

news release

05 July 2023

County Councils appointed to prepare Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Sussex

West Sussex and East Sussex County Councils have been appointed as the 'Responsible Authorities' for the production of two Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Sussex over the next 18 months: one covering West Sussex, and one for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a flagship measure in the Environment Act 2021 to encourage more coordinated, practical, and focussed action and investment in nature. It is the first time that planning for nature recovery in England has been put on a statutory footing.

We will be working in partnership to produce these stakeholder-led and evidence-based strategies, supported by Brighton & Hove City Council and Natural England. We will explore what actions can be taken to address the biodiversity crisis in Sussex as well as related matters, including the impacts of climate change.

To develop these Local Nature Recovery Strategies, we will work in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the Sussex Nature Partnership, local authorities, the South Downs National Park Authority and the bodies for the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Sussex Wildlife Trust, and major landowners.

Deborah Urquhart, West Sussex County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, said: "I'm delighted that the County Council has been appointed to prepare the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Sussex. We look forward to working with East Sussex County Council, our partners, and a wide range of stakeholders, including local communities, farmers and landowners, and biodiversity and natural environment experts. We want our Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Sussex to link nature to people and places and to explore what actions can be taken to deliver positive change for nature and to aid its recovery."



NEWS RELEASE

20 July 2023

West Sussex County Council to express concerns to government over proposed infrastructure levy

Members and Councillors of West Sussex County Council have passed a motion for the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, to state its concerns over a proposed Infrastructure Levy and the possible impact it could have on funding.

In June of this year, the Leader of West Sussex County Council, Cllr Paul Marshall, joined other local government and construction industry leaders in calling on the government to review the introduction of a new infrastructure levy, which has been proposed in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

Fellow WSCC councillors shared the concerns outlined by Cllr Marshall in his original letter and a statement issued since submitting the letter, and have passed a motion at the recent full council for the Leader to contact the Secretary of State on behalf of the whole council to highlight the level of disappointment and apprehension felt within the organisation around the changes the proposed new system would introduce.

Since the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in 2010, which was adopted by all but two of the planning authorities in West Sussex, the county council has seen a significant drop in funding for essential services. In the period of 2021/22, the county council only received 6% of the CIL available in West Sussex. This is due to it only being a consultee in the CIL process and so having no control over setting and collecting the levy, or deciding spending priorities and the allocation of funds.

Under the Government's proposal for the new system, which would replace Section 106 agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy payments, the council would no longer be statutory consultees with regard to future planning developments in the county. It is only described as a 'third party', which is dismissive and suggests it is just an interested observer of the developer contributions system, rather than a key provider of infrastructure that is essential to economic health and social wellbeing.

The county council's strategic priorities include developing a sustainable and prosperous economy, delivering safe and effective transport options and providing access to education, employment and other services. However, as we would not be formally involved in the process, planning authorities will be able to ignore our requests for funding contributions for new education facilities, new roads, public transport and active travel schemes – all things our growing communities need.

There are also concerns that the levy would result in leaving communities with fewer new social and affordable homes and could impact negatively on housing delivery as a whole, which will affect future generations considerably.

Cllr Marshall said: “The potentially negative impact on our communities and the infrastructure that supports them will be compounded by a key proposal of the levy where the amount being paid by developers won’t be calculated until the project is complete. This will delay provision of new and improved infrastructure to support the new developments by months or even years as the county council and other service providers can only plan for delivery once the levy funds have been secured.

“We have also seen no guidance on how the transition from the current use of CIL and S106 would be managed. If the Infrastructure Levy was introduced under a phased system, this would result in the county council having to navigate different developer contributions systems in different areas at different times, which is not practical

“The county council are keen to support the government in finding a solution that does work for everyone. However, the Infrastructure Levy could result in less infrastructure being delivered and the delivery of that infrastructure being even further out of step with the delivery of new homes.

“This is not just a problem for WSCC, our position reflects that of over 30 organisations who wrote to The Secretary of State calling on him to not implement the proposed levy. All agreed that it could result in less infrastructure being delivered, fewer affordable homes being built and a potential adverse impact on housing delivery.

“The county council would be very happy to work with the government and others in reforming the current developer contributions system and, if the proposal is retained, the introduction of the Infrastructure Levy so its shortcomings can be addressed.”

The motion was passed at a meeting of the Full Council, held on Monday 17th July 2023.