27 June 2024). It was noted that some projects had not yet started. The following objectives / actions had been updated since the last meeting:

### **Buildings and Energy Efficiency – Objective 1.1 Mass Retrofit of Existing Buildings:**

- Fund Energy Efficiency Measures in Community Assets through Community Infrastructure Levy, UKSPF: The second round of Village

Hall Energy Project funding closed on 28 June 2024; a further £172,700 was committed. All projects should be completed by 31 December 2024.

**Transport – Objective 2.2 Facilitate the Transition to Low / Zero Carbon Vehicles:**

- Install Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure in Council Car Parks: As at 15 July 2024, the contract was still being drafted by the Legal Team (delayed as a result of personnel changes). The Provider advised that the system should be installed and operational by March 2025. Questions were raised regarding failure to receive the finalised funding on completion of the scheme (25%) because of delays that were outside of the Councils' control e.g. Highways etc. Conversations would need to be had regarding funding and compensation etc. The Chair was encouraged to speak to the relevant East Sussex County Council officer, Cabinet Portfolio holder and / or Leader of the Council regarding this.

**Transport – Objective 2.3 A Programme of Activities to Promote Active Travel Across the District:**

- Promote Behaviour Change to Encourage Active Travel through Corporate Communications: The Staff Commuter Survey was repeated in May 2024 (more specific information was requested); full results were pending; however, it was noted that sustainable travel activity had increased.
- Climate Awareness Training introduced for all Council staff: It was clarified that 70 officers had completed the training; 56 officers were accredited. Several officers had volunteered to support the CPO to deliver training going forward. In June 2024, the Council was accredited as a Bronze Carbon Literate Organisation. A printed framed certificate would be placed in the reception area. The Chair suggested that a digital visual display board be installed in the reception area to advertise these types of messages. The CPO agreed to raise this suggestion with the Green Team's Customer Services Representative at the next Green Team meeting.

**Resource Consumption and Waste – Objective 3.1 Reduced Consumption of Resources and Waste:**

- Introduce Residential Food Waste Collections: Neighbour Services were currently managing logistic preparations ready for implementation in March 2026.

**Resource Consumption and Waste – Objective 3.2 Increased, Repair, Reuse and Recycling of Goods and Materials:**

- Introduce Glass Collection from Operational Buildings: Unfortunately, no service could be found for the Bexhill area. New waste facilities and signage had been implemented in the Town Hall buildings.

**Biodiversity and Land Use – Objective 4.2 Halt Land and Marine Species Decline:**

- Work in Partnership with Relevant Organisations to Improve the Health of the Water Environment in the district: In future, a member of the Planning Policy team would be representing the Council at Catchment Partnership meetings.

## **Energy Generation – Objective 5.1 Solar PV on all Suitable Roof Spaces:**

- Support Local Community Renewable Energy Creation: Two village halls had secured Government grants towards solar panels and one village hall for solar batteries.

**ACTION 2:** The installation of a Digital Visual Display Board in the reception area to be raised with the Green Team's Customer Services Representative at the next Green Team meeting. (Climate Projects Officer)

## **POST MEETING UPDATE**

The Customer Services Team Leader advised that installing a screen in reception at the Town Hall had been considered and it was understood that a screen had been procured. However, due to lengthy IT staff shortages it had not yet been installed, with no current plan for this to happen. Hopefully, this was something that could be done once the IT vacancies had been filled.

