



**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY GROUP
THURSDAY, 2 APRIL 2026**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West
Bridgford
and live streamed on Rushcliffe Borough Council's YouTube channel

PRESENT:

Councillors H Parekh (Chair), L Plant (Vice-Chair), M Barney, J Billin, R Butler,
C Grocock, D Mason, P Matthews and A Phillips

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors J Wheeler – Portfolio Holder

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

D Burch	Assistant Director of Environment and Communities
D Hayden	Communities Manager
Leddy-Owen	Team Manager for Environment
E Palmer	Communications and Customer Services Manager
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer

14 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

15 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Barney declared that he worked for a company involved in zero-emission fuels and carbon technologies operating in Rushcliffe and Nottinghamshire but which had no involvement with Rushcliffe Borough Council.

16 Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2026

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 22 January 2026 were agreed as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

17 Carbon Management Plan Update

The Communities Manager introduced the Carbon Management Plan Update report and said that this was the fifth year of presenting an update to Scrutiny. He noted that the report covered activity between 2024 and April 2025 due to when national data was released.

The Team Manager for Environment gave a detailed presentation to the Group and said that significant progress had been made towards the Council's 2030 net-zero target and the Government's 2050 UK target. He highlighted a number

of key projects that the Council had achieved, being:

- Rushcliffe Arena Solar Project
- Cotgrave Leisure Centre, Sir Julien Cahn and Gamston Community Hall decarbonation Projects
- 90% reduction in fleet emissions
- Offsetting - £860k of Grants from Trees for Carbon fund granted for planting and managing trees cover at Wolds Wood and Rushcliffe Woods
- Warm Homes: Local Grant and Energy Company Obligation 4 across East Leake and Borough wide.
- EV Charge Points at Nursery and Bridgford Road Carparks
- Home Energy Advice Team 2
- Facilitating Ethical Solar Loans at Railway Heritage Centre Ruddington

The Team Manager for Environment explained that the Council had achieved a reduction in carbon emissions equivalent to removing five Cotgrave Leisure Centres, or 124 properties from the national grid.

The Communities Manager provided an update in relation to the Council's offsetting strategy. He explained that following review of the Council's land holdings, which were limited, and open spaces and also consideration of working with partner agencies, Cabinet had agreed to proceed with acquisition of land within the Borough, of grade 3 agricultural land value or below. He explained that suitable land had been identified and purchased at Rushcliffe Wood (Upper Broughton) which had a brook running through it and Wolds Woods (near Kinoulton) which was formerly a woodland. He said that these two sites would provide 123% against the Council's identified sequestration offset requirement and so provided some flexibility for the Council. He said that deer and rabbit fencing would be installed to help protect the planting initially and added that the Council had secured £860k of grant funding which covered the cost of all the tree planting and 15 years of maintenance for both sites.

The Team Manager for Environment informed the Group about the Council's key projects for 2026-27, being:

- Gresham Sports Pavillion - install solar PV and improved water management system
- Edwalton Golf Course Refurbishment – including energy measures and adding solar PV to roof
- Streetwise Solar – solar electric scheme on the roof to supplement EV charge bays installed last year
- Hound Lodge Energy Efficiency – development of implementation of insulation programme
- Develop a Scope 3 (supply chain emissions) monitoring and reporting mechanism for all RBC operations to support mapping and maximising efficiencies.

The Team Manager for Environment also highlighted the Council's future pipeline project to decarbonise the whole of Rushcliffe Arena and said that the Council would explore future funding schemes to decarbonise heating as the current gas boilers/combined heating powerplant came to the end of their life.

The Team Manager for Environment said that the Council was also supporting

community decarbonisation schemes, such as the Warm Homes Local Grant scheme and the Affordable Warmth Solutions Innovation Fund (in collaboration with Nottingham Energy Partnership) and also installation of EV charging points at Bridgford Road and Nursery Road. He added that it had also contributed to the production of a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) which would provide a comprehensive energy map across the local area showing where energy was being used most, where it was being wasted, where was fuel poor and where the biggest businesses were through colour coded 3D digital modelling. He said that the LAEP for the Rushcliffe, Broxtowe and Gedling cohort was due to be published at the end of April.

