

APPENDIX 2

SMALL STEPS, BIG IMPACT

Seven years of the Environment and Sustainability Member Working Group

December 2019 to July 2026



A celebration of the achievements of the Council's cross-party Working Group, presented with the report *Review of the Environment and Sustainability Member Working Group* to Thriving Council Committee on Thursday 24 September 2026.

FROM THE CHAIR



Cllr Stephen Bunney, Chair of the Working Group and Member Champion for Environment and Climate Change

When this Council resolved in November 2019 to make its activities net zero carbon by 2050, we set up a cross-party Working Group to turn that ambition into a strategy, and then into action. Nearly seven years on, I am proud of what the Group, and the officers who supported it, have achieved.

I want to begin by thanking former Councillor Tracey Coulson, who chaired the Group in its founding years and steered our first Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy through to unanimous adoption in June 2021. Her insistence that carbon reduction should go hand in hand with tackling fuel poverty, protecting nature and improving health and wellbeing shaped everything that followed.

The pages that follow tell the story: solar panels on our buildings and our waste trucks, a new depot built as a green hub, twin-stream recycling that cut contamination by two thirds, a carbon net zero Local Plan, and a campaign that reached more than 100,000 people. Most recently, the Group helped shape a Community Benefit Policy that will give communities living alongside large solar developments a fair and lasting return.

None of this was the work of one party or one person. Members from across the Council gave their time freely, challenged constructively and kept the agenda moving through changes of administration and the demands of local government reorganisation. Officers turned ideas into funded, delivered projects.

The Strategy is now embedded in how the Council works, and its delivery continues through our new governance. The Working Group has done its job. Together, our small steps have made a big impact.

Councillor Stephen Bunney

Chair, Environment and Sustainability Member Working Group

THE GROUP AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED

3 December 2019 by Prosperous Communities Committee, following the Council's unanimous net zero motion of 4 November 2019

PURPOSE

To develop, and then oversee delivery of, the Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

MEMBERSHIP

Six cross-party Members plus the Member Champion for Environment and Climate Change, who chairs

CHAIRS

Cllr Tracey Coulson (founding Chair) and Cllr Stephen Bunney

REPORTED TO

Prosperous Communities Committee, later Thriving Places Committee, with annual progress reports from 2022

STRATEGY

Adopted June 2021; refreshed June 2024 to reflect new policy developments; ten themes; Action Plan updated 2025 and 2026

MEETINGS

Regular cross-party meetings with an action log and standing updates from officers

CLIMATE FINANCE

£500,000 Environmental and Climate Change Reserve set aside by the Council to support delivery – more than £500,000 brought in through competitive funding bids and spent on delivery

FINAL MEETING

9 July 2026

“Embracing this strategy fully into the fabric of our Council will ensure all decisions and policy making has to put our mission to reduce carbon and consideration for our environment at the forefront.”

Cllr Tracey Coulson, founding Chair, on the adoption of the Strategy, June 2021



THE GROUP IN NUMBERS

28%



lower net emissions than the 2008/09 baseline: 2,036 tonnes down to 1,467 tonnes CO₂e in 2024/25

6



waste trucks fitted with solar panels, each saving around 600 litres of diesel and six tonnes of CO₂ a year

545



solar panels at Gainsborough Leisure Centre, funded by £401,500 of Government grant, saving about 42 tonnes of CO₂ a year and keeping costs down by cutting energy bills

£10m



Home Energy Upgrade scheme launched, with 90 homes helped to improve their energy efficiency in 1st year

100,000+



people reached by the Small Steps, Big Impact campaign since its launch in July 2023

£500,000



Green Growth grant fund for local businesses, alongside the Green Tourism Toolkit and the Hospitable Green Programme

29



staff certified as Carbon Literate, and 11 schools visited to promote waste awareness in 1 year

