

Climate Leadership Gloucestershire Meeting #17 17/09/2024, Meeting Notes

Climate Leadership Gloucestershire

This meeting followed a presentation from the University of Gloucestershire's Countryside & Community Research Institute, on their 'Climathon' methodology. This is an innovative engagement approach, supporting rural communities in their net zero transition. Practicalities of implementing Climathons within the county was discussed (notes available separately).

Notes and actions of the meeting

Attendance

The following partners were in attendance:

Partner organisation	Attendees	Apologies
Cheltenham Borough Council	Cllr Iain Dobie Debbie Baker	
Cotswold District Council	Cllr Mike McKeown (Chair) Rob Weaver Olivia McGregor	
Forest of Dean District Council	Cllr Chris McFarling (Chair) Nigel Brinn Marcus Perrin	
Gloucester City Council	Jon McGinty	Cllr Sebastian Field
Gloucestershire County Council	Cllr David Gray Petula Davis	Colin Chick David Owen
Stroud District Council	Cllr Chloe Turner Brendan Cleere	
Tewkesbury Borough Council	Cllr Cate Cody Chris Atkinson Adam Spokes	Simon Dix
Hospitals Trusts	Jen Cleary	Ian Quinnell
Integrated Care Board	Mary Hutton	Cath Leech
Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner and Gloucestershire Constabulary	Mandy Gibbs	

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Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership	Doug Hulyer Nicola Hillary	
Gloucestershire Universities	Alex Cottrell (UoG)	Jackie Jobes (Hartpury) Graham Pollard (Royal Ag)
Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils		Kerrin Wilkinson
Gloucestershire Youth Climate Group	Polly Gannaway-Pitts Rebecca Fulford	
Secretariat	Afriqnmun Lovejoy David Sharman Dylan Evans – presenting	

1) Welcome, apologies and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, and noted apologies from:

- Cllr Sebastian Field, Gloucester City
- Colin Chick, County Council
- Jen Cleary, Glos Hospitals Foundation Trust
- Simon Dix, Tewkesbury Borough Council - Adam Spokes attending in his place

The Chair wished to put on record partners thanks to Doug Hulyer attending his last meeting- as outgoing Chair of the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership, and for his tireless work in bringing forward the biodiversity agenda to this important forum.

The Chair also took the opportunity to remind people of the importance of the work of this group, and that now more than ever with the news of the most recent extreme weather events in Europe, that the partnership continues to bring forward resources to urgently address this important agenda now rather than after the effects.

The Chair then moved to the formal agenda for the meeting.

2) Declarations of Interest

No declarations.

3) Approval of meeting notes: June CLG meeting (paper 2)

Meeting notes approved by attendees as a true and accurate record.

Decision: Climate Leadership Gloucestershire approved the June meeting notes.

4) Election of Chair and Vice Chair

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Cllr Chris McFarling as the Chair confirmed that as per the Terms of Reference, Cllr Mike McKeown as previously elected Vice Chair will now assume the role of Chair for the next 6 months.

Cllr McKeown took over the Chair role, thanking Cllr McFarling for his brilliant chairmanship to date and set out his intentions for his own term of Chair, with a firm aim to focus on actions and not just reports and plans.

He reminded the group that 35% of the carbon footprint of Gloucestershire is under the direct control of partners and residents who we provide for, therefore there is huge opportunity for change within our grasp.

Vice Chair nominations

Cllr McKeown then set out that following his elevation to Chair that CLG is now seeking nominations for a new Vice Chair starting today and to then assume the position of Chair in February of 2025.

He noted that Cllr Cote Cody had put her name forward for this role and sought other nominations from the floor. No other nominations were received.

Election of Vice Chair

Cllr Cate Cody formally nominated and welcomed to the Vice Chair role.

Decision: Cllr Cody elected as Vice Chair of CLG until February 2025, at which point she will assume to role of CLG Chair.

5) Action Plan and Funding update (Paper 5)

The Chair invited the Secretariat to update on changes to the CLG action plan. The Secretariat reminded members that this latest version of the action plan will be published externally, as per the agreement earlier this year for a 6 monthly external reporting cycle. This will be the first time progress status will be published against actions. The Secretariat urged attendees to review the version and to get in contact with any comments or queries before publication.

The Chair sought support for the updated action plan to be published to the CLG web pages.

Decision: The Action plan was approved for adoption by Climate Leadership Gloucestershire partners, and publication on the CLG webpages.

