



ADUR & WORTHING  
COUNCILS

Joint Strategic Committee  
6 February 2025

Key Decision [No]

Ward(s) Affected: All.

## Update on the Sussex Bay Programme

### Report by the Director for Sustainability & Resources

#### Officer Contact Details:

Dean Spears, Head of Sussex Bay

[dean.spears@sussexbay.org.uk](mailto:dean.spears@sussexbay.org.uk)

## Executive Summary

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The Sussex Bay programme, initiated by Worthing Borough and Adur District Councils demonstrates the Council's existing clear strategic commitment to ocean recovery and working both within the Council's geographical boundaries and regionally: a fully externally funded, nature first, project of hope without Councils funds, attracting over £1M in the first year.
- 1.2. 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 and including an agreement about next steps, including to actively seek external funding and to identify progress with marine restoration and recovery projects with partners, including The Crown Estate, seabed owners. The commitment to "Improve our Blue Space and Deliver Sussex Bay' was identified as a Strategic Priority for Worthing Borough Council (JSC, June 2023) noting the successful application for additional bathing waters in Worthing,

installation of publicly accessible litter picks along the foreshore at Sealane and East Beach to help citizens remove plastic pollution from the foreshore, in addition to the foundational work to help reuse and recycle ghost netting.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The Joint Strategic Committee is asked to reflect on the progress made with the Sussex Bay programme post its launch, from June 2024.
- 2.2. Endorse the Sussex Bay approach to continue to build a delivery model for marine, coastal and estuarine habitat restoration at scale, creating the exciting prospect of Sussex Bay as a “destination” and new economic opportunity expressed via the three emergent work packages noted in 2.11 below.
- 2.3. Accept the external funding that the Sussex Bay programme has attracted to date and endorse the headline and ring-fenced areas for its expenditure.
- 2.4. Endorse the programme of future events, including a quarterly Members forum with Leaders from each of the 11 Councils in the Sussex Bay programme area whilst balancing the need for ownership and the regional inclusivity.
- 2.5. To approve the bringing forward of the capital budget of £49,632 from the proposed 25/26 programme and to accept the additional funding and subsequent variation as set out in Section 5.2.

### **Context**

#### **Addressing the problem.**

- 2.5 A full summary of the significant depletion of our seascape, rivers and watercourses was detailed in the 8th June 2021 JSC paper, reflected in Councils priorities in the 13 June JSC paper and further updated in the 6 February 2024 JSC paper. Early review of the issues identified that there is no sustainable funding for the sea and rivers, nor one government department with strategic ownership. There is no body of government with a clear regional strategic leadership role. With the significant biodiversity decline across the seascape in recent decades, including 98% loss of historic West Sussex kelp beds, a range of organisations, from national and local government departments, regulators to charities and individuals are working hard in this space, but lack coordination and direction. Intertidal rivers, coastlines and inshore waters across Sussex are under pressure with sea temperatures predicted to rise due to climate change, and storms, flood events and erosion risk expected to increase as we seek ways to adapt to a changing climate with ever increasing demographic pressures. Much of the work is disconnected, without an overarching strategic and coordinated approach.
- 2.6 Sussex Bay has been developed as a pioneering regional response to the biodiversity and climate change crises in the seascape, and the collapse of coastal ecosystems. Founded upon radical collaboration amongst hundreds of organisations and communities over the past four years, the programme benefits from being hosted by a coastal local authority, whilst acting as an entrepreneur regionally and nationally to lead the development of high integrity blended finance to power communities-driven seascape work.
- 2.7 Geographically, we define Sussex Bay as the Sussex coastline (across 11 Councils) from Selsey in the west to Camber Sands in the east, the intertidal zones of our Sussex rivers and our inshore waters, taking a whole seascape approach to interconnected habitats and the communities and businesses within the area. Sussex Bay is the “blue mirror to the South Downs”, a means to give an identity to the connected seascape for the first time.
- 2.8 Since 2019, when a significant number of organisations declared a climate emergency, including ADR & Worthing Councils, amongst hundreds of organisations and individuals, the approach to collaborate across sectors and to seek ways to attract sustainable funding sources was born, based on the need for sound scientific research coupled with community participation. The Councils also declared a Biodiversity Crisis in 2020.