## **CCSG24/06. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following any other business items were discussed:

- Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) Membership: Councillor Coleman advised that Councillor McGurk would be replacing him on the CCSG. This would require agreement by Cabinet; therefore, a formal report would be presented at the next scheduled Cabinet meeting on Monday 2 September 2024. It was considered an opportune time to review the CCSG's Terms of Reference (ToR). This would be completed at the next meeting which was scheduled to be held on Thursday 26 September 2024. It was noted that any proposed changes to the ToR would require Cabinet approval.
- Councillors Coleman and Gray had met with a local representative of a Plant-Based Organisation, to discuss the Council's policies on using / providing plant-based products e.g. oat milk etc. It was suggested a representative from the organisation delivered a presentation at the next meeting of the CCSG. After discussion, it was agreed that an initial meeting should be held with both Councillors, the Chair and the Climate Projects Officer prior to a presentation being delivered to the CCSG. Councillor Gray was asked to arrange an MS Teams meeting in September.
- It was pleasing to note that the Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan reported to Cabinet in July referenced decarbonisation throughout.
- It was clarified that the Council's 2022/23 Emissions report would be presented to the CCSG at the meeting scheduled to be held on Thursday 31 October 2024. It was confirmed that this would be a formal (webcast) meeting.
- Councillor Gray expressed her concerns regarding the condition of some of the street trees in Bexhill (and Pebsham). Some were in a poor state, either dying and / or dead. Councillor Gray was advised to report her concerns to the Head of Neighbourhood Services.

- Councillor Mrs Cook advised that Battle Town Council (BTC) had produced two sustainable policy (guidance) documents regarding catering / for hiring BTC buildings. It was important to remember that some people were unable to eat plant-based products due to allergies etc. She agreed to share the documents with the CCSG.
- Members were advised that Community shops selling 'best before' supermarket products for discounted prices were becoming more commonplace across the district. Councillor Coleman highlighted ArkWhites, Hastings Old Town. It was understood that Rother Voluntary Action supported these organisations.

**ACTION 3:** To arrange a meeting with a representative from the Plant-Based Organisation with Councillors Coleman, Field, Gray and the Climate Projects Officer. (Councillor Gray)

#### **POST MEETING UPDATE**

A meeting was scheduled to be held on Tuesday 17 September 2024.

**ACTION 4:** The Council's 2022/23 Emissions report be presented at the meeting scheduled to be held on Thursday 31 October 2024. (Democratic Services/Climate Projects Officer)

**ACTION 5:** The Terms of Reference be reviewed at the next scheduled meeting. (Democratic Services/Climate Projects Officer)

**ACTION 6:** Battle Town Council Sustainable Policy Documents (Guidance) to be forwarded to Members. (Councillor Mrs Cook)

#### **CCSG24/07. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the date of the next "informal" meeting would be held on Thursday 26 September 2024 at 2pm.

#### **CHAIR**

The meeting closed at 3:09pm

CCSG240725jh

**CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP**

26 September 2024



Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group “informal” meeting held remotely on Thursday 26 September 2024 at 2:06pm.

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

Advisory Officers Present: Climate Projects Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

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**CCSG24/08. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs V. Cook.

**CCSG24/09. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

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

**CCSG24/10. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 25 JULY 2024 – MATTERS ARISING**

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

- **Action 1:** Members to forward actions for the Council Plan to the Chief Executive. It was assumed that actions had been forwarded.
- **Action 2:** Installation of a Digital Visual Display Board in Reception. A post meeting update had been included within the Minutes. A screen had been purchased and was awaiting installation, once resources were available.
- **Action 3:** Arrange a meeting with a representative from the Plant-Based Organisation. A successful meeting was held on Tuesday 17 September 2024. The Plant-Based Council (PBC) had agreed to forward some useful resource materials; these were still awaited. The PBC would be consulted during the development of the Council’s Sustainable Food Policy. It was pleasing to note that the Council currently provided plant-based biscuits for meetings at the Town Hall.
- **Action 4:** Rother District Council 2022/23 Emissions Report to be presented at the meeting scheduled to be held on Thursday 31 October 2024.
- **Action 5:** Terms of Reference (see Minute Ref CCSG24/11 below).
- **Action 6:** Battle Town Council Sustainable Policy Documents (Guidance). It was unknown whether this action had been

completed, as Councillor Mrs Cook was not in attendance at the meeting.

Councillor Burton suggested that information on Rother Voluntary Action's sustainable reward scheme be sourced.