Action Plan update

The Secretariat introduced the key changes and areas of progress within the action plan:

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- Adaptation - Action 0102: The Countywide CRVA contract has now been awarded to Atkins Realis, who will attend and present the full project plan to CLG in October 2024.
- Economy – Action 0401: The Green Skills Coordinator post – Interviews for the role took place on 4th September, the preferred candidate accepted the offer and we are working towards a start date of 1st November.
- Food and Farming - Action 0601: CCRI have now been offered a grant from UKRI and National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE) to progress this project. Project requires £3k of CLG match funding to proceed.
- Planning - Action 0702: The remit and objectives of the proposed countywide climate and planning officer role are being revisited and further developed by the CLG theme lead Cheltenham BC.
- Retrofit – Action 0803: the expert retrofit support contract has now been awarded to Furbnow, with mobilisation over Autumn 2024. Furbnow will attend October CLG to present on plans for platform.

External funding update

The Secretariat then introduced Dylan Evans the new CLG shared bid writer, and invited him to introduce his segment of the discussion:

- Dylan introduced his background in bid writing and his work to date on identifying funding streams suitable to helping deliver the CLG action plan.
- He noted the need to consider available staff and administrative resources to take forward key bids for projects such as that on expanding Farm Clusters (Action 0402). He suggested that a solution to filling the gap for initial resourcing on bids such as these is to precede larger bids with a smaller one focused primarily on getting a consultant to scope the project and help to deliver the fuller bid.
- He noted that within the CLG action plan there is a clear split between areas of work solely within the LA remit to deliver, and those which are likely to be fundable externally and that naturally his role would be focused on the later segment of the plan.
- He also noted that with the continuing uncertainty around the future government priority funding areas, the focus of our work now should be to maximise access to the pre-existing pots which are still available. It was made clear that CLG may need to consider supporting community/charity partners in bids for these pots.
- He also identified the need for better join-up between partners of work on existing opportunities and encouraged the early sharing of ideas to maximise partnership delivery and avoid duplication by partners pursuing bids separately.
- Dylan then spoke around the options for CLG to form a company limited by guarantee. This would allow CLG to bid into larger funds that are not traditionally open to Local Authorities. He noted that it would only cost £30 to become limited by guarantee to allow us to bid for items otherwise outside of our reach.
- Alternative options to access funds of this scale would be to work through partners who have an existing appropriate structure.
- He then noted work that he was currently undertaking to circulate a shared funding priorities list to begin to discuss potential shared opportunities.

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- Dylan then moved on to talk about how best to share opportunities and current priorities with partners and his plan to create a database to be shared with partners.

Key points arising from the discussion:

Rob Weaver also raised the opportunities for income generation presented by carbon bonds and Cotswold's experience to date with this. He noted that so far Cotswold DC (CDC) has generated £500k through third party involvement for solar and EV chargers. This work was done in partnership with the Green Finance Institute and an organisation called Abundance allowing the Council to utilise their online platforms. The work has been hugely successful in raising and delivering ambition on the Council's decarbonisation priorities. The initial ROI was 2.5% which although wasn't high still drew in investors, possibly those looking for a safe space for investment, with local and national investors inputting anything from £5 to few thousand pounds. He then flagged that CDC are now considering their carbon bond Mark II and encouraged others to look at this investment generation model.

Cllr David Gray noted that having a shared bid writer on board was great news in terms of CLG maximising potential areas of opportunity, but that he was conscious of not wanting to diffuse the value of this expertise by staying too broad in terms of what to focus on. He suggested the approach should be to prioritise and then push hard on a limited number of priority areas. He also noted the point on Carbon Bonds and suggested partners also continue to explore other areas such as crowd funding to generate investment for priority areas. He asked whether CLG could jointly put together an offer for the public, designing things which will jointly bring in funding from partners.

Dylan responded to say that in his experience projects co-designed with communities had the best rate of success in leveraging public interest and funding. Using examples of the mobilisation of allotment groups, and community energy schemes where local communities were given access to surplus energy.

The Chair noted that CDC had already engaged in some crowd funding activity and that they had seen success when the fund was seeded by the Council before seeking public investment.

Action: Secretariat to work with the Behaviour Change theme officers to explore potential of countywide crowdfunding schemes.

The point was made that funders, particularly central government, were increasingly favourable to consortium bids, where work, impact, and outcomes could be maximised. There was therefore agreement in the plan to create a shared funding priority record to identify partnership opportunities. In addition to this, it was suggested that a dedicated funding subgroup could be set up to review CLG funding priorities and consider further financing options.

Mary Hutton noted ICS interest in this area due to current funding partnership work on infrastructure projects, in partnership with both councils and private sector.

Action: Secretariat to explore the set up a CLG finance subgroup, and to proceed with the planned shared funding record.