- 2.9 In line with the Priorities to 'Deliver Sussex Bay' in the June 2023 JSC paper, in November 2023, Adur & Worthing Councils were successful in attracting early seed funding of £150,000 from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for one year, to set up a Sussex Bay programme to address these problems. A Head of Blue Natural Capital was appointed alongside marketing and engagement consultants to develop a package of projects and launch the programme. A funding allocation was given for small test-case projects, and a small overhead return into the Councils for associated running costs required to host this regional programme.
- 2.10 The Sussex Bay programme successfully launched on 13 June 2024 to a broad audience of 450 at Brighton Dome, with a day of guest speakers followed by an evening event delivered by the Blue Earth Summit.

### **Announcing the three work packages**

- 2.11 During the launch, following careful analysis of a synthesis of sources, data and studies, three overarching work packages were announced which support our vision for a healthy blue ecosystem in which nature, people and economy thrive into the future.

#### (i) Forming the UK virtual Blue Natural Capital Lab and Network

The BNC Lab is a place to attract and 'test-out' new high integrity funding to develop a pipeline of projects, tests and trials, bringing them to investment ready status. Working behind the scenes with financiers and regulators to advance understanding of the high integrity credits and funding markets, linking biodiversity net gain, marine net gain and voluntary credits, blended with external large grant funding for project delivery. A headline target of attracting a £50 Million fund for nature recovery was published. In May 2024, [The Crown Estate and Blue Marine Foundation with partners published 'A Road Map for Action'](#) for high integrity blue natural capital markets in the UK and featured Sussex Bay Blue Natural Capital Lab as a best practice case study (p56) reflecting our contributions to ideas workshops and the significance of our work nationally.

#### (ii) Develop a blueprint for areawide seascape recovery

Science and community led, the blueprint will provide an integrated approach and road map to ecological recovery, considering how projects in the ocean impact on one another. The work, which will also examine the social and economic

benefits of nature recovery, will become the voluntary marine extension to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Sussex.

(ii) Engage communities and build participation around our work

Sussex Bay is broadly defined as one hundred miles of coastline, from Camber Sands to Selsy Bill, encompassing over one million residents and eleven Councils areas. Esmée Fairbairn Foundation as the core funder, requires the Sussex Bay programme to encourage and find safe spaces for those who do not normally get involved in nature or marine type thinking to do so. The Sussex Bay programme places diversity, equality and inclusion front and centre in the way community engagement and participation is designed.

2.12 The Sussex Bay team of two employees are operating within a network of 450 local, regional and national organisations working at pace and are either leading or co-producing at least 60 projects. The focus is nature first. As the host coastal local authority, key benefits include:

- Attracting over £1.2M for the Sussex Bay programme delivery with funds managed safely into the Councils ring-fenced accounts, breakdown as noted in 3.1 below.
- Developing an online work experience toolkit for people wishing to enter into the marine profession, in partnership with the Weald to Waves project and the pupils of the Eco-Committee of Bohunt School, Worthing who will help to test the module from March 2025.
- Being a Location Partners for the government's innovation agency, with four national businesses testing out brand new highly technical, space enabled projects across Sussex Bay, using AI to talk to rivers, monitoring storks, mapping large areas of tree health and biodiversity within the Councils land and across our partners, in work that has never been done before in the UK with a non-cash value of £1M.
- Managing the refurbishment of the Rotunda, building upon years of Council's work, opening Summer 2025 as a place for local fishers to prepare their fish in addition to their small boats should they wish.
- As the home to the UK virtual Blue Natural Capital Lab, enabling government departments to work in Sussex Bay as a case study to trial new approaches and work, showcasing Adur & Worthing Councils nationally.
- Rolling out citizen science programmes with partners to test and trial.

- Being home to the development of an areawide blueprint for seascape recovery across the 100 miles of Sussex Bay, on behalf of the 11 Councils in the project area, forming the voluntary extension to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Creating new jobs and opportunities in the marine and nature sector.
- Shining a light on projects made in Adur & Worthing and working with other partners locally, regionally and nationally to share best practice and try out innovative approaches.
- Creating new networks across sectors to develop further collaboration and regenerative opportunities.
- Operating within existing geographical boundaries and regionally.