**ACTION 1:** To source information on Rother Voluntary Action's sustainable reward scheme (Climate Projects Officer).

## CCSG24/11. **REVIEW OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP'S TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Since its inception in 2019, the Climate Change Steering Group's (CCSG) initial objectives within their Terms of Reference (ToR) was to produce an Action Plan or Strategy to ensure that the operations of the Council were carbon neutral by 2030, and to identify powers that the Council might exercise to encourage carbon neutrality throughout the district. The Council's [Climate Strategy](#) and [Climate Action Plan 2023-2026](#) met these objectives. It was therefore recommended that the ToR be updated to reflect the ongoing purpose of the CCSG in tackling the Climate Emergency. A copy of the original and proposed new ToR were attached at Appendices A and B to the report, respectively.

The main updates were as follows:

- A shift in focus from objectives to develop a strategy and action plan, to monitor and review the Strategy and Action Plan.
- Updated language to mirror the terminology of the Climate Strategy and acknowledge the Ecological Emergency.
- Updated Member information.

One amendment was suggested for bullet point (6) under Objectives; to be rewritten as follows:

- To liaise with Rother Association of Local Councils 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 that the best platform for raising / promoting the profile of climate champions across the district would be at the Rother Association of Local Councils' Annual Parish Conference. Significant resources would be required to develop / complete this objective successfully.

Members were reminded that any changes to the ToR would need to be formally approved by Cabinet.

After discussion, the CCSG was fully supportive of the amended ToR and recommended that these be approved by Cabinet.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet consider and approve the proposed amendments to the Climate Change Steering Group's Terms of Reference, as detailed in Appendix B to the report.



**ACTION 2:** To raise / promote the profile of climate champions at the Rother Association of Local Councils Annual Parish Conference. (Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group / Climate Projects Officer).

**CCSG24/12. ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGE POINTS IN THE STAFF CAR PARK – VERBAL UPDATE**

The Climate Projects Officer (CPO) advised that the Council's Facilities Team had been tasked with sourcing sustainable options to install Electric Vehicle Charge Points (EVCP) in the Town Hall staff back car park. This was a separate scheme from the Council's public car parks EVCP project.

Members were advised that this autumn, the Council would be adopting a new staff benefit: a salary sacrifice scheme to encourage staff to lease and use electric vehicles. Several infrastructure options were being considered, including installing solar panels to provide renewable energy (assist with the electricity supply required). Specific details of the scheme / how it would be managed were yet to be finalised, e.g. whether staff would be charged etc. However, a booking system would be instigated to enable staff to book specific times to charge their vehicles. To reduce costs, installation would be carried out by the Council's in-house maintenance team (electrician).

The Chair asked whether the scheme would be made available to Members, particularly for when they attended evening meetings. The CPO advised that a policy / guidance document would be established, and Members using the EVCPs would be considered.

**ACTION 3:** Once established, the staff Electric Vehicle Charging Points Policy / Guidance for the Town Hall car park be reported back to the Climate Change Steering Group at a future meeting. (Climate Projects Officer)

**CCSG24/13. CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT – SEPTEMBER 2024**

The Climate Projects Officer (CPO) updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on the Climate Action Plan Progress Report – September 2024. It was noted that some projects had not yet started. The following objectives / actions had been updated since the last meeting:

**Buildings and Energy Efficiency – Objective 1.1 Mass Retrofit of Existing Buildings:**

- Run a Series of Community Engagement Events to Raise Awareness and Demystify Retrofitting: In September 2024, Energise Sussex Coast's Eco-Open Homes Events were published in 'MyAlerts'.
- Retrofit Rother District Council (RDC) Operational Assets to EPC C or above and Replace Gas Boilers in RDC Operational Assets for Low Carbon Heating Sources at end of life: Over the next 12 months, the Estates Manager was hoping to recruit into the team and adopt a property management database to assist in developing a net zero pathway for all Council assets.