2.5GW+



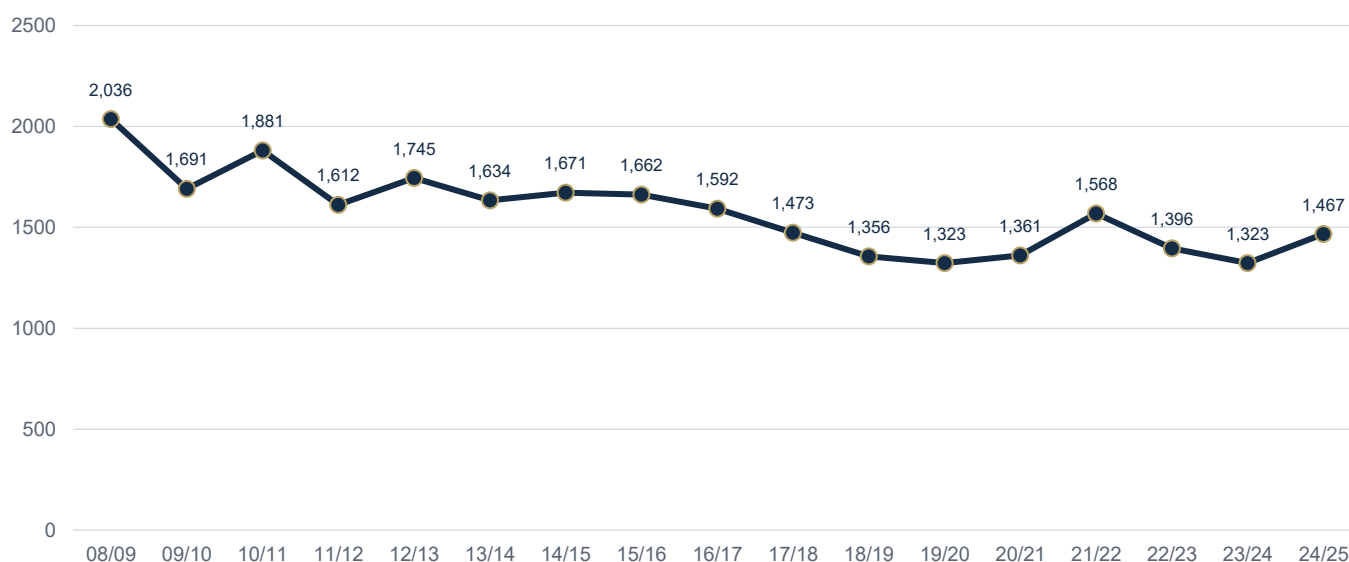
of consented solar covered by the Community Benefit Policy: at least £500 per MW targeted every year for host communities

7,000t



of West Lindsey paper and card and 'dry recycling' through twin-stream collections annually, with contamination cut from over 30% to under 5%

Council net greenhouse gas emissions, 2008/09 to 2024/25 (tonnes CO₂e)



Source: WLDC Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report 2024 to 2025 (published 24 September 2025). The 2021/22 rise reflects post-Covid recovery and the first inclusion of Market Rasen Leisure Centre and Lea Fields Crematorium; the 2024/25 rise reflects higher DEFRA conversion factors and increased activity. The green electricity tariff saved 83.56 tonnes CO₂e in 2024/25.

The Group kept the Council's own estate, fleet and services at the front of the agenda, so that the organisation could ask others to act with credibility.



Solar panels on the Council's waste collection fleet, July 2023 (WLDC)



Solar panels on West Lindsey Leisure Centre (Gainsborough), July 2025



A green hub at Caenby Corner

The £5 million operational depot opened in November 2021 with rooftop solar and battery storage, air source heat pumps for heating and hot water, LED lighting and six electric vehicle charging points. Part funded through Govt Funding following an Officer bid. Supervisor vans were cut from six to three, two of them electric.



Cleaner fleet, cleaner collections

Solar panels on six waste trucks (July 2023) cut each vehicle's diesel use by around 600 litres and emissions by six tonnes a year. The Vehicle Decarbonisation Strategy (July 2024) charts the 38-vehicle fleet's route to full decarbonisation by 2035, informed by a depot electrification study funded by the Midlands Net Zero Hub.



Decarbonising our buildings

Solar on the Guildhall, Gainsborough Leisure Centre and Festival Hall has earned around £21,000 a year in feed-in tariff income for over a decade. A Low Carbon Skills Fund bid (2023) set the path to make our buildings cleaner and more efficient, and 545 new panels at the Leisure Centre (2025) save about 42 tonnes of CO₂ and 221 MWh a year – whilst reducing running costs too.



Right thing, right bin

Twin-stream recycling, agreed in November 2021 and rolled out from April 2022, has seen almost 6,000 tonnes of West Lindsey paper and card collected, with contamination falling from over 30 per cent before roll-out to under 10 per cent. Next: kerbside battery and vape collection, agreed for 2027, following information gathering and campaigning by E&S Members.



