

Subject: Sussex Energy Update
Date of Meeting: 28 January 2026
Report of: Chair, Greater Brighton Economic Board
Contact Officer: Name: Natasha Bridge
Email: Natasha.Bridge@brighton-hove.gov.uk
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 in October 2025 and the next steps in developing the mission.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Board notes the progress on Sussex Energy.
- 2.2 That the Board supports the:
 - i. Next steps needed to take Sussex Energy forward as set out in section 3.13, 3.17, 3.20, 3.26, 3.29 and 3.33.
 - ii. Recommendations from the Sussex and Brighton Energy Briefing, giving practical early priorities and longer-term opportunities for the Sussex & Brighton Combined County Authority (SBCCA) summarised in sections 3.4-3.9.
 - iii. Engagement with the SBCCA to embed energy within its future priorities and governance arrangements, as set out in section 3.10-3.12, including nomination of a Board member to support this work by engaging SBCCA leadership.
 - iv. Requests for support set out in section 3.30 relating to commercial landlord

2.3 That the Board agrees to receive a further update on Sussex Energy at the next Board meeting, including an integration approach as described in 3.11 to support the alignment of Greater Brighton's priorities with the future delivery of the SBCCA

3 CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Sussex Energy aims to achieve net zero energy status across Sussex 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 generating inclusive economic prosperity.
- 3.2 This remains a strategic priority, and pace is needed in 2026 because climate change is cumulative, accelerating and characterised by tipping points. As governance arrangements evolve, it is important to stay closely aligned with Board plans and SBCCA priorities and prepare for transition so that momentum is maintained and this work does not fall between organisations.

UPDATE

Summary

- 3.3 Sussex Energy has made strong progress across all workstreams while also beginning structured work to position the programme for transition into the emerging SBCCA.
 - Upper-tier authorities have drafted a joint Sussex and Brighton Energy Briefing to inform the SBCCA, setting out early priorities, a pipeline of deliverable projects and longer-term opportunities, with wider engagement across districts, boroughs and the Sussex Energy Forum to follow.
 - In parallel, Sussex Energy is being positioned as a Sussex-wide, delivery-ready and investable programme that can be carried into the SBCCA, offering a low-cost, high-impact platform for early regional delivery and continuity through devolution.
 - Communications work has advanced through:
 - A new Sussex-specific content library, developed by University of Sussex students, which is being built into a communications calendar to help coordinate and amplify messaging through partner organisations on Sussex Energy themes.
 - Sussex Energy contributing to the Worthing Heat Network launch planned for February 2026.
 - Two major work packages — the Regional Funding & Investment Strategy and Solar Across Sussex — are moving into procurement, supporting the development of a scalable pipeline of investable projects.
 - New initiatives are building the foundations for delivery including.
 - Early work to engage commercial landlords and tenants to unlock solar deployment on industrial buildings; and
 - Development of an online, filterable regional energy-projects map, led by a University of Brighton master's student with Brighton & Hove City Council GIS and Net Zero support.

Workstream: Devolution – Sussex & Brighton Energy Briefing

- 3.4 Net zero, energy and environment leads from the three upper-tier authorities have jointly developed a Sussex and Brighton Energy Briefing to inform the emerging SBCCA (see appendix 'Sussex & Brighton Energy Briefing DRAFT').

3.5 The briefing highlights that Sussex starts from a position of strength, with robust climate strategies across all upper-tier authorities and the Sussex Energy collaboration already bringing together local authorities, universities, NHS Sussex, business groups, a strong and experienced community energy sector and the Greater South East Net Zero Hub.

3.6 The briefing identifies a clear set of early priorities for the first 1–2 years of the SBCCA, focused on practical and achievable actions that will maintain momentum through transition and create long-term value. These include:

- Ensuring continuity of existing climate and energy activity during the transition to the SBCCA;
- Embedding climate and environment across all SBCCA decision-making;
- Commissioning a Sussex-wide Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) to provide a shared evidence base for infrastructure investment and spatial planning;
- Establishing a regional investment framework and early funding mechanisms;
- Accelerating delivery of priority programmes, particularly heat networks and solar deployment;
- Strengthening net-zero skills pathways; and
- Ensuring inclusive governance that embeds key partners from the outset.

3.7 The briefing will set out a pipeline of early deliverable projects already underway across Sussex, including heat networks, solar farms, battery storage, community-owned PV, renewable transport and public-estate decarbonisation. With targeted SBCCA support, many of these projects could reach delivery or major milestones before or within the first mayoral term, providing early, visible progress and demonstrating credibility to government, investors and communities.

