

## Rother District Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	25 April 2022
<b>Title:</b>	Progress on the Environment Strategy (2020)
<b>Report of:</b>	Ben Hook, Director – Place and Climate Change
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To update Members on progress of implementation of the Council's Environment 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 (ES) was developed in 2019 and subsequently adopted on 21 September 2020. The ES 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 Committee on 18 October 2021.

### Overview of last 6 months activities

#### Staff resources

3. It has been agreed that the role of Environment and Policy Manager will no longer be replaced like for like. Instead two posts at slightly lower grades have been agreed. The first is Projects Officer (Environment) and will sit within the special projects team. The purpose of this role is to focus on project development and delivery. This role has now been appointed to with the successful candidate due to start in June 2022.
4. The second post is that of Environment Strategy Officer, the purpose of this role is to maintain and develop the ES as well as progressing the delivery of strategic ambitions of the action plan through partnership working, communications, and wider stakeholder engagement. This role is to be advertised throughout May following the Easter break.
5. Each department has been asked to nominate officers to take part in a staff 'Green Team'. This group will be used to consider what opportunities exist within current Council operations to improve either our carbon footprint or our

environmental impact. They will also be a key conduit for ensuring that all departments of the Council are embedding the principles of the ES and Action Plan into our day-to-day decision making and operations.

## **Projects**

### **Bexhill Tree planting**

6. Bexhill i-Tree Eco study has now been completed using survey data collected by volunteers. A draft document has been produced by Treeconomics, URBAN FOREST 1066, ASSESSING THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF TREES and is being reviewed. This gives an accurate estimate of the number and diversity of trees in Bexhill as a basis for producing a tree planting strategy. It estimates the current value of ecosystem services provided by the trees such as carbon sequestration, removing pollution and reduction in water run-off, all of which will be used to inform future planning.
7. 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 Bexhill. This project is in the planning phase with planting due to take place during Autumn – Winter 2022-23 with opportunities for community participation. Community engagement is an important part of the project. The Field Studies Council is producing a series of tree identification guides and will be running a series of three workshops locally and online to raise the profile of trees and tree planting. The first workshop is on 7 May 2022.
8. Trees for Cities are also working with East Sussex County Council on a separate Urban tree Challenge Fund project focused on planting trees in Bexhill roadside verges.
9. Bexhill Environment Group completed hedgerow planting at Broad Oak Park in December 2021 plus some additional tree planting on Bexhill Down. The Council will continue to work with Bexhill Environment Group on tree and hedge planting initiatives and proposals for Winter 2022 – 23 are being developed. Tree planting has also been completed at Sidley Recreation Ground as part of the Bexhill BMX and Skate Park project.

### **Bio-diversity**

10. We are continuing to reduce the quantity of expensive seasonal bedding displays in our parks and open spaces by planting shrubs which not only reduces costs but also increases bio-diversity.
11. More permanent perennial and shrub planting is due to take place at Manor Gardens and along East Parade to reduce environmental impact of maintenance and increase attraction to birds and other species.
12. Flower towers at Marina Gardens have been replaced with an annual meadow mix for Summer 2022. Again, this has the advantage of lower maintenance and is a nectar source for a wide range of invertebrates.

## **Carbon literacy training**

13. A second round of carbon literacy training has been undertaken with a wider group of staff and member participation. It is anticipated that further training will be brought forward into the future.

## **Electric vehicle charging points in Council owned car parks**

14. On 28 March 2022, the Council approved the procurement of an appropriate service provider to complete feasibility studies on various Council owned car parks across the district to determine into which car parks the service provider could install electric vehicle charging infrastructure at nil capital cost to the Council.
15. Officers are working with the Council's legal team to complete initial due diligence on a list of potential car parks, and with the support of the Energy Saving Trust and the procurement teams' experience with other EV tenders, are in the process of drafting a suitable specification with which to go out to tender.
16. It is important to note that not all the car parks listed in the specification may be viable locations for EV charging points; the decision regarding which car parks will be determined by the results of the appointed service providers feasibility studies.

## **Hydro-treated Vegetable Oil (HVO) Waste collection fuel trial**

17. Following initial research completed by the consultancy firm Hester Management Services, who are investigating carbon reduction proposals on behalf of the Joint Waste Partnership, an extensive trial is now in progress in Wealden using hydro-treated vegetable oil instead of diesel in 13 waste collection and cleansing vehicles. Wealden was selected to represent the partnership in this trial due to operational ease and, if successful, the use of HVO could be extended to other depots that service Rother and Hastings.
18. The start date of the trial was in mid-March, once the existing tanks of diesel fuel had been exhausted, and the trial will continue until all the HVO has been used – approximately five weeks. The Joint Waste and Recycling Committee will consider the outcomes of this trial and other related carbon reduction work for waste services at its meeting in July and recommendations will then be made back to each partner Council.
19. The aim of the trial is to test use of HVO as an alternate fuel to diesel; to include consideration of:
  - HVO supply options from environmentally acceptable sources. (Note: the trial is using an environmentally certified HVO supply).
  - HVO supply cost and security (and procurement options for hedging prices).
  - HVO storage considerations (fuel tank licensing, fire risk assessment etc.).
  - Vehicle performance: log any mixed diesel and HVO fuel issues.
  - Vehicle performance: log any HVO only fuel issues.
  - Vehicle performance: routine servicing assessment to identify any mechanical issues that might be associated with HVO use.