### **3. Issues for consideration**

*Progress made with the Sussex Bay programme since its launch.*

3.1 We are on track to bring in well over £1m of external funding in our first year of operation. Our funding strategy is to ensure that all funding is of high integrity, directed to our work packages and represents value for money by ensuring that outcomes make a difference to communities. Following our initial £150,000 seed funding from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, we have secured:

- £100,000, July 2024, from Rewilding Britain principally to appoint a Seascape Recovery science lead to co-produce the seascape recovery plan; to develop with the Weald to Waves project an online work experience tool-kit; a contribution to the Sussex Dolphin Project so that early stage researchers can do their work in Sussex Bay if they cannot afford to travel overseas; and a much needed contribution towards a Worthing based Fishing Net Reuse and Recycling scheme. We were also able to support the United Nations World Ocean Symposium running costs in their Bexhill conference which attracted an audience of 150 people. The Councils were also able to support the Anglers National Line Recycling Scheme via CiL funds to help.
- £30,000, November 2024, from the Championing Coastal Communities fund (administered by the Environment Agency from DEFRA) to deliver a piece of research to help us build the participation foundations for a new Engagement specialist to work with communities and engage them around our work as a national exemplar for others.
- £53,000, October 2024, from the Marine Management Organisation as a contribution towards the refurbishment of the Windsor Lawns Rotunda project, with work underway and due to be completed by Spring 2025 as a place for local small-boat fishers to sell their fish on

Worthing seafront. The fishers initially made the funding application and then approached Sussex Bay for help to deliver.

- £26,700, June 2024 - January 2025, from our public crowdfunder and from local businesses who wish to support the pipeline of projects, including Properlternet, Get Set Hire, RSA Aqua, Royal Haskoning Dhv.
- £2,300 December 2024, from marine charity Sea Changers, as a contribution towards some new immersive signs, tracing the history of Worthing coastal communities that will be attached to the Rotunda post opening.

*£762,000 Forthcoming, from January 2025.*

- £450,000, from January 2025 (£150,000 per year for three years), from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation to continue with our core, foundational operating costs and to attract longer sustainable income streams post 2028.
- £40,000, from January 2025 from the Marine Management Organisation to fund an academic piece of research exploring regional decision making in the ocean with the University of Sussex.
- £27,000, from January 2025 from Natural England to roll out an ocean literacy survey, currently underway across Sussex Bay for 2,000 respondents. We are co-project managing. Results are due from Spring 2025 and will provide further detail of communities' connection to nature.
- £60,000, from January 2025 from Innovate UK, known as Connected Places Satellite, as a contribution towards expertise and time from the Head of Sussex Bay and the Seascape Research Lead in supporting four businesses who are delivering cutting edge space enabled projects that connect people to nature in Sussex Bay between January - March 2025. A showcase event is planned on 28 March 2025, details to be announced by Innovate UK.
- £85,000, from June 2025 from Innovate UK, known as Connected Places Satellite, as a contribution towards expertise and time from the Head of Sussex Bay and the Seascape Research Lead in supporting two of the four businesses to develop their product further and take to market over six months. This allocation is subject to confirmation in March 2025.
- £100,000, January 2025 from the USA based Novo Foundation to principally appoint a Participation Lead for one year to engage communities around our work and put in place measures for long term

regional communities participation around our blueprint for seascape recovery. Small allocations were agreed with the funder and included a contribution towards an online mapping tool for communities across Sussex Bay to upload their details and encourage volunteers to join them, and a contribution towards supporting fishing communities expressed via the Rotunda project above.