3.8 Looking further ahead, the briefing outlines longer-term opportunities (3–10 years), drawing on learning from established combined authorities. These include whole-system energy planning, large-scale retrofit and heat programmes, expansion of solar and storage, market-shaping and innovation activity, regional skills academies, strengthened energy governance, and longer-term funding and investment mechanisms.

3.9 The briefing highlights that Sussex Energy is commissioning a regional funding and investment strategy, which will benchmark best practice, map funding and investor opportunities, and recommend models suited to Sussex—providing an important evidence base for future SBCCA decisions.

Workstream: Devolution – Transition to SBCCA

3.10 Sussex Energy has been developed as a Sussex-wide collaboration, bringing together the three upper-tier authorities alongside districts and boroughs, universities, NHS Sussex, business networks, community energy organisations and the Greater South East Net Zero Hub. It has established its own programme identity and delivery infrastructure, including an active Partner Group, communications platforms and an emerging pipeline of activity. This provides a ready-made programme with defined workstreams, commissioned activity, and projects that could be accelerated through coordinated regional support and investment. As such, Sussex Energy offers the SBCCA a low-cost, high-impact platform to demonstrate early regional delivery, build confidence with government, investors and partners, and retain Sussex's emerging competitive advantage in low-carbon energy collaboration.

3.11 In parallel with finalising the Sussex and Brighton Energy Briefing - including identifying a set of "early win" projects deliverable within 2–3 years where regional coordination or investment could unlock faster progress - an integration approach will be developed that frames Sussex Energy as an "investable proposition" for the emerging SBCCA. This will include (i) setting out the governance and resourcing arrangements required to maintain delivery confidence; (ii) engaging with the SBCCA's leadership and officer team to build a shared understanding of the value of embedding the Sussex Energy Programme in the organisation; and (iii) subsequent engagement to agree options for adoption, resourcing and oversight.

3.12 To enable this approach, it is recommended that a Board member is nominated to engage the SBCCA leadership and prior to this, work with the Sussex Energy Programme on the messaging needed to facilitate this engagement.

3.13 Next Steps:

- ***Socialise Sussex & Brighton energy briefing with a) the Sussex Energy Partner Group and b) Districts & Boroughs and c) Sussex Energy Forum and incorporate input.***
- ***Compile a short list of "early win" projects deliverable within 2–3 years where coordinated regional action or investment could unlock faster progress or scale.***
- ***Develop an integration approach as set out in 3.11.***
- ***Develop a concise integration offer for the SBCCA, setting out Sussex Energy's current programme infrastructure, pipeline, and options for future governance and resourcing within SBCCA structures.***
- ***Establish a planned route of engagement with SBCCA leadership/officers (timed to SBCCA capacity), to agree how Sussex Energy can be carried forward as part of the region's emerging priorities and governance.***

Workstream: Communications – Pick n Mix Communications Calendar

3.14 Greater Brighton partnered with five University of Sussex students through the Winter 2025 Student Consultancy Programme to support Sussex Energy communications. The students curated a shared library of Sussex-specific content (posts, images, videos and infographics) aligned with key themes such as Keeping Sussex Warm, increasing local renewable generation and promoting community energy. This “pick and mix” bank of materials will enable partners to adapt high-quality, Sussex-specific content for use across social media, websites, newsletters and other channels.

3.15 This work will underpin the development of a Sussex Energy communications calendar, to socialise with organisations across the region, via the Sussex Energy comms working group. The aim of the Sussex Energy communications calendar is to create something simple to use to help organisations understand the themes, timing and the content available. The aim is to coordinate and amplify messaging on Sussex Energy themes, with partners aligning their communications around shared campaigns and key dates.

3.16 An article is being developed, containing student quotes, publicising this student work experience to a) promote Sussex Energy, b) publicise the communications calendar and c) attract future volunteers to support with content development.

3.17 Next Steps:

- ***Develop Sussex Energy communications calendar and review with Sussex Energy comms working group to refine.***
- ***Socialise communications calendar to encourage organisations to adopt using it to amplify Sussex Energy messaging.***
- ***Publish article about the student help to develop content.***
- ***Apply for future student support to produce more content for communications calendar.***

Workstream: Communications – Worthing Heat Network Launch

3.18 Sussex Energy has been invited to play a prominent role in the Worthing Heat Network launch, scheduled w/c 9th February 2026. The plans include a formal launch event, where a Sussex Energy representative will present alongside partners, and a community drop-in session with stalls.

