

CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP

28 September 2023

Minutes of the Climate Change Steering Group “informal” meeting held remotely on Thursday 28 September 2023 at 2:00pm.

Members of the Steering Group Present: Councillors K.M. Field (Chair), S.J. Coleman, P.J. Gray, P.N. Osborne and S.M. Prochak.

Other Members present: Councillors S. Burton, Mrs. V. Cook, S.B. McGurk, C. Pearce (in part) and A. Rathbone Ariel (in part).

Advisory Officers Present: Director – Place and Climate Change (in part), Environment Strategy Officer, Project Officer (Environment) and Democratic Services Officer.

CCSG23/01. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(1)

There were no apologies for absence.

CCSG23/02. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

(2)

There were no declarations of interest made.

**CCSG23/03. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 27 APRIL 2023 –
MATTERS ARISING**

(3)

Progress was sought on the Electric Bike Scheme. Members were advised that a Cycle to Work Roadshow was relaunched at the Town Hall in the summer and all staff were being encouraged to use low carbon travel options, where possible. At present, there was no secure covered / shelter facilities for bicycles at the Town Hall; this was currently being investigated and would be financed via the Human Resources department. For security purposes, the shelter would be located in the rear car park (not in public view). It was understood that electric bicycle batteries were removable and could be charged inside the Town Hall, subject to PAT testing.

Concerns were raised that in-house funding was limited for smaller carbon reduction projects and that, in general, external funding opportunities would need to be sourced. It was clarified that Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy funding could only be applied for and used for the larger infrastructure type projects.

The Director – Place and Climate Change advised that a £104,000 annual budget was assigned to the climate projects, which included funding for the Environment Strategy Officer and Project Officer (Environment) posts. This funding had also been used for the Couch to Carbon Zero Scheme and carbon literacy training.

CCSG23/04. **PROJECTS SUMMARY – UPDATE**

(4)

The Project Officer (Environment) updated the Climate Change Steering Group on the completed, ongoing, outstanding short, medium and long-term projects. The following project / objectives had been updated since the last meeting:

- Evaluate & Reduce Council Staff Travel Emissions: Green Team priorities were a) publish staff commuter survey findings (completed); b) promote active travel, public transport and low emission vehicles providing costs (w/c 25 September 2023); c) explore adopting staff benefit packages regarding public transport and low emission vehicles; and d) ensure team agreements supported home and office working including the environmental impact on travel.
- Electric Vehicle Charging Points in Council Car Parks: On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme funding still to be realised. Enquiries were underway to explore 100% supplier funded models that did not rely on funding.
- Improve Tree cover in Bexhill: Over 200 trees were planted in Spring 2023; approximately 100 trees were scheduled to be planted in Autumn / Winter 2023. Bexhill was recognised as a Tree City of the World. An application was being considered to the Coronation Living Heritage Fund, which would allow the Council to plant 'micro woods' in urban areas and offer grants for community orchards.
- Biodiversity Audit: Site audits had been completed; a report and findings would be presented at the meeting scheduled to be held on 30 November 2023.
- Reduce Village Halls Carbon Emissions and Install Electric Vehicle Charging Points: Phase 1 was completed in June with bespoke Net Zero Plans issued to 39 participating halls. Grant funding offers were being drafted and would be issued to halls as soon as possible. Additional funding options were being explored.
- Local Plan: The latest update on the Local Plan was detailed on the Council's website at the following link: [Local Plan Review – Rother District Council](#).
- Plant More Wildflower Areas on Green Spaces: Biodiversity Audit surveys for 23 Council-owned green assets, outside Bexhill had been completed. Reports with recommendations for biodiversity enhancements were expected by the end of November 2023.
- Meet the Target Page on the Council Website for Tree Coverage: Available on the Council's website at the following link: [Trees – Rother District Council](#)
- Incentivise Parish and Town Councils to adopt Climate Emergency Policies and encourage Biodiversity Audits: The Environment Strategy Officer (ESO) had attended three Battle Town Council (BTC) Climate and Ecology Committee meetings where key actions

to reduce emissions were identified. BTC were calculating their operational emissions. Salehurst and Robertsbridge Parish Council had declared a climate and ecological emergency; the ESO would sit on their working group and assist with climate action planning. The ESO had attended Ashburnham and Penhurst Parish Council, East Guldeford Parish meeting and Brede Parish Council and presented a report on declaring a climate and ecological emergency including next steps. The ESO had provided climate and ecological emergency information to Brightling and Udimore Parish Councils.

- Green Asset Management Plan: Conversations were underway to define “Green Asset Management” and how this might align with the strategic asset management plan scheduled to be developed.
- Develop a Plan to ensure all Rother District Council assets are Carbon Neutral: The Environment Strategy was currently being reviewed and would be published by the end of 2023; it would include a decarbonisation strategy. In September 2023, the boilers in both Town Hall buildings were replaced with energy efficient condensing gas boilers; significant carbon emission savings were anticipated.
- Low Carbon Energy / Heat Pumps on New Housing and Retrospectively: 566 registrations were made by Rother residents to Solar Together Spring 2023. 115 households had paid for installations with 23 completed to date.
- Promote Repair Swap Shops: Robertsbridge Repair Café was promoted in EcoTips on the Council’s website (September 2023).
- Increase Use of Public Transport and Active Travel: Flexi bus and £2 Government bus fare cap was promoted on all Council communication platforms.

