

CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP

25 April 2024

Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group “formal” meeting held remotely on Thursday 25 April 2024 at 3:03pm.

Steering Group Members present: Councillors K.M. Field (Chair), S.J. Coleman, P.J. Gray, T.M. Killeen (MBE) and P.N. Osborne.

Other Members present: Councillors S. Burton and Mrs V. Cook (in part).

Advisory Officers in attendance: Climate Strategy Officer, Climate Projects Officer, Regeneration Officer (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also Present: Nick Adlam, Specialist Advisor – Sustainability & Net Zero Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council (in part), 5 members of the public via the live webcast.

CCSG23/60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

CCSG23/61. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

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

CCSG23/62. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 28 MARCH 2024 - MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

CCSG23/63. CLEAN GROWTH UK - NET ZERO BUSINESS AND PROJECT PRESENTATION

The Regeneration Officer updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on the Council’s Net Zero Business Project. The Council had been allocated £1.6m (£1m UK Shared Prosperity Fund and £603,000 Rural England Prosperity Fund [mix of capital and revenue]) Government funding to invest in “building pride in place and increasing life chances” across the district, specifically focusing on three investment priorities, namely community and place; supporting local businesses; and people and skills. Projects would be delivered through the approved Investment Plan, facilitated by the Council and overseen by the Rother Shared Prosperity Local Partnership. Funding would be available until March 2025.

The Council hosted 4,590 small medium enterprises (SMEs), predominantly in manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality sectors, most of which were in the early stages of transitioning their businesses to be net zero. Last year, carbon accounting and sustainability feedback was collated from the SMEs, to ascertain what was required. This work also supported the Council's Climate Strategy to be net zero by 2030. The project was to be delivered in partnership with Clean Growth UK, based at the University of Brighton who had extensive knowledge of delivering green business and innovation support (Net Zero 350 programme) to SMEs, as well as supporting local authorities across East Sussex. They had over 3,000 business members, awarded Low Carbon Across the South and East (LoCASE) grants and was looking to progress larger green innovation projects. It was confirmed that they would present a report to the CCSG at a future meeting.

The Council's Net Zero 360 Programme/Grants were scheduled to be launched on 7 May 2024 via all social medium platforms. Three free Business Net Zero Skills Workshops would be held in the district; the first was scheduled to be held on Monday 24 June 2024 at 9:30am to 4:00pm at Ashburnham Place. The workshops would be open to any small enterprises / businesses (target of 50 businesses) and would provide essential networking opportunities.

Also scheduled to be launched in May was Rother's Business Energy Efficiency Grants in partnership with Clean Growth UK. £60,000 was available to SMEs who wished to upgrade their energy efficiency solutions e.g. solar, LED lighting, air source heat pumps etc. Trading businesses in the district with two year's accounts could apply for up to £5,000. Each business would need to contribute a minimum of £1,000 to the project. Grants would be allocated on a first come first served basis and facilitated by the Council's Regeneration Team.

Members were advised that both initiatives would be advertised on all of the Council's social media platforms including 'MyAlerts', as well as through Clean Growth UK's networks. Members were encouraged to promote the schemes within their Wards and local communities. An email would be forwarded to all Members.

The Climate Strategy Officer thanked the Regeneration Officer for all her hard work in progressing the projects.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) progress of the Council's Net Zero 360 Programme and Business Energy Efficiency Grants be noted; and
- 2) all Members to promote the Council's Net Zero 360 Programme and Business Energy Efficiency Grants within their Wards and local communities.

CCSG23/64. HOME UPGRADE GRANT 2 - APRIL 2024 - VERBAL UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Nick Adlam, Specialist Advisor – Sustainability & Net Zero at Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council to the meeting, who delivered an update on the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2).

The HUG2 provided energy efficiency upgrades and low-carbon heating via local authority funding. The Council was part of a consortium with Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council and Lewes District Council (LDC) to deliver HUG2. LDC was the administrating authority with support from officers at each authority. A grant of just over £6m had been awarded to be spent in 2023/24 to 2024/25 (up to March 2025). Members were advised that East Sussex County Council managed the Warm Home Check Service and was the lead on the joint authority Fuel Poverty Strategy across the county.