3.19 At the community event, Sussex Energy will work with partners to showcase a wider range of low-carbon energy activity beyond the heat network, e.g. community-owned local solar opportunities and sustainability advice for small organisations.

3.20 Next Steps:

- ***Confirm community event partners.***
- ***Develop presentation for formal launch to showcase the regional energy work and collaboration and confirm presenter.***

Workstreams: Regional Funding & Investment Strategy and Solar Across Sussex – Procurement

3.21 The Regional Funding & Investment Strategy is a 9-month contract to develop a regional approach to finance energy decarbonisation work in Sussex. It includes work on fund design options, investor mapping, an Investment Prospectus, a business case for a long-term funding and investment function, and a strategic report on regional funding and investment for energy decarbonisation.

3.22 The Solar Across Sussex 4-month contract will map and prioritise solar opportunities (e.g. rooftop, car port, ground-mounted) to support accelerated deployment of investable solar projects across the region.

3.23 The two contracts have been developed and are in the process of being issued to suppliers to get quotations.

3.24 A subset of the Sussex Energy Partner Group will be responsible for evaluating supplier responses and overseeing the supplier's work.

3.25 Considering potential changes to the Board's governance arrangements, and should the Board be dissolved, there may be a requirement for an organisation to administer and manage the Sussex Energy contracts to completion. Delivery oversight will be provided by an agreed group from the Sussex Energy Partner Group, responsible for monitoring progress and confirming deliverable sign-off. The role would therefore be limited to contract administration, including verification of signed-off deliverables and processing payments to suppliers. Further consideration will be given to which organisation could appropriately house this role and whether any additional costs arise from this arrangement. Where relevant, these will be reflected within the Board dissolution costs to be included in the final budget for April–September 2026, due to be presented to the Board in the March 2026 meeting.

3.26 Next Steps:

- ***Work with Sussex Energy Partner Group to shortlist potential suppliers for work packages.***
- ***Award contracts.***

Workstream: Solar Across Sussex – Commercial Landlord Engagement

3.27 Sussex Energy has begun work to engage commercial landlords on industrial estates, where many tenants face high energy costs in older, hard-to-treat buildings. The aim is to turn industrial estates into a “distributed solar power station”, cutting bills and CO₂e while protecting asset values.

3.28 The emerging proposition is based on community energy / third-party models that fund, own and operate rooftop solar, removing landlord capital barriers while offering tenants cheaper, long-term power purchase agreements. Initial discussions with local commercial property contacts suggest significant potential, particularly for older stock. Next steps include developing a programme of awareness-raising events with Sussex Chamber of Commerce and local authorities, enabling landlords and tenants to share experience and building a pipeline of solar-ready roofs suitable for aggregation e.g. Mid Sussex have suggested hosting an event linked to their business parks, and there is scope for similar events with other local authorities and business networks. This work will help build a pipeline of solar-ready industrial roofs suitable for aggregation through Solar Across Sussex and community energy partnerships.

3.29 **Next Steps:**

- *Develop a programme of awareness-raising events, working with partners such as Sussex Chamber of Commerce and district/borough councils to engage business parks.*

3.30 **Asks of Board:**

- *Support with facilitating introductions to property agents / owners in the area.*
- *Support for events. E.g. ability to convene business parks, support event promotion, identification of local, early adopter landlords willing to share their experience.*

Mapping Work – Building a Single View of Energy Decarbonisation Activity

3.31 A key gap identified by partners is the absence of a single, up-to-date view of energy decarbonisation projects across Sussex. A static map presented previously to the Board is helpful as a snapshot but is not easily updated or interactive.

3.32 To address this, Sussex Energy is developing an online, filterable (e.g. by technology or status) map of energy projects, drawing on existing data sources and designed for low-maintenance, semi-automated updates. A Masters-level student from the University of Brighton has been recruited to do this work via a university-funded placement (30 days in spring 2026), with oversight from Brighton & Hove's Net Zero team and expert input from their GIS mapping and IT&D teams. Once operational, this map will support project replication, strengthen Sussex's reputation and provide a valuable strategic regional energy planning tool for the Board and, in time, the SBCCA.

