

Playden DC Report April 2018

1. On 8-9th March, I attended the Local Government Conference in the City of Culture, Hull, on Tourism, Culture and Sport. The Conference was interesting and very useful. The clear point which came across was the importance of the public realm on tourism - a point that I absolutely agree with. Tourism country-wide has until recently been considered a bit of a 'Cinderella' industry, but as you are aware, I believe tourism is a vital industry in Rother and has huge potential for growth. We need to not only increase tourism and the breadth of visitors coming to our District, but also increase the use of our tourism capacity across the year, boosting visitors during the quiet winter months. You will also be aware that RDC is developing an ambitious Public Realm Strategy. Following a meeting with senior RDC officers a couple of weeks ago, we will also be reviewing tourism. I wholly believe that developing a tourism strategy for Rother District will be a positive way forward and will fit into place with our Public Realm Strategy.

Investment in our public realm, in high quality public spaces will not just attract private sector investment to the village, but will attract increased private investment, by the very fact that the Council would be making an on-going tangible commitment to invest in, and improve, its public realm. It essentially shows confidence in our own 'fabric'.

High quality public spaces will reinforce our towns and villages 'sense of place'. The quality of the public realm is widely acknowledged as being essential to the creation of environments that people wish to live and work in. High quality public realm can produce measurable benefits to the local economy, health, social well-being and safety, encourage greater economic activity. Research has shown that there is a positive, significant and consistent value added to private business by maintaining and improving the public realm. Research has also confirmed the health and social benefits of public realm improvements.

As a point to note, Hull's Cultural Regeneration Strategy only took off once it had actively started to invest in its public realm and fabric infrastructure.

2. Cabinet Meeting 12th March 2018

2.1 Coastal Environments Corporate Project - East Parade, Bexhill: This is a prime example, as is the investment in the Colonnade in Bexhill, of RDC showing confidence in its own town fabric. A series of town centre regeneration and planning studies have shown that the quality and accessibility of the public realm and historic environment are key factors in enhancing the economy of a town. Bexhill's seafront is the town's greatest cultural asset and is a key focus for regeneration initiatives. In 2015, Councillors approved the delivery of the East Parade Heritage Project.

Whilst Full Council has already agreed to set aside £295,000 in the Capital Programme from the car parks' earmarked reserves to progress something called 'Project A' (improvements to create a mini destination and seafront users hub at the easternmost end of East Parade) incorporating the carpark, adjacent public realm and a new Bexhill Sea Angling Club building), Cabinet recommended that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee review the recommendation as some time has passed since Full Council's approval. There are other projects, which can be found in the Report on RDC's website, and these will be further developed and brought before Councillors as appropriate.

2.2 The Landgate, Rye. It had previously been decided that RDC explore the options for devolving RDC's ownership of the Landgate as the historic building was not considered central to Rother's core business and maintenance costs were likely to prove considerable in the future. In 2016, RDC commissioned architects, Thomas Ford & Partners to set out a vision for the future of the Landgate. The paper produced sets out a useful assessment of the history and cultural significance of the building and explores the options for the future of the building and its guardianship. In a nutshell, unless RDC was prepared to do nothing or have the building repaired

as a 'managed ruin', RDC needed to invest in urgent repairs before any private investor, charitable trust or otherwise would be interested in taking the Landgate on. Cabinet recommended that RDC carries out urgent repairs totalling up to £74,000, to be met from the Repairs and Renewals Earmarked Reserves (and including a contribution from Rye Town Council of £7,000). It was also agreed that we should continue negotiations with local stakeholders to secure a long term solution.

For note, an action group, the Landgate Action Group, made up from members from RDC, Rye TC, Rye Conservation Society, Rye Museum and Rye Friends and chaired by Rother Councillor Lord Amptill, has been set up to explore options for the Landgate's future and enact the steps needed to safeguard it.

2.3 East Sussex County Council: grass verge cutting - ESCC's approved budget includes a reduction in highway contract costs of £400,000 for grass cutting services effective from 1 April 2018. This means that the number of urban grass cuts undertaken by County will be reduced from the current six per season to two per season from 1 April 2018.

Due to the fact that parish and town councils have already set their precepts and budgets for 2018/19, Cabinet unanimously decided that RDC should cover the significant costs, including ESCC agreed contribution, for the entire District for one year. This will give us and parishes time to think about and decide upon options for future grass cutting. RDC has also set its budget for 2018/19 and this means that additional equivalent savings will need to be identified.

2.4 Cabinet also approved 5 Community Grant applications. To note, a reminder about the Small Grant Scheme for grants of up to £500. The process has been simplified and made more accessible. Scheme applications can be made online all year round. We have been asked to encourage groups within our wards to apply for small grants - please spread the message around!

Please see RDC website - <http://www.rother.gov.uk/communitygrantscheme>

3. I chaired a Beach & Water Safety Group Meeting Friday 23rd March. Retiring officer, Brenda Mason gave an update on judicial proceedings. RDC has recently received confirmation that the lawyers representing the families of the tragedy in Camber have advised that they will not be proceeding with an oral hearing in respect of the Judicial Review application in Camber and that they will not be proceeding with any civil claims. This has been a tragic event with a number of young men losing their lives, which has been difficult for all those involved. This is now the end of the matter and files will be closed. RDC has put the safety of visitors as a priority and will continue to do so.

Dr Anthony Leonard gave a learning overview, following which Rob Cass updated us with preparations for the 2018 season. To note (and further information to follow) there will be a Camber RNLI set up for fundraising in Camber for equipment, training etc. This will be run by local volunteers.

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