Funding would be awarded to private housing only (owned or rented); not heated by gas, only to landlords that had no more than four properties, and households that earned less than £36,000 per annum. Measures were split into three grades, namely Grade A – solar panels, loft and wall (internal and external) insulation, and air source heat pumps; Grade B – storage heaters in flats; and Grade C – windows and storage heaters in houses/bungalows. Grants awarded ranged from £22,000 (minimum) up to £38,000 (maximum). All properties were surveyed / assessed prior to grant award and Government approval, though sometimes costing differences could result in funding being rejected. The finalised list of properties would need to be submitted to the Government for approval by December 2024, which gave the consortium three months to deliver the projects.

Funding would be used to upgrade / retrofit 150 homes (most in need) across all four authorities. Initial focus had started with Rother, the next phase would commence at LDC. Printed postcards promoting the scheme would be disseminated across each authority area.

Further advice could be sought on Freephone 0800 464 7307 – quote HUG2, or text WARM to 80011 or click on the following link [Warm East Sussex – keep warm and well in East Sussex](#).

Clarity was sought on whether local contractors / businesses would be given priority to complete the upgrade works, as this would assist with the local economy and reduce carbon emissions across the county. This was currently being investigated / sourced and would be a priority for the project.

RESOLVED: That progress of the Home Upgrade Grant 2 be noted.

CCSG23/65. MICRO WOODS PROJECTS UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Climate Projects Officer (CPO), which updated the Climate Change Steering Group regarding progress of the Micro Woods Projects and proposed sites for planting.

In October 2023, the Council was awarded a Coronation Living Heritage Fund grant of £27,149 to plant urban Micro Woods in Battle, Bexhill and Rye in honour of King Charles III's Coronation.

The CPO had liaised with relevant officers / stakeholders, reviewed documents to identify / assess eligible and suitable sites for planting micro woods (approximately 200sqm [size of a small tennis court]) in each of the specified towns, including intensive soil preparation that would be required. Advice had also been sought from Natural England, which included the appropriate mix of tree species to create biodiversity-rich woodland habitats. Prior to planting, underground infrastructure surveys would need to be completed.

The following Council-owned locations had been identified: Coronation Gardens, Battle; Mason's Field, Rye; and Seabourne Road Recreation Ground, Bexhill (split into two plots). Alternative sites had been identified should issues be found because of the underground infrastructure surveys. Community Tree Planting events would be organised at each site towards the end of 2024 / early 2025. 16 local groups had expressed an interest in co-ordinating planting sessions.

Planting would need to be completed by March 2025 (unspent monies would need to be returned).

RESOLVED: That progress of the Micro Woods Projects be noted.

CCSG23/66. CORONATION COMMUNITY ORCHARDS GRANT SCHEME

In October 2023, the Council was awarded a Coronation Living Heritage Fund grant of £49,024.50 to plant Community Orchards in Rother. The Coronation Community Orchard Grants Scheme opened for applications on Monday 1 April 2024 (until Friday 28 June 2024). Grants of £500 up to £5,000 could be applied for towards the cost of planting at least five fruit or nut trees in a new or existing community orchard. Benefits would be engaging the community in setting up, planting, or maintaining the orchard, or providing free access on a permanent or occasional basis for leisure and recreation activities and events or harvesting the fruit.

Grant expenditure included purchase of the trees, tree protection, soil enhancers, equipment e.g. spades, gloves, benches etc., as well as signage to dedicate the site to King Charles III's Coronation. Expenses relating to salaries, consultancy fees, volunteering, land purchase or rental, establishment and maintenance of the trees beyond initial planting were not included.

Guidance for designing and planting Community Orchards was available on the Council's website at the following link: [Planning your](#)

[Coronation Community Orchard – Rother District Council](#). To encourage applications, 75% of the grant award would be paid upfront and the final 25% paid on completion. Projects would need to be completed and grants claimed by 1 March 2025 (unspent monies would need to be returned).

Some interest had been received and the scheme would be re-advertised via all social medium platforms. Members were encouraged to promote the scheme within their Wards and local communities.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) progress and timelines of the Community Orchards Scheme be noted; and
- 2) all Members to promote the Community Orchards Scheme within their Wards and local communities.