3.33 **Next Steps:**

- *Continue delivery of the mapping project (following project kick-off in January 2026).*
- *Establish Sussex Energy programme oversight for the mapping work, including Partner Group input and regular progress check-ins.*

Lewes District Council – Whole Energy System Feasibility Study

- 3.34 By March, Lewes District Council expect to conclude a significant two-year whole energy system feasibility study which looks in depth at how to decarbonise at town scale. It is an advanced version of a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) that has investigated varying net-zero carbon pathways for all technology and fuel options that could be applied to (i) domestic and commercial buildings (ii) road, rail and marine transport. Newhaven made an ideal test case thanks to its representative population size, mix of a residential and varied range of commercial activity, alongside high levels of deprivation and the learning can be transferred across Sussex. This study has included solar PV, hydrogen, biomethane, wind, heat networks, EVs, private wires, micro grids and BESS.
- 3.35 The project was led by Clear Futures, a joint venture between Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, Robertson Construction and AECOM. In addition to the engineering and commercial expertise brought by the external Clear Futures partners, the project has included collaborators from the Sustainable Market Initiative, convened by HRH the King Charles, UKPN, and leading UK companies that can deliver the range of solutions, so its conclusions are based on what can be delivered at scale and in a timely manner.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Board is unlikely to have sufficient funding directly for projects, but even if it could, 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 clean power system by 2030, create 400,000 additional jobs in the clean energy sector by 2030 and support over 1,000 local and community energy projects, boosting community ownership.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Community engagement is an important principle of Sussex Energy. 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.
- 5.2 The first Sussex Energy Forum meeting was held on Wednesday, 9 July 2025. The Forum brings together individuals working on low-carbon energy solutions in Sussex to strengthen connections, accelerate their efforts, and co-create Sussex Energy. This community is being cultivated through continuous online discussion on a private Sussex Energy Forum LinkedIn group.

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, including an integration approach to support the alignment of Greater Brighton's priorities with the future delivery of the SBCCA.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

7.1 In July 2024, the Board agreed to earmark a total of £100,000 from the Greater Brighton Economic Board Operational Budget to support the Sussex Energy mission — £50,000 from the 2024/25 Operational Budget (carried forward to 2025/26) and a further £50,000 from the 2025/26 Budget.

7.2 It is proposed that this funding is utilised as follows:

- £50,000 to commission priority work packages (the *Regional Funding & Investment Strategy* and *Solar Across Sussex – Solar Identification and Prioritisation*), providing specialist expertise to accelerate delivery of Sussex Energy priorities; and
- £50,000 for follow on Solar Across Sussex work to engage site owners and develop projects.

Finance Officer Consulted: Modupe Oshin, BHCC Principal Accountant - Capital Date: 20/01/26

Legal Implications:

7.2 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. In progressing the procurement activity noted within this report, Brighton and Hove Council (BHCC) as accountable body is required to comply with the relevant Public Contract Regulations and legislation as well as well as its Contract Standing Orders.

Lawyer Consulted: Siobhan Fry Date: 19/01/26

Equalities Implications:

7.3 Sussex Energy is aiming to ensure that the benefits of the transition to net zero energy are shared equitably across the region. This includes supporting community energy models that retain value locally; promoting investment in energy efficiency measures that help reduce fuel poverty; and ensuring that smaller organisations and community groups, which often lack capacity or technical expertise, can access support through dedicated workstreams.

The communications working group is being built with a wide variety of organisations to ensure engagement activity is designed to be inclusive, reaching residents, businesses, and voluntary sector organisations across Sussex. Citizens Advice and Fuel Poverty Coordinators are included in the Sussex Energy Forum so that the voices of those most affected by high energy costs or poor housing are heard when shaping solutions. The [Sussex Energy Useful Resources page](#) also signposts to Citizens Advice and support services focused on tackling fuel poverty and reducing energy costs.

By embedding these practices, Sussex Energy is helping to ensure that vulnerable households and smaller organisations are not left behind in the transition but

instead are supported and empowered to participate in and benefit from a fairer, more resilient low-carbon economy.

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. The programme promotes renewable energy generation, energy efficiency, and decarbonisation of heat, all of which directly contribute to the UK's legally binding carbon budgets. It also supports adaptation and resilience by enabling more localised generation and greater energy security. Co-benefits include improved air quality from reduced fossil fuel use, job creation in low-carbon industries, and the development of skills and supply chains that will have long-term positive impacts for the regional economy. Sustainability principles will also be embedded in procurement processes, for example by exploring ways to prioritise local suppliers and ensure social value.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

Sussex & Brighton Energy Briefing DRAFT