## **Community Infrastructure Levy**

20. A new process for distributing the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was approved in March with some minor amendments to be considered at May Full Council. This new structure specifically identifies a pot of CIL funding that can be directed to projects that directly address the climate emergency or those which have a distinctive environmental benefit, as long as they meet the base criteria for CIL. Based on current CIL collections this part of the CIL pot equates to circa £700,000.

## **Work of the Climate Change Steering Group**

21. The CCSG has met three times since the previous update. The CCSG has agreed a long list of projects, attached at Appendix A, which will be progressed by the new project officer in due course.
22. Four projects in the list have been considered as suitable for CIL funding and have been put on the funding list to be considered by the Strategic CIL Allocations Panel at their up-coming meeting.
23. The 'Green Tips' and a staff 'Digital Suggestion Box' projects have now been substantively completed although officers are still considering how best the proposal for a 'public' digital suggestion box can be implemented.

## **Next Steps**

24. Following the appointment of the two new officers, it will be important to establish a programme of work and project delivery that continues to drive and accelerate the 'net carbon-zero' ambitions of the Council.
25. In addition to this the Council has contracted the Sussex Wildlife Trust to undertake a review of the current action plan and project proposals. They will be making recommendations towards the end of May which will then be considered by the CCSG before being presented to this Committee at its next review of the strategy in six months.

## **Conclusion**

26. Progress on the delivery of the Environment Strategy and action plan remains slow. There is, however, a renewed focus within the CCSG which is now meeting more regularly and driving the policy agenda of the Council's climate change ambitions. The new staff resourcing will make a significant impact on the ability of the Council to delivery against its aims and the work of the Sussex Wildlife Trust will be important in the continued development of the Council's action plan and how we focus our resources.

## **Environmental implications**

27. 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

Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston
Report Contact Officer:	Ben Hook / Deborah Kenneally
e-mail address:	<a href="mailto:Ben.hook@rother.gov.uk">Ben.hook@rother.gov.uk</a> / <a href="mailto:deborah.kenneally@rother.gov.uk">deborah.kenneally@rother.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Appendix A - Projects
Relevant previous Minutes:	N/A
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None

## PROJECTS

RDC Deliverable (Corporate)	RDC Deliverable (District)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Party Deliverable (RDC Partnership)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Green Asset Management Plan (CP)</li> <li>- Electric bike hire</li> <li>- Electric vehicle pool for staff</li> <li>- Formalise flexible working</li> <li>- Pollinator and pesticide policy</li> <li>- Officer working group – Green Team</li> <li>- Real time display on Town Hall to show how much is being generated by solar panels/ Meet the Target page on the website</li> <li>- Renovate Town Hall bike shelter</li> <li>- Survey of staff travel to work arrangements</li> <li>- Heat pumps on new housing and retrospectively</li> <li>- Improve signage on waste bins at bring sites</li> <li>- Plant more wildflower areas on Rother green spaces</li> <li>- Solar panels on leisure facilities, Rother buildings</li> <li>- Review ‘Grey Fleet’ for RDC Staff Travel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EV Charging Point in RDC Car Parks (CP)*</li> <li>- Top tips on My Alerts</li> <li>- Electric bike hire</li> <li>- Double tree cover</li> <li>- Verges campaign</li> <li>- Air quality monitors</li> <li>- Charging points for electric bikes*</li> <li>- Repair swap shop</li> <li>- Air quality measurement kit for cyclists</li> <li>- Heat pumps on new housing and retrospectively</li> <li>- Biodiversity audit for villages</li> <li>- Become a veg first District</li> <li>- Outdoor gyms to generate power*</li> <li>- Supply composters</li> <li>- Plant more wildflower areas on Rother green spaces</li> <li>- Rother Carbon Reduction Award for businesses</li> <li>- Have more solar bins for litter*</li> <li>- Consider subsidising the community bus services to go electric*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help village halls to install EVPs*</li> <li>- Incentivise drivers to go electric</li> <li>- Heat pumps on new housing and retrospectively</li> <li>- Increase public transport*</li> <li>- Biodiversity audit for villages</li> <li>- Pedestrianise streets in Rother Town Centres*</li> </ul>

(CP) = Included in the Corporate Programme

\* = Potential to apply CIL Funding