

## Rother District Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	11 December 2023
<b>Title:</b>	Climate Strategy 2023
<b>Report of:</b>	Ben Hook, Director – Place and Climate Change
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Field
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To consider the recommendation arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 November 2023, regarding the Council’s Climate Strategy 2023. The report and recommendations arising are reproduced below and the Minutes of that meeting (Appendix G) should be read in conjunction with this report.
<b>Decision Type:</b>	Key
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	<b>Recommendation to COUNCIL:</b> That the draft Climate Strategy be approved and adopted.
<b>Reason for Recommendations:</b>	To summarise the work of the Climate Strategy refresh and obtain approval from full Council to adopt the revised Strategy.

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### Introduction

1. To tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergencies, the strategy to reduce emissions and create a cleaner, greener, more equitable district must evolve. The strategy review carried out in 2022/23 in partnership with stakeholders and the wider community, has resulted in the refreshed Climate Strategy (CS).
2. The CS sets out how the Council will use its powers and influence to make Rother District carbon neutral, and reduce the Council’s operational emissions to Net Zero, by 2030.
3. This report presents the findings of the Environment Strategy 2020 review, the additional evidence base required for the strategy refresh, stakeholder engagement, and the final copy for the CS (Appendix A).
4. The layout of the CS will be designed by a professional graphic designer and copy editor once the copy is agreed.

### Background

5. On 16 September 2019, Rother District Council (RDC) formally declared a Climate Emergency at full Council and committed to:

*Pledge to do what is within our powers, to make Rother District carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions.*

6. In 2020, the Council’s response to the Climate Emergency was developed in consultation with local partners and residents. On 21 September 2020, the Environment Strategy 2020 was adopted by the Council.
7. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the publication of the Action Plan, but significant steps have been taken by the Council to reduce emissions both across the district and operationally. The Council’s progress on the Environment Strategy 2020 is published on the Climate Emergency web pages.
8. Climate awareness, Climate Emergency Declarations, and Local Authority Environment Strategies were relatively new in 2019/20. Climate science and public awareness have increased considerably in the relatively short time since. The COVID-19 pandemic has also changed our lives in many ways and the public response demonstrates how quickly behaviour can change when resourced and motivated.
9. Considering these changes, the Council agreed to refresh the Environment Strategy in 2022 and the CS has been produced.

### **Environment Strategy Review**

10. A review of the Environment Strategy 2020 highlighted the following areas for improvement:
  - Emissions evidence-based – District and Organisational.
  - Changes to national policy – Environment Act 2021.
  - Rother-specific climate risks and opportunities.
  - Climate Action Plan – to direct delivery.

### **2020 Consultation Review**

11. The public consultation for the Environment Strategy ran from March – May 2020. The consultation received 108 individual responses and 14 organisations responded.
12. A summary of the responses is provided in the table below:

What could I do to reduce the impact my household and I have on the environment?	What support could the Council provide me to help me reduce my impact on the environment?	What should the Council be doing to reduce its impact on the environment?	Is there anything missing from the draft action plan that we should consider including?	Please let us know if you have any other comments regarding the proposed Environment Strategy
Energy efficiency	Waste – recycling, food waste, compost bins, go digital	Lead by example – buildings	Food waste	Positive comments

Transport – EV, bike, drive less	Transport – EV charging points, cycle routes, more busses	Lead by example – staff travel	Biodiversity	Get on with it
Renewable energy	Planning Permission	Planning permission	Planning permission – solar panels	Don't exclude those who can't afford to be green
Waste	Encourage community action	Reduce waste the council produces	Ban bonfires	Silly jargon

## Best Practice

- The following local authority climate strategies were reviewed for best practice.
- Hastings Borough Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, and Lewes District Council have all updated their strategies in the last year and Wealden District Council is about to embark on a strategy refresh.

Neighbouring Authorities	Climate Emergency UK – 2022 top rated	Similar – Emissions profile, deprivation, rural-urban population density	Others
Hastings BC	Somerset West and Taunton Council	Norfolk CC	Bristol One City
Wealden DC	Staffordshire Moorlands DC	Suffolk CC	North Norfolk DC
Eastbourne BC	East Devon DC	East Lindsey DC	Swale BC
Lewes DC			Horsham DC
East Sussex CC			Surrey CC
Folkestone and Hythe DC			Kent CC
Ashford BC			Winchester CC
Tunbridge Wells BC			

## Evidence Base

- Both Rother district and operational GHG emissions were included in the evidence base for the CS (Appendix B and C).
- Other RDC strategic documents including the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the emerging Local Plan, annual Air Quality Assessments, and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment have formed part of the evidence base for the CS.