Councillor Barney and asked how the Council would ensure that the woodlands were protected in future years and about long term removal of plastic tree guards. The Communities Manager confirmed that the Council owned the two sites, with clauses within those sales for uplift if there was any future change in usage and was also looking at potential local nature reserve classification to provide greater protections. He said that there was extensive deer netting and rabbit protections on both sites which reduced the need for plastic guards. He added that the tree contractors would replace any trees that died within the first three years.

Cllr Phillips asked about Rushcliffe Arena solar panels and whether they would fully power the site. The Team Manager for Environment said that they would power circa 50% to 60% of the energy requirements of the site, that the panels were 400-500kw each and that there would be 1038 of them and that they had been fully funded through EMCCA grant funding. The panels would also sit flat on the roof so would benefit from all day sun and would cover the whole roof and it was anticipated would save the Council circa £2m over their lifecycle.

Cllr Matthews asked about future maintenance costs and liabilities for all of the Council's solar projects and also about financial implications for the EV charging points. The Communities Manager said that income generation from the solar panels would cover costs for lifecycle maintenance and confirmed that the panels had a lifecycle of around 20 years. He said that the Council's capital programme also had provision built in for future cost and noted that the Council was putting in place low energy measures such as LED lighting at its sites to minimise energy consumption also. In relation to EV charging point installations, he confirmed that this was being undertaken by an external company who were financing installation of the necessary infrastructure and who would then receive the payments from the EV chargers usage. He noted that as the bays were in car parks, parking tickets would be required for people using the EV chargers and that their installation provided a social value for the community.

Councillor Grocock asked for information about financial savings and economic benefit to the Council and the local area. He also referred to the low DEFRA scoring for Rushcliffe for wildlife diversity but thought that the woodland creation work would help address this. The Communities Manager explained that the Council had produced a Nature Recovery Strategy which fed into the Nottinghamshire Nature Recover Strategy and said that the Council was creating a meadow and a lake and wet habitats in the new woodlands. He explained that in part the Borough's low score was due to it having much

productive agricultural land. The Assistant Director of Environment and Communities said that the output economic information could be included as part of the next annual update to the Group.

Cllr Mason referred to LGR and asked how the Council's climate commitments would be protected through the reorganisation process. The Communities Manager said that whilst the new authority would set its own climate targets the Council was focussed on delivering and achieving as much as possible up to that point and noted that the 2050 borough wide carbon neutral target was a legally binding Government target. The Team Manager for Environment added that the need to retrofit net zero interventions in properties would remain and hoped that the work to address this would continue.

Councillor Plant asked how the Home Energy Advice Team initiative was publicised for borough-wide uptake and the Team Manager for Environment said that the Council worked with the Local Energy Partnership to promote it including through social media platforms and had found that most support required was around how to go through the process. He confirmed that 40% of carbon emissions came from housing but that 98% of the housing stock was within the able to pay market and as such, support was needed in encouraging those households to part fund/take out a loan to finance those improvements.

Cllr Billin asked about solar panels on carparks and also scope 3 emissions from the HVO supply chain. The Team Manager for Environment said that the Council's HVO procurement was certified to only come from waste oil and Government conversion statistics put it at 90%, factoring in processing and diesel transportation. In relation to solar panels over car parks, he said the current methodology and costs of installation made it unfeasible but confirmed that the Council was continuing to monitor.

Members of the Group thanked Officers for their hard work and were pleased and encouraged to see the significant work being carried out by the Council.

Councillor Billin suggested that next year's update report be presented to the July 2027 meeting to allow officers time to include the latest national emissions data.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Communities Scrutiny Group noted the progress to date of the adopted carbon management action plan and priority projects for the forthcoming financial year 2026/27.

18 **West Bridgford Contact Point**

The Communications and Customer Services Manager presented the West Bridgford Customer Contact Point report to the Group and thanked Members who had attended the site visit earlier in the week.

