

## Rother District Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	18 October 2021
<b>Title:</b>	Progress on the Environment Strategy (2020)
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Service - Neighbourhood Services
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To update Members on progress of the implementation of the above strategy
<b>Officer</b>	
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It be <b>RESOLVED</b> : That: the progress made against the Environment Strategy (2020) be noted.

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### Introduction

1. On 16 September 2019, full Council passed a motion declaring a 'Climate Emergency' and made a carbon neutrality commitment for Rother District Council (RDC) with a target date of 2030. The Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) has been established by Cabinet to develop, plan, and initiate the steps that the Council will need to take to meet this highly ambitious target. The Environment Strategy (The Strategy) was developed in 2019 and subsequently adopted on 21 September 2020. The Strategy and its action plan are delivered across all the Council's service areas.
2. This report is intended to update Members on progress made since the last report to Overview and Scrutiny on 15 March 2021.

### Overview of last 6 months activities

#### Staff resources

3. The role of Environment and Policy Manager, which is currently vacant, is under review to take into account the general restructure of the Council's staffing and to explore working in partnership with neighbouring authorities to allow greater flexibility and efficiencies of scale. It is expected to have appropriate staff in place by no later than 31 March 2022.

#### Projects

4. **Bexhill Tree planting** - Work continues on the Bexhill i-Tree Study. Volunteers from Bexhill Environment Group, Combe Valley Countryside Park and Bexhill Rotary plus Rother parks and tree officers have received training in conducting tree surveys to provide detailed data to the i-Tree projects team. The data will inform a tree planting strategy and other local planning. Nearly 200 survey plots have been completed to date.

5. Following on from this work, the charity Trees for Cities has secured funding of £143,000 for the Rother area from the second round of the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund as part of their 'Forgotten Places' project. This project will specifically focus on increasing tree cover in smaller coastal cities and towns with lower than average tree canopy cover and high levels of socio-economic deprivation. To support the project the Trees for Cities team will deliver a presentation to Members during the Overview and Scrutiny meeting.
6. The Council will continue to work with Bexhill Environment Group on tree and hedge planting including a hedge at Broad Oak Park and is developing a tree planting project at Sidley Recreation Ground to increase biodiversity.
7. **Carbon literacy training** - Training was delivered by the Director of the Climate Emergency Support Programme of the Centre of Sustainable Energy to all Councillors and members of the Corporate Management Team on 22 April. The general feedback from the session was that the training was informative, and the knowledge gained will help to support understanding of climate change and its impact, and how future projects may be able to reduce carbon emissions.

### **Council Contractor progress**

8. **Waste Collections and Street and Beach Cleansing contract** - The Joint Waste Partnership team arranged for consultants Hester Management to facilitate a workshop on 2 June 2021 which was attended by Wealden, Hastings and Rother Joint Waste Committee Members, Biffa and relevant partnership executive officers including from East Sussex County Council. The workshop reviewed the existing carbon footprint of the vehicles and equipment used to deliver the service and offered various proposals to reduce the carbon emissions for partners to consider in more depth. Work is now in hand, with further support from Hester Management, to develop a more detailed, evidenced based and costed proposal to enable each local authority to make decisions on their way forward.
9. **Idverde Grounds Maintenance Contract** - Work is in progress to include the possibility of variations in the two year extension to the grounds maintenance existing contract that will facilitate increased bio-diversity, reductions in carbon emissions through the increased use of electric vehicles and equipment, and alternatives to some pesticides. The Idverde management team will deliver a presentation to Members at this or a future meeting of this Committee on a date to be agreed.
10. **Freedom Leisure Centre contract** - The table below shows energy consumption for the three centres and comparisons for the same month for the last two years. There have been significant reductions in energy usage as compared to the same month last year and the same month in 2019. This has been achieved through numerous minor operational changes that together add up to a substantial saving, including overnight boiler settings reduced to 60% capacity (allows extra savings to be made, but centre systems (such as frost protection) are still maintained); pool water temperature trimmed by 0.5 – 1.0 degree C (this is to be monitored following re-activation of swim school); swimming pool air handling unit (AHU) air temperatures trimmed in line with pool water temperature; central heating systems adjusted to ensure they are held off until outside temperature requires; dry side AHU supply air

temperatures adjusted to ensure centres feel 'fresh'; all areas and facilities individually assessed to identify ventilation requirements allowing some systems to be turned off when not needed.

