

Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	5 September 2022
Title:	Village Halls Energy Project
Report of:	Director - Place and Climate Change
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Field
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of Report:	To present details of the Village Halls Energy Project, with a view to gain approval to progress the project to both assessment and installation phases, as per the prioritisation process detailed herein, assigning the £500,000 as awarded by the Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy Allocations Panel.
Decision Type:	Key
Officer Recommendation(s):	Recommendation to COUNCIL: That the Village Halls Energy Project be included in the Council's Capital Programme with a budget of £500,000, to be funded from ring-fenced Community Infrastructure Levy strategic funding.

AND

It be **RESOLVED**: That:

- 1) subject to Full Council approval, delegated authority be granted to the Director – Place and Climate Change to accept the £500,000 grant from the Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy, for the purposes of delivering this project; and
- 2) delegated authority be granted to the Director – Place and Climate Change to procure the contractor/s required for both the assessment and installation phases and enter into any other contracts as necessary for the completion of the project works.

Introduction

1. At the Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy Allocations Panel's first meeting on 26 April 2022, infrastructure projects were identified to be invited to apply for Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding. Projects identified by the Council's Climate Change Steering Group were invited to apply to the Climate Emergency Bonus Fund (CEBF), a sub-fund established to support either in part or whole infrastructure projects which can demonstrate that they will make a significant contribution to the reduction of carbon emissions.

2. The Village Halls Energy Project aims to reduce the carbon footprints of Village and Community Halls across Rother by reducing their consumption of oil and gas, and decreasing electricity drawn from the national grid. An application for £500,000 from the CIL CEBF was submitted in June 2022. This was approved at the Strategic CIL Allocations Panel in July 2022.

The importance of Village Halls

3. Village Halls provide extensive economic, social and cultural benefits to our communities. Section 12.36 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy details the pivotal role that Village Halls play in Village Community life, the importance of their protection and the Council's ongoing commitment to provision for new, extended or refurbished facilities.
4. The Council declared a Climate emergency in Rother in November 2019 and has committed to become a carbon neutral district by 2030. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ([IPCC](#)) [reported in 2022](#) that the impact of current levels of global warming, which they have high confidence will reach the 1.5 degree limit of the Paris Agreement between 2030 and 2052, will persist for centuries, if not millennia. An overshoot of a 1.5 degree rise can only be achieved if CO2 emissions begin to decline in advance of 2030. Engagement with Village Halls has identified that many are ageing or otherwise inefficient buildings with high energy costs and therefore expected high levels of emissions - particularly those fuelled by oil. These venues must be decarbonised to meet the Council's net-zero target of 2030 and protect the future of the planet.
5. Climate change brings more extreme weather, including hotter, drier summers and wetter, stormier winters. In the face of increasingly probable severe weather events, the Council must also consider the potential for increased reliance on Rest Centres. Ensuring those halls designated as Rest Centres can operate when connection to the National Grid fails is of growing importance, and the Council must move away from using emergency diesel generators to sustainable, renewable energy generation in order to align with the net-zero pledge for Rother.
6. The Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions' (CREDS) [place-based carbon calculator](#) shows emissions from cars in Rother are almost 20% higher than the national average - a reflection of the rural nature of our district and limited public transport. A blueprint of public EVCP infrastructure in East Sussex developed by Urban Foresight in March 2022 detailed only six existing public Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) in Rother. Whilst projects to improve EVCP provision are in progress, they focus largely on urban areas. Rural residents, particularly those with a lack of in-curtilage parking, currently face a long wait for the opportunity to de-carbonise their personal vehicles. Some Village Halls could be ideally placed to provide a rural EVCP resource for their community.

Rother Village Hall provision and engagement

7. A review of the definition and provision of Village Halls has been undertaken by the Environment Projects Officer, in consultation with Action Rural Sussex. The agreed definition of "Village Halls" and halls considered eligible for this project is as follows:

Any charitable community facility whose primary purpose is to provide a venue for hire to the local community for economic, social and cultural purposes. Other venues which offer general hire however have a primary responsibility to a sub-section of the community, such as Scout/Guide huts, Sports Clubs and Church Halls, have been excluded from the scope of this project in the most part, with an exception for those which fall into Parish Council areas where there is no alternative community venue that fulfils the definition of “Village Hall”.

8. Through direct engagement with hall committees, 40 halls have been confirmed eligible for this project, 37 of which have already confirmed their desire to participate in principle. Efforts have been made to ensure at least one hall in every Parish Council area of Rother is invited to participate, however, to date, no eligible venues have been identified in the areas of Bodiam and Rye Foreign. The only identified eligible venue in Ashburnham and Penthurst has declined to participate.

Project outputs and outcomes

9. During Phase 1 of the project, site assessments will be completed to generate a bespoke report for all halls, prioritising measures for energy efficiency and decarbonisation in line with the energy hierarchy “Lean, Clean and Green”, taking a whole buildings approach:
 - Lean – increasing energy efficiency of the buildings themselves, for example through improved insulation, draft proofing or replacement doors and windows.
 - Clean – improving and decarbonising energy systems within the building, for example replacing oil / gas systems with more efficient or electric alternatives, low energy LED lighting, water saving taps and toilets and Smart meters / thermostats.
 - Green – considering feasibility for renewables, such as solar panels and batteries, and EVCPs.
10. The proposals will be reviewed and prioritised based on a range of factors approved by the Climate Change Steering Group on 26 June 2022:
 - a) potential emissions reduction with priority for halls relying on oil;
 - b) how regularly each hall is used by the community;
 - c) cost and payback timeframes;
 - d) whether the hall is a designated Rest Centre; and
 - e) accessibility of the hall.
11. A target date of March 2023 has been set to confirm and prioritise the best range of measures for installation which fall within the budget of the project.
12. Phase 2 will involve a procurement process to acquire suitable contractors for the works as detailed in Phase 1. Installations will be completed systematically between June 2023 – May 2024 until the full £500,000 budget is spent.