Action: Dylan Evans to prepare briefing on CLG forming a company limited by guarantee.

Greener Gloucestershire Action Fund

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The Secretariat then moved on to the slides relating to the Greener Gloucestershire Action Fund. First raising the successful spend to date under round 1.0 and identifying how the first £200k allocation was spent:

- A countywide Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
- A shared bid writer
- A green skills coordinator

Further input from the County Council allowed an extension to this initial fund to include:

- The early stages of a Local Area Energy Planning (stages 1-3)
- The launch of the Greener Gloucestershire Community Fund

The Secretariat then referred to the longer list of projects and finance raised with an estimated £1million leveraged for delivery of the Greener Gloucestershire Action Plan, from the £200k seed funding delivered by the first Action Fund.

He also noted the need to consider options for a £3k underspend within the Action fund 1.0 and suggested this was reallocated to the integrated food and farming action plan.

The project would see research conducted by the University of Gloucestershire's Community and Countryside Research Institute (CCRI), which would -

- Identify the barriers and levers that LAs have to influence the sector (across environment, social, health and economic policy areas)
- Identify activities that could be expanded across the county, maximising collaboration, efficiencies, and impact, and reducing duplication.
- Ultimately look to create integrated, long-term initiatives to deliver multiple, cross-sector, outcomes in supporting the agri-food sector.
- Form the basis for a case study library of food and farming project best practice

CCRI have already sought funding for this project and have been offered funding from UKRI, and the NICRE to cover 90% of the costs. The Chair sought a show of hands in favour of re-allocation of the underspend.

Decision: Climate Leadership Gloucestershire agreed relocation of the £3k underspend to the Integrated Food and Farming Plan project.

The Secretariat then moved on to outline the proposal for the Greener Gloucestershire Action Fund 2.0 as a key part of leveraging further external funds. He then outlined an initial project list identified for potential funding under the Greener Gloucestershire Action Fund 2.0 including:

- Completion (stages 4-7) of a Gloucestershire Local Area Energy Plan
- A shared climate and planning resource (approved but not yet funded)
- A waste fleet decarbonisation infrastructure plan
- An expanded climate and community fund
- A green economy matching platform (unfunded under the last round)

Decision: Approval to re-allocate the £3k underspend within the Action Fund 1.0 to the Integrated food and farming plan.

6) Biodiversity theme update

Introduction

Nicola Hillary introduced the item and gave a brief update on the wider biodiversity theme. Noting that the item would focus on the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

Nicola introduced the LNRS and the fact that under the 2021 Environment Act every county will need to have one. The intention of the document is to set out the local biodiversity priorities including the priority habitats, species and wildlife corridors. Actions will both improve existing sites as well as creation of new sites.

The work will include the creation of spatial maps – setting out areas of existing designations as well as other areas relevant to biodiversity outcomes, and where we want to bring forward new actions.

Nicola outlined that she expected the main users of the strategy to be landowners and managers – specifically to bring forward actions through agri-environment funding or flood risk mitigation etc.

The document will also be used to support the delivery of the biodiversity priorities of the LAs. LAs will be expected to have regard to the plan before taking any action on biodiversity. It will also outline draft priorities on biodiversity in developments, infrastructure, and other core responsibilities centre to LA working. The intent is for the strategy to also link to delivery vehicles such as the parish biodiversity action plans already being developed.

So far a huge number of partners have been involved in the early stages of the work – including through the established nature recovery working group (i.e. the governance group). As well as this, extensive engagement has been carried out with farmers and landowners, the public and communities.

So far a huge range of priority habitats and species have been identified and therefore the initial part of the strategy seeks to develop simplified set of key messages:

1. Protection and maintenance of existing biodiversity-rich sites
2. Bigger, better, more and more joined (Maintaining, extending, and connecting wildlife habitat)
3. Climate Emergency
4. Our relationship with water
5. The value of mixed and wilder habitats
6. Biodiversity in our developments and settlements

Key points arising from the discussion:

Doug Hulyer reminded attendees of the importance of this work and its alignment with Government's commitment to 30 by 30 (30% of land dedicated to nature by 2030). He also noted it's alignment with Gloucestershire specific goals in being a 'good place to live and a good place to work'

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He noted that the Gloucestershire LNP had even suggested that we might aim for more than 30% habitats by 2030 for Gloucestershire as we are already doing well and want to continue to be a leader in nature nationally.

Cllr Gray asked if there was a list of top priority species. Nicola pointed out that there was a huge range of priority habitats and species with over 600 rare and threatened species listed in the Strategy.

