westsussex.gov.uk

west sussex county council

Climate Change Strategy Progress Report

April 2025 – March 2026



Contents

Foreword 3
Introduction 4
Reducing our operational carbon emissions 5
Resources & Influence 6
Priority Action 1: 6
Priority Action 2: 7
Priority Action 3: 7
Embedding climate commitments into decision-making 8
Buildings & Energy 9
Priority Action 4: 9
Priority Action 5: 10
Priority Action 6: 11
Priority Action 7: 11
Priority Action 8: 11
Solar PV & Battery Storage Programme 12
Transport 13
Priority Action 9: 13
Priority Action 10: 13
Priority Action 11: 14
West Sussex Chargepoint Network 14
Active travel 15
Public transport 15
Transport resilience 16
Procurement & commissioning 17
Priority Action 12: 17
Priority Action 13: 17
Nature & environment 18
Priority Action 14 18
Priority Action 15 18
Priority Action 16 19
Investing in nature recovery and climate resilience 20
Priority Action 17 22
Communities 24
Priority Action 18: 24
Priority Action 19: 24
Priority Action 20: 26
Waste prevention and recycling 26

Foreword

Addressing climate change presents one of the greatest opportunities to create a healthier, more resilient and more sustainable future for West Sussex. Across the county, we are seeing how action to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the changing climate can deliver wider benefits for our communities, economy and natural environment. Through innovation, partnership and long-term investment, we are making steady progress towards our climate ambitions while helping to improve the places people live, work and visit.

Protecting the environment remains at the heart of our work and is embedded throughout the priorities set out in Our Council Plan. Through our Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030, we committed to making the county council's own operations carbon neutral and climate resilient by 2030. This report highlights the significant progress made during 2025-26 as we continue to turn that ambition into practical action.

Over the past year, we have continued to reduce our operational carbon emissions while investing in projects that will deliver lasting benefits for our communities and the environment. Major programmes have progressed across our estate, including the expansion of renewable energy generation and battery storage, the procurement of renewable electricity, and the launch of our four-year LED streetlighting programme. These initiatives are helping to reduce emissions, improve energy efficiency and support the transition to a low-carbon future.

Alongside reducing carbon emissions, we are strengthening resilience to the impacts of climate change. Through nature recovery projects, flood risk management activities and the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, we are helping communities adapt to future challenges while enhancing biodiversity and protecting valued local environments.

Partnership continues to be central to our success. Working with residents, schools, businesses, community groups and organisations across West Sussex, we are supporting wider climate action through projects that encourage sustainable travel, reduce waste, promote renewable energy and build climate awareness. Together, these efforts are helping to create positive change across the county.

The achievements set out in this report demonstrate the commitment and dedication of colleagues, partners and communities across West Sussex. While challenges remain, the progress made gives us strong foundations for the years ahead. By continuing to work together and investing in practical solutions, we can build a cleaner, greener and more resilient West Sussex for current and future generations.



Natasha Davie

Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change

Introduction

Our Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030 sets out the far reaching and transformative benefits to the council and West Sussex communities of tackling and adapting to climate change. Embracing the climate challenge will increase people's health and wellbeing, improve local air quality, protect our natural environment, support biodiversity, grow a greener local economy, reduce energy bills and enhance energy security. To respond effectively and realise these benefits, the council has five key commitments which we apply across all areas of our business when planning, delivering our services and operations:

- We will mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing carbon emissions
- We will adapt and be resilient to a changing climate
- We will source and use resources sustainably
- We will support and grow our local green economy
- We will transform how we work

Having made strong progress since 2020 on embedding these Strategy commitments, we published our Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) in August 2024, setting out the climate action we will focus on during the three years from 2024 to 2027. The CAAP identifies 20 priority actions to be taken across the council and in partnership with key stakeholders in the county. These priority actions are organised into six pathways which are outlined in the table below:

CAAP pathways for action:

	Resources and influence Ensuring climate change mitigation and adaptation are at the forefront of decision making across the organisation		**Buildings and energy** Pursuing a sustainable estate with carbon-neutral operation, that supports the transition to low carbon energy
	Transport Supporting transportation that minimises environmental impacts and promotes sustainable travel methods		**Procurement and commissioning** Securing the best possible value including carbon, cost, quality, and social value when purchasing goods and services
	Nature and environment Pursuing 'nature-based' solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change, sequester carbon, and protect the environment		**Communities** Supporting, enabling, and inspiring West Sussex partners, communities, and businesses to work together to address climate change

This report will discuss each of the 20 priority actions in the CAAP and the progress made to develop and deliver them over the period from April 2025 to March 2026. Alongside these priority actions, other important projects have been progressed by different services during the reporting period, details of which are also incorporated into the report.