The main project outcomes are as follows:

13. District-wide emissions from the direct consumption of oil and gas will be reduced by reducing heat loss and replacing inefficient, high emission systems.
14. District-wide emissions from the consumption of electricity drawn from the National Grid will be reduced through efficiency measures and potential installation of renewables.
15. Income may be generated by halls from selling excess energy back to the national grid from solar arrays, or from EVCPs.
16. Halls may use their site assessment to identify additional carbon reduction and / or efficiency opportunities they may wish to explore outside of the boundaries of this project.
17. Improved EVCP provision unlocks the potential for local residents to switch to electric vehicles.

Funding

18. The full project budget of £500,000 was approved by the Strategic CIL Allocations Panel in July 2022. £42,000 is assigned to Phase 1 for site assessments and subsequent related surveys, quotes and detailed specifications. The remaining £458,000 will be dedicated to capital investment in Phase 2.
19. It is expected the cost of all measures identified in Phase 1 will far outweigh the project budget. Based on need and potential impact, applications for additional funds from future rounds of CIL funding and / or other sources to expand the project will be considered.
20. On completion of Phase 1, grants and funding opportunities that may be available to individual halls will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and support offered to the hall committees to apply for these where possible.

Key Risks

21. Listed below are some of the key risks and the relevant mitigations:

Risk Description	Mitigation
Scope – change in direction / eligibility / scope creep	Clear eligibility criteria have been set outlining which halls are eligible. Once site assessments are completed, a clear set of prioritisation criteria will be developed to fairly and transparently decide which measures at which sites are funded within the project budget.
Delays	Appropriate allocation of officer resource to oversee the project and robust procurement processes to identify providers that can meet the specified milestones.
Increase in costs of installations	Budgets will be closely monitored as the project progresses and include a contingency against any quotes. As it is

Risk Description	Mitigation
beyond the specified budget	anticipated that demand for this project will? outstrip feasible delivery within two years, a phased approach with additional bids for funding will be considered likely in the future. Alternative / additional funding streams will routinely be considered on a site by site basis.
Installations not meeting expected carbon emission reduction and / or energy efficiency levels	Quality site assessments will be completed by industry approved experts, giving clear expected financial and carbon offset returns for each proposal. Only industry approved experts will be considered for installations.
Insufficient resource for project oversight	Whilst led by the Environment Project Officer, consideration will be given to delegate various aspects of the project to other specialised officers where required and appropriate.
Failure to procure suitable contractor/s	Diligent procurement processes will be followed. Research and engagement with stakeholders and local experts has been conducted to identify appropriate contractors for both phases.

Monitoring

22. In order to measure the impact of the project we will seek to undertake baselining for all those halls chosen for the first phase. Following the completion of the project we will be able to measure the direct impact on energy usage and carbon output giving us a 'carbon saved' figure for the scheme.

Conclusion

23. This project directly links to the strategic objective within the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy 'to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts and to use natural resources efficiently', specifically the objective "to reduce carbon emissions and move towards a low carbon future".
24. The vision of the Council's Corporate Plan places residents at the heart of what we do whilst delivering key objectives, which include protecting our natural environment and tackling climate change. The project also supports the Environment Strategy 2020 – 2030, promoting green economy, improving air quality and sustainable transport provision, providing sustainable energy and decarbonising existing buildings.

Financial Implications

25. The project will be a demonstration of the Council's execution of the CIL, specifically the CEBF, implemented for infrastructure projects of this type that will drive a reduction in emissions. Supplementary funding from local schemes and grants will be considered and applied for where applicable (to be identified on completion of Phase 1).

Environmental

26. The project will deliver a reduction in local emissions through a reduction in reliance on fossil fuels, decreased consumption of energy through efficiency measures, increase in generation of renewable energy, and potential to provide EVCPs to encourage residents to switch to low emission vehicles.
27. This project will demonstrate both locally and nationally, the Council's commitment to our Environmental Strategy and Core Plan, as well as providing a leading example to drive further carbon reducing change within our communities.

Sustainability

28. Reducing their reliance on fossil fuels and installing renewable energy generation and storage, where feasible and economical, will improve the sustainability of our Village Halls.

Risk Management

29. A full project risk register has been developed and will be maintained through the lifetime of the project.

Equalities and Diversity

30. An equality impact assessment has been completed and through consultation with the Equalities Officer, it has been agreed that each participating hall will be asked to provide their Access Statement and confirm that all areas of the venue and toilets are fully accessible. In the event of any uncertainty, the Equalities Officer will conduct site visits to ascertain the extent of accessibility. A higher weighting will be awarded during the prioritisation exercise to those venues which are fully accessible to accommodate the needs of all users in line with statutory requirements, promoting inclusivity, diversity and wellbeing.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Yes
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	Yes	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	Yes		

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Appendices:	None
Relevant Previous Minutes:	CCSG 21/12: February 2022 CB20/20: September 2020
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None