

Subject:	Sussex Energy Update
Date of Meeting:	2 April 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 subsequent Board meetings highlighting the progress made since the launch event.
- 1.3 This report gives a further Sussex Energy update setting out the work undertaken since the last Board meeting and the next steps in developing the mission.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Board notes the progress on Sussex Energy and notes the positive communication and engagement between officers from Local Authorities including East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council.
- 2.2 That the Board supports the next steps needed to take Sussex Energy forward as set out in the workstreams identified in section 3.5.
- 2.3 That the Board agrees to receive a further update on Sussex Energy at the next Board meeting.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Sussex Energy aims to achieve net zero energy status by 2040 in the Sussex and Brighton region. 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 priority for the Greater Brighton Economic Board members. Pace is needed to progress this in 2025/6 because climate change is cumulative, accelerating, and characterized by tipping points. This means delaying action makes solutions more challenging, costly, and potentially less effective.

3.3 Steering Group Terms of Reference being Developed

The Sussex Energy Core Network has been re-named the Sussex Energy Steering Group for the sake of clarity. The Group will provide strategic oversight, coordination, and leadership to stakeholders working towards energy neutrality in the region.

A Terms of Reference is being drafted to align on the purpose, objectives, membership, structure, governance and interactions of this Group. This document is still in draft but the following themes are proposed:

Objectives:

- To work collaboratively towards the mission. Group members will seek to work collaboratively and in partnership with each other, other organisations / groups / meetings / boards with similar objectives (e.g. Greater South East Net Zero Hub (GSENZH), the proposed Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority) the sector and our community - residents, businesses, institutions, and other interested parties. By working collaboratively as a region to progress the mission, rather than in competition, we can be more effective and not duplicate effort.
- To promote low-carbon energy solutions in Sussex and position the area as a leader in sustainable energy solutions, ensuring Sussex gains recognition for its pioneering work in the energy transition.
- To support local communities and businesses in the transition of the region to energy neutrality, fostering policy development, innovation, research, knowledge exchange, and development of the sector skills base to deliver energy solutions.
- To develop and oversee the implementation of a roadmap to energy neutrality, using the Sussex Energy Forum to inform and course-correct the direction.
- To design and implement effective, impactful sectoral solutions that demonstrate a regional pathway to clean economic growth. This to support the just transition to a net zero regional economy in line with national climate and energy policies.
- To target, resource and accelerate prioritised adoption of low carbon solutions across all carbon-intensive sectors. Primary, but not exclusive focus shall be on renewable energy generation, energy storage solutions, and energy efficiency measures.
- To inform the devolution and Local Government Reorganisation processes in support of delivery of environment and climate change ambitions.
- To secure funding to progress the mission.
- To monitor progress, evaluate impact, and adjust strategies accordingly.

Members: This group started in December with individuals from key local authorities building relationships and trust. This included positive communication and engagement between officers from East Sussex County Council Environment Team, West Sussex County Council Environment and Public Protection Directorate, and Brighton & Hove City Council Net Zero Team. It has grown to include representatives from NHS Sussex Together to Zero Team, University of Sussex Sustainability Team, University of Brighton Sustainability Team, South Downs National Park Authority Climate Change and Net Zero Team and Greater South East Net Zero Hub. The compact nature of this group has facilitated building relationships, sharing knowledge and starting discussions. However, it has been recognised that a wider range of perspectives are needed because energy has a large array of stakeholders, and this is a collaborative programme. As part of the Terms of Reference development, the group membership and other networks being formed are being reviewed to assess what additional voices are needed (e.g. businesses, skills, etc) and in which groups they are most helpful.

Members will be expected to actively contribute their expertise, resources, and networks to support the Group's mission.

Structure:

As the steering group grows, the larger group means more time is needed for discussion. To maintain momentum on the work, sub-groups will be formed to focus on progressing individual workstreams with the complete Steering Group to be used to share the progress and address any issues or decisions.

Governance:

A Sussex Energy Governance Board, project team, and working groups (topics TBD by work plan e.g. energy generation, energy efficiency, jobs & skills, transport, heat, smart energy, etc) are expected to be created once the work progresses and funding is secured, ensuring long-term strategic oversight and operational effectiveness.

The progress on Sussex Energy will be reported to the Greater Brighton Economic Board in the quarterly, public meetings for 2025/6.

Interface:

The Group will interface back with their organisations to progress Sussex Energy solutions and with the Sussex Energy Forum, which consists of people from a wider range of organisations wanting to collaborate on Sussex Energy and co-create it.

3.4 **Sussex Energy Roadmap to 2040**

A Roadmap has been developed (see appendix 1) to show the high-level stages to achieving the energy neutrality mission by 2040 (see 1st page of appendix Sussex Energy Roadmap 25th March 2025). This is an evolving document which needs to be able to flex to impacts such as government direction, actions of other organisations (e.g. the Regional Energy Strategic Plan, The Distribution Network Operator), funding availability, infrastructure constraints, resourcing etc. This Roadmap is split into 6 sections:

1. **Governance:** Setting up a Sussex Energy governance board, ongoing reporting to Boards (GBEB and any other relevant Boards including Local Authority boards across Sussex).
2. **Capacity:** Establishing a steering group, a Sussex Energy forum for collaboration, a programme team to drive forward the work and working groups of experts to input.
3. **Funding:** Securing funding for a programme team to drive forward the work. Part of their role would be to secure funding for projects and to develop a regional community energy fund to accelerate community and place-based solutions.
4. **Community and place-based solutions:** Energy solutions rolled out by an organisation in one site. *E.g. Solar PV on roof, retrofitting a block.* These solutions are already happening but organisations implementing them report challenges which slows down their work.
5. **Strategic system interventions:** Tackling challenges to accelerate the launch of community and place-based solutions. *E.g. How to incentivise landlords to implement energy generation and efficiency measures.* By showing success at these, it demonstrates the right people are working together to provide confidence to potential investors and develops working relationships to build on with collaboratively delivered scaled solutions.
6. **Scaled solutions:** Energy solutions requiring deep collaboration for strategic approach by multiple partners. *E.g. Solar/wind/battery farm, heat network, transport solutions, Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan.* These are needed to match the difference in the region's energy demand and zero carbon energy supply.