## Environmental Management

Kwh	Aug-21	Aug-20	Aug-19	Var to 2020	%	Var to 2019	%
<b>BLC</b>	12044	13722	17180	-1678	-12%	-5136	-30%
<b>BLP</b>	Data not available	(16882)	(26270)	-	-	-	-
<b>RYE</b>	14474	10502	18495	3972	38%	-4021	-22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26518</b>	<b>24224</b>	<b>35675</b>	<b>2294</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>-9157</b>	<b>-26%</b>

11. **General grounds maintenance** - The piloting of areas of longer grass (environmental grass) to promote the growth of wildflowers and grasses and provide habitat for invertebrates has been extended to additional sites this year. Customer feedback has been very limited and whilst some negative comments have been received, this does not necessarily reflect the views of the wider public. The sites where this has been piloted will be reviewed by officers taking into account customer feedback alongside input from officers and the grounds maintenance contractor. Alternative or additional locations for new pilots will be considered where there is opportunity.
12. **Long stay car parks Bexhill, Battle and Rye** - The Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group recommended the implementation of three, 'long stay' car parks across the district to both support people who need to park all day and reduce congestion and therefore carbon emissions, in town centres by encouraging people to park on the outskirts in these lower daily tariff car parks; this was supported by Cabinet and implemented.

## Local Plan Review

13. The purpose of the planning system is to achieve sustainable development. Interventions through planning policy are essential to support the delivery of the Environment Strategy.
14. The published programme in our Local Development Scheme (March 2021) anticipates that the Council will adopt a new Local Plan by December 2023. The Planning Policy team are on track to achieve this and is currently collating the evidence base to enable a draft Local Plan to be issued for consultation by April 2022. The potential to draft a Net Zero Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in tandem with the Local Plan Review process is being explored.
15. Working across departments and across local authorities is an essential part of this process and particularly for delivering climate action through coordinated strategies that maximise co-benefits and provide a joined up, long-term vision. Some of the environmental evidence that underpins the Environment Strategy sits within the Council's Planning Policy and vice versa.
16. The dialogue with Planning Policy colleagues will ensure that there are robust linkages between The Environment Strategy and the sustainability and climate evidence which will underpin the new Local Plan and a critical part of this

currently is a consideration of staff resources within the new Place and Climate Change Directorate. Discussions continue about how links with the Planning Policy team can be developed and strengthened to identify opportunities for joint evidence-bases to support the Environment Strategy and policies within the new Local Plan, such as the Bexhill i-Tree Study. The MSc placement study of onshore and offshore wind mapping potential has been completed and the Planning Policy team are currently producing a guidance document on renewable energy land requirements and is linked to a call for potential sites.

### **Progress within the Council**

17. The Council has made steady progress in making changes that will contribute to our carbon reduction target, including:
- Changes to buildings, such as the addition of solar panels and new, energy efficient windows and roofs.
  - The use of a 100% renewable energy supplier for our electricity and a gas supplier with offset certificates.
  - More opportunity for staff to work from their homes to cut down on travel, and schemes to encourage greener travel.
  - Continuing the use of Microsoft Teams for non-decision making meetings and internal meetings.
  - Implementing a paperless pledge to reduce the amount of paper used by Councillors and staff.
  - Forming Alliance Homes (Rother) to build houses to high environmental standards.
  - Distributing grants to local environmental projects through our grants scheme.
  - Enabled a number of Members and officers to attend a Carbon Reduction training day and the intention is to roll this out throughout the organisation.

### **Next Steps**

18. Ben Hook, Director of Place and Climate Change will talk verbally to the proposed next steps for driving forward carbon reduction across the district. This will include proposed use of the budget and resources to focus on key areas for early phase delivery.

### **Conclusion**

19. Whilst there is still a long way to go to deliver on the ambitions of the Council, it is important to recognise that the significant changes to working practice and contracts that will help us reach our target take time to implement and need to be made in line with legislation, particularly relating to contracts. The targets set out in our Environmental Strategy are regularly monitored to ensure that every possible step to become a carbon neutral authority is taken. Our Climate Change Steering Group meets regularly to review the Council's progress and identify policies and strategies that require amendment. These meetings are open to the public and the group is keen to identify residents across Rother who can become climate champions for their communities and help implement initiatives locally.

### **Environmental implications**

20. This report is about delivery progress against a key strategic document, Rother's Environment Strategy 2020.

<b>Other Implications</b>	<b>Applies?</b>	<b>Other Implications</b>	<b>Applies?</b>
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	External Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	Yes	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	None
Relevant previous Minutes:	N/A
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None