

RYE TOWN COUNCIL, 12th NOVEMBER 2007
REPORT OF ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

Planning matters

I attended last Tuesday's Planning Committee site visits. Particularly interesting applications included a site in Buckhurst Road, Bexhill, where there is a scheme to demolish the existing buildings and erect 3 blocks comprising 43 private and 28 affordable flats (the issues included "overlooking" and sufficiency of parking spaces); and the former Mill site at Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge, which is a large area of previously developed land. The site is clearly suitable for continuing employment use: so there is a tension between the requirement to build new houses, and refurbish existing stock, and the need for job opportunities – which affects the whole District.

I mention these matters because of the on-going proposition that Rye's District Councillors should only be concerned with the affairs of our Town and perhaps its hinterland (with the presumed corollary that Councillors from elsewhere should keep out of our business). I don't believe that we can live in that sort of isolation: and here is another problem. Because I have expressed opposition to the Udimore Road application and have urged that the site should not be released from reserve status, I am deemed to have a prejudicial interest in that, although I have no personal interest involved, I have made up my mind that such a development would be a "bad thing" and thus cannot participate in discussions or help to determine the matter. Just supposing, one day in the future, Rye planning decisions were to be reserved for Rye Area Councillors only, these Code of Conduct problems would multiply - to the point of chaos.

The Minutes have not yet been published from last Thursday's Planning Committee meeting; but a decision of interest to us is that **Udimore Road** is a delegated refusal. There are continuing discussions with the Environment Agency relating to drainage and other problems of which we are aware. Principally, the Committee has said that there is no requirement for the early release of the site. I am surprised that no other planning reasons for refusal have yet been deployed; and we must remain on our guard because this has only been a skirmish before the battle which lies ahead.

Regarding the **Jempsons/Budgens Foodstore**, the application to extend the existing store by some 600 square metres was approved with certain conditions. These relate to landscaping matters, necessary highway improvements and (ESCC) green travel opportunities.

Despite claims in the Press that our new **library** project is dead in the water, a revised design has been submitted to planners, and the Committee will consider the application at its December meeting. Since, however, consultations may not have been completed at that stage, the eventual decision will probably be taken in January. There is an apparent improvement involving the entrance to the building which has been switched to the wider end of the site.

De La Warr Pavilion

Another district-wide matter which is of very great interest to us is the forthcoming decision on a new funding agreement for the De La Warr Pavilion. A progress report is coming before next Monday's Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Working Group is charged with the duty of reviewing the whole operation: and has undertaken a consultation. It has been asked to consider all social, economic and environmental issues as they relate to the Trust from a local, regional and national viewpoint – no small task.

The Arts Council England funding agreement (current value 2007/08 £523,880) ends in March 2008: and that body intends to enter into a new three-year funding agreement – which cannot be confirmed before January because Arts Council England is dependent on government funding - the level of which is not yet known. A likely decision by Rother is that any future funding needs to be linked to incentives such that the Trust improves its own financial security and reduces reliance on public sector support.

Village Shops and Post Offices

I am a member of a Working Group which is examining ways to support vulnerable Village Shops and Post Offices. There is almost no budget for the initiative; but the Council is extending advice on the availability of benefits or rate relief, and is providing assistance with publicity and contacts. The C.A.B. is also involved.

Grants

A recent grant of £5,000 to Rother Meads Tennis Club from the Community Grants programme was approved, as was an annual contribution of £1,500 for our Christmas lights. I noticed a gibe in a local publication about the capital cost of new Christmas lights at Bexhill Town Hall. We may recall that Rother tax payers made a capital contribution of £15,000 towards our new lights last year.

RTC/RDC liaison

A recent Rye/Rother liaison meeting covered all sorts of points of mutual interest. My impression of the past six months is that Rother is nothing like as inefficient and unresponsive as some people would have us believe. We may recall all the recent teething problems associated with the new waste collection arrangements. Verdant makes a weekly visit to 41,500 premises. The current level of "missed bins" is running at below 150 per week.

DR 12/11/07