Reducing our operational carbon emissions

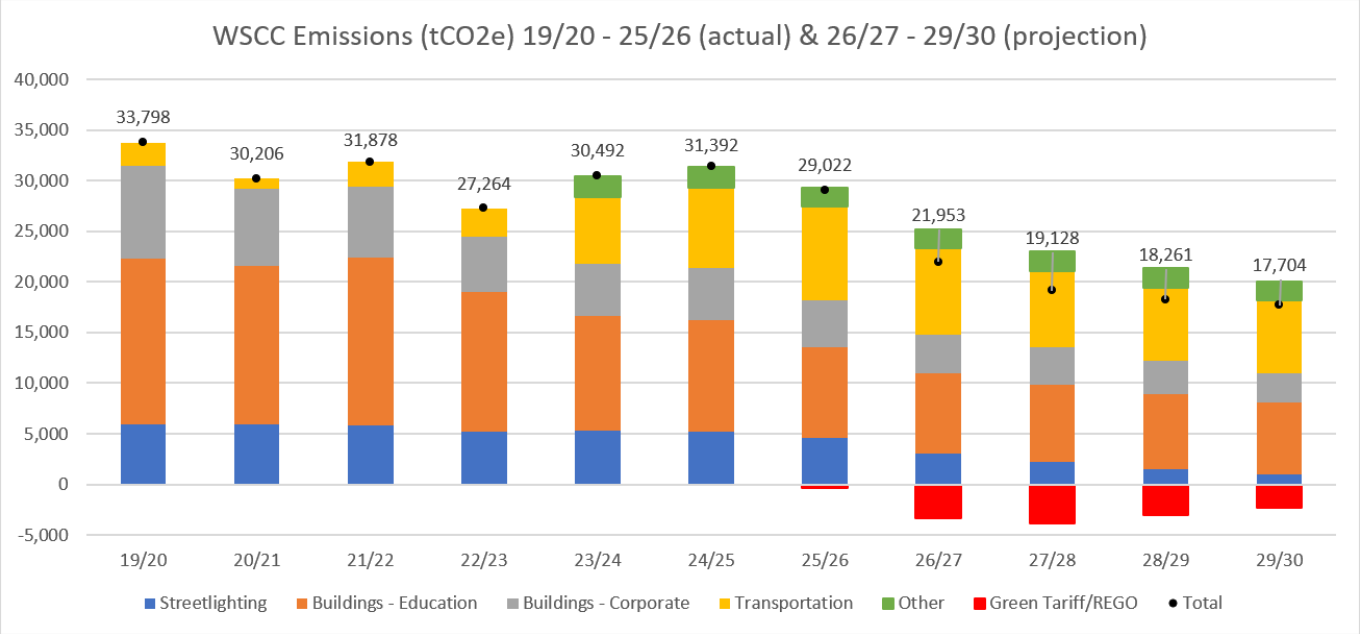
The total operational carbon emissions generated by the county council, excluding our supply chain, from April 2025 to March 2026 was 29,022 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO_2e). This is 7.5% lower than the emissions reported for the previous year.

The trend over the period indicates a decrease in emissions from our streetlighting, education buildings and corporate buildings emissions categories due to reductions in utility consumption following decarbonisation works (e.g., corporate building decarbonisation, streetlight LED conversion) along with an electrical grid that has become less carbon intensive. There was also a decrease in the "other" emissions category, driven by a decrease in reported working from home by staff. However, there was an increase in transport related emissions, driven by an increase in grey mileage[1], business travel and, reported staff commuting.

From the third quarter of 2025/26, we started purchasing REGO-backed electricity[2] for some of our corporate estate consumption. This means the electricity we are using in some of our corporate estate certifiably comes from renewable sources, which contributes to lowering our carbon footprint. This is reflected in the negative red bars on the graph below.

Since setting our original carbon emissions baseline in 2019/20, our operational carbon emissions have shown an overall downward trend, with 2025/26 emissions 14% lower than in 2019/20. It should be noted that in 2023/24 we expanded our baseline to include more emissions categories (e.g., working from home, employee commuting), meaning that emissions in 2019/20 are not directly comparable.

The chart below sets out our carbon emissions reductions to date and the projected emissions reductions to 2029/30. Having made good progress in cutting emissions so far, the council is continuing to develop ambitious projects and seek the necessary resources to tackle more challenging emissions sources, such as those from employee commuting and the education estate.



[1] Grey mileage business travel undertaken by employees in their own privately owned vehicles rather than in a company-owned, leased, or fleet vehicle.

[2] Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin certificates (REGOs) - for more information on REGOs see: https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/environmental-and-social-schemes/renewable-energy-guarantees-origin-rego

Resources & Influence

Priority Action 1:

Prioritise climate change awareness across the organisation by ensuring Carbon Literacy Training and other related Learning & Development options are embedded within the corporate training offer.

The county council has continued to embed climate change awareness and sustainability skills across the organisation. During 2025/26, a further 147 staff achieved Carbon Literate certification, bringing the total number of certified staff to 785, representing nearly 12% of the workforce[3]. Carbon Literacy Training remains a key mechanism for building knowledge and empowering staff to identify and implement practical carbon reduction measures within their roles.

To support wider participation, an alternative training format incorporating e-learning was developed. This approach will provide greater flexibility for staff, particularly those in frontline roles, and help expand the reach of Carbon Literacy Training across the organisation.

Our Highways, Transport and Planning (HTP) department achieved Silver Carbon Literate Organisation accreditation from the Carbon Literacy Project, reflecting how the programme is being embedded in the council's operations. It also represents an important step towards our goal of achieving Silver CLO accreditation for the whole council.



[3] Based on headcount of 6,702; excludes school staff.

The county council also continued to invest in developing the skills needed to support the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient future through its apprenticeship programme. At the end of 2025/26, 37 staff were undertaking apprenticeships classified as "green" by Skills England. In addition, a bespoke Data Analyst apprenticeship with a sustainability focus was established, helping to build specialist capability to support future climate-related decision making and performance monitoring.

Priority Action 2:

Seek and bid for government funding and other green investment opportunities to support decarbonisation and energy transition projects

The county council has continued to explore external funding opportunities to support delivery of climate action and adaptation projects. Working in partnership with the University of Brighton, the council successfully secured £55,000 of funding from the MACC Hub to engage heat-vulnerable and underrepresented communities in Crawley. The project will support the co-design and implementation of a climate resilience demonstrator project and is scheduled to be delivered during the 2026/27 financial year.

Alongside this work, officers have continued to investigate opportunities for funding through Horizon Europe and are engaging with external organisations and key stakeholders to identify potential collaborative projects and future funding bids that could support climate mitigation and adaptation activities across West Sussex.



Priority Action 3:

Develop and action a long-term climate change communications strategy and plan, covering internal and external communications

The county council has continued to use a range of communication channels to raise awareness of climate change and environmental issues and to share progress on delivery of the Climate Change Strategy. Our West Sussex Climate Action webpages continued to underpin our communications activity, acting as a central source of information on our work and providing access to key publications, updates and news.

