

Greater Brighton Economic Board

Agenda Item 6

Subject: Greater Brighton Transition to Net Zero Action Plan

Date of meeting: 19th July 2022

Report of: Chair, Greater Brighton Officer Programme Board

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LA(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 At previous meetings of the Greater Brighton Economic Board (“the Board”) a number of recommendations have been agreed in relation to the development of a Blue-Green Investment Plan, decarbonising homes and establishing a Retrofit Task Force, investing in and supporting Hydrogen Sussex and developing a Greater Brighton Food Scoping Study ahead of the possible development of a Regional Food Strategy.
- 1.2 This is part of the Board’s aspirations of moving towards a net zero city region, following development of ambitious Energy and Water plans in 2019, the agreement on the “GB10” Environmental Pledges in 2020, and hosting the Climate Summit in the autumn of 2021. This report seeks to bring together those workstreams to articulate a single action plan on Climate Change, Sustainability and Resilience as part of the new Chair’s ambition for Greater Brighton to be a leading city region in this field.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Board agree to bring all of the workstreams referred to in paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2 above into a Transition to Net Zero Action Plan.
- 2.2 The Board agrees that new workstreams that relate to the environment, climate change, sustainability and resilience should be added to the Transition to Net Zero Action Plan.
- 2.3 That the Board agrees that regular progress updates will come back to the Board on all elements within the Action Plan.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Greater Brighton Economic Board is a well-established body which offers local leadership on a number of work strands. Whilst each of the Board Member organisations have sustainability plans, carbon reduction plans, or similar strategies to move towards net zero, there is a limit to what individual organisations can achieve acting alone and the impact that they can have. There is certain activity that because of, for example, economies

of scale, it makes sense to look beyond local authority boundaries and for organisations to collaborate across a wider geography. There is also need to take a strategic view to determine how limited resources can be best utilised to deliver desired outcomes and generate real benefits.

- 3.2 The Greater Brighton Infrastructure Panel, established in 2018, recognised this, and pulled together organisations from across Greater Brighton and beyond, to develop solutions at a city region level. The Panel oversaw development of the Greater Brighton Energy and Water Plans, agreed in 2019.
- The **Energy Plan** identifies proposals to accelerate the delivery of energy projects that will boost resilience and security and at the same time help reduce carbon emissions to zero.
 - The **Water Plan** builds on work around the water environment that is already in progress across a number of organisations to set out a range of opportunities to address ongoing challenges in new, innovative ways, compared to current, 'conventional' approaches. The intention is to move new development towards 'water neutrality'.
- 3.3 The Energy and Water Plans were the Board's first step on the path towards sustainability, resilience, security, and transitioning to a low-carbon economy, and this was soon followed by adoption of the **GB10 Pledges** on the environment. These 10 environmental pledges are approved actions agreed and ratified by the Board in October 2020 with progress reported on at the October 2021 Board meeting. The GB10 Pledges and the underlying Energy and Water Plans are very much linked to the economic recovery and future prosperity of the City Region.
- 3.4 At the October 2021 Board Meeting, some of the key successes that were highlighted relating to progress on the GB10 included;
- Sussex Kelp Restoration Project and development of the Sussex Bay initiative to restore nature and enhance the potential of marine and coastal environments to deliver carbon sequestration, biodiversity and other public benefits.
 - Joint working on high-profile infrastructure including Hydrogen Sussex and the Housing Retrofit Task Force
 - Members in an improved position to bid for national funding on public sector decarbonisation
 - Delivery of the first school raingarden at Moulsecoomb Primary school through The Aquifer Partnership's 'Rainscape Campaign'.
 - South Downs National Park Authority launching 'ReNature' nature recovery campaign.
 - Adaptive work by water companies to deliver water efficiency messages during Covid when home visits were not possible.
- 3.5 This shows the great progress being made by Greater Brighton local authorities and other partners, but is important that the Board follows up on previous commitments to transition to a low carbon economy and to the next steps announced at the Greater Brighton Climate Change Summit if

progress is to be made. To that end, in February 2022 the Board agreed the development of a Blue-Green Investment Plan for the City Region.