The Communications and Customer Services Manager explained that the Council had moved to Fountain Court in 2020, a few weeks before the pandemic began, at a time when it was experiencing around 10,000 customer visits per year to its customer service site in West Bridgford. He said, however,

that the pandemic had changed behaviours and interactions and visits subsequently dropped to around 3780 in 2023. In light of this, the Council had reviewed its customer access provision at all its sites, including at Cotgrave situated in the HUB, at Bingham situated in the Medical Centre and East Leake in their Library, to ensure that they were fit for purpose, met customer needs and were accessible. The Council had identified that moving the West Bridgford centre to the Library would both improve service and provide financial savings. He updated the Group with information about opening times and dates, currently Monday, Thursday and Friday which had been identified as the busiest times of the week and confirmed that if any changes in need were identified, these timings would be reviewed. He said that being situated in the Library had made the customer centre easier to find and more accessible.

The Communications and Customer Services Manager said that the Council continued to monitor how people chose to interact with customer services and confirmed that most contact was via the telephone, followed by emails and then webform contact and then site visits, with a total of 6000 visits over the year in total to its contact points.

The Communications and Customer Services Manager outlined the main types of service enquiries that it received, being in relation to Council Tax, waste collection, garden waste, benefits and environmental health.

In relation to provision for holding private conversations, the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that the Council had noticed that post pandemic, most private enquiries were coming through via telephone or digital communications. He said that customers had requested a private room at West Bridgford Library on two occasions over the past year and that a library meeting room had been utilised for these on both occasions. He added that should a room be unavailable, a private appointment could be held in a meeting room at Rushcliffe Arena on the same day, if needed. Councillor Plant expressed concern should there be occasion where there were many people wishing to hold private conversations at the same time and the Communications and Customer Services Manager confirmed that the Council was monitoring demand and would look at additional options should there be need.

For comparison, the Group were provided with information about face-to-face customer service provision across the County.

Councillor Phillips asked whether the Library would be able to cope if customer visits returned to pre pandemic levels and the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that the Council continued to monitor provision and would look to adapt should it experience a change in demand, with the Library being a flexible partner in this.

In response to questions regarding LGR, the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that the Council was working with other local authorities as the process progressed and was working to put the Borough in the best position for the future and would champion for this to continue. He thought that AI may bring changes to service provision in the future.

Councillor Billin asked whether staff moved around the different customer contact sites and the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that this varied and that the Council tried to base staff where was convenient for them. In addition, some staff would work in contact centres close to where they lived and this helped to provide further reassurance to visitors to the contact points through local ownership and knowledge of local issues

Councillor Plant asked how information about customer service contact points was communicated and the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that this information was printed on the back page of all Rushcliffe Reports newsletter but that it would look at how to increase prominence of this information.

Councillor Grocock asked about queries regarding matters that the Council was not responsible for and the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that Officers would always try to signpost to the appropriate agencies and people.

Members of the Group thanked the customer service staff for their hard work, wide level of knowledge and sensitivity to customers. Councillor Wheeler, as Portfolio Holder was pleased to note the positive comments from members following the visit to the library and would ensure that these were passed on to the staff concerned. In his view the move had been a sensible decision to make at the time and that the joint arrangements in the library worked well with a more central location, next to the largest car park in the town centre, allowing greater accessibility for residents to visit.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Communities Scrutiny Group considered the content of the report (and presentation from officers) and identified any follow up actions required.

19 **Work Programme**

The Assistant Director of Environment and Communities presented the Work Programme and outlined the upcoming scrutiny items.

The Chair suggested that the next meeting in July start earlier, at 6pm, to allow time for discussions of the two items, and this was agreed.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Communities Scrutiny Group approved the Work Programme as set out below:

xx July 2026

- Council Tax Policy Changes (2nd homes premium and discounts for terminally ill residents and foster carers)
- Article 4
- Work Programme

xx October 2026

- Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing

- Work Programme

xx January 2027

- Review of debt collection agents by RBC in line with the outcome of the Government's consultation on Council Tax and Enforcement
- Road Sweeping
- Work Programme

xx April 2027

- Work Programme

Actions:

Minute No.	Action	Officer Responsible/ Update
17	The Group asked for information about financial savings and economic benefit to the Council and local area to be included in the next update report	Communities Manager
17	The Group asked that the next update report be scheduled for the July 2027 meeting to allow Officers time to include the latest emissions data and that the work programme reflect this change	Communities Manager
18	The group asked that the positive comments made following their visits to the contact centre were passed onto the staff involved	Assistant Director Environment and Communities

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

CHAIR