



WORTHING BOROUGH  
COUNCIL

Worthing Joint Strategic Sub Committee  
6 February 2024

Key Decision [No]

Ward(s) Affected:

## **Motion for the Ocean and the Sussex Bay Programme**

### **Report by the Director for Sustainability & Resources**

#### **Report Author**

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#### **Executive Summary**

##### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. On 12th December 2023, Worthing Full Council considered a Motion on Notice received from Cllr Claire Hunt regarding “sustainable marine recovery”.
- 1.2. The Motion called on Worthing Council to declare an urgent need for marine recovery and sustainability to realise “clean, healthy and productive seas, to meet our net zero targets and for all of the direct economic, health and wellbeing benefits it will bring”.
- 1.3. The Motion, seconded by Cllr Sophie Cox, cabinet lead for Climate, was debated and then referred to Worthing Joint Strategic Sub Committee for consideration and determination.
- 1.4. This report sets out the key features of the declaration and considers how the Sussex Bay programme initiated by Worthing Borough Council in partnership with Adur District Council demonstrates the Council’s existing clear strategic commitment to ocean recovery and

how the declaration would reinforce and extend that commitment further.

## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1. That the Committee:**

- Approves that the Council become a signatory to the Motion for the Ocean Declaration, joining 21 other local authorities, and registering this on the LGA Coastal SIG website.
- Writes to the Government, as called for in the Motion.
- Notes the progress being made by the Sussex Bay programme and its ability to deliver the commitments being made through the Declaration. Updates to be included in the regular Worthing Priorities updates to Committee.

### 3. Context and progress

- 3.1. A report was presented to the Joint Strategic Committee on 8th June 2021 entitled “Sussex Bay: Restoring our marine and estuarine habitats, supporting our coastal communities”. This report set out the considerable progress being made to develop a significant strategic programme to drive marine recovery. Both Worthing and Adur Councils showed clear leadership, recognising the potential to lead and enable marine recovery as coastal local authorities.
- 3.2. At this stage, the work included active project involvement in the recovery of the West Sussex kelp beds (strongly supported by in the Climate Assembly 2020 recommendations), partnership with the Weald to Waves landscape recovery project and Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, along with the development of strategic links with the Crown Estate, seabed owners.
- 3.3. Regular updates have been provided to Committee since then, outlining the developing programme and partnerships, including funding successes as follows:
  - £75k DEFRA Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund
  - £73k Coastal to Capital LEP Funding
  - £150k Esme Fairbairn Foundation
  - (shortlisted for) £100k Rewilding Britain Challenge Fund competition
- 3.4. Over the last two years, strong progress has been made to develop the vision for Sussex Bay with local partners, gaining significant levels of interest on a national level for the work being done, and involvement in a number of national working groups.
- 3.5. In November 2023, the first member of staff was recruited - to the role of Head of Blue Natural Capital, and the following activities are planned for 2024
  - Launch of the Sussex Bay website
  - Recruitment of a science lead
  - The production of a Sussex Bay seascape recovery strategy with partners
  - The development of a scientific research programme
  - Establishment of an Advisory Board and a number of forums
  - Curriculum development for ocean literacy in partnership with Knepp Wildland Foundation and Sussex Wildlife Trust aimed at young people
  - The development of sponsorship packages and early stage investment models

- Proposition development for creating a kelp nature credit
- A public launch for Sussex Bay in June / July 2024