- 3.6 As highlighted in 3.1, maximum impact will be gained from organisations working across a wide geography. This investment plan will be a clear guide to those who can assist with net zero transition and will set out tangible steps on how to get there. The aim of the plan is to trigger investment from Infrastructure Panel members and wider stakeholders. As well as stimulating private sector investment, this resource could be used as a 'pitch document' to use in government funding negotiations as well as a guide for public agencies when considering location and investment options.
- 3.7 Operating in a competitive funding and investment environment requires us to have a strong, consistent and compelling narrative, and a practical plan. This plan will be explicit about the resources, needs and constraints in the City Region and will set out our aim to establish a partnership of the key players to help us stand out. A concise and tangible plan, clearly demonstrating the level of ambition, will mean that the City Region is well positioned to respond quickly to funding announcements and incentives, and will also provide greater confidence to those committing funding.
- 3.8 The next steps agreed on the Blue-Green Investment plan were to produce new governance arrangements for a refreshed, revised and repurposed Infrastructure Panel, with an independently appointed Chair. It was also agreed That the Board agree to nominate a local authority Member and a Business Partner to sit on the revised Infrastructure Panel. The University Business Partners will also nominate a representative to sit on the panel.
- 3.9 The Board also agreed to the establishment of a Scientific, Technical and Advisory Panel (STAP) led by the Universities of Sussex and Brighton to secure research funding and create a roadmap to net zero targets.
- 3.10 The Board has been overseeing other workstreams in the environmental and sustainability space. This includes establishing a Greater Brighton Task Force to ensure the city-region's homes and buildings are fit for a zero-carbon future. This work is being overseen by Lewes District Council, and the research study led by the University of Brighton.
- 3.11 The proposed Task Force has three main objectives. One immediate challenge, and two longer terms objectives:
 - Outline how public sector home and building improvements can take place on a mass scale across the region, while identifying opportunities to boost new skills, create good, green-collar jobs, and drive investment in low-carbon industries.
 - Identify and promote long-term changes to energy usage, increase private sector engagement with the whole-life cycle decarbonisation agenda.
 - Future proofing our private and public buildings within the region.
- 3.12 These goals are designed to meet Greater Brighton's carbon reduction targets by 2030 and to support a sustainable economic recovery from the

pandemic by creating the conditions and supply chain to support the wider decarbonisation agenda. The full Asset Plan and Roadmap is due to be presented to the Board this autumn.

- 3.13 A UK Hydrogen Strategy was published in October 2021, together with notice of a Net Zero Hydrogen Fund for 2022, as part of a raft of decarbonisation strategies culminating in the government's Net Zero Strategy in November 2021. Hydrogen will have a critical role in the UK's net zero energy future.
- 3.14 Moving quickly to develop a strong UK hydrogen economy by 2030 presents opportunities for investment in projects and associated infrastructure and supply chain companies. With such a critical role to play in enabling the UK hydrogen economy, it is important that a joined up and strategic approach is taken to hydrogen Research and Innovation investment.
- 3.15 Hydrogen Sussex, born out of the Greater Brighton Infrastructure, is the body supporting and facilitating the hydrogen economy across Sussex. Hydrogen Sussex has already built a significant network of key stakeholders across local and central government and the private sector, and has been engaging other stakeholders including regional MPs to enhance support and understanding of the region's hydrogen ambitions.
- 3.16 This all puts the region very much at the forefront of a hydrogen fuel revolution and there is a great opportunity for the creation of high-skilled, green-collar jobs in this region. To ensure the potential of this opportunity is maximised an investment proposition and strategy for the City Region is currently under development, and this has received financial support from the Board. The aim of the investment proposition would be to give a clear focus and direction, establish a place-based perspective, and ensure that research and innovation is embedded in all hydrogen projects. The investment proposition is complementary to and gives a supporting framework for individual projects to proceed, mapping to a variety of funding sources and focusing on research excellence and delivery at commercial pace.
- 3.17 The work described above demonstrates that building economic, environmental, and social resilience is a strategic priority for the Board. Food fits within these areas of focus. Food system vulnerabilities have been revealed during the covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine and opportunities now exist to improve local supply chains and infrastructure. The Board is in a position to be proactive and to transform the local and regional food system.
- 3.18 In 2021 the Board agreed to support the scoping work for a Greater Brighton Food Plan focussed on building resilience and integrating innovations. There is a specific item on this on the agenda of this meeting.
- 3.19 The rapidly emerging backdrop to all of this is a cost-of-living crisis that has started to grip the UK. At the time of writing, UK the inflation rate was at a 40-year high, seeing 9.1% in May. The surge in the costs of energy and fuel

are a major driver of this. Oil and gas prices remain at an elevated level, and since the energy price cap was raised in April, average gas and electricity prices jumped by 54% and 96% respectively compared with a year ago. In May 2021, the average price of a litre of petrol was 130.5p, but in June 2022 this had risen to 186.6p per litre. Around 30p of that rise was in May 2022 alone.