The monthly Environment and Climate Change newsletter remained an important communications channel during 2025/26. Subscriber numbers increased to 10,680 by the end of the reporting period, while average open rates remained above 50%, demonstrating strong engagement from residents, partners and stakeholders and continuing to perform above sector averages. The newsletter provides regular updates on climate action being delivered by the county council and its partners, while highlighting opportunities for communities, organisations and individuals to take action on climate change.



Embedding climate commitments into decision-making

A new Climate Change Decision Support Tool was developed during the year to help officers and elected members incorporate climate change considerations into the development of services, strategies, policies and projects. The tool supports more consistent decision making across the organisation by ensuring potential climate impacts, risks and opportunities can be considered at an early stage and now forms a key part of our decision-making process.

The county council also continued to strengthen the integration of climate adaptation into broader strategic planning. Public consultation was undertaken on proposals for the West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan 2026-2030, which was subsequently adopted and launched in March 2026. Climate change is embedded as a cross-cutting theme within the new plan, recognising the increasing risks posed by extreme weather and other climate-related impacts. In addition, the county council published its updated Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2025-2030 (LFRMS)[4].

[4] See Priority Action 16 below for more information on the LFRMS.

Buildings & Energy

Priority Action 4:

Deliver estate decarbonisation projects

Emissions from the corporate estate remain a significant source of the council's operational carbon emissions. Reducing these emissions is essential to achieving our commitment to become carbon neutral in our own operations by 2030.

Following completion of the first phase of heat decarbonisation works in 2024/25, 2025/26 focused on monitoring, optimisation and evaluating the performance of the improvements delivered across the initial programme sites. The knowledge and experience gained from operating these new low-carbon heating systems is helping to inform the design and delivery of future phases of the programme.

During the year, planning work commenced for the next phase of estate decarbonisation projects. Detailed development work has focused on identifying priority sites, refining delivery approaches and ensuring future investment achieves the greatest possible carbon reductions. Subject to funding and approvals, delivery of the next phase is expected to begin in 2027/28.

Alongside our long-term programme, we're investing an extra £500,000 from 2025/26 to improve the energy efficiency of our buildings. This dedicated funding allows us to incorporate carbon-cutting upgrades into our planned maintenance works. During this year, 11 projects were funded across libraries and fire stations, including LED lighting upgrades, insulation improvements and window replacements. Once completed, these projects are expected to reduce emissions by an estimated 12.3 tCO_2e each year.



Priority Action 5:

Initiate and deliver the LED streetlighting programme

During 2025/26, we began a major programme to upgrade approximately 65,000 streetlights to modern, energy-efficient LED technology. The programme will reduce energy consumption, lower carbon emissions and generate significant financial savings. It will also deliver improved value for residents through more efficient operation and maintenance of the street lighting network. A trial installation of around 500 lanterns was completed in Crawley in February 2026 to test installation procedures and remote management systems in advance of the main rollout. Following successful completion of the trial, the full installation programme commenced in March 2026.

The £24 million programme will be delivered over four years and includes the introduction of a new remote monitoring system. This technology will improve asset management, enable quicker fault detection and reduce maintenance requirements. Over the four-year construction period, the programme is forecast to deliver an energy saving of 10.7 million kWh and reduce emissions by over 2,800 tCO_2e.

Alongside the street lighting programme, we completed a countywide upgrade of traffic signals to the latest LED technology. Across West Sussex, 94 traffic signal sites have been modernised with new signal heads, push-button units, vehicle and pedestrian detectors, advanced controller systems, poles and cabling. The new LED signals use 84% less energy than the halogen equipment they replaced and are forecast to save approximately £594,000 in operating and maintenance costs over their lifetime. Carbon savings are estimated at around 590 tCO_2e.

The programme also provided an opportunity to improve pedestrian crossings by installing modern puffin crossing technology. These crossings improve safety and reduce delays by responding in real time to pedestrian movements. Additional accessibility improvements included resurfaced footways, new tactile paving and refreshed road markings. The improved reliability of the upgraded infrastructure is also expected to reduce maintenance-related exposure to hazardous working conditions by around 90 hours each year.



Priority Action 6:

Launch and deliver a reinvestment scheme to support decarbonisation across corporate and education estates and develop school partnerships

During 2025/26, we established a new Energy Reinvestment Fund to support ongoing investment in energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures across council buildings and schools. The Fund has been designed to support projects that generate a positive financial return, allowing savings achieved through energy reduction measures to be reinvested in future projects.

An initial £750,000 has been allocated to the Fund across 2025/26 and 2026/27. This value is expected to grow over time as additional opportunities are identified and delivered. New delivery processes and governance arrangements have been established, supported by a framework that provides end-to-end services including site surveys, design development, procurement and project management.

By March 2026, nine projects with a combined value of approximately £175,000 had been approved through the Fund, with a further 21 projects progressing through development and appraisal stages.

Priority Action 7:

Explore renewable energy purchasing and viability of Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin certificates (REGOs)

Reducing emissions associated with purchased electricity is an important component of our pathway to carbon neutrality. During 2025/26, we progressed plans to transition to renewable electricity procurement across the council's operations. From October 2025, we moved onto a Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGO)-backed electricity tariff. This change is expected to deliver an estimated carbon saving of 348 tCO_2e during 2025/26.

Building on this progress, all corporate electricity consumption, including street lighting, will be supplied through a REGO-backed tariff from April 2026 onwards. Based on current emissions conversion factors, this is expected to reduce reported Scope 2 emissions by approximately 3,590 tCO_2e during 2026/27. The approach will utilise a combination of Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin generated by the county council's solar farms at Tangmere and Westhampnett, supplemented by guarantees sourced from certified renewable generation including solar and wind power.

Priority Action 8:

Explore a Forward Funded Investment model for maximising on-site renewable energy generation potential

The Energy Services team has continued to expand renewable energy generation across the council's estate and education sites through the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems and battery storage technologies.

