

Subject:	Sussex Energy Update
Date of Meeting:	28 January 2025
Report of:	Chair, Greater Brighton Economic Board
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Ward(s) affected:	All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 On 16th July 2024 the Greater Brighton Economic Board (“the Board”) supported the launch of the Sussex Energy mission.
- 1.2 An update was provided in the October Board meeting highlighting the progress made since the launch event.
- 1.3 This report gives a further Sussex Energy update setting out the work undertaken since October and the next steps in developing the mission.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Board notes the progress on Sussex Energy. The key update is a Core Network of sustainability experts has been established (including representatives from the 3 upper tier authorities) to steer Sussex Energy.
- 2.2 That the Board notes this is a Sussex wide initiative, dependent on building good working relationships against a politically sensitive backdrop of devolution conversations.
- 2.3 That the Board supports the next steps needed to take Sussex Energy forward as set out in section 3.10.
- 2.4 That the Board agrees to receive a further update on Sussex Energy at the March 2025 Board meeting.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Sussex Energy aims to achieve net zero energy status by 2040. This ambitious goal seeks to ensure that our community's energy use equals the amount of zero-carbon energy generated locally, thereby enhancing energy security, driving down energy bills and addressing urgent climate concerns, at the same time as driving economic growth.

- 3.2 This is a Sussex wide mission. There are existing Sussex wide, energy related, working relationships run by a mix of organisations (e.g. Sussex Solar Together, Hydrogen Sussex) connecting sub-groups of the energy sector. Similarly, there are also groups within geographies of Sussex (e.g. East Sussex County Council Climate Group, West Sussex Affordable Energy Partnership). These connections are a good foundation for Sussex Energy to build on. Knowledge of the existing collaboration structures and ongoing work needs to be kept in mind to avoid duplication and ensure efficient use of individual's time and effort. Sussex Energy working relationships are being built with individuals buying into the benefits of collaboration, and networks are being designed, in parallel with devolution conversations, making for a politically sensitive environment. The impact is that it takes time to build these relationships in a step-by-step manner.
- 3.3 For Sussex Energy to be successful, it is important it is co-created with organisations who are playing an active role in low carbon energy work. This will give the mission the best chance of being effective, prioritising the most needed outcomes, leveraging (and avoiding duplication of) the work of other projects / organisations and increase commitment to the mission. To enable this strong foundation for the mission, the focus has been on building a network of experts. A core network has been established to shape Sussex Energy. A Sussex Energy Forum is being proposed to be set up to engage a wider network.

Core Network

- 3.4 The first step to forming this has been engaging the sustainability leads within a core network of Local Authorities (including the 3 Sussex upper tier authorities). Meetings have been held in the last few months to establish this core group and distil the benefits of collaborating on Sussex Energy, and a regular meeting series is now in place involving sustainability individuals from other organisations too, including NHS Sussex and the Greater South East Net Zero Hub. At a high level the benefits of collaborating are:
- i. Sharing knowledge, experience and templates:
 - a. Leveraging best practice and solutions to save effort.
 - b. Using the power of the hive mind.
 - ii. Sharing solutions and services:
 - a. Sharing expert resources, benefitting from split cost and cross pollination of knowledge.
 - iii. Being greater than the sum of our parts:
 - a. Having one voice for external organisations to increase efficiency and problem-solving power.
 - b. Uniting on policies at scale to drive change.
 - iv. Using economies of scale to accelerate the energy transition:
 - a. Aggregating demand for products to both negotiate a better price for everyone.
 - b. Aggregating demand for a skill (e.g. a pipeline of retrofitting work) to attract / develop specialists due to the certainty a pipeline provides.
 - v. Developing scaled, collaborative solutions to transform the energy transition:
 - a. Generating interest of central government / private investors for funding and support by making the area known for it's energy work, for being joined up and successful at de-risking energy projects.

- b. Assessing the region strategically for where the best areas are for renewable energy, considering existing plans.
- 3.5 This group will expand to include other key organisations whilst keeping small enough to maintain momentum and enable sharing to effectively work together to steer the Sussex Energy programme development, helping to unlock opportunities and identify opportunities for scaling up and attracting funding.

Sussex Energy Forum

- 3.6 There has been engagement with a wider group of sustainability experts from all Sussex Local Authorities (e.g. contacts working on climate, social housing, council owned buildings, etc.), Universities, Community Energy Organisations, South Downs National Park Authority, businesses, etc. to make them aware of Sussex Energy, keep them updated on the progress and understand their perspectives and challenges.
- 3.7 To build this wider network, a Sussex Energy forum is proposed to allow ongoing engagement in a regular session as a way to showcase what different organisations are working on, discuss challenges, best practice and connect with external speakers to cross pollinate learning. This will enable input to the Sussex Energy programme development, ensuring that relevant activities are collated at the same time as building relationships and knowledge. This is inspired by the successful [Sussex Nature Partnership](#) which runs something similar and has been received positively.