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- Frustration was expressed that projects were progressing at a slow “drawn out” pace e.g. Village Halls etc. The Project Officer (Environment) advised that it was important detailed assessment / surveys were completed, as some buildings did not consume enough electricity for them to warrant having solar panels installed; it was a complex decision-making process. Other carbon reduction opportunities would be explored, such as heating, insulation, glazing systems etc. It was important that data was collated to see what the most appropriate option for each building was. It was agreed that lessons should be learnt and shared from projects that had been successfully implemented.
- Members agreed that best practice guidance / opportunities should be disseminated via Rother Association of Local Council (RALC) meetings.

CCSG23/05. CLIMATE STRATEGY REFRESH – VERBAL UPDATE

(5)

The Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) was updated on the Council’s Climate Strategy 2030. Since the Council’s Climate Emergency Declaration in September 2019, significant work had progressed regarding the Council’s Climate Strategy. The existing strategy consisted of eight priorities including 45 pledges. Following on

from the consultation responses received in 2020, data / evidence collated, policy changes, and best practice initiatives sourced from other similar local authorities, it was considered an opportune time to reconsider the priorities / pledges and completely refresh the strategy.

It was proposed to reword the Council's Strategy Development – Vision to *“By 2030, Rother will be a carbon-neutral district where climate-resilient communities are well-equipped to deal with the challenges of climate change and are no longer contributing to global warming.”*

The Environment Strategy Officer advised that the revised strategy would be considered at the next meeting of the CCSG scheduled to be held on Thursday 26 October 2023 at 2:00pm.

It was anticipated that the new Climate Strategy would be fully approved and adopted by the end of 2023.

CCSG23/06. LOCAL AREA ENERGY PLANS (LAEPS) – VERBAL UPDATE

(6)

The Environment Strategy Officer updated the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) on Local Area Energy Plans (LAEP) which were being commissioned by some local authorities who were looking to create a plan to help address power supply and meet their net zero goals and climate emergency declarations.

Discussions with UK Power Networks (UKPN) and Energy Systems Catapult (ESC) had confirmed that it would cost approximately £100,000 to complete a full LAEP over a period of one year for the Council. No funding was available. Discussions with ESC suggested that a countywide approach would be more appropriate, and currently regular discussions were being held with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and the Climate Officers from Eastbourne Borough Council and Wealden and Lewes District Councils. It was understood that ESCC had already unsuccessfully applied for funding. Feedback was also being sought from local energy groups regarding best practice and future solutions / technologies etc.

As a full LAEP was unaffordable, it was proposed to produce a LAEP for decarbonising heat only; a funding application was in progress, and the CCSG would be kept abreast of developments. Members agreed that it was essential that the Council worked alongside all relevant partners / stakeholders to progress the LAEP.

CCSG23/07. PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE – VERBAL UPDATE

(7)

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Climate Change Steering Group would be a “formal” meeting and held in the public domain. The meeting would be held on MS Teams and webcast live. The Council's amended Climate Strategy would be reviewed and considered at this meeting.

ACTION 1: That the meeting scheduled to be held on Thursday 26 October 2023, be a “formal” meeting, held in the public domain and webcast live (Democratic Services).

CCSG23/08. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(8)

The following any other business items were discussed:

- **Weedkiller:** Concern was aired that toxic weedkiller products were being used to control the spread of weeds across the district. Members were advised that East Sussex County Council was responsible for the maintenance / upkeep of the district’s public pathways and roads. It was clarified that ‘NO’ pesticides weedkillers were used on all Council-owned open spaces by the Council’s Grounds Maintenance and Arboriculture Contractor.
- **Wildflowers – Marina, Bexhill:** Clarity was sought regarding the future of the wildflower beds at Marina, Bexhill. Mixed views had been expressed regarding whether the wildflowers should remain or be replaced by more traditional / seasonal flowers / planting. It was understood that Councillor Bayliss was sourcing volunteer interest to take over the responsibility of the upkeep of these beds. Members were advised that, to date, no decision on the future of the flowerbeds had been made. It was agreed that a cost-effective / appropriate planting scheme should be adopted and where possible, best practice followed. It was difficult to please all, as some people would prefer wildflowers (which required little watering and were sustainable) and others more traditional planting (which would require continuous maintenance). The Council would be open to community-led / volunteer group suggestions. It was recommended that the Council produced a best practice “planting” guide; this was already in the process of being developed.
- **Bexhill in Bloom:** Councillor Gray advised that Bexhill had recently won a ‘Gold Award’. She felt certain that the wildflower beds had helped to secure this honour for the town.
- **EcoTip:** Members were encouraged to forward any EcoTips to the Environment Strategy Officer to upload to the Council’s Climate Directory on the website.

CCSG23/09. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

(9)

The date of the next “formal” meeting was arranged for Thursday 26 October 2023 at 2:00pm to be held remotely on MS Teams.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 3:09pm

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