

**CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP**

2 July 2020

Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group meeting held remotely on Thursday 2 July 2020 at 1:30pm.

Steering Group Members present: Councillors K.M. Field (Chairman), S.J. Coleman, P.J. Gray, L.M. Langlands, P.N. Osborne and S.M. Prochak.

Other Members present: Councillor Mrs V. Cook.

Advisory Officers in attendance: Executive Director (TL), Head of Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration, Head of Environmental Services, Licensing and Community Safety, Head of Housing and Community, Head of Strategy and Planning, Planning Policy Manager, Policy Officer, Programme and Projects Officer, Corporate Programme and Business Improvement Officer and 2 x Democratic Services Officers.

Also Present: 10 members of the public.

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**CCSG20/1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**CCSG20/2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**CCSG20/3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 3 JANUARY 2020 - MATTERS ARISING**

Councillor Coleman requested that Recommendation 1 of Minute Reference CCSG19/05 be reworded as follows:

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer+, Black, Asian and Migrant Ethnic communities be added to the list of target groups for the consultation process. It was agreed that the minutes be amended accordingly.

**RESOLVED:** That the recommendation be reworded to include reference to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer+, Black, Asian and Migrant Ethnic communities.

## **CCSG20/4. CONSULTATION REPORT - DRAFT ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY**

Consideration was given to the Executive Director's report which set out the responses of the Environment Strategy (ES) consultation to enable the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) to form its recommendations to Cabinet.

The consultation was launched on Friday 25 February 2020 and ran for 12 weeks closing on Friday 18 May 2020. It was primarily conducted using an on-line questionnaire and promoted regularly through 'MyAlerts', all social media platforms and posters displayed across the district. Unfortunately, the ability to provide launch events / consultation exhibitions was compromised due to the COVID-19 emergency and other priorities. In addition, direct invitations were sent to a number of identified organisations as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

At the close of the consultation, overall 135 responses had been received; 116 from the public and 19 from identified organisations. Despite the low response rate, the quality of the responses received were considered satisfactory.

The results showed that there was support for the draft ES. The only negative comments were regarding the lack of actions identified in the Action Plan (AP). Members were advised that the AP would be bolstered by the development of a more comprehensive programme of projects and interventions once adopted.

The CCSG considered the 10 additional recommendations proposed as identified in Appendix B to the report, namely a) light pollution and dark skies, b) supply chain, c) reduction in business rates and Council Tax, d) effects of COVID-19, e) High Weald Management Plan, f) ecological collapse and biodiversity crisis, g) public transport, h) farmland and working countryside, i) hydrogen and biomethane and j) vehicle noise. Appendix C to the report detailed the responses received on how residents could reduce their own carbon footprint and impact on the environment. Consideration was also given to two supplementary documents which detailed the complete identified organisations' and resident responses.

The Chairman agreed to consider each of the 10 additional recommendations in turn and during discussion the following salient points were noted:

a) Light pollution and dark skies

- It was agreed that light pollution and dark skies should be referenced in the ES but not included in the AP as it was felt that these specific issues would be considered in the Council's Local Plan.
- It was clarified that Planning Policy only dealt with new development and not the existing built environment.

b) Supply chain

- Environment issues was a substantial part of the procurement process and was/would be considered by the East Sussex Procurement Hub for current/future contracts.
- It was expected that cost implications to current contracts would be applied should environmental issues be agreed and introduced e.g. electric vehicles for the waste contract.
- It was suggested that the Council focused on procuring products/services from local suppliers/businesses.
- It was agreed that the supply chain should be incorporated into the ES and AP.

c) Reduction in business rates and council tax for good environmental practice

- The Council had limited control regarding business rates, as it was part of the East Sussex Business Rate Pool; any deductions would be the responsibility of Rother District Council and could prove costly.
- It was felt that a reduction in council tax could be targeting the wrong people.
- It was agreed that reduction of business rates and council tax should not be incorporated into the ES.

d) Review strategy again due to environmental effects of social distancing, new Government policy post COVID-19 etc.