3.8 Other Progress since October 2024

- i. A register of energy experience is being established with organisations filling in information about what they're working on currently, in the past and future ambitions and what skills/experience the individuals have. This will be used to a) help the network to connect effectively with the expertise they need and b) to identify working groups with expertise in different themes (energy production, energy use reduction, skills and jobs) for the core network to work with on programme development.
- ii. A meeting was organised by [Community Energy South](#) between community energy organisations and a Deputy Director from Great British Energy and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ). The objective was to better understand how to scale up the work of community energy organisations (through GB Energy's Local Power Plan) by talking through the challenges of the sector. For example:
 - a. Co-ordination, leadership and direction needed to scale up community energy work.
 - b. Multi-year funding needed to give certainty to community energy work.
 - c. Landlords are not incentivised to make energy changes to their buildings because they do not benefit, the tenants do. This applies both to commercial landlords and the private rented sector where fuel poverty in low energy rated properties is an issue.
 - d. Community energy organisations need introductions and promotion. People don't know they exist / are dubious whether their offer is genuine because they are used to energy companies trying to make a huge profit so are looking for the hidden catch.

- e. Local authority procurement frameworks cause an administrative barrier to community energy organisation work.
 - f. The local authority discussion recognised that if organisations work independently, there is a limit on what can be done to decarbonise energy, but working together (for example through Sussex Energy) allows the ambition to be scaled up.
 - iii. An email newsletter has been created to maintain engagement with a broad cross-section of local authorities and other organisations of relevance (approx. 200 people). The first of these newsletters was issued in December 2024.
 - iv. Greater Brighton Officers presented at a [Brighton Chamber of Commerce event](#) on 15 January to increase awareness of the Sussex Energy mission, alongside the Head of Net Zero from Brighton & Hove City Council presenting the city council's recent [decarbonisation pathway](#) work.
- 3.9 The focus of Sussex Energy will continue with an emphasis on developing the network and the sharing culture. This will help to cement pan-Sussex working in the energy space and lay the groundwork to deepen partnerships. For the work requiring deeper partnerships, a key team will be needed to drive forward the programme – Technical expertise, economic expertise and community energy organisation expertise needed to do feasibility work, project selection/development, baselining, etc. This will require external funding to establish. The key team will need the support of working groups of experts so these would be set up around the same time.
- 3.10 Next steps:
- Sussex Energy Core Network & Forum**
- i. Jan – March 2025: Establish regular core network meetings.
 - ii. March – May 2025: Plan Sussex Energy forum schedule with proposed speakers, audience, resource sharing, etc.
 - iii. June – August 2025: Launch Sussex Energy forum to allow wider network to build relationships and share knowledge / expertise / challenges.
 - iv. Sept - Nov 2025: Establish working groups.
- Delivery**
- v. March – June 2025: Identify 'quick win' priorities to start Sussex Energy momentum, medium term and long-term priorities. Start progressing delivery of 'quick win' priorities, dependent on capacity, skills and an enabling political environment.
 - vi. June – Aug 2025: Confirm capacity and skills required for delivery of the priorities and identify funding to target.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Board could provide funding directly for projects, but the impact would be far less than incubating collaborative working to attract funding into the region for energy solutions, culminating in the implementation of scaled solutions which could make a large impact to the UK net zero goals. The Government has highlighted decarbonisation of energy as a priority with aims to transition to a zero-carbon electricity system by 2030, create 650,000 new jobs by 2030 through investment in clean energy and infrastructure and install thousands of clean power projects which local people directly benefit from.

- 4.2 The Government's energy ambition confirms the right approach is an ambitious goal that the Sussex Energy mission aligns strongly with.
- 4.3 The Greater South East Net Zero Hub work with public sector organisations and their stakeholders to support the development and financing of local net zero projects to increase the number, scale and quality of projects. They will be part of the Sussex Energy Core Network and will support to progress Sussex Energy e.g. with their expertise and sector knowledge. However, they have limited resource and are covering large regions so are unable to deliver the scale or geographical focus of collaboration needed for Sussex Energy.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Community engagement is an important principle to Sussex Energy. The creation of the Sussex Energy email newsletter is an important step to building engagement across our communities.
- 5.2 The ongoing approach will vary depending on the proposed energy solution, from consulting the community, offering community ownership options to enabling communities to implement their own solutions. Community engagement options will be different for each working group / project but will be considered and prioritised.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Board is asked to agree the recommendations 2.1-2.4, which will mean the work to operationalise Sussex Energy will continue.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. From the July 2024 Sussex Energy report, a total of £100,000 was agreed to be set aside from the Greater Brighton Economic Board Operational Budget to support the working groups in delivering the net zero energy status by 2040. £50,000 of initial funding would be met from the 2024/25 Operational Budget. A further £50,000 committed in 2025/26.

Finance Officer Consulted: Haley Woollard, BHCC Head of Corporate Finance & Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Date: 17/01/25

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

Lawyer Consulted: Siobhan Fry
Date: 17/01/25

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Sussex Energy is aiming ensure that the benefits of the transition to net zero energy will be shared across the City Region, whilst addressing fuel poverty.

Sustainability Implications

- 7.4 The driving force behind Sussex Energy is to reduce carbon emissions and accelerate the journey to net zero, which will help protect the environment, enhance natural capital, limit the effects of climate change, and build resilience in key infrastructure and the supply of energy. This is the foundation of all work under the Sussex Energy umbrella.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

None