CCSG23/67. **CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT - APRIL 2024**

The Climate Strategy Officer (CSO) updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on the refreshed Climate Action Plan Progress Report – April 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: As at 19 February 2024, six halls had received funds and completed works, 10 had signed grant funding agreements, 10 had grants approved in principle. On completion, all projects would save an estimated 1,115 tonnes of CO₂e. It was clarified that 26 village / community halls had received funding; a list would be disseminated to Members after the meeting. The Climate Projects Officer confirmed that those village halls that did not receive funding in the first round could re-apply. The second round of funding was scheduled to be launched shortly. Sports pavilions could apply for funding through the Rural Community Infrastructure Scheme.
- Support Retrofit Skills Partnership: A Retrofit Awareness Course was held on 16 April 2024. Several Council officers had attended.
- Retrofit Rother District Council operational assets to EPC 'C' or above: Members were advised that an Interim Strategic Assets and Estates Manager had been appointed and was developing the Strategic Assets Management Plan.

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

- Climate Awareness Training introduced for all Council staff: It was clarified that 43 officers had completed and a further 50 were scheduled to complete Carbon Literacy Training. Progress had

commenced regarding the Council becoming a Silver Carbon Literate Authority and the CSO was certified as a Carbon Literate Facilitator. Clarity was sought on whether this training could be made available to parish and town councils (P&TCs), although it was felt it could be unaffordable for the smaller parishes. The price would depend on the size of the organisation. The CSO advised that the Carbon Literacy Accreditation Scheme was the most appropriate and was not aware of any smaller scale providers; this would need to be investigated. It was suggested that a joint carbon literacy training session be delivered to the P&TCs via Rother Association of Local Councils.

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

- Promote Behaviour Change to Reduce Waste through Corporate Communications: Initiatives to reduce paper and single-use plastics for food and drink were planned by the Green Team in 2024/25.
- Introduce a decision-making tool that includes carbon impacts: A Carbon and Co-Benefits Tool Member briefing was held on 4 April 2024. Two officer sessions were delivered on 16 April 2024 and 24 April 2024 and a third session was scheduled to be delivered next week.

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

- Promote Office Swap Shop and Related Activities: A 'staff marketplace' Teams Channel had been created to encourage officers to offer, request and share resources both work-related or personal items before purchasing new.
- Introduce Glass Collection from Operational Buildings: The Senior Leadership Team had approved a recommendation to introduce glass and snack packaging recycling collections at the Town Hall buildings.

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

- Deliver on Bexhill Tree Planting Strategy: Proposed site for a Micro Woods would be Seabourne Road Recreation Ground, Pebsham, subject to further checks. Grant Applications opened on 1 April 2024.
- Audit Council Green Assets to Provide a Baseline for Biodiversity: Nine reports had been received.

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

- Support Local Community Renewable Energy Creation: Four village halls had accepted Government Grants towards solar, covering a minimum of 50% of costs. The remainder would be covered by Energise Sussex Coast, or halls could match-fund to buy panels outright.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the report be noted; and

2) a list of the 26 village/community halls to be disseminated to Members.

CCSG23/68. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following any other business item was discussed:

Culture Declares Emergency, South East Cultural Assembly – 22 April 2024. Both Councillors Burton and Gray, as well as the Climate Strategy Officer (CSO) and Climate Projects Officer had attended the event held at the De La Warr Pavilion. The event had been attended by many organisations from across the South East, including representatives from other local authorities. Mixed views were expressed, but overall, it was generally agreed that the event had been worthwhile and useful. Having sought advice from the facilitators, the CSO confirmed that, due to multiple issues, it was not considered appropriate to host a joint event in the future.

CCSG23/69. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING, TBC, 2:00PM

It was agreed that the date of the next “informal” meeting would be held on Wednesday 26 June 2024 at 3pm. All future meetings would be held on the last Thursday of the month (except August and December), starting at 3pm. Dates to be confirmed and MS Teams invites forwarded.

RESOLVED: That dates of future meetings to be arranged, confirmed and MS Teams invitations forwarded.

CCSG23/70. VOTE OF THANKS

The Chair advised Members that this was the last meeting that Lucie Bolton, Climate Strategy Officer would be attending, as she was leaving Rother District Council at the end of May. Members expressed their thanks to Lucie for all her hard work and wished her well for the future. She had been “a real inspiration.”

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 3:49pm.