

Environment and Climate Change

Where we are now

Our environment is precious and the impacts of climate change will be wide ranging and have a profound impact on our lifestyles as well as our economy. Protecting our environment and tackling and adapting to climate change are therefore two of the most important issues we face. One of the county's greatest assets is its natural environment and many come to visit its countryside, coast and cultural attractions. Two thirds of the county falls within two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the county has received national and international recognition for its countryside, bird habitats, fisheries, sites of special scientific interest and coastline. Around 1,000 local people volunteer for practical conservation tasks.

A good quality local environment can help improve health, reduce crime and contribute to our economy.¹ Some towns have benefited from regeneration schemes and Conservation Areas have been designated in some settlements to maintain their unique character. Compared with the rest of the south east, the county is generally well provided with green space near where people live and there are proposals to convert the current waste landfill site between Bexhill and Hastings into a new countryside park. East Sussex has the second highest coverage of woodland of any county at 16.7%.² Woodland is an important habitat for wildlife³ and leisure attraction⁴, and also provides an important economic function for its landowners.⁵ Air quality in most of the county is generally good, but there are exceptions such as along roads such as between Bexhill and Hastings, and in central Lewes. We also have a problem with more widespread pollution with ozone levels in Sussex being some of the highest recorded in the UK. Waste is also a key issue. East Sussex has reduced the amount of household waste going to its landfills by 7% between 2004/5 and 2006/7 by encouraging residents, businesses and other organisations to recycle, however, waste from all sources continues to grow and landfill space will start to run out in 2008.⁶ Our focus will continue to be about promoting more sustainable waste management practices and encouraging people and organisations to reduce, reuse and recycle their waste.

Our climate is changing. Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions and other greenhouse gases are the main human influence on the global climate and the Government has set national targets for reductions in CO₂ emissions. The County has already experienced water shortages, heat waves, intense winter storms and flooding. Climate change will increase the frequency,

severity and cost of such events and could have devastating social and economic impacts, especially on those whose future is dependent upon their environment, for example our coastal towns and farmers. It is therefore important we work together to tackle climate change and plan for its impacts both positive and negative. Councils and other organisations in East Sussex have already started to work together to address this issue and reduce CO₂ emissions and pilot renewable energy schemes. However, a great deal more needs to be done to deliver the reductions necessary and to plan for the impacts of climate change.

The Challenges Ahead

Achieving planned regeneration and new developments whilst protecting and enhancing our natural and built environment is a huge challenge. Reducing CO₂ emissions, mitigating and adapting to climate change will require great effort but not taking action will be costly, especially in relation to public health, prosperity and our quality of life. We can all play our part, for example by reducing our waste, energy and water consumption, and using greener transport options. We also need to care for our open spaces, ensuring they are accessible to all, and to improve our town centres.

Our strategic priority for 2026 is to protect and enhance our natural and built environment for current and future generations, and enable individuals and organisations to tackle and adapt to climate change

Our key tasks will be to:

- Develop high quality environments in our towns and villages
- Reduce traffic, increase alternative sustainable travel choices and improve air quality
- Increase green spaces, leisure opportunities and visitor facilities and make best use of our natural assets
- Prepare for the effects of climate change; manage the risks and make the most of the opportunities
- Encourage individuals and organisations to minimise their water consumption, CO₂ emissions and overall environmental impact
- Reuse, reduce and recycle more household, business and industrial waste
- Ensure climate change is a strategic consideration of Local Development Frameworks and other planning policies.

¹ ODPM 2004 “Safer Places. The Planning System and Crime Prevention”

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² Weald District Council and Woodland Trust. Weald Ancient Woodland Survey 2006

³ Sussex Wildlife Trust 1996. The Vision for the Wildlife of Sussex. Sussex Biodiversity Partnership. Habitat Action Plan for East Sussex: Sussex Woodlands

⁴ Forest Research Annual Report and Accounts 2003-2004

⁵ Woodnet. Woodlots, Issue 69 Winter 2007-2008 and previous issues

⁶ East Sussex County Council, Personal Communication.