### **Transport – Objective 2.2 Facilitate the Transition to Low / Zero Carbon Vehicles:**

- Install Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in RDC car parks: The CPO advised that the first draft contract was imminent (should be resolved within the next few weeks). Installation would need to be completed by March 2025 in order that the final 25% of funding could be claimed. The Provider was confident that installation would be completed by the required date. Once operational, a robust communications strategy would be launched to promote the scheme. Some delays were anticipated, which were outside of the Council/Provider's control, e.g. the co-ordination of works with third parties; compensation might be forthcoming. Members would be kept abreast of developments.
- EV Charging Infrastructure Installed at Council Offices to Support Fleet and Staff Transition to EVs: A decision was still awaited on how the EV Charging Points (EVCPs) would be managed / see Minute Ref CCSG24/12 above.
- Encourage Homeowners to Install EVCPs through collective buying: West Sussex County Council (WSCC) was preparing a tender for a new joint purchase solar scheme, which would include provision for supplying home EVCPs.

### **Transport – Objective 2.3 A Programme of Activities to Promote Active Travel Across the District:**

- Climate Awareness Training introduced for all Council staff: The latest course was held on 18 / 19 September 2024; the next was scheduled for December. The Chief Executive was committed to encouraging Members to participate in the training.

### **Resource Consumption and Waste – Objective 3.1 Reduced Consumption of Resources and Waste:**

- Incorporating Sustainable Food Principles in Council Catering and at Council-run Events, where possible: On 17 September 2024, Members and officers met with representatives from the Plant-Based Council (see Minute Ref CCSG24/10 above).

### **Biodiversity and Land Use – Objective 4.1 Halt Land and Marine Species Decline:**

- Introduce Conditions to New Lease Agreements: Over the next 12 months, the Estates Manager was hoping to recruit into the team and adopt a property management database to assist in developing a net zero pathway for all Council assets and managing lease agreements.
- Eliminate Use of Pesticides, Herbicides and Peat in Council Grounds Maintenance: A detailed report, including cost implications, would be presented to the CCSG at the meeting scheduled to be held on 28 November 2024.

### **Biodiversity and Land Use – Objective 4.2 Increase Biodiversity and Carbon Sequestration:**

- Audit RDC Green Assets to Provide a Baseline for Biodiversity: As at 16 September 2024, 18 audits had been uploaded to the Council's website - [Biodiversity Audit 2023 – Rother District Council](#).
- Develop District-wide Tree Strategy: This Strategy would be developed in consultation with the Council's Planning Development

Manager and Parks Team. At present, the cost implications / resources to progress this action were unknown.

- Designate a Proportion of the RDC Estate to 'Wilding' and Nature Recovery: Over the next 12 months, the Estates Manager was hoping to recruit into the team and adopt a property management database to assist in developing a net zero pathway for all Council assets and grow capacity to consider carbon credits.

#### **Energy Generation – Objective 5.1 Solar PV on all Suitable Roof Spaces:**

- Participate in Collective Buying Schemes such as Solar Together: WSCC was leading on this project and was preparing a tender for a new joint purchase solar scheme, which would include provision for supplying home EVCPs. It was understood that the scheme would be time-phased, and each phase quality assessed prior to commencement of the next phase.
- Consider RDC Investment Opportunities for Renewables & Explore Options for Solar Carports in RDC Carparks: Over the next 12 months, the Estates Manager was hoping to recruit into the team and adopt a property management database to assist in developing a net zero pathway for all Council assets.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- Micro Woods Project: The CPO advised that, due to lack of resources, the Seabourne Road Recreation Ground, Pebsham site had been removed from the project. All relevant stakeholders had been contacted to ascertain if they would be interested in taking over management of the project; unfortunately, no interest was received. Planting was scheduled to commence in November at Coronation Gardens, Battle and Masons Field, Rye. Members would be advised of the exact dates once known and advertised through the Council's social media platforms.
- Tree Preservation Orders (TPO): Concern was raised that TPOs were being ignored during the planning application process.
- Councillor Gray reiterated her concerns regarding the condition of some of the street trees in Bexhill (and Pebsham). There was a general lack of care, some were in a poor state, high proportion were either dying and / or dead, and protective webbing was broken / not being replaced. This significantly impacted the Council's reputation to protect the district's street trees. Members were reminded that maintenance of street trees was the responsibility of East Sussex County Council (ESCC). Councillor Gray was advised to report her concerns to her County Councillor. Members requested that a copy of ESCC's routine street tree maintenance programme be obtained.