During 2025/26, we continued to explore integrating renewable energy infrastructure into new-build projects at the design and construction stage, rather than relying solely on retrofitting existing buildings. This approach builds on the council’s extensive experience of delivering renewable energy retrofits and seeks to ensure that new developments are designed from the outset to maximise opportunities for clean energy generation.

Incorporating solar PV and battery storage into new developments can reduce installation costs, enable larger renewable energy systems to be delivered and accelerate the generation of low-carbon electricity across the council’s estate. This approach will help maximise the long-term environmental and financial benefits of future building projects while supporting the council’s transition to a low-carbon energy system.

Solar PV & Battery Storage Programme

During 2025/26, the latest round of our Solar PV & Battery Storage (SPVBS) Programme progressed from the design and survey phase into active delivery across the council and school estate. Installation works were completed at four school sites: The Gattons Infant School, Trafalgar Community Infant School, Buckingham Park Primary School, and Shelley Primary School.

The programme supports the council's ambition to expand on-site renewable energy generation and battery storage capacity across its estate and contributes towards its wider carbon reduction objectives.



Transport

Priority Action 9:

Deliver the installation of charge points across the estate to support the transition of corporate and fire fleet to electric vehicles

Work has progressed to establish the infrastructure required to support the county council's transition to electric vehicles. Following the award of the corporate chargepoint contract to Blink Charging, initial project scoping was undertaken to develop an electric vehicle chargepoint rollout plan across council sites. Plans were developed to replace and expand the existing charging provision at County Hall in Chichester, while grid connection requirements at highways depots were reviewed and a programme of associated upgrades began to take shape.

The fleet transition programme has been closely coordinated with infrastructure planning to ensure charging capacity is available where vehicles are based and operated. Data analysis has been used to identify sites with the highest levels of vehicle use and charging demand, helping to prioritise locations for further investigation and future investment.

Priority Action 10:

Purchase/lease electric vehicles to replace existing assets and explore other alternative fuel options

The county council continued developing a long-term programme to transition its fleet to lower-carbon vehicles. Vehicles suitable for replacement have been identified and aligned with existing hire and lease replacement cycles. Capital funding requirements have been confirmed both for vehicle replacement and the additional investment required to support electric vehicle adoption.

An initial tranche of approximately 70 electric vans is being planned for Highways services, with demonstration vehicles being trialed to assess real-world performance and operational suitability. The programme is being delivered alongside the installation of charging infrastructure to ensure fleet electrification can be implemented effectively. In addition, engineers are receiving training in electric vehicle maintenance to support the transition.

Alongside electrification, the council has continued exploring alternative low-carbon fuels. A trial of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) was undertaken during the final quarter of 2025/26 at Clapham Depot, making use of existing infrastructure provided by Chichester District Council. The trial received positive feedback from staff and drivers, and the results are currently being reviewed.

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service also received investment to modernise its fleet. The county council committed £4.8 million to purchase 12 new fire engines. The vehicles incorporate modern firefighting technology, including a clean-cab design to reduce firefighters' exposure to contaminants, and the modern diesel engines deliver lower emissions than the vehicles they replace, supporting the council's ambition to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2030.

Priority Action 11:

Develop and implement a transport hierarchy and related supporting policies to encourage and enable staff to adopt more sustainable travel choices

The county council has continued to review how it supports sustainable travel for staff. A comprehensive review of existing transport-related offers and incentives was undertaken, alongside engagement with colleagues across the organisation to identify opportunities for improvement. This work has informed the development of short, medium and long-term actions designed to encourage more sustainable commuting and business travel.

The annual staff travel survey was completed during 2025/26 and provided valuable insight into travel behaviours, demands and barriers. Engagement with a range of directorates helped improve understanding of both commuting and business travel requirements. The survey findings will inform the development of staff travel initiatives that enable and encourage sustainable transport choices.

West Sussex Chargepoint Network

The West Sussex Chargepoint Network has continued to expand, enabling West Sussex residents to gain the confidence to go electric. The network is particularly important for residents without access to private driveways and is helping to make the transition to electric vehicles more accessible and convenient.

Following public consultation during 2025/26, a further 30 on-street charging locations were confirmed. As of March 2026, 940 sockets had been installed on streets and in public car parks across 170 sites throughout the county. The next phase of delivery will combine the installation of active chargepoints alongside underground infrastructure that enables additional chargepoints to be added quickly as demand increases in the future.