Measuring what matters

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reports covering Scopes 1, 2 and 3 have been published every year, and a green electricity tariff saved 83.56 tonnes of CO₂e in 2024/25 alone. Carbon intensity has fallen from 4.1 to 3.1 tonnes CO₂e per full-time employee since 2008/09. A Climate, Environment and Sustainability Impact Assessment now sits at the front of every committee report, so that climate is weighed in every decision.

Parish councils, village halls, charities and volunteers took the lead, with the Council providing grants, advice and a route to funding.



Mulsanne Park Pavilion, Nettleham: solar and storage with £10,000 of grants



Rock Foundation, Caistor: community allotment and solar. Officers helped write a successful bid for £120,000 worth of energy efficiency and heating



Parish and community energy

Mulsanne Park Pavilion became a sustainability exemplar for Nettleham after £10,000 of grants, including £5,000 from Zero Carbon Parishes, paid for solar panels and energy storage: instant savings and a blueprint for other parishes. The Rock Foundation in Caistor gained permission for solar to power its whole site. Toft Newton Village Hall and Bardney Christian Trust added solar, Great Limber planted a community orchard, and groups such as Welton Village Hall secured energy assessments to plan their next steps.



Grants that unlock local action

Officers helped community organisations apply successfully for national funding for tree planting, protecting nature, improving heating systems and energy efficiency, and running events. We are also supporting a £50,000 Community Sustainability Grants scheme, paid for from the Climate Reserve. It offers grants of £200 to £5,000 for local projects that reduce carbon emissions, save energy or support nature. We will keep supporting national bids and make a positive difference through the Community Grants Programme launched this summer.



Wildflower meadow, West Lindsey (WLDC)



Planning for nature and net zero

The carbon net zero Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (2023) sets standards for energy use in new development and for nature recovery, and several Neighbourhood Plans now promote community-led climate initiatives. The Council's first Biodiversity Duty Report (March 2026) works alongside Lincolnshire's new Nature Recovery Strategy to aid protection of assets such as the Bardney Limewoods and the Witham and Ancholme river corridors.



Keeping communities informed

The Small Steps, Big Impact campaign, launched in July 2023, reached 100,000 people in its 1st year alone, with practical ideas for homes, businesses and parishes. A regular funding digest, newsletters and parish bulletin now signposts grants, news items and advice across the district as we keep amplifying our messages and keep our public informed of opportunities.

BUSINESSES AND HOMES

Local businesses cut costs and carbon with Council support, and Government funding was brought into the district to make homes warmer and cheaper to run.



Hemswell Antiques Centre



Sudbrooke Village Store



Depot Rail Ltd, Gainsborough



Cherry Tree Garden Centre



Green Growth for local business

A £500,000 Green Growth grant fund, delivered through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, helped businesses invest in energy efficiency and renewables. The Green Tourism Toolkit and four Hospitable Green sessions gave the visitor economy a route to certified sustainability, and businesses were signposted to the Lincolnshire Energy Toolkit, a carbon calculator and free advice. Agri-tech innovation was supported with Riseholme College.



Businesses making the change

Hemswell Antiques Centre, Europe's largest, joined more than 400 others on the Council's commercial waste service and added solar, insulation and EV charging. **Sudbrooke Village Store** fitted 26 panels generating 8.51 MWh - 22 per cent of its needs. **Depot Rail Ltd** installed six battery units to make the most of its solar, cutting over 2.5 tonnes of CO₂ a year. **Cherry Tree Garden Centre** moved to LED lighting, rainwater harvesting and efficient kitchen equipment, saving over 17,000 kWh and 3,300 kg of CO₂e a year. Businesses are picking up the baton realising that being greener makes good financial sense too.



Warmer homes

The £10 million Home Energy Upgrade scheme was launched – a regional scheme lead and hosted by WLDC staff. More than 100 West Lindsey homes received funding to improve their energy efficiency. Earlier rounds brought £800,000 of insulation and renewables grants to 90 homes and over £300,000 to improve insulation in 150 hard-to-reach homes, with Lincs 4 Warmer Homes signposting residents to help. Officers brought regular updates to the group and Members provided support, encouragement and directional steer.



Skills and awareness

Twenty-nine staff completed certified Carbon Literacy training, alongside three councillors, building the knowledge to make climate part of everyday decisions. Officers visited 11 schools to promote waste awareness, and the Council's waste vehicles became rolling advertisements for solar power.