#### **4. The Declaration Pledges**

- 4.1. The Motion seeks to ensure that the Councils embed marine recovery in strategic decision-making, policymaking and budget-setting, driving the development of a blue economy that delivers nature recovery, economic development, and contributes to tackling socio-economic inequality, health and well-being (pledges 1 & 2)
- 4.2. The Sussex Bay programme will respond to this initially through the development of a seascape recovery strategy, identifying potential areas for habitat restoration across Sussex Bay, such as saltmarsh, vegetated shingle, oyster beds, mussel beds, kelp beds and artificial reefs. We have secured support from national policy leads at the Marine Management Organisation, Natural England, DEFRA and the local Sussex IFCA to establish a regulators forum which will explore improved and better integrated terrestrial and marine planning (pledge 3). We believe this will be a first in the UK.
- 4.3. Subject to funding, Sussex Bay will begin development work on an Ocean Literacy package for schools, and we are currently supporting the EYE project to design a learning day for school children with input from a range of local environmental organisations (pledge 4)
- 4.4. There is significant scope for learning and citizen science opportunities flowing from this work and Sussex Bay will be in a position to seek funding and investment from philanthropic funders, grant funders and local businesses to implement such programmes over the next few years, with a focus on inclusion.
- 4.5. The Sussex Bay website, to be launched in early 2024 will develop into a significant resource enabling a range of projects to communicate their contributions to the Sussex Bay mission, and to help engage communities on an ongoing basis with “blue nature”. (pledge 5)
- 4.6. The Sussex Bay team has established very strong links with national organisations as well as local ones, including peer projects in Tyneside, Cornwall and North Devon. We plan to instigate a national practitioner network, and our Blue Natural Capital Lab concept (which brings together innovation in research, regulation and investment) has been picked up in a

number of national reports as a model to be rolled out.

- 4.7. Pledge 6 in the Motion calls on the Council to hold polluters and regulators to account, and this will be a focus of work in 2024, with the aim of engaging key organisations in positive strategic project opportunities as well as providing challenge and scrutiny.
- 4.8. Pledge 7 calls on the Council to write to the Government asking them to put the ocean into net recovery by 2030 through a range of actions, including the appointment of a dedicated Minister for Coastal Communities and the production of a national Ocean Recovery Strategy. Officers have reviewed the suggested elements of the national strategy and they are sound.

## **5. Engagement and Communication**

- 5.1. Significant engagement has been undertaken with national and local organisations by the Sussex Bay team, with over 100 people attending a briefing webinar in late 2021, and Sussex Bay being presented to a large audience recently at the UN Ocean Symposium 2023 in Bexhill-on-Sea.
- 5.2. There are regular briefings being given to local authority Chief Executives, and discussions are developing with Sussex University and others with regard to developing community participation approaches and funding opportunities for 2024.
- 5.3. The science lead, once recruited, will have a remit to engage with community organisations and groups to co-produce the seascape recovery strategy.
- 5.4. Links are being made into Worthing Council's Council for the Community approach, and a Nature Plan for Worthing will include the Sussex Bay work and the seascape recovery opportunities within it.
- 5.5. Engagement with the Worthing small boat fishing community is ongoing, with ambitions to develop a Sussex Bay fish brand.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 Section 3.3 within this report discusses the securing of £298k of funding to support work on Sussex Bay to date and further work being underway.
- 6.2 There are no other financial implications arising directly from the content of this report.

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1. Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.
- 7.2. Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 7.3. Section 1 of the Localism Act, 2011 allows a Council to do anything any other person can do , apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation.
- 7.4. The funding streams referred to in paragraph 3.3 of this report must be spent by the Councils in a way that does not breach the funding terms and conditions or create any unlawful state aid to any commercial undertaking.

### **Background Papers**

- JSC Report June 2021 “Sussex Bay: Restoring our marine and estuarine habitats, supporting our coastal communities”

## **Sustainability & Risk Assessment**

### **1. Economic**

There are significant opportunities that come with the recovery of the seascape, and increased biodiversity and water quality. These include the revival of small boat fishing, opportunities for aquaculture, circular economy opportunities regarding ocean plastics recovery and ecotourism and leisure. There are also opportunities for Sussex Bay to become a centre of excellence for innovation in marine research and habitat monitoring, including the use of new technologies.

### **2. Social**

#### **2.1 Social Value**

Opportunities to develop highly inclusive learning and volunteering options across multiple Sussex Bay projects, with a focus on a just transition.

#### **2.2 Equality Issues**

Particular attention is required to ensure projects and volunteering opportunities do not exclude, and are offered and marketed in ways that ensure diversity and inclusion.

#### **2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)**

No impacts identified

#### **2.4 Human Rights Issues**

No impacts identified

### **3. Environmental**

As a coastal local authority, marine recovery and sustainability is vital in the Council's overall approach to climate and biodiversity crises, ensuring land and sea are recovered with an integrated approach.

### **4. Governance**

Sussex Bay is hosted at Adur & Worthing Councils, and future governance options are in development as the programme develops. An Advisory Board and a number of consultative forums will be established in 2024.