### *Additional areas of non-cash support and impact*

- 3.3 Reflecting local, regional, national and international interest in the Sussex Bay programme, we have received over 100 pro-bono offers of free support from local communities and organisations who whilst may be unable to offer cash, have provided specialist services at no cost. We are very grateful to all contributors. Some highlights include local lawyers who have helped with legal advice about trade marking and licences, building and surveying firms who are providing expertise for the Rotunda Project and numerous communications and engagement professionals. We have also been provided with free office space at co-working areas in Brighton, on the University of Sussex Campus, in shared offices in Newhaven from Lewes and Eastbourne Councils in addition to our core base in Adur & Worthing Councils. Through links with the Universities, the Seascape Recovery Lead has negotiated workshop space, academic production of maps and more which would have cost around £20,000 per year.
- 3.4 We won, via a competitive process, academic research support from University College London to conduct a three month research investigation, at our request, into the future governance, operating and stakeholder analysis. The team conducted interviews with 20 cross-sector stakeholders, and helped to clarify the Sussex Bay mission, whilst seeking feedback from stakeholders to enable us to exceed expectations. Sussex Bay remains a project in local government with clear benefits associated with the long term custodianship role of local authorities, and there are currently no plans to become any other type of organisation.
- 3.5 We are developing strong links with colleagues in Cornwall, The Solent, The Crown Estate, DEFRA, Natural England, The Environment Agency, Marine Management Organisation to form our Blue Natural Capital Lab and network. The Crown Estate is exploring ways to support the network. More details will be announced over 2025.
- 3.6 In Summer 2024, we received news that our Trademark application for our logo and the words together, Sussex Bay, was unchallenged and successful in key areas, including research, finance, education, tourism and more. We want everyone to refer to Sussex Bay in the ways that they wish. The trademark is owned by Adur and Worthing Councils with the current designation due to run for ten years, 2034, the standard term with a future application for continuation due from 2032. We trademarked to ensure that any further financial benefit is returned to



the public sector and to avoid any confusion i.e., that we are the official Sussex Bay programme.

- 3.7 We are in the early days of exploring the place shaping and regenerative aspects of Sussex Bay, as we know from our website records, that people are searching for a way to stay in Sussex Bay, and as people take ownership of the programme in their areas. We will collaborate further in this area of the year ahead.

*Looking to the next six months, post launch anniversary, June 2025.*

- 3.8 We will continue to make progress against the three work packages noted above and will produce a full report to coincide with our anniversary from June 2025. In addition to the forthcoming engagement noted below, we continue to meet and share ideas with the Cabinet Members for Environment Services for Worthing and Adur and are very grateful for their time.
- 3.9 There are currently two team members, the Head of Sussex Bay, supported by a Seascape Science Research Lead, and a to be recruited Participation Lead, all externally funded.

#### **4. Engagement and Communication**

- 4.1 Sussex Bay launched in June 2024 and was founded upon five years of preceding collaboration amongst hundreds of groups and organisations. We are currently developing our participation plans ahead of the recruitment of our participation lead from Spring 2025, funded by the Novo foundation. Whilst our priority is primarily focused on projects in the ocean, we are keen to support, where we can, organisations that are involved in tackling some of the challenges that our coastal communities face, with expertise and external bid writing.
- 4.2 Sussex Bay seeks to develop a suite of best practice, participatory citizen projects that can be replicated by the coastal authorities across the Sussex Bay project area. Examples include the development of a citizen science land Search project in conjunction with Sussex Dolphin Project, connecting disadvantaged coastal communities with the seascape to help improve mental well being, while gathering vital scientific data to monitor seascape recovery, and a forthcoming online work experience tool kit.
- 4.3 In January 2024, we published [www.sussexbay.org.uk](http://www.sussexbay.org.uk) which attracts on average 500 hits per week-day and 300 over the weekend, rushing to 6,000 daily hits around our launch, featuring projects and ways to get involved, with over 130,000 visitors to-date. We have since launched a LinkedIn page (1,700 followers), published a monthly e-newsletter (1,000

followers) and have recently launched BlueSky, TikTok and Instagram accounts. We are seeking input from students from the Chichester College Group, which includes 7 Colleges in West Sussex and Brighton & Hove, about how to create fresh and vibrant content to attract new audiences.