**ACTION 4:** To obtain a copy of East Sussex County Council's routine street tree maintenance programme. (Climate Projects Officer)

#### **CCSG24/14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following any other business items were discussed:

- To celebrate the Council's 50 years of public service (the emblem was an oak tree), Councillor Gray advised that she had been given some oak seedlings and suggested that they be planted at a suitable location(s) near the Town Hall or in Bexhill. Two sites were suggested either / or the pedestrian area (middle of the road) opposite Warburtons Pet and Garden Centre, Station Road and Ninfield Road, entrance to Bexhill. Alternative suggestions were welcome. Tree planting on street verges would require East Sussex County Council (ESCC) approval, plus maintenance responsibilities would need to be sought.
- Councillor Gray expressed her concern regarding the increased volume of traffic (particularly large heavy goods vehicles) that were driving through her Ward, Bexhill Old Town (High Street). She agreed that sat-nav was partially to blame. Councillor Gray was advised to contact her ESCC Councillor or establish a petition to introduce traffic calming / safety measures in that location. She explained that she would like to see more pedestrian areas within Bexhill, e.g. Western Road, Devonshire Road (one-way system) and introduce more trees in these locations.
- Concern was raised that the Council still did not have a dedicated Tree Officer in post in the Planning Department. As a result of climate change, it was considered important that resources were in place to support the district's protected trees. It was understood that funding had been secured from the digital improvement fund to upgrade the Council's Tree Preservation Order data. The Chair agreed to speak to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning regarding this issue.
- Upgrading Council-owned properties to EPC Grade 'C' or above and other properties across the district: It was difficult to upgrade Grade II Listed properties with decarbonisation products. The Climate Projects Officer advised that all Council-owned properties would either be purchased with an EPC 'C' grade or would be upgraded to achieve this. Retrofitting guidance was available on the Council's website. It was important that the Council promoted its retrofitting objectives / actions, however there was limited resources to do this. Promotion could be delivered at the Rother Association of Local Councils Annual Parish Assembly. It was agreed that promotion should be delayed until the Council's new Local Plan had been adopted.
- It was clarified that all Village Hall Energy Project grants had been approved. Most projects had been completed, e.g. solar panels installed at Sedlescombe Village Hall. However, some were still in progress.

## **CCSG24/15. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the date of the next "formal" meeting would be held on Thursday 31 October 2024 at 2pm.

## **CHAIR**

The meeting closed at 3:18pm

CCSG240926jh

**CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP**

28 November 2024



Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group “informal” meeting held remotely on Thursday 28 November 2024 at 2:04pm.

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

Other Members Present: Councillor S.M. Prochak (in part).

Advisory Officers Present: Chief Executive, Head of Neighbourhood Services (in part), Climate Projects Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

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**CCSG24/25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Anna Evett.

**CCSG24/26. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

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

**CCSG24/27. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 31 OCTOBER 2024 – MATTERS ARISING**

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

- **Action 3:** That the Repair, Reuse and Recycling Grant Scheme be promoted at the Annual Parish Conference. Councillor Burton confirmed that this action had been completed.
- **Action 4:** That advice be sought from the Planning Department regarding Biodiversity Net Gain data and an appropriate time to report this to the Climate Change Steering Group be identified. This action was still ongoing.