This investment is a key element of our ambition to make the business more sustainable in the longer term.

Arvind Bhutiya, owner, Sudbrooke Village Store



Our business is continuing to expand and we intend to try and make our Gainsborough premises zero carbon.

Owen Snell, Director, Depot Rail Ltd

A FAIR SHARE FOR COMMUNITIES

£500

per megawatt, per year

index-linked, targeted for the full operational lifetime of each development

5

consented solar NSIPs: Gate Burton, Cottam, West Burton, Tillbridge and One Earth

2.5GW+

combined capacity, one of the largest concentrations of consented solar in England

Tens of millions

of pounds potential for host communities over the lifetime of the projects

Turning concern into a lasting return

West Lindsey hosts one of the largest concentrations of consented utility-scale solar in England. The Working Group's response evolved from concern about scale, with the Leader writing to Ministers in October 2022, into a constructive policy that secures a fair share for the communities that will live alongside this infrastructure for decades.

Over many months the Group examined the approach adopted by other councils and case studies elsewhere, tested its thinking - with local campaign groups as a critical friends - responded to the Government's consultation on mandatory community benefits, and liaised with live schemes such as Sutton Bridge locally, to see community benefit models working in practice.

The Large-Scale Renewable Energy Community Benefit Policy was adopted unanimously by Thriving Places Committee on 14 July 2026. It sets a floor, not a ceiling, and aligns West Lindsey with North Kesteven to give developers a consistent framework across Central Lincolnshire.

HOW THE GROUP SHAPED IT

Oct 2022

Leader writes to Ministers on the cumulative scale of solar proposals

Jan 2024

North Kesteven adopts a £500 per MW community benefit floor

June 2025

Group workshops; response to the Government consultation on mandatory community benefits

Feb 2026

Policy update to the group from Member / Officer sub-group.

Mar 2026

Legal advice and liaising with community organisations. Examining best practice

14 Jul 2026

Policy adopted unanimously by Thriving Places Committee. Communication Plan launched and then letters to developers

“Communities that will live alongside this infrastructure for many years should receive a fair share of the benefits. This policy is about making sure local people see a lasting return from developments in their area.

Cllr Stephen Bunney, July 2026

“This was a unanimous decision and reflects a shared commitment to securing the best outcome for our communities.

Cllr Peter Morris, Chair of Thriving Places Committee, July 2026





Embedded in how the Council works

The Strategy is now delivered through business as usual. Progress on Environment and Sustainability deliverables is reported through the Thriving Places Strategic Delivery Panel and the Thematic Business Plans to the Council's policy committees, and a Task and Finish Group can be convened if a specific piece of work ever needs it. The Working Group has fulfilled the brief set out in its Terms of Reference.



Continuing to deliver for West Lindsey

- Environment and Sustainability grant funding within the Community Grants Programme 2026 to 2028
- Rolling out the Community Benefit Policy so that communities receive the maximum benefit
- Sustainability built into decisions on Council assets, including any decision on the leisure centre
- Partnership work with Lincolnshire councils on community preparedness and resilience
- Small Steps, Big Impact communications through every Council channel delivering to a plan. Newsletters, funding updates etc
- Horizon scanning so that new opportunities reach Members for decision



WITH THANKS

Members who served on the Group

Founding Group, 2019 to 2023

Cllr Tracey Coulson (Chair)
Cllr Stephen Bunney, Cllr Owen Bierley, Cllr Lesley Rollings, Cllr Jane Ellis, Cllr Steve England, Cllr Caralyne Grimble, Cllr Jeff Summers

2023 to 2026

Cllr Stephen Bunney (Chair)
Cllr John Barrett, Cllr Emma Bailey, Cllr Matt Boles, Cllr Karen Carless, Cllr Ian Fleetwood, Cllr Maureen Palmer, Cllr Paul Swift

Officers

The Group was led by Steve Leary, supported by colleagues from the Policy and Strategy team and Democratic Services, with colleagues from across the Council, including waste and operational services to property, planning, communities, economic growth and communications, turning the Group's steer into delivered projects. Special thanks to Sue Norman for support throughout.

"Together, our small steps can have a big impact on our environment."

Cllr Stephen Bunney

FIND OUT MORE

- Environment and Sustainability Strategy (2024) and Action Plan (2025)
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report 2024 to 2025
- Biodiversity Duty Report (2026)
- Large-Scale Renewable Energy Community Benefit Policy (2026)

www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/climate