3.5 **Sussex Energy 2025 Plan** (see 2nd page of appendix Sussex Energy Roadmap 25th March 2025)

A plan of the work to be addressed in 2025 under Sussex Energy is in draft. It is subject to change because it needs to be able to flex to impacts such as government direction, actions of other organisations (e.g. the Regional Energy Strategic Plan, The Distribution Network Operator), funding availability, infrastructure constraints, resourcing etc. This mission is a Board priority and pace is needed in 2025/6 to set it up for success. The following work streams have been identified, each one has a high-level plan in the process of being defined and owners and steering sub-groups assigned to progress them.

1. **Devolution:** Government published the [Devolution White Paper](#) on 16 December setting out its new approach to English devolution. As a result of this, a [Mayoral Combined County Authority](#) (a type of Strategic Authority) has been proposed for Sussex and Brighton, comprising the administrative areas of Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council. This area has been selected to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme to achieve mayoral devolution at pace with mayoral elections due in May 2026. Within the Devolution White Paper, the Government has set out areas of competence. These are areas where Strategic Authorities will have a mandate to act strategically to drive growth as well as supporting the shaping of public services, where strategic level coordination adds value. One of the areas of competence is Environment and Climate Change. Sussex Energy would like to collaborate on shaping the Environment and Climate Change approach in the proposals for the Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority.
2. **Work Plan:** In order to identify immediate priorities for 2025, the issues that could be addressed need to be collated along with ideas of solutions to address them. These should be assessed against a criteria (e.g. technical, collaborative and legal complexity, speed of delivery, impact, etc.), informed by data and constraint factors such as current funding, resources, skills etc need to be taken into consideration to determine what is most beneficial and feasible to work on in 2025 and what should be assessed for 2026 when funding is secured and a programme team is onboarded. E.g. Communications is an important component of Sussex Energy (e.g. to make the area better known for its low carbon energy work, to promote available schemes to residents, to increase awareness in the able to pay market of actions to take) and this would be a project included in the work plan assessment.
3. **Funding:** A Sussex Energy programme team is needed to drive the mission forward to do feasibility work, project selection/development, baselining, etc. External funding is required to establish this team. The aim is to secure funding to start this team in early 2026.
4. **Forum Building:** The Sussex Energy Forum is the group of stakeholders that are interested in collaborating on Sussex Energy and co-creating it. They are from across the public sector, businesses, community energy organisations, higher education sector, etc. The plan is to build this Forum through a) making them aware of one another through a directory of all the organisations and their experience and skills, b) setting up meetings to share knowledge and c) an online collaboration channel for persistent chat. The objectives of building this community are:
 - To have a Forum to help shape Sussex Energy to a) improve it and make it work for the region and b) to encourage support and promote wider adoption of the mission.
 - To facilitate knowledge and experience sharing and find collaborations to help accelerate low carbon work.
 - To have channels through which to roll out strategic system interventions (e.g. spreading best practice etc.).

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Board is unlikely to have enough direct funding for individual projects. However, even if direct funding were available, it would have far less impact compared to fostering collaborative efforts. Such collaboration would attract external investment to the region for energy projects, ultimately enabling larger-scale solutions that significantly contribute to the UK's 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 Alternative individuals or consultants could lead on shaping the Environment and Climate Change approach in the submissions for the proposed Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority. However:
- i. Sussex Energy is working on the same geography as a future proposed Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority.
 - ii. A wide network of contacts has been built (from Sussex local authorities and other organisations) that have the necessary expertise to inform an Environment and Climate Change approach for the proposed Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority in a way that can gather input from many stakeholders, so increasing buy in to the approach.
 - iii. A Steering Group, including representation from the 3 Sussex upper tier authorities, has been established and is working together successfully.
 - iv. Conversations about ways to leverage strategic level coordination to drive growth and add value have started in the Sussex Energy Steering Group.
- 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. Whilst they will be an active partner, they are not in a position to deliver the range and scale of activity with the geographical focus envisaged for Sussex Energy.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Community engagement is an important principle to Sussex Energy. The workstream of 'Forum Building' in 3.5 will engage stakeholders involved in sustainability work in Sussex to co-create Sussex Energy. The Sussex Energy 2025 work plan (2nd page of appendix Sussex Energy Roadmap 25th March 2025) includes the distribution of the Sussex Energy email newsletter which is an important vehicle 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 2.1-2.3, which will mean the work to operationalise Sussex Energy will continue.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. In July 2024, the Board agreed to earmark a total of £100,000 from the Board's Operational Budget to support the working groups in delivering the net zero energy status by 2040, of which 2024/25 was allocated from the 2024/25 budget and a further £50,000 from the 2025/26 budget. The 2024/25 allocation has been carried forward to 2025/26 on the basis that it would be best utilised as match funding in a bid, and the programme was not at a stage to submit a business case during 2024/25. Therefore, the full £100,000 is proposed to be allocated in the 2025/26 budget, as outlined in the Operational Arrangements 2025/26 report, also on the agenda for the Board.

Finance Officer Consulted: Haley Woollard, BHCC Head of Finance & Deputy Chief Finance Officer

Date: 24/03/25

Legal Implications:

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

Lawyer Consulted: Siobhan Fry

Date: 24/03/25

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Sussex Energy is aiming to 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:

