



# Re-imagining Lewes District:

*Delivering the Vision 2024 → 2028*



# Introduction from the Leader, Councillor Zoe Nicholson

Our corporate plan reflects what our residents told us is important. It means the work the council is doing in local communities, is the work residents asked us to do.

We have five key areas to focus on over the next four years and in the following pages you can read about the action we are taking and how success will be measured.

We know that providing good quality frontline council services is so important to our residents and visitors to the district. Councils don't receive government funding for these services anymore, so it doesn't get any easier, but we've made big improvements in our customer service, not least in the way we engage with people online and through the council website.

Top of our list is also continuing to support people who are struggling with the cost of living crisis. We know the most vulnerable people in the district live day to day, often unable to pay their bills, afford the most basic items and worrying about keeping a roof over their heads. During the pandemic we learned a lot about helping people in this situation and I'm most grateful to local charities, voluntary organisations and other council partners for the vital role they play too.

We will also be doubling down on our efforts to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. We have a wide ranging and exciting programme of work ahead of us. The challenge is considerable, but we are making good progress and have a long list of brilliant partners that share our determination to deliver the change that is needed.

Building our Communities wealth and wellbeing is really important and we know it's making a big difference. It's basically about how we prioritise the local economy in our buying decisions. We want to keep the 'council pound' in the Lewes district, helping local businesses to keep employing local residents. And we want our partners in the district to adopt the same approach.

Providing decent, warm and affordable homes is a top priority for so many. We need more social and affordable homes in the right place and built to high standards, including energy efficiency and climate resilience. Since 2019 we've been bucking the trend by building council homes, but we need more of them that local people can afford. Our four-year target is 500 new affordable and council homes.

In addition to all the above, we will continue to provide good quality frontline council services to our residents and visitors to the district. Councils don't receive government funding for these services anymore, so it doesn't get any easier, but we've made big improvements in our customer service, not least in the way we engage with people online and through the council website.





**In partnership with you, over the next 4 years we are focusing on:**

- 1 Delivering high quality, responsive services to local people**
- 2 Supporting local people through challenging times**
- 3 Providing leadership in tackling the climate and nature emergencies**
- 4 Creating sustainable community wealth**
- 5 Building genuinely affordable homes**

**Here we are setting out our target ambitions for the coming four years. Detailed work programmes will be developed, showing how we will deliver on these ambitions.**

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*High quality,  
responsive  
services*

## **Making sure we listen, respond and consistently provide good customer service**

Providing excellent customer service and focusing on resolving questions and problems first time is central to how this council operates. We will continue to ensure that our services meet our residents' needs and strive to deliver consistently high quality and responsive services.

↓ **Key Areas**



## We will:

- Improve the quality of customer experience by offering a wider range of access routes to our services, including more on-line and self-service options to allow 24/7 access, alongside face to face and phone options.
- Providing face to face and telephone services which support those in need, working in collaboration with others such as town councils and Citizens Advice in key locations across the district.
- Identify and address inequality in our communities in order to promote fairness, equitable services and a commitment to uphold these principles throughout our work.
- Maximise use of technology to be able to identify and target those in most need, to ensure they get access to the support services to which they are entitled.
- Get our communication and engagement right through regular information sharing and consultation.
- Respect our communities and engage meaningfully with local people to nurture strong relations.
- Continue to embed a culture of continuous improvement, where we constantly re-evaluate our quality of service.
- Support local communities in maintaining up to date Neighbourhood Plans.



## 4 year goals:

1. Delivery of consistently high customer service standards
2. Listening and responding to the needs of local residents through good quality consultation and engagement
3. Providing a range of ways to get in touch that meet different residents' needs, particularly those with disabilities or experiencing disadvantage
4. Increased proactive and responsive neighbourhood and partnership services
5. Increased resident and business involvement in neighbourhood services (e.g. litter picking)
6. Reduction in levels of non-recyclable household waste

# 2

## *Support through challenging times*

### **The Council's role in addressing hardship**

The council has an important role in supporting those in most need in society. Since the pandemic, and the economic challenges that followed it nationally, we have been working hard in particular to support people experiencing hardship due to the cost of living crisis. This work will continue, especially whilst the national economic situation continues to be difficult. We are taking a holistic approach to this, working across all departments in the council.

#### **Key Areas**



## We will:

- Maintain our new support regime of 100% council tax reduction for those most in need, whilst reviewing the level of council tax required for second homes and vacant properties.
- Give support to local voluntary organisations assisting those worst affected by the cost of living crisis, and build strong relationships with our voluntary sector partners to ensure joined up support (including benefits advice, assistance with form filling, sign-posting etc).
- Support those on lowest incomes through housing benefit, council tax reduction and other assistance schemes, providing local delivery of national schemes as these arise.
- Assist residents to maximise the welfare benefits they are entitled to and remove barriers (such as digital exclusion or lack of understanding) to ensure people are able to take up their entitlements.
- Provide the right advice to residents at the right time, ensuring information and advice is available to those needing extra support, to let them know what is available and how it can be accessed.
- Provide additional support to businesses where national schemes are administered locally.
- Identify and address inequality in our communities and uphold a commitment to the principle of fairness throughout our work.
- Using available data and technology, to help identify those most at risk of falling into debt and who require welfare support, so that targeted offers of support can be provided.
- Make use of the council's extensive communications channels (including District News, email services, social media and conventional media) to inform residents of the range of support available.
- Make advice and services easily available, whether through 24-7 self service channels or by providing direct support those those unable to self-serve.

## 4 year goals:

1. **Reduced levels of inequality experienced in the district**
2. **Increased uptake of benefits and assistance schemes provided by the council**
3. **Increased uptake of business support**



# 3

## *Climate, nature and food systems*

### **A net zero carbon and climate resilient council and district by 2030**

Tackling the climate crisis and nature emergencies is central to all our activities. We are committed to supporting measures to help arrest biodiversity losses, restore habitats and work for climate resilience to promote healthy and thriving communities. We will continue our journey to reduce carbon emissions and aim to become a fully climate-resilient council by 2030. We will prepare a climate and nature action plan for a net zero carbon district. Meaningful nature-based solutions and adaptation measures are at the heart of these ambitions.

We will also provide leadership in areas outside of the council's direct control, working with our partners, so that we can make a real difference to our local communities and to the planet. Our key partners include the Environment Agency, Ouse Valley Climate Action, Town & Parish Councils, East Sussex County Council, Transition Town Lewes, The Living Coast (UNESCO Biosphere), Changing Chalk, South Downs National Park Authority, The Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Sussex Nature Partnership, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Ouse & Adur River Trust, Ouse Sussex Flow, Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre, Natural England, Sussex-air and a wide variety of local volunteer groups.

#### **Key Areas**





## We will:

- Refresh, with our partners and residents, our climate and nature action plan, clearly setting out our aspirations and how they will be measured.
- Engage the community energy sector and others in the shift to low or zero carbon electricity generation, and directly invest in local renewable energy schemes and providers where opportunities arise.
- Improve the energy efficiency of homes including by supporting low-carbon heating technologies in our own council houses, whilst also supporting homeowners and private renters.
- Work with partners to deliver nature-based solutions to achieve connection between natural environments (ecological connectivity), improved biodiversity and climate resilience in our local landscape.
- Deliver a programme of nature restoration including second high profile rivers and nature restoration project, following the Cockshut Stream restoration.
- Increase biodiversity, wildflower and pollinator opportunities through managing grass cutting regimes and planting schemes on council land.
- Consolidate our focus on our rivers, seas and water quality. Prioritise efforts with partners to manage the risks posed by flooding, support the Environment Agency and other partners to address coastal erosion and explore a 'rights of rivers' approach with partners Love our Ouse.
- Build, and encourage the development of, housing which is affordable, energy efficient, climate resilient, adaptable and locally sourced, and utilise the Modular Housing Framework to increase the use of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) in the delivery of new council homes.
- Monitor, and work with partners to improve, air quality in the district, focusing in particular on nitrogen dioxide and particulate levels, making use of air quality action plans for relevant areas.
- Work in partnership towards more sustainable food systems in the region.
- Deliver a new local plan with the greenest possible policies at its centre, including building on existing successes in delivering Biodiversity Net Gain and aim for higher levels of delivery in future, ahead of national guidance on this area.
- Work in partnership on opportunities arising from the Seaford to Eastbourne Nature Recovery Project, launched in summer 2023 by Defra and Natural England'.
- Move our waste and recycling vehicles to lower emission alternatives.
- Encourage lower emission travel across the district by increased access to Electric Vehicle charging, car share schemes and car clubs.
- Increase opportunities for public transport, cycling and walking in the district by working with partners such as community cycling groups, East Sussex County Council, Ouse Valley Climate Action and others to improve infrastructure and reduce barriers to accessible, low carbon active travel between and within our towns and villages.
- Work with residents and local towns and parishes to increase residents' separation of food and garden waste from 'residual' household waste, increasing the amount of high-quality compost created by our partners.
- Achieve waste reduction overall by encouraging a 'Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' approach that is collaborative with the community.
- Create opportunities to reduce littering and improve the public realm in collaboration with local and national partners
- Continue to utilise the Clear Futures Joint Venture Partnership and Framework to support sustainable and transformational change.

## 4 year goals:

1. The indicators in the refreshed Climate and Nature Action Plan
2. Reduction in council carbon emissions to be net zero by 2030
3. Reduction in direct fossil fuel use
4. Increase the level of biodiversity net gain delivered.



# 4

## *Community Wealth and Wellbeing*

### **A great place to live and work**

For the last 4 years the council has embraced a community wealth building approach to its work. This is about ensuring that local people and the local economy are placed at the centre of how the council operates, and how we work with our partners.

We will continue to work with key local institutions including our county council, local businesses, police and NHS partners (anchor institutions) to change procurement practices to focus on local providers where possible. We aim to provide more local employment through all of our activities. We will support the development of social enterprises and identify where additional social value can be achieved in local communities.

### **Key Areas**



## We will:

- Support our local economies, including the rural economy, by procuring from local suppliers, and encouraging other local partners to do the same.
- Work with suppliers to maximise what additional social value benefits can be gained when contracts are delivered for the council, in line with the council's Social Value Charter, and develop a sustainability and social value procurement framework.
- Complete the Pathfinder Pilot regeneration projects in Newhaven, funded with support from central government where a community wealth approach is central.
- Increase local employment opportunities by actively recruiting locally through a range of media (including social media), and by committing ourselves and our partners to paying the real living wage where possible.
- Embed circular economy principles to enable reuse of materials and sustainable management of resources throughout the council's work.
- Use our land and assets, and partners' public land and assets, to benefit the local community and businesses.
- Support the local voluntary and community sector to help ensure its ongoing strength and vitality, using our revolving loans scheme to enable community led groups to further develop and flourish.
- Develop green and renewable job training opportunities for local people by working with education and training partners. The new Local Plan will provide a vehicle to promote training and employment opportunities in local labour agreements, when agreeing to new commercial developments.
- Find ways to enable more of the district's money to stay within the district, directly benefiting residents and local companies.
- Support and enable plural ownership through worker and consumer cooperatives and social enterprises, looking to achieve joint council and social enterprise ownership where appropriate.
- Enable local social enterprises to develop and thrive, supported by our Lewes District Start-up Programme
- Work to reduce deprivation in the district through our regeneration activities, in partnership with other anchor institutions.
- Encourage local town and parish councils to work actively with us to further develop a community wealth building approach across the area.
- Encourage a thriving visitor economy, based on our natural, cultural and heritage assets, which supports and nurtures our local economy and environment through collaborative initiatives and events.
- Invest in children's and families' positive experience of the outdoors, with attractive activity spaces, seats, including picnic tables and fun play equipment.
- Work to reduce vandalism and antisocial behaviour in our public conveniences, whilst providing more fully accessible Changing Places and finding ways to reduce the environmental impact of our toilets.
- Ensure robust and effective ways of dealing with littering and fly-tipping, including through our 'Educate Remind Enforce' campaign.
- Promote community wellbeing by supporting active enjoyment of our countryside and environment as well as valuing and promoting our local sporting and leisure activities and facilities.

## 4 year goals:

1. Improvement in Thriving Places Index Score ([www.thrivingplacesindex.org/](http://www.thrivingplacesindex.org/))
2. Increase in proportion of procurement spend going to local companies.
3. Increase in social value achieved through council contracts.
4. Better cared for and more accessible public spaces.
5. More local job opportunities in renewable and green technologies.



# 5

## *Delivering Homes*



### **Build warmer, better homes that people can afford to live in**

The home in which we live has a huge impact on our quality of life and our health. Access to safe and secure housing, that local people can afford, is fundamental to supporting wellbeing and enabling our communities to thrive.

Working with partners we will support, promote and enable the delivery of housing for local people to buy and rent, including through community land trusts and other relevant community groups. We will seek to rebalance our local housing markets and help build sustainable communities.

We will deliver and maintain affordable, high-quality homes. We will do this in partnership with TOLD (Tenants of Lewes District). Alongside providing council housing, we will support people to access other social housing and private rented accommodation, particularly supporting those who are at risk of homelessness. Using our planning policies we will work to ensure provision of the right homes in the right places for local people.

#### **Key Areas**

## We will:

- Enable the delivery of an additional 300 new affordable homes, across the district, alongside 200 new council houses.
- Support the provision of social, affordable, sustainable, energy and resource efficient, climate resilient housing, delivering for our tenants and residents more effectively.
- Build more rented council homes in the district, including using innovative approaches such as modular housing.
- Provide the broadest possible range of accessible housing to meet the diverse needs of the community.
- Explore opportunities to work with public sector partners to identify land suitable for housing development, where social rents could be achieved.
- Use our planning system to support the provision of truly affordable housing, narrowing the inequality that exists whilst delivering for our tenants and residents even more effectively.
- Implement a system of revolving loans to enable Community Land Trusts to develop affordable housing in the area.
- Reduce the reliance on temporary and emergency accommodation, improve prevention measures for those experiencing homelessness and deliver more appropriate accommodation.
- Support independent living, including providing accessible housing for those with physical and additional support needs, and work with partners on health, housing and care strategies that enable supported living.

- Ensure residents have equal access to housing services across the district and have a strong voice in how their homes and communities are managed.
- Prioritise regulatory and legislative compliance to ensure the council owned homes remain at a high standard, including improving responsiveness on repairs and maintenance, retrofitting, making them cheaper to heat and improving shared and amenity space.
- Ensure that when new housing is being delivered, the developers minimise waste and avoid removing material from the development site where possible.
- Support the provision of new infrastructure and community facilities close to locations where new housing developments are taking place.
- Ensure new council built homes are as sustainable as possible.



## 4 year goals:

1. Enabling the delivery of 300 new affordable homes.
2. Delivering 200 additional council houses.
3. Directly deliver more council housing for rent.
4. More sustainable and energy efficient homes across the district.
5. Accessible housing for those with additional support needs.



## How we will work with you

In working with local people and partners, we are committed to:

- **Putting residents first in decision-making.**
- **Being open and transparent, including following principles of open governance.**
- **Having a collaborative culture which involves local people and stakeholders from an early stage and directly involves them in delivering solutions.**
- **Taking a preventative approach to how we address local issues and concerns, investing to tackle problems early.**
- **Ensuring equality and diversity principles are core to all we do.**
- **Ensuring the wellbeing of our staff, prioritising their physical and mental health.**
- **Having a workforce and culture that reflect the diversity of the local community and providing diversity training for our staff.**