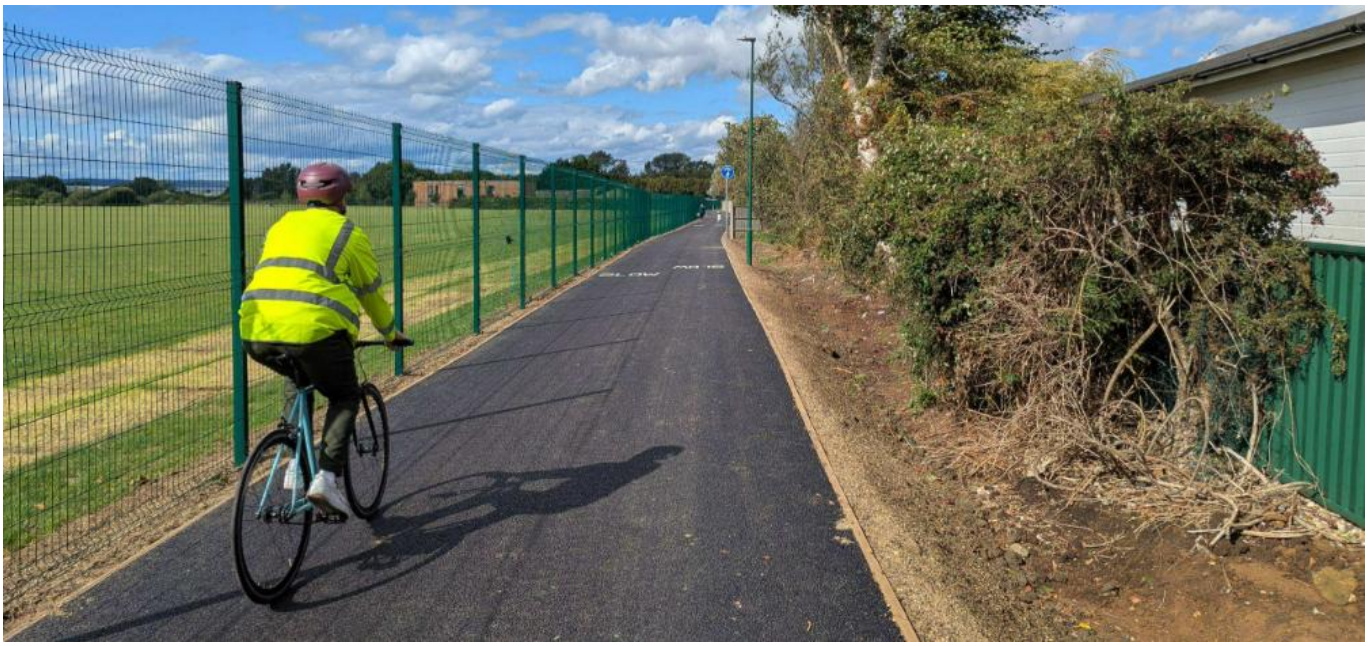


Active travel

We continued to improve opportunities for active travel across West Sussex. The latest phase of improvements to create a safe and accessible active travel route between Bognor Regis and the South Downs National Park were completed. The upgraded Felpham Way shared-use path provides improved walking, wheeling and cycling access for pupils travelling to Felpham Community College and Downview Primary School. Improvements included widening the route, installing new lighting, enhancing drainage, removing vegetation and upgrading crossing facilities to improve accessibility and safety.

Significant public realm and active travel improvements were also completed along Bognor Regis Esplanade. These works enhanced pedestrian, cycle and disabled access, introduced new crossings and traffic-calming measures, reduced speed limits, increased planting, added new seating and improved drainage through the creation of rain gardens.

Consultation was undertaken on sustainable transport improvements around Victoria Business Park in Burgess Hill. Proposed measures include upgraded walking and cycling routes, improved crossings, enhanced accessibility features, improved bus infrastructure and parking improvements, supporting both sustainable travel and economic growth.



Public transport

The county council has continued delivering improvements through its Bus Service Improvement Programme (BSIP). Since 2022, £21 million has been invested to enhance bus services, including new bus lanes, bus priority measures, 548 real-time passenger information displays, accessibility upgrades at 298 bus stops and support for local bus shelter installations.

These improvements have increased the attractiveness of public transport, with more than one million journeys made using the discounted 16-20 Bus Saver scheme and over 38,000 journeys completed through the county's Book-a-Bus demand responsive transport service. Resident satisfaction with bus services also increased to 86% in the latest Transport Focus survey, above the national average.

A new extension to the Manor Royal bus lane network in Crawley was completed during the year, helping buses avoid congestion and improving journey reliability. Delivered through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and supported by partners including Metrobus and Manor Royal BID, the improvements are expected to benefit approximately 170,000 bus movements and up to 3.4 million passenger journeys annually. Early monitoring indicates buses are saving around three minutes during peak periods.

We allocated funding to keeping services operating that have not yet recovered to pre-Covid passenger numbers and to help with significant inflationary pressures on costs. These services would either have been reduced or withdrawn without the funding. Routes such as the 23 (Horsham – Worthing), 273 (Crawley – Brighton), 17 (Horsham – Brighton), 700 (now 24 hours between Chichester – Bognor and Worthing – Brighton) and 400 (East Grinstead – Crawley – Gatwick) have all had significant BSIP investment and the improvements are on track to become financially sustainable. In addition, we set up route 500 (Littlehampton – Barnham – Chichester) which runs half hourly, increased frequencies, added journeys, created 24-hour services and funded evening and Sunday services on a variety of routes across the County. The aim is for these additions to become financially self-supporting and not require significant long-term funding

The county council also secured a further £32.7 million in funding for its bus improvement programme from the Department for Transport through the Local Authority Bus Grant. This funding will support continued investment in bus infrastructure, service improvements and fare initiatives over the next four years, helping maintain reliable, accessible and sustainable public transport across West Sussex.





Transport resilience

The completion of the Lyminster Bypass represents a significant investment in climate-resilient transport infrastructure. As the route crosses a floodplain, the scheme was designed using the latest flood modelling and climate change projections to ensure it remains operational under future conditions. A 225-metre viaduct was constructed over Black Ditch, maintaining natural water flows and reducing flood impacts on the surrounding environment. Additional engineering measures were incorporated to strengthen floodplain soils and improve the long-term resilience of the route. Together, these features enhance transport connectivity while helping the infrastructure adapt to climate change impacts.

Procurement & commissioning

Priority Action 12:

Develop a corporate Sustainable Procurement Policy and support its implementation across commissioning teams, focusing initially on high-value, long-term contracts.

Following a detailed development process, a new corporate Sustainable Procurement Policy was drafted and submitted to members for consideration. Further refinements were identified through this process, and the Policy will be updated with a view to adoption during the 2026/27 financial year.

A Sustainable Procurement Toolkit was developed and combined with a new Social Value Toolkit to create a single practical resource for commissioners and contract managers. The Toolkit is designed to support the incorporation of appropriate environmental, social and economic measures into strategic contracts, helping to ensure that sustainability considerations are embedded consistently throughout commissioning and contract management activities. Trials of the new Toolkit have commenced, enabling feedback to be gathered and improvements to be made before wider roll out across the organisation.

Priority Action 13:

Improve data collection for procurement-related (Scope 3) emissions and establish reduction targets.