## Stakeholder Engagement

- Extensive stakeholder engagement has been a core part of this strategy review. The CS Engagement Tracker in Appendix D lists the occasions when the Environment Strategy Officer has presented, discussed, or otherwise engaged

with stakeholders on the refresh. The Tracker does not include discussions about the CS via email. This engagement is ongoing as stakeholders respond to the CS.

## Guiding Principles

18. The CS refresh identified the need for Guiding Principles which can be seen below. The Guiding Principles ensure the Council is using its position and influence to lead by example, work in partnership, and ensure no one is left behind.

Act now	Work in partnership	Continuously improve	Communicate impact	Be Fair
The Council recognises the urgency and will take action commensurate to the challenge.	The Council recognises its own limitations and the scale of the challenge. The Council will continue to work in partnership to achieve its goals.	The Council will measure, review, and update the Climate Strategy and Climate Action Plan regularly to ensure it remains relevant and effective.	The Council will communicate its impact and climate action to encourage others.	The Council will ensure the transition is fair. This means ensuring the benefits of climate action are accessible to all and no one is excluded.

## Vision

19. The vision has been updated and aligns with the refreshed CS.
20. *A climate-resilient Rother where communities are well-equipped to deal with the challenges of climate change and are no longer contributing to global warming.*

## Aims and Objectives

21. The following aims and objectives have been proposed. They reflect the CS vision and the Council's 2019 pledge.

### Aim

The aim of this strategy is to enable, encourage, and accelerate the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions across the district to net zero by 2030.

### Objectives

- The built environment will be low carbon and climate resilient.
- The need to travel will be reduced, those that do will be on foot, bike, public transport, or in a low/zero carbon vehicle.
- The district will produce less waste and support a thriving circular economy.
- Nature will be in recovery across the district.
- Renewable energy will be produced locally.

## The Climate Strategy

22. Each of the five action areas is addressed within the CS with details of both the challenge and the Council’s approach explained.
23. Each action area supports one of the CS Objectives and has two or three outcomes which are displayed in the table below:

Vision	A climate-resilient Rother where communities are well-equipped to deal with the changing climate and are no longer contributing to global warming				
Overall Impact Measure	Greenhouse Gas Emissions reduced to 10% of 2019 baseline and nature in recovery across the district				
Theme	Buildings and Energy Efficiency	Transport	Resource Consumption and Waste	Biodiversity and Land Use	Energy Generation
Strategic Goals (Outcomes)	1. The built environment will be low-carbon and climate-resilient	2. The need to travel will be reduced, those that do will be on foot, bike, public transport, or EV	3. The district will produce less waste and support a thriving circular economy	4. Nature will be in recovery across the district	5. Renewable energy will be produced locally
Measure of success - Objectives (Outputs)	<p>Mass retrofit of existing buildings</p> <p>New buildings are net zero or carbon negative</p>	<p>Sustainable forms of transport supported through the planning system</p> <p>Facilitate the transition to LZC vehicles across the district</p> <p>A programme of activities to promote active travel across the district</p>	<p>Reduced consumption of resources and waste</p> <p>Increased repair, reuse, and recycling of goods and materials</p>	<p>Halt land and marine species decline</p> <p>Increased biodiversity and carbon sequestration</p>	<p>Solar PV on all suitable roof space</p> <p>Support renewable energy generation</p>

## Climate Action Plan

24. A three-year Climate Action Plan has been produced to direct delivery of the CS (Appendix E). The Climate Action Plan is a working document.
25. The Climate Action Plan for 2027-2030 will be developed in 2026.

## Options

26. The Council considered continuing with the existing Environment Strategy, but the evidence base included in the CS refresh demonstrates the need to focus the Council’s resources on supporting emission reductions in the five action areas of Buildings and Energy Efficiency, Transport, Resource Consumption and Waste, Biodiversity and Land Use and Energy Generation.

## Conclusion

27. The CS is a well-researched, evidence-based document that will guide the Council's climate action and enable to Council to meet its pledge to do what is within its powers to make Rother a carbon-neutral district.
28. The Climate Action Plan will direct delivery and ensure the Council is doing what is within its powers to reduce emissions to net zero and make Rother climate resilient.

## Financial Implications

29. The Council has an Environment Strategy budget to coordinate and deliver operational and district-wide emission reduction, but it will need to secure alternative funding to deliver on the ambitious 2030 target.

## Environmental

30. The CS builds upon the work of the Environment Strategy 2020. It will guide the Council's climate action and enable to Council to meet its pledge to do what is within its powers to make Rother a carbon-neutral district.