The following matter arising was also discussed:

Minute Ref CCSG24/21, bullet point (6) – *waste management was the only sector in Rother which rose from the previous year (+39%). This was a local trend across the county, with all other local authorities reporting a rise in emissions. Clarity was sought on this situation. Members would be kept updated.* No update was available. It was anticipated that with the introduction of food waste collections in 2026, the Council's carbon emissions could / would increase. The Waste

Contractor's vehicles would be using hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) as fuel, if affordable, therefore it was hoped that emissions would reduce. A general discussion ensued on HVO; would it be purchased in the UK or abroad and how this could affect the Council's overall carbon emissions? Details were unknown.

Members referred to some of the actions from the 26 September 2024 meeting, and the following were confirmed / noted:

- **Action 2:** To raise / promote the profile of climate champions at the Rother Association of Local Council's (RALC) Annual Parish Conference. It was confirmed that this action had not been completed. It would be raised with RALC to promote at their next scheduled meeting.
- **Action 4:** To obtain a copy of East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) routine street tree maintenance programme. It was confirmed that this action was still ongoing. The Climate Projects Officer was encouraged to contact Kate Cole, ESCC Ecologist.

**ACTION 1:** To raise / promote the profile of climate champions at the next scheduled RALC meeting. (Chief Executive / Climate Projects Officer)

#### CCSG24/28. **USE OF PESTICIDES, HERBICIDES AND PEAT IN THE COUNCIL'S GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Parks Development Officer which updated Members on the introduction of a policy to eliminate the use of pesticides, herbicides and peat in the Council's ground maintenance (Objective 4.1. of the Council's Climate Action Plan).

A new 5-year Grounds Maintenance Contract (with extension opportunities) was scheduled to commence on 1 December 2024 with idverde, which no longer included the maintenance of sports pitches and seasonal bedding. The outgoing contract made provision for the application of herbicides to hard surfaces to reduce weed growth damage. This provision was not included in the new contract on a routine basis, but it was expected that some herbicide application would be requested on an ad-hoc basis, subject to funding. The work would be kept to a minimum; a consequence of this could be an untidier public realm appearance.

All seasonal bedding plants would be grown in a peat-free medium. The quantity of bedding had reduced with provision restricted to three war memorial locations and a small quantity in Manor Gardens, Bexhill.

Due to budgetary restrictions, weed management would be dealt with by the application of herbicides rather than hand weeding, which was much more expensive. This could result in an increase in the use of herbicides. The exception to this would be West Parade, Egerton Park and Manor Gardens, Bexhill.

It was anticipated that the sports clubs might continue to use herbicides for weed management. Environmentally friendly practices would be promoted and encouraged, wherever possible. It was important not to restrict the clubs' abilities to operate on a financially sustainable basis.

It was important to realise that there could / would be consequences of discontinued weed management in hard surfaces and planted areas resulting in visual, safety and degradation of infrastructure, usability of play areas, reduction in the diversity of cultivated plants and potentially an increase in customer complaints.

During the discussion, the following was noted:

- The changing climate could / would influence weed diversity, establishment and management; additional treatments might be essential.
- Priority would be given to playground areas for safety reasons e.g. reduce trip hazards etc.
- Clarity was sought on how other neighbouring authorities had dealt with weed management. Bedding areas had been grassed over and alternative weed management methods used e.g. foam / jet washing. These methods were extremely expensive.
- Spot spraying was an alternative weed control management method.
- Pavement weed management was the responsibility of East Sussex County Council.
- Important to re-educate the public on alternative weed management methods without using herbicides / pesticides. A cut lawn / landscape was aesthetically pleasing; however, it could encourage pest growth. Nature was naturally untidy. What was pleasing to one would not be pleasing to another (views would vary).
- The new contract would be reactive rather than proactive; important to closely monitor the new contract (over the first year) to understand all issues experienced and review the level of complaints received, if any.