The county council is continuing to improve its understanding of supply chain emissions so that effective action can be taken to measure, monitor and reduce them. During the year, the trial of the Climate Essentials carbon management platform, which began in December 2024, continued and was extended for a second year. The platform enables suppliers to measure and report their carbon emissions, helping to improve the quality of data on carbon emissions across the council's supply chain.

By March 2026, carbon emissions data had been collected from 120 suppliers through the platform, representing approximately 43% of the council's annual supply chain spend. The council has also engaged directly with suppliers, including adult social care providers, to encourage participation. This work aims to support the development of a more robust supply chain emissions baseline and inform future target-setting.

As well as improving data maturity, the council is seeking to support suppliers and the wider business community with practical decarbonisation. Through the Climate Essentials programme, suppliers can access tools, resources and guidance to help them understand and reduce their own carbon emissions.

Nature & environment

Priority Action 14

Develop corporate Land Use Policy that includes climate change considerations and support its implementation for decision-making regarding WSCC-owned property

Development of the county council's Land Assessment for Sustainable Schemes Policy Statement was completed during the previous reporting period. The policy statement supports decision making relating to WSCC-owned land and property assets, enabling climate change, biodiversity and protecting the environment to be considered within land use decisions. A proposal to incorporate the policy statement as an appendix to the Asset Management Policy & Strategy for 2026-29 was considered by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee in March 2026.

Priority Action 15

Develop WSCC carbon offsetting plan and establish partnerships with other local and regional offsetting and nature recovery projects

Work continued to explore options for addressing residual carbon emissions that may remain in 2030. Following further assessment, a previously identified tree planting scheme is no longer being pursued as the primary offsetting option. Instead, the council has been investigating the potential of biochar production through pyrolysis as a future carbon sequestration solution.

Pyrolysis involves heating organic biomass, such as wood, agricultural residues or manure, in a low-oxygen environment. This process produces stable carbon-rich biochar, which can be used to improve soils and lock away carbon for the long term. It also produces combustible gas (syngas) and bio-oil, which can be used to supply some of the energy needed to run the process.

The council is now preparing a feasibility study to assess the potential for pyrolysis within West Sussex. Lessons learned from the Greenprint project, which also explored biochar production, are helping to inform this work. We have also maintained close links with Shropshire Council, which has invested in biochar technology and is supporting wider adoption of the approach nationally. The feasibility study is expected to be undertaken during the next reporting period.

Priority Action 16

Continue to lead and support the development and roll-out of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Biodiversity Net Gain, and the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

The West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was prepared by West Sussex County Council in its role as the responsible authority for the Strategy. In collaboration with the East Sussex responsible authority, we are leading work with partners to facilitate the delivery of the LNRS and its priorities. The Strategy establishes a long-term vision for nature recovery and identifies priorities and measures to support the creation, restoration and enhancement of habitats, improve ecological connectivity, and contribute to climate resilience and wider environmental benefits. The Strategy provides an important evidence base for nature recovery and will help inform future planning, land management and investment decisions across Sussex.

The LNRS has been developed jointly with East Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council and Natural England, creating a coordinated approach to nature recovery across Sussex. Extensive engagement has taken place with district and borough councils, the South Downs National Park Authority, landowners, farmers, environmental organisations and community groups. The draft Strategy was subject to statutory public consultation during autumn 2025, with responses generally supporting its focus on habitat connectivity, nature-based solutions and the role of nature recovery in supporting wider environmental and social outcomes. Following consideration of consultation responses and final amendments, the Strategy was approved by the county council in February 2026.[5]

As Lead Local Flood Authority, the county council published the new West Sussex Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2025-2030 in July 2025, setting our long-term approach to managing and reducing flood risk across West Sussex, including a programme of actions for the next five years. The Strategy promotes a catchment-based approach to understanding and managing flood risk, supports resilient and sustainable development, encourages nature-based solutions, and helps communities prepare for and respond to flooding.



[5] The LNRS was published in June 2026

Investing in nature recovery and climate resilience

Our Operation Watershed programme has been supporting communities to address local flooding issues since 2013. During 2025/26, grants totalling £714,239 were awarded to 13 parish and town councils and community groups across Arun, Chichester, Horsham and Mid Sussex. Funding has enabled a variety of local flood resilience projects, including bank stabilisation works, culvert improvements, highway drainage upgrades and riparian ditch improvements to increase watercourse capacity. These schemes help reduce the risk of flooding to residential properties, community facilities such as parish halls, and local roads, improving resilience to extreme weather events. The grant programme will continue during 2026/27.





We updated the West Sussex Tree Plan for the period 2026 to 2030. Key priorities include enhancing the management and sharing of tree-related data, strengthening tree protection, improving resilience to pests, diseases and climate change, and securing long-term investment to enhance local treescapes through partnership working and community engagement. Delivery of the Plan's objectives continues to progress, including the recent adoption of the Policy for the Protection of Highway Trees Affected by Street Works.

The county council awarded the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust £100,000 over five years towards the Adur Adaptation Project, a ten-year partnership initiative that works with natural processes to improve the condition and function of the River Adur. Working with the Environment Agency and the county council, the project seeks to reduce peak water flows by 10% through nature-based flood management measures. The project aims to reduce flood risk, mitigate drought impacts and enhance wetland habitats, delivering benefits for both wildlife and local communities. The scheme will create wetland habitat and floodplain woodland, increasing natural water storage, improving biodiversity and enhancing resilience to climate change. It is the first project to receive funding through the council’s planned £2.5 million investment in nature recovery and climate resilience.



Buchan Country Park was again recognised through the prestigious Green Flag Award scheme, receiving the award for the fifteenth consecutive year. Green Flag status is an internationally recognised benchmark of quality for parks and green spaces, recognising high standards of management that benefit both people and wildlife.