The question was then asked if there was a fixed width needed for the wildlife corridors needed, or specific areas identified where we know a space is creating a genuine barrier to the spread of a specific species.

Nicola confirmed the role of the LNRS is exactly to prioritise species and where they need special measures to protect them and that the more we can do to join existing sites nature will find ways to adapt and expand where we provide opportunity for it to do so. The exact parameters of corridors are therefore potentially less important.

Cllr Chris McFarling gave the example of the Lesser Horseshoe bat which is known not to traverse more than 3m of open space. Demonstrating the 'nature corridors' could be as narrow as a hedgerow to allow some species to traverse open spaces to extend their ability to access food and resources.

Attendees also questioned the role of the LNRS in delivering water quality outcomes, Nicola confirmed that although water priorities and measures were included it was expected that the Environment Agency and water companies existing mechanisms would continue to be the main driver for improvements in this area.

Attendees flagged future opportunities to link with other work in this area including with the county Citizen Science work.

Nicola then went on to confirm the timelines for completion of the work to draft the LNRS text, acknowledging that final drafts are likely to be needed by October to allow for consultation and then to progress through Gloucestershire County Council cabinet approval and other processes, in time for a final product for March 2025.

Attendees asked about the impact of the recent NPPF consultation on the objectives of the LNRS. It was agreed that the LNRS, BNG and other tools being developed to support nature outcomes will help planning authorities to defend protection of land for nature outcomes.

Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund

Rachel Lenane introduced her session and outlined the background to the Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund.

Biodiversity Net Gain is a new statutory responsibility which became law in February 2024. Developers are now required to demonstrate biodiversity net gain to obtain planning permission for new developments. GNCF seek to support the delivery of this new function by working with landowners and developers to trade biodiversity units and turn these into demonstrable nature improvements within the county.

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GNCF is not for profit, but does charge commission on their work to cover business running costs. Any surplus will be divested into a Trust which can be accessed by other organisations wishing to deliver nature recovery beyond that delivered under BNG.

Rachel noted that GNCF also recognises the huge upskilling needed within Local Authorities to support developers to effectively deliver BNG, the team have therefore been supporting training roll out for LAs in Gloucestershire.

So far the scheme has created a bank of around 1500 units and wants to be in position to sell these to developers asap. The final hurdle which needs to be bridged is the development of an approved section 106 document for offsite BNG schemes, by the Gloucestershire LPAs. This document will secure each of GNCF's BNG schemes for 30 years and enable the sale of units. GNCF is unable to sell offsite BNG units without this contract in place.

Rachel confirmed that until a template s.106 is agreed the BNG units cannot be sold.

If the s.106 development is delayed further all biodiversity units needed to allow new developments in Gloucestershire (and therefore associated nature improvements paid for by developers building within Gloucestershire) will be bought and delivered outside of Gloucestershire.

Key points arising from the discussion:

Attendees clarified that a hold up in agreeing a template for Gloucestershire could result in nature benefits and funds for nature being delivered outside of our borders, rather than inside the county.

Rachel confirmed that she was awaiting the approval (by the planning authorities' legal services) for the offsite/habitat bank s106 agreement.

Rachel confirmed that there are three types of these s.106 contract templates that will be required to make BNG work in the county. These include the offsite/habitat bank s.106 and s.106 for onsite BNG.

Rachel confirmed that even following agreement of the templates and signing of the contract between a landowner and the LPA it can take a further 12 weeks to register a site on the necessary Defra websites and therefore even with a swift resolution, developers seeking planning approval in the next few months would need to look outside of the county to deliver any agreed net gain.

Rachel provided the following information on the implications of delays in s106 agreement drafting:

- If no off-site BNG locations are available within the county off-site BNG will necessarily be delivered outside Gloucestershire for developments within the county.
- If the BNG is delivered out of area it is likely that the developer will need to pay more for their off-site BNG. This could impact on the viability of developments.

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- If other off-site BNG habitat banks or brokers are used rather than GNCF, there is likely to be less benefit for nature recovery in the county and the local economy will not benefit to such an extent as profits are likely to go out of the county.

Action: Partners agreed the urgency of securing the template 106 agreements and Chief Executives were tasked with chasing legal teams to secure approval of these asap. The next meeting date of 24th October CLG was given to report back on progress with these templates.

7) Any Other Climate Business

Cllr Dobie raised a question related to the County Council' position on heating new school buildings: of whether GCC will operate a policy of presumption in favour of heat pumps (rather than gas boilers) when planning major new school construction projects.

It was confirmed that County Council officers operate under such a presumption, where it is practical to do so.