## Equalities and Diversity

31. The impacts of climate change are not felt equally by residents in Rother. The CS recognises those inequalities and through the Guiding Principles, will ensure a just transition to a low-carbon society for all residents. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken (Appendix F).

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
Risk Management	No	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	A Climate Strategy B Rother District Emissions 2021 C RDC Annual Operational Carbon Emissions 22/23 D Climate Strategy Engagement Tracker E Climate Action Plan F Climate Strategy Equalities Impact Assessment G Extract from OSC Minutes
Relevant previous Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting – 20 November 2023****OSC23/38. CLIMATE STRATEGY**

(7)

Members received the report of the Environment Strategy Officer, which summarised the work of the Climate Strategy refresh and provided the resulting draft Climate Strategy (CS) to be considered for onward approval and adoption.

In 2022/23, in partnership with stakeholders and the local community, a review of the Council's strategy to reduce emissions and create a cleaner, greener, more equitable district was completed, alongside a review of the Environment Strategy 2020. The resulting CS detailed how the Council would use its powers and influence to make the district carbon neutral and reduce its operational emissions to Net Zero by 2030.

The report before Members detailed the findings of the Environment Strategy 2020 review, the additional evidence base required for the strategy refresh and stakeholder engagement information. The draft CS was attached at Appendix A to the report. The layout / design of CS would be professionally completed by a graphic designer and copy editor.

The review of the Environment Strategy 2020 highlighted the following areas for improvement: Emissions evidence-based – District and Organisational; Changes to national policy – Environment Act 2021; Rother-specific climate risks and opportunities; and Climate Action Plan – to direct delivery.

Both Rother district and operational greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were included in the evidence base for the CS, attached at Appendices B and C to the report. Other Council strategic documents, including the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the emerging Local Plan, annual Air Quality Assessments, and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, also formed part of the evidence base for the CS. Appendix D to the report contained the CS Engagement Tracker, which listed all occasions when the Environment Strategy Officer had presented, discussed or otherwise engaged with stakeholders on the refresh, but did not include discussions via email.

The aim of the CS was to enable, encourage and accelerate the reduction of GHG emissions across the district to net zero by 2030. The CS outlined its five objectives with five action areas (Buildings and Energy Efficiency, Transport, Resource Consumption and Waste, Biodiversity and Land Use and Energy Generation), which detailed the challenges and the Council's approach. A three-year Climate Action Plan had been produced to direct delivery of the CS and was attached to the report at Appendix E; this was a working document.

The Council had considered continuing with the existing Environment Strategy, but the evidence base included in the CS refresh demonstrated the need to focus the Council's resources on supporting emission reductions in the five action areas. The CS was a well-researched,

evidence-based document that would guide the Council's climate action and enable to Council to meet its pledge to do what was within its powers to make Rother a carbon-neutral district.

Councillor Field, Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environmental, Licensing, Community Safety, Climate Strategy and Joint Waste Contract thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee, and the Environment Strategy Officer for her hard work in developing the refreshed CS. The CS proposed the Council's first Climate Action Plan and a lot of engagement had taken place with stakeholders throughout its development.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted during the discussions:

- Members were pleased to note that the CS was clear, easy to read and understandable;
- Members raised concerns about green issues for older properties across the district, in particular listed buildings and those properties owned by Southern Housing;
- climate friendly initiatives were central to new housing within the Local Plan;
- carbon literacy training was being rolled out to all Council officers and was being delivered in-house. Further opportunities would be available for Member training also. It was not possible for officers to deliver training within schools as the training toolkit required the trainer to be based in the school, but discussions were taking place with neighbouring authorities to deliver to their Members and officers;
- reducing transport emissions was key;
- the action plan had been written with the current financial situation in mind. Funding had already been secured for some actions, but others would require additional funding to be applied for;
- an adaptation report, detailing how the Council was dealing with the current impacts of Climate Change would be forthcoming;
- East Sussex County Council had commenced discussions about adaptations for the county and initiatives would be coming forward from Central Government in due course, which the Council had already expressed an interest in;
- the objectives and action plan focused on factors that the Council could directly influence and would be monitored by the CCSG;
- the CS would remain a living document, to be adapted and amended as new research and technology emerged;
- a 'green directory' could be developed which gave details of individuals / organisations that provided 'green' goods or services; and
- the CS should ensure connectivity between rural and urban communities and address the differing dynamics.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet be requested to consider that the draft Climate Strategy be recommended to Council for approval and adoption.

(When it first became apparent, Councillors Clark, Field each declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Members of East Sussex County



Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

(When it first became apparent, Councillor Maynard declared a Personal Interest in this matter as an Executive Member of East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).