

Civic leadership award is indicative of Brighton & Hove approach to sustainability

Fifty years on from their introduction to the UK, parking meters are entirely taken for granted as just another irritating piece of urban street furniture. Closer inspection of these unloved automata, however, would show how much they have evolved from the original clockwork mechanism that frequently did not work correctly and gave rise to long and acrimonious disputes over parking penalties. One machine for each parking bay has generally been replaced by devices that can serve a whole row of parked vehicles and print out a ticket to fix inside windscreens. Since this generation of parking meters requires electricity to power the display and the ticket printer, the cost of the power appears on each local authority's rapidly rising energy bill. More specifically, it is energy whose use is properly challenged under carbon management programmes.

The City of Brighton & Hove on the South Coast of England is one of a growing number of local authorities which have introduced solar powered parking machines within the gamut of their carbon reduction strategies. The fact that the city council had, years previously, taken that route provides an indication of how seriously the more progressive local administrations are taking the subject of climate change.

In terms of the timeframe for local authority involvement in carbon reduction programmes, Brighton was certainly one of the first English boroughs to start turning good intentions into affirmative action. For most councils, the first step on the road to a climate change policy is signing the Nottingham Declaration: the first authorities went through the motions as early as 2002 after the concept of a voluntary commitment to developing and effecting a climate change strategy was launched by Nottingham City Council.

Intentional delay in signing Nottingham Declaration

There is no record of Brighton & Hove's admission to the list of the Good and Great for another three years; a fact which would appear to conflict with the council's standing as a pioneering 'green' authority. The paradox was resolved by Thurstan Crockett, the Head of Sustainability and Environmental Policy at Brighton & Hove. "The council established a sustainability commission in 2002 to help implement its sustainability strategy. We understand that Brighton & Hove was the only local authority to have taken such an innovative step at the time, and this provided a platform from which all of the subsequent activities evolved."

Three years down the line from that seminal event, the council's city-wide sustainability conference – by then an annual event – focused on how all of those involved in the city's future could prepare a climate change action plan. That event, in April 2005, was clearly a good opportunity for Brighton to sign up to the Nottingham Declaration.

Mr Crockett felt that it was a landmark on the route towards implementing an effective strategy. As he noted, "The signing of the Declaration by the

Carrying experience forward into LACM Programme

Council Leader and Chief Executive had political impact as it triggered another round of actions in pursuit of reducing carbon emissions.”

Appointment of energy manager

Probably one of the more important actions which emerged was the employment of an energy manager by the council in the 2006-7 financial year. His remit was to manage all of the council's energy arrangements. While Brighton generates a small amount of the energy it consumes, the focus for renewables has been as part of a sustainability package in new build programmes.

That includes all new buildings and extensions for which the city is responsible, including the education sector to which Thurstan Crockett was to return later.

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The campaigns which secured the award encompassed every aspect of renewable resources from the conversion of its parking meters to solar power, through to its implementation of what has come to be known in local government circles as the Merton Rule.

Merton is a highly significant planning policy that was pioneered by the London Borough of Merton. It requires the use of renewable energy onsite to reduce annual carbon dioxide emissions in the built environment. As Crockett observed, Brighton had been operating the rule informally but had nonethe-



less been doing it well by all accounts. “It was 10% to 20% of energy demand in large new developments through the correct application of planning policy. The strategy also saw significant expenditure by the council on our energy efficiency grants and solar thermal in housing.”

With a forward-looking development plan already being implemented, it was a relatively short step for the Brighton & Hove team to join the Carbon Trust's Local Authorities' Carbon Management Programme (LACM). The scheme was taking on board its fifth annual round of new entrants when Brighton signed up for the 10 month programme of activities in 2006.

The experience gained from implementing its own sustainability strategy stood the council in good stead when it was called upon to submit a strategy and implementation plan – one of the building blocks within the LACM Programme. Indeed, there is evidence that Brighton had taken its commitment further in areas such as staff commuting, business travel and fleet operators than the Carbon Trust's initiative had required.

Setting targets under LACM Programme

Local authorities familiar with the Carbon Trust programme will be aware that targets for carbon reduction are set and then monitored subsequently by the Trust. Brighton & Hove had made a commitment to a 20% cut over five years back in 2006, or an average of 4% each year. Thurstan Crockett was keen to cite the gross reduction of 6% in the first year, which was equivalent to around 4% in real terms.

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While the numbers work out at face value – one fifth of the city council's own five year target achieved in year 1 – was there not the possibility that Brighton had targeted the easiest energy savings at the start of the campaign? That is the advice given by the Carbon Trust to councils joining the LACM Programme as it gives a good psychological boost to those involved.

Crockett accepts that the city council had taken that course to an extent. It was achieving the 4% largely through raising staff awareness, but with the fastest payback technical fixes to follow. Lights and equipment being switched off, and heat being conserved by simple actions on the part of staff: that was sufficient to set the ball rolling to the target. "We are conscious that it will not be as easy in the remaining years of the programme, but there are now so many drivers working in our favour – the cost of energy being the most obvious – that more resources are being applied by the council to energy management."

Salix Finance loan fund

The Brighton & Hove team is highly supportive of Salix Finance, the government-backed institution that provides funds to the public sector on a matched basis for specific carbon-reduction projects.

That is probably to be expected as Salix awarded the city council £200,000 (with the council adding an equivalent sum) in 2006 when it was embarking upon the LACM Programme. This was one of the largest contributions to a local authority fund made by Salix.