- 4.4 Following demand, we began #SussexBay conversations by themes, including investment, business, communications, communities, creativity and more to bring together like-minded individuals to co-produce and engage communities innovatively. We are pooling these conversations together as we plan for a summer event.
- 4.5 From March 2025, following demand, we will host our first online Sussex Bay Council Leaders Briefing, with the 11 Councils (including the Countys) that make up Sussex Bay, with the purpose to update, share examples of how Councils are making use of the Sussex Bay programme and to begin a quarterly dialogue to foster further collaboration. These forums build upon the good officer collaboration underway regionally.
- 4.6 The Sussex Bay programme has attracted much media interest, locally, regionally and nationally, including coverage in The Guardian and The Observer, and a published Tedx Talk on the global Tedx network. When requested to provide media input, we always put forward the partners first, the groups and organisations working in Sussex Bay in our amplifying role.
- 4.7 We have established links with charities regionally focusing on older people, people of colour, LGBTQ+ communities to prepare joint funding bids with them, to engage communities who do not usually participate in seascape work to do so.
- 4.8 We have been asked to form a civic engagement partnership with the University of Sussex, who provide our Seascape Research Lead with desk space and access to Journals and members of their academic community, with links to the Universities of: Portsmouth, Southampton, York, SAMS, Plymouth, Leeds.
- 4.9 Upon the request of our core funder, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, complementing our local government scrutiny and governance arrangements, we run an informal advisory group, who provide ideas, support, challenge and network introductions, acting as a critical friend outside of their day-to-day jobs. Bringing expertise from their specialist areas, the group meet quarterly in venues across Sussex Bay and their profiles are published: [www.sussexbay.org.uk/people](http://www.sussexbay.org.uk/people) Following the appointment of the new Participation Lead, we will welcome additional members via an application process to be developed.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications for the Councils other than to seek endorsement of the acceptance of additional forthcoming funding as noted above. The project is on track to attract over £1M of external funding in its first year of operation, and within this funding includes funds for Councils overheads and support to the programme including office space, HR, legal, Finance.
- 5.2 In relation to the Rotunda Project mentioned in the report content above, the current funding offers and options achieved total £89,000. Members are asked to accept the external funding of £53,000 from the Marine Management Organisation, and £20,000 from the wider Novo funding achieved by Sussex Bay. A further £16,000 is to be funded by CIL funds. Members are therefore asked to approve the virement of £39,368 from these funding sources in order to reflect the additional funding achieved and extend the budget of the project to £89,000.

## **6. Legal Implications.**

- 6.1 Sussex Bay is not a legal entity and operates as a project via Adur and Worthing Councils and the Councils have to comply with their respective constitutions and statutory obligations in all dealings for and on behalf of the Sussex Bay project.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 Section 1 Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 confers power on the local authority to enter into a contract for the provision of making available of assets or services for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the local authority
- 6.4 Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 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.
- 6.5 The funding streams referred to in paragraph 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**

[8 June 2021 JSC Sussex Bay report.](#)

[5 June 2023 Strategic Priorities for Worthing Borough Council: 2022/3 Progress Update Report and New Priorities for 2023/24.](#)

[6 February 2024 JSC Motion for the Ocean report.](#)

[15 May 2024 The Crown Estate High-Integrity Marine Natural Capital Markets in the UK – A Roadmap for Action](#)

## **Sustainability & Risk Assessment**

- The positive benefits for sustainability in Sussex Bay expressed through the three work packages are noted above.

### **1. Economic**

- Some examples include: supporting coastal communities, especially fishers, and more include the 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 as exemplified by the Innovate UK work. The developing work experience tool-kit has the potential to attract and create green and blue sector jobs.

### **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. The forthcoming blueprint for seascape recovery and the developing participation strategy will empower communities through a sense of place to participate in the work.

#### **2.2 Equality Issues**

- Particular attention is required to ensure projects and volunteering opportunities are not exclusive, and are offered and marketed in ways that ensure diversity and inclusion. We are actively working with LGBTQ+ groups, the Black and Anti Racism Organisation (BARCO) based in Southwick, and people who wish to get involved in our work.

#### **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 there are no plans for the programme to change at this point in time. An Informal Advisory Board and a number of consultative forums have been established in 2024 and more will be produced once the Participation Lead is in post.