- Members were reminded that the Council had established an Economic Recovery Steering Group. Its role would be to consider the impact of the COVID-19 on the local economy and establish a Rother Economic Recovery Plan in alignment with other relevant agencies and authorities plans, as well as the direction provided by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and Government.
- Concern was aired that cheap vehicles had and were being purchased/used over the last few months, as the public were reluctant to use public transport during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was agreed that the effects/issues of COVID-19 should not be incorporated into the ES but be considered by the Economic Recovery Steering Group.

e) Add references to the High Weald Management Plan

- It was noted that the Council already considered materials considerations of the High Weald Management Plan (HWMP) for future developments. Members were advised that the HWMP was reviewed every five years.
- Members were reminded that the Council was scheduled to consider and adopt the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Housing Design Guide as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications at the full Council meeting scheduled to be held on 6 July 2020.
- It was agreed that the HWMP should be referenced in the ES but not included in the AP as it was felt that these specific issues would be considered in the Council's Local Plan and Building Regulations.

- f) Address ecological collapse and biodiversity crisis
  - It was agreed that ecological collapse and biodiversity crisis should be referenced in the ES but not included in the AP as it was felt that these specific issues would be considered in the Council's Local Plan.
- g) Public transport
  - It was considered important that new development planning applications contained and delivered sustainable transport measures, as well as promoted/provided cycleways, footpaths and public transport routes.
  - Encourage bus service providers to operate low omission or electric vehicles, align timetables with other public service providers e.g. trains (start/end journeys at the station), introduce 3-day per week season ticket and provide an evening service across the district.
  - Promote a town "hop on and hop off" bus service.
  - Ensure that all public transport services were affordable.
  - Provide route finder information at all bus stops across the district.
  - Encourage train providers to upgrade their vehicle stock and add additional carriages to their engines.
  - Encourage installation of electric vehicle charging points across the county/district.
  - All public transport must be accessible so disabled passengers could use it.
  - Introduce a park and ride scheme and pedestrianise town centres.
  - It was agreed that public transport including reference to disability and additional needs should be incorporated into the ES and AP.
- h) Include Farmland and the working countryside
  - Important to maintain a dialogue with farmers.
  - It was agreed that the farmland and the working countryside should be referenced in the ES but not included in the AP as it was felt that these specific issues would be considered in the Council's Local Plan.
- i) Hydrogen and Biomethane
  - Energy efficiency was already incorporated within the ES, therefore it was agreed that hydrogen and biomethane should not be referenced in the ES or AP.
- j) Vehicle noise
  - It was agreed that vehicle noise should not be referenced in the ES or AP.
  - In general, Members were pleased with and encouraged by the responses received and thanked the public and identified organisations for their comments and participation.

- It was considered imperative that all Council policies aligned with the ES and that some “quick win” projects were incorporated within the AP.
- The CCSG requested that all future reports to all Committees included a carbon reduction risk assessment statement.
- The Council used Appendix C to the report as a key basis to advise/encourage residents of ways to reduce their carbon impact on the environment.

Members were advised that Kristina Sodomkova would be joining the Council mid-August as the new Environment and Policy Manager. The CCSG requested that Kristina be formally introduced to them at a future meeting.

Members were reminded that the ES was a ‘living / working’ document and would be reviewed annually and updated as and when appropriate.

**RESOLVED:** That the following recommendations be actioned for onward recommendation to Cabinet:

- 1) the Environment Strategy Action Plan be updated to incorporate b) supply chain g) public transport including reference to disability and additional needs;
- 2) a) light pollution and dark skies, e) the High Weald Management Plan, f) ecological collapse and biodiversity, h) farmland and the working countryside and j) vehicle noise be referenced only in the Environment Strategy;
- 3) c) reduction in business rates and council tax and i) hydrogen and biomethane not be incorporated into the Environment Strategy;
- 4) d) effects of COVID-19 not be incorporated into the Environment Strategy but considered by the Economic Recovery Steering Group;
- 5) all future reports to all Committees included a carbon reduction risk assessment statement;
- 6) the Council used Appendix C to the report as a key basis to advise/encourage residents of ways to reduce their carbon impact on the environment; and
- 7) the Climate Change Steering Group be formally introduced to the Environment and Policy Manager at a future meeting.

## CCSG20/5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Pension Fund: Members were advised that ESCC’s Pension Committee had voted against divesting in non-fossil fuel providers for the pension fund.

Members were advised that Officers had introduced a new communication strand on ‘MyAlerts’ called ‘green tip of the week’.

**Environment Champions:** Cllr Mrs Cook volunteered to be the Council's Public Transport Champion.

It was suggested that the Council encouraged local housing associations to appoint Champions to raise/promote environment awareness within their properties.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) Cabinet be requested to consider appointing Cllr Mrs Cook as the Council's Public Transport Champion; and
- 2) the Council encourage local housing associations to appoint Champions to raise/promote environment awareness within their properties.

**CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 3:18pm.