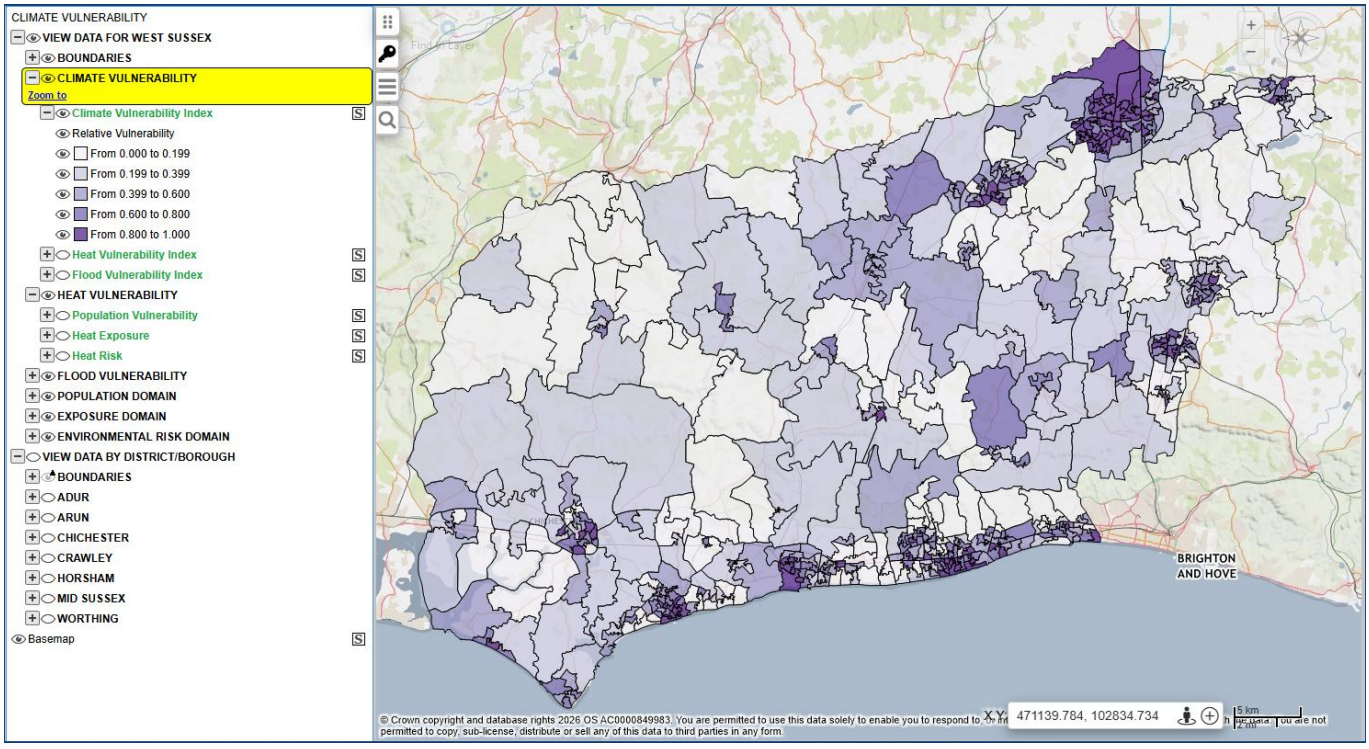
Priority Action 17

Develop detailed climate adaptation actions based on assessed risks to service delivery and begin to embed climate resilience (e.g. business continuity planning, asset management plans)

The Resilience and Emergencies Team successfully expanded its Community Emergency Hub programme to additional parish councils. The programme provides training and equipment that enables communities to strengthen local preparedness and response during emergencies and extreme weather events.

Water neutrality restrictions affecting parts of West Sussex were withdrawn in October 2025, enabling infrastructure and development projects that had been delayed to progress. While the restrictions were in place, the county council worked closely with partner authorities and stakeholders to identify solutions that would help developments achieve water neutrality while protecting internationally important habitats in the Arun Valley. Although the restrictions have now been lifted, West Sussex remains a water-stressed area and protecting sensitive habitats and biodiversity will continue to be a key consideration in the development process.

Working with the University of Brighton, the council also updated its Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI). The revised index incorporates an enhanced methodology, additional environmental risk datasets and dedicated sub-indices for flood and heat risk. The updated CVI is now being used to identify council assets that may be most vulnerable to future climate impacts and to inform resilience planning.



The county council worked alongside Arun District Council, Chichester District Council and other partners on a major coastal clean-up operation following debris entering the marine environment from cargo ships offshore. More than 145 tonnes of waste material, including plastics, metals, organic material and sections of shipping containers, were collected from the West Sussex coastline and disposed of appropriately. Recovery work also included the removal of foam material from Medmerry Nature Reserve and large container fragments from beaches across the county.



Communities

Priority Action 18:

Continue to engage residents, businesses, and community groups in climate action, and identify the role of WSCC in supporting area-wide mitigation and resilience planning

Through the West Sussex Joint Climate Change Board (WSJCCB), which brings together representatives from county, district and borough councils, the South Downs National Park Authority, Sussex Wildlife Trust and National Landscapes, we have continued to develop a coordinated countywide approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Building on the foundations established in previous years, this work aims to strengthen collaboration between partners and provide a shared framework for climate action across West Sussex.

Working alongside district and borough councils, WSCC procured specialist consultancy support from City Science to develop countywide climate mitigation and adaptation action plans. The mitigation plan is identifying sector-based pathways to net zero across West Sussex, while the adaptation plan is assessing the major climate hazards likely to affect the county, highlighting gaps in current activity and identifying areas of greatest risk. Together, these plans will provide prioritised and costed actions that can be taken by local authorities and key stakeholders to help achieve shared climate objectives.

A programme of expert stakeholder interviews and workshops was completed to identify priority mitigation and adaptation actions. Public consultation on the draft action plans is planned for summer 2026, ensuring residents, businesses and community organisations can help shape the county's climate response.

