

Rother District Council Report
by Cllr Granville Bantick
at 14th August, 2006

Since the 5th June when I gave my last report to Council there have been two Cabinet meetings, the last of which was held at the Bodiam Church of England Primary School as part of the Council's policy to communicate the workings of the Council to the rural districts of Rother.

The Capital Expenditure Programme for 2005/06 showed that there had been an underspend of £2,553,978 (56%) which was due to a number of schemes that had not been progressed as quickly as planned. These included the Bexhill seafront project, leisure redevelopment programme, kerbside recycling and the Bexhill museum project. The Liberal Democrats Group proposed some of the underspend should be utilised on projects which had been abandoned in the Budget Round, but the ruling Conservative Group, as expected, voted unanimously against the proposal saying that the money should be held in reserve.

The revenue Outturn for 2005/06 given by the Director of Resources highlighted the financial performance for 2005/06 compared to the various budgets, and the position of the Council's reserves and balances at the year end. £1,271,340 was transferred into uncommitted reserves at the year end. This was basically due to the increased investment earnings due to higher interest rates than had been budgeted for.

In the absence of no call in by the Secretary of State with regards to the Local Plan, the Council determined that the Local Plan be adopted with immediate effect. The Local Plan is now a Statutory Plan with the implication that planning applications must now be determined in accordance with it and the Structure Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Adopted Local Plan will be produced shortly. We are still within the 6 week period of challenge but it is expected that the grounds for challenge are limited.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 has been exercising the minds at Bexhill. It was interesting to note the conclusions of the Director of Services in his Report to Cabinet on the 31st July in which he stated that the powers of the Act were very useful in strengthening the Authority's ability to enforce environmental crimes, improve residential amenity and reduce neighbour nuisances. He added though that resourcing the enforcement would be the challenge! This latter comment from the Director of Resources was put more succinctly by him in his report to the Licensing & General Purposes committee on the 27th July when he stated that the Council does not have any Officers designated to enforce for example the street trading controls, a matter of great concern to this Council with the increase of ice cream vendors plaguing the town. He added that Officers would have to be taken off their existing duties which, he says, would

adversely affect the Council's environmental health performance targets and affect its responses to customer complaints about litter, fly-tipping, dog fouling etc. Whilst the Police can enforce the orders they look to the Local Authority to take the lead. Rother admits they could be open to legal challenges or complaints to the Ombudsman. Complainants might reasonably have a legitimate expectation to expect enforcement by the Authority. It will be interesting to see what happens.

You will know that an application has been submitted to Rother's planning committee by the company acting for the owner of the Central Garage site for a Library and Help Point and 10 flats. The expectation is that it will be approved and that building will at last commence. There are some reservations with regard to the facade and the spaces allocated to various functions within the library, but in the main it has to be said the library will be an improvement on the existing one in Lion Street, not least of all being a great deal larger.

Cabinet resolved to enter into a Licence with East Sussex County Council for Rye Swimming Pool for a term of 21 years with commencement date to be agreed between the parties. Whilst Rother operates the swimming pool through a management contract with Freedom Leisure 2016, the land on which the swimming pool occupies is owned by ESCC and represents their only contribution to the project.