

Rother District Council Report
by Cllr Granville Bantick
at 11th December, 2006

Due to my absence from recent meetings in Bexhill due to holidays, and having operations to remove cataracts, I am dependant on the Minutes of the meetings that I have missed. Obviously I allow as always for Cllr Souster to fill the Council in on those working group meetings on which he sits, whilst I will endeavour to give you an overview of council business in general

On the 6th December Cllr Gubby issued a Press Release announcing the new Government Grant Settlement for 2007/08. It did not make very good reading. Across the Country the headline increase in grant support was 4.9%. The Government did say that there would be a minimum increase of grant support of 2.7% for Districts. However, we now understand that in Rother we will receive a derisory 0.17% or £11,000. Because the Government considered that in the past we had received too much grant they now wish to claw it back! Unless further savings are found it is feared that services will be further reduced. This will have a big impact on the next phase of kerbside recycling to reduce the waste that goes to landfill.

There have been two Cabinet Meetings. At a meeting on the 30th October it resolved that in view of the increase made in car park charging in 2006/07, and comments made by customers, car park fees would be retained at the 2006/07 levels for this coming year.

The Home Energy Conservation Act came into force in England on the 1st April 1996. The Act requires local authorities to prepare a report identifying practicable and cost-effective energy conservation measures likely to significantly improve the energy efficiency of all homes in the District. The definition of "significant" is vague but separate guidance defines it as 30% improvement in energy efficiency over a 15 year period. At the joint budget meeting on 30th January, the Services and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee committed £20,000 as a one off growth item to help deliver the requirements of the Act. The Council has got together with Bexhill and Rother PCT to develop an Affordable Warmth Strategy. This scheme will provide standard loft and cavity insulation to any householder over the age of 60 who is living in a property within Council Bands A - D and who is considered potentially vulnerable to fuel poverty. It is aimed at people not receiving qualifying benefits. A payment of £200 will be made towards the cost of works and materials.

You will all know that a Discussion Document has been published setting out the new Local Development Framework for Rother. It is the new system of development plans introduced by Government. In time it will replace the current local Plan and Structure Plan. It is really a portfolio of a number of documents including one covering a core strategy, another containing site allocations and ones setting out more detailed

policies for particular areas or subjects. The first task in the process is to produce a "Core Strategy". This is the document that will set the vision and general distribution of development within the District up to 2026. It will identify broad locations where development will be accommodated, but will not specify actual sites. By looking up to 20 years ahead, the Core Strategy can take a long term view of the direction of change, rather than simply meeting short to medium-term development requirements. A "Residents' Questionnaire" is already available at the Town Hall and the Partnership Offices. This will assist Rother to prepare a new planning strategy, building on its local Plan, to guide development and change in Rother over the next 20 years. It is hoped as many people as possible will have used this opportunity to make their views heard.

Members will know of my concern for flooding in Rye as a result of climate change. I have expressed my views on a number of occasions and have had correspondence with Charles Sharrod, the Emergency Planning Officer, and meetings with residents who are knowledgeable of the waterways which criss-cross Rye and the ditches which feed the river systems. I believe they know what they are talking about. Last Thursday, I received an anguished telephone call from a resident at the bottom of Old Brickyard who told me that she and her husband were surrounded by flood water which had reached the top of their kitchen step. I could empathise with her as I once lived in this particular residence myself some years ago when first coming to Rye. It is not a pleasant experience. I am informed that the danger could worsen if development eventually takes place on the north side of Udimore Road, and that it could encompass most of Tilling Green. As sea levels rise there are dangers also at the River Tillingham. It is hoped that the planners will take these signals from these local well informed people on board before deciding on a particular site for development.

On the subject of the proposed Udimore Road development, Cllr Souster and I had a meeting on the 16th November with Richard Halderthay of Green Issues at his request. He is the consultant acting for Arun Corp, the owners of the land north of Udimore Road where it is planned to build 114 houses should this site come off the Reserved List. We made it clear that we were not going to offer any personal opinion with regards the proposal, but only reflect the views of our constituents. Mr Halderthay planned to have a public consultation in January, probably at the Tilling Green Infants School. We did bring to his attention the main points which were considered could be an obstacle to such a plan, such as the infrastructure - busy and dangerous main road, flash flooding and the increased demands on water supply in the area where there was a hose pipe ban. It was emphasised that it was of paramount importance that the 40% rule for affordable housing should be enforced

Finally, members should know that there has been no further progress of the plan to build a library and flats on the central garage site due, it would seem that since the planning meeting in October, following which Roger Scott and Richard Wilson of the Planning Department met with the architects and the owner of the site, a sketch plan only had been received in late November which was considered unacceptable to provide a basis for full amended plans. Nothing has been heard since.