Priority Action 19:

Support WSCC schools in delivering climate action through a partnership approach to achieving energy efficiency, sustainable transport, climate change curricula, food security, and other key mitigation and resilience actions

Supporting schools to take climate action has remained an important area of focus. In partnership with the Climate Ambassadors Programme, we developed a series of Climate Action Planning workshops for West Sussex schools.

The first workshop was delivered in March, with the remaining sessions scheduled for summer and autumn 2026. The workshops help schools understand the expectations of the DfE's Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy and how to address four key action areas: decarbonisation, adaptation and resilience, biodiversity, and climate education and careers. During the sessions, schools showcase the positive actions they are already taking to address climate change, share ideas and issues, and build the knowledge and confidence to create effective Climate Action Plans.

Schools continued to receive updates on resources and support available through national and local initiatives, including the National Education Nature Park, Climate Ambassadors,

Sustainability Support for Education and Sussex Wildlife Trust. We also supported participation in the Young Green Briton Challenge, helping students develop local climate action projects while building valuable green skills and knowledge.

Our Schools Waste & Climate Education Programme, delivered by Wastebuster on behalf of the West Sussex Waste Partnership, provides West Sussex schools with free classroom resources and campaigns designed to boost waste prevention and recycling behaviours and support climate action. Activities include the Planet Protector Challenge, Hidden Treasure Hunt, Recycle to Read, and battery, toy, and textile collections. During 2025-26, 136 (59%) West Sussex primary schools engaged with the programme and 20 secondary schools utilised Wastebuster resources.

In addition, West Sussex schools were able to access free support for climate action plan development through the programme, which includes a Climate Action Planner tool. The tool enables schools to build a programme of climate actions relevant for their setting, and measure and report the progress they make.



The six school street schemes continued encourage active travel and promote safety and accessibility at the school gate. Following school engagement and community feedback, the three original school street sites had complimentary highway improvements designed to further enhance safety and accessibility for walking, wheeling and cycling. The improvement works will be delivered during 2026 school summer holiday period.

Priority Action 20:

Continue to support the community net zero transition through a solar PV group purchasing scheme and Local Area Energy Planning

The Energy Services team secured £350,000 from the West Sussex Pooled Business Rates Fund to support the creation of a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) for West Sussex. The LAEP, which will be supported by district and borough colleagues and wider energy stakeholders, will help to inform strategic investments needed in the county's energy infrastructure in support of climate, spatial planning, and economic development objectives. LAEPs can also provide key input to the Distribution Network Operators' strategic investment planning for the next 7-10 years, and the National Energy System Operator can also use LAEPs as an evidence source for their Regional Energy Strategic Plan. This work is currently at mobilisation stage.

A procurement exercise was undertaken to identify a new delivery partner for a Sussex-wide domestic solar PV scheme for residents. The scheme was previously run with group purchasing company, iChoosr, and delivered more than 2,500 solar PV and battery storage systems between 2020 and 2024. The new scheme will have the same broad approach as before, providing residents with the opportunity to purchase high-quality solar PV and battery systems at a competitive price. It will be managed by WSCC and supported by all local authorities in Sussex. The scheme launch is currently being planned.

Waste prevention and recycling

Preventing waste and increasing reuse and recycling continues to play an important role in reducing carbon emissions and conserving resources. Our Waste Prevention Advisor team engaged with more than 21,000 residents through events including talks for community groups, school assemblies and information stands at community events. The team helped residents learn more about waste prevention and recycling, promoted the West Sussex Recycles campaigns, and raised awareness of the rollout of new food waste collection services by district and borough councils.

The Waste Prevention Community Grant Fund continued to support local groups to develop initiatives that encourage reuse and reduce household waste. In June 2025, the ten successful community groups began delivering projects including sewing workshops, repair cafés and furniture restoration activities. Between June 2025 and January 2026, these initiatives diverted more than 78 tonnes of waste from disposal while also providing volunteering opportunities and supporting community participation.

The reuse shops at our Billingshurst and Worthing recycling centres continued to provide opportunities for materials to be reused rather than discarded. Items diverted from waste included bicycles, books, furniture, garden tools, textiles, footwear and household goods. During the reporting period, the shops diverted more than 120 tonnes of material from disposal, including 22 tonnes of bicycles, 30 tonnes of furniture and 64 tonnes of bric-a-brac.

Across the county's 11 recycling centres, we redistributed over 32 tonnes of surplus paint to residents and community groups through the Community RePaint scheme, helping to prevent waste while supporting local projects and reducing the need for new products to be purchased.

In partnership with UKHarvest, we continued our regular Community Food Hubs, tackling food waste while supporting residents and communities across West Sussex. Operating

monthly in each district and borough, the hubs provide access to surplus food that would otherwise have gone to waste in exchange for a small voluntary donation.

During the year, more than 3,800 residents attended a Food Hub, helping to feed almost 11,500 people. The scheme saved over 30 tonnes of food from becoming waste, with a retail value of nearly £95,000. The hubs also hosted 226 information stands from support organisations, including the Waste Prevention Team, South East Coast Ambulance Service, West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, Age UK and energy advice services, providing residents with access to a wide range of support in a single location. Reflecting the success of the programme, funding has been secured to continue the scheme until April 2027.

We worked with our waste service providers to coordinate the rollout of food waste collection services across county council premises, ensuring compliance with the Environment Act 2021. Of the 235 schools using the council's waste collection contract, around 74% already had food waste collections in place, while the remaining schools were supported to meet their obligations through the council contract or alternative arrangements.

A further 100 council premises, including libraries, fire stations, Family Hubs, highways depots, residential homes and day care centres, were provided with dedicated food waste bins and weekly collections. These improvements ensure food waste can be collected separately across relevant sites, supporting increased recycling rates, reducing waste and contributing to the council's wider environmental objectives.