## **CCSG24/29. CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT – NOVEMBER 2024**

The Climate Projects Officer (CPO) updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on the Climate Action Plan Progress Report – November 2024. It was noted that some projects had not yet started. The following objectives / actions had been updated since the last meeting:

### **Buildings and Energy Efficiency – Objective 1.1 Mass Retrofit of Existing Buildings:**

- Use Environmental Health Enforcement Mechanisms to Improve Private-Sector Rented Accommodation: Once a disrepair enquiry was received, the level of EPC was assessed and if appropriate enforcement action undertaken; to date no appropriate enforcement action had been necessary.
- Train Energy Champions to Work with Communities: A training session was held on 28 November 2024 (second cohort). To date

five members of the public across Rother had been fully trained; the aim was to train up to 10 people.

- Fund Businesses' Decarbonisation Plans with Capital Grants for Net Zero Infrastructure: Two Workshops were scheduled to be held on 4 December 2024 – Sustainability Storytelling, in Battle and 29 January 2025 – Your Sustainability Journey, in Rye. It was clarified that Clean Growth UK led on the promotion of these events. More events were available on their website at the following link: [Events Archive - Clean Growth UK](#)

#### **Transport – Objective 2.3 A Programme of Activities to Promote Active Travel Across the District:**

- Climate Awareness Training introduced for all Council staff: The latest course was held on 25 and 26 November 2024. It was anticipated that a Member training session would be held in the new year. Councillor Burton suggested an alternative training source at the following link: [Climate Fresk \(world\) – Climate Fresk](#)

#### **Resource Consumption and Waste – Objective 3.1 Reduced Consumption of Resources and Waste:**

- Improve Procurement Policies for Operational Resources: The East Sussex Procurement Hub (ESPH) Working Group would be reviewing the new Sustainable Procurement Policy. The CPO was a member of the ESPH.

#### **Biodiversity and Land Use – Objective 4.1 Halt Land and Marine Species Decline:**

- Eliminate Use of Pesticides, Herbicides and Peat in Council Grounds Maintenance: See Minute Ref CCSG24/28.

#### **Biodiversity and Land Use – Objective 4.2 Increase Biodiversity and Carbon Sequestration:**

- Adopt the County-side Local Nature Recovery Strategy: A table of draft measures was shared with stakeholders on 8 November 2024 for review and comments by 22 November 2024.

### **CCSG24/30. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following any other business items were discussed:

- Community Infrastructure Levy (Climate Emergency Bonus Fund): Clarity was sought on how much funding was available. Information was not available at the meeting. Advice would be sought from the Principal Community Infrastructure Levy Officer.
- It was clarified that environmental / climate emergency issues were embedded across the Council. One of the Council's key objectives in the Council Plan was 'Green to the Core'. The Head of Corporate and Strategic Services would be leading on this.
- All good news stories to be promoted regularly. Communications was a key function and came under the remit of the Head of Corporate and Strategic Services. It was anticipated that Communications would significantly improve.



- Sustainable Events Policy: To investigate other local authorities' policies / what are they doing?
- Councillor Gray advised that she had recently attended two fascinating environmental talks: Rother Environment Group on Pevensey Levels (potentially hosting an open day next summer) and Bexhill Environment Group on Sussex Underwater (marine conservation from Brighton to Bexhill).
- Battle Memorial Hall (solar panels): It was understood that the roof was not structurally stable to support solar panels. An alternative option was suggested, namely ground mounted solar panels. It was understood that there was not enough free-standing land surrounding the building for solar panels to be ground mounted.
- Battle Abbey Car Park: Electric Vehicle Charging Points were being installed in the car park.

**ACTION 2:** Advice be sought from the Principal Community Infrastructure Levy Officer on the Climate Emergency Bonus Fund. (Climate Projects Officer)

#### CCSG24/31. **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the date of the next "informal" meeting would be held on Thursday 30 January 2024 at 2pm.

#### **CHAIR**

The meeting closed at 2:56pm

CCSG241128jh

## 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).

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### 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 TCO<sub>2</sub>e. 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

CCSG250130jh



**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

CSG250227jh

**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.

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**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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