Backed by this fund, Brighton & Hove was able to draw down consultancy from Hitachi through the LCM Alumni Programme to support a self-assessment of its CMP. This honed the council's carbon management strategy and the business plan that underpinned its involvement in the Programme.

The analysis demonstrated that the council rated itself 2 out of 5 for insulation; 3 each for heating and lighting. "What we heard back from the consultant working for the Carbon Trust was that those were consistent with most

councils joining the Carbon Management Programme, apart from those which had started early on managing energy resources."

Setting City in context

Initiatives taken by Brighton & Hove at the city council level – such as joining Round 5 of the LACM Programme - have to be seen in a broader context. A local authority is one component of the total carbon emitting 'mix' in an area.

Apart from its internal target of 20% savings over five years, the council soon agreeing with government, the business community and the public sector operating within its area for a 12% carbon reduction spread over 3 years. Given the diverse nature of the interests represented, this target is probably a more adventurous goal than that agreed with the Carbon Trust.

The key focus of the city-wide campaign is the reduction of emissions; the second highest target of its kind in the South East.

Contributing significantly to the total emissions across Brighton & Hove is transport. As Thurstan Crockett observed, there are inevitably issues about bus emissions and their impact on air quality as well as CO₂. "But it would be difficult to imagine how bad it would have been without a co-ordinated transport policy that sought to reduce the use of private cars wherever practicable."

He cites the city council's own Staff Travel Plan which has seen many staff – himself included – give up owning a car. "Cycling and buses provide effective local transport, while car clubs, trains and hire cars are available for longer journeys.

"Partly as a reflection of how far the council has developed its sustainable transport policy and practice within the city, the area can demonstrate a larger number of initiatives on transport than most other councils.

"I believe that Brighton & Hove has a good record in this field and it therefore matters that our Staff Travel Plan as a local authority is the best in the city. We have a travel planning officer who is able to demonstrate to our partners what we do, and how we do it well."

Sun, sea ...and sustainable parking at Brighton & Hove





Education sector

Discussions with local authorities about carbon emissions always touch on the impact of the education sector. The way in which education is funded today means that each institution has a very high degree of autonomy over the priorities for its expenditure.

Direct control from 'city hall' has been superseded by the governing bodies of the institutions. They need to be convinced that a course of action is the correct one for their particular establishment.

For a city council like Brighton & Hove to implement its strategy across the education sector, requires winning the support of literally dozens of schools and colleges. Whatever the city council can do to secure that buy-in can only contribute positively to the authority's overall strategy. In the current financial year, the city council is looking to appoint a schools carbon management officer for one year.

Part of that person's brief will be to provide information about regulatory matters such as the Display Energy Certificate process which will affect every educational establishment and, indeed, every public building, from October.

While there is no evidence that schools and colleges are inherently worse at implementing energy control measures than other groups within the community, sheer weight of numbers means that they have a major impact on total energy consumption and carbon emission.

Joining the Carbon Trading Councils Scheme was a low-cost way of exploring the Carbon Reduction Commitment in which Brighton & Hove – by virtue of its size – would have to participate between its launch in 2010 and 2013.

Brighton & Hove has overall responsibility for about 100 such establishments. Of the carbon emissions for which the city council has responsibility, it is estimated that 65% is derived from buildings. Schools and colleges account for a little over half of that output, at 35%.

It follows that the new building and re-furbishment programmes of the city council's premises, and its schools in particular, figure prominently in the strategic plans for carbon reduction. Brighton & Hove has monitored closely the actions of other local authorities when drawing up its action plans for the LACM Programme. The ability to learn from the successes – and difficulties – encountered by other local authorities has proved to be one of the most important factors in that scheme.

Carbon Trading Councils Scheme

Completing the 10-month sequence of events of the Carbon Trust's programme is not the end of the road for Crockett and his colleagues. Brighton & Hove appears in the list of the 28 local authorities to have joined the Carbon Trading Councils Scheme for 2008-9. That adventurous project was considered in depth in an earlier edition of this publication.

The rationale for the city council's decision to take part was worth closer examination. According to Thurstan Crockett, it was a low-cost way of exploring the Carbon Reduction Commitment in which Brighton & Hove – by virtue of its size – would have to participate between its launch in 2010 and 2013. "It is a valuable opportunity to understand first hand the issues surrounding carbon trading.

"The Councils Scheme is initially a one-year commitment to dummy trading which allows us to go embark on a full trading programme with other participants ahead of the CRC."

One of the features which had made the Councils Carbon Trading Scheme interesting when the concept was first raised was that it provided an opportunity to involve other public and third sector organisations in trading carbon.

Had that been a factor in Brighton's support for the scheme? Crockett was cautious on that point, arguing that to involve third parties at this early stage would be more than the city council's team could reasonably contemplate. The prospect has not been ruled out in the future, however.

Sustainability as long term plan

That the sustainability team at Brighton & Hove reports into the Chief Executive's Policy Team reflects the extent to which the question of sustainability is seen as part of the city council's long term plans. The steepening cost of energy has helped make a compelling case to its Director of Finance and Resources, who has the role of Director Champion in taking forward the CMP, building on the LACM Programme. But buy-in from the top is only part of the reason for the authority's major progress to date. There is every indication that a credible strategic development plan had been developed at the outset. It therefore secured good cross party support, while liquidity from Salix Finance helped turn the possibilities into reality. §