- 3.20 Additional inflationary pressures stem from the rising prices of food, particularly, cereals, bread and meat. The cost of raw materials has also increased, impacting the price of furniture and other household items.
- 3.21 Salary and wage increases are not keeping pace with the rising prices, so individuals and households are facing large real-term income reductions. At the minute there doesn't seem to be an obvious break point. Fuel prices continue to rise and record prices at the pump are being reported on a regular basis. OFGEM has warned that the energy price cap looks likely to rise by a further £800 in the autumn and the conflict in Ukraine, which is partly driving the rising costs of energy and some foods, does not look like being resolved in the near future. The Bank of England predicts that the inflation rate is set to rise to 11% over the coming months.
- 3.22 The cost-of-living crisis makes the important work highlighted in this report more crucial than ever as many of the interventions will also help tackle the burden of rising prices. For example, mass retrofitting will help decarbonise homes by reducing energy usage, but that will also drive down energy bills, and building resilience in food sector supply chains will help protect the region from external price shocks and other pressures. There is a need to move forward with even greater urgency.
- 3.23 The incoming Chair of the Board has set out his priorities for the year ahead, and making real progress in the transition to net zero is chief among them. Bringing all of the current and future work on this theme together under one over-arching heading, will help to give the Chair, any future Chair, and the Board in general, greater ownership and oversight of this work.
- 3.24 Packaging all of this work together, in an easily understood heading like "Transition to Net Zero Action Plan", will also help inform and enhance communications activity on this theme. There is a dedicated net zero section on the new Greater Brighton website and work within the Action Plan can be highlighted and signposted on the website, as well as through social media channels.
- 3.25 Having a clear and focused plan, backed up through proactive communications activity, also provides a strong platform for negotiating with Government. Transitioning to a low carbon economy is a key priority for Government as highlighted by recent publications that include the UK Hydrogen Strategy and Levelling-Up White Paper. It is important that as a region competing for limited funds, we can clearly articulate that our priorities are aligned to those of Government and that with the right interventions we will deliver the Government's key objectives at a local level. The Transition to Net Zero Action Plan will inform development of the

Investment Plan outlined in 3.5-3.8 above, and the Investment Plan will form the region's pitch to Central Government.

- 3.26 In the future there may be other workstreams which would be a good fit within the Transition to Net Zero Action Plan. One such area for current consideration could be the circular economy. Many local authorities are developing plans around the circular economy. A review of how this work is progressing within each local authority would be helpful as it will highlight possible areas for collaboration e.g. around procuring at scale to reduce costs and improve value for money.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 All of the work highlighted in this paper has been agreed by the Board and is progressing. The purpose of establishing a new Transition to Net Zero Action Plan would be to bring all of the various workstreams together, which would allow improved strategic oversight of the wider work programme
- 4.2 The work will continue if the recommendations in 2.1-2.3 are not adopted. However, opportunities for closer collaboration on and between the workstreams may be missed. The backdrop to all of this is levelling up, and the general understanding is that the south-east is not a priority area for levelling up funding. However, what Government has made clear is that transitioning to net zero is a priority and has a key part to play in the levelling-up agenda. In that regard, section 3 highlights the work that puts Greater Brighton on the front-foot, but we need to ensure that we are as joined up as possible to ensure we can exploit the few opportunities that may be on offer.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 Consultation requirements will be different for each workstream and have been considered within each of the projects/programmes.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Whilst all of the work highlighted in 3.2-3.18 above has been agreed by the Board and is making good progress it is slightly disjointed and could be better connected.
- 6.2 Bringing all of these workstreams together under the banner of a Transition to Net Zero Action Plan will give Board Members and officers a clearer understanding of the work and activity being undertaken. It will allow easier oversight of the progress being made and ensure potential synergies between the individual workstreams are being exploited and opportunities for collaboration maximised.
- 6.3 It will also provide an opportunity for a proactive communications campaign and a sound reference on which to engage with Government.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications to this report. A number of initiatives that fall under the Transition to Net Zero Action Plan have already been reported to this Board with their own financial implications. This includes the Blue-Green Investment Plan, decarbonising homes, investing in and supporting Hydrogen Sussex and developing a Greater Brighton Food Scoping Study.

Name of finance officer consulted: Rob Allen, Principal Accountant
Date consulted: 06/07/22

8. Legal implications

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

Name of lawyer consulted: Alice Rowland, Head of Commercial Law
Date consulted: 08/07/22

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The Blue Green Investment Plan will seek to ensure that the benefits are shared across the City Region. In addition, one of the ongoing aims of the work is to address inequalities by looking at how, for example, access to energy and water can be made affordable for all Greater Brighton residents. Work around decarbonising homes and building resilience in food supply chains will help to tackle fuel and food poverty respectively.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 The driving force behind the Transition to Net Zero Action Plan and workstreams within it, is to protect the environment, enhance natural capital, limit the affects of climate change, and build resilience in key infrastructure and the supply of energy and food. This is the foundation of all work within the plan, but this sustainability focus will also cascade